

EVANGELICAL BIBLE COLLEGE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



**“Last Words Commentary”  
2 Chronicles Chapters 1-36  
(The Priestly View of History)**

BY

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**[BOOK 2 – Vol 2]**

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**WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?**

Professor Simon Greenleaf was one of the most eminent lawyers of all time. His "Laws of Evidence" for many years were accepted by all States in the United States as the standard methodology for evaluating cases. He was teaching law at a university in the United States when one of his students asked Professor Greenleaf if he would apply his "Laws of Evidence" to evaluate an historical figure. When Greenleaf agreed to the project he asked the student who was to be the subject of the review. The student replied that the person to be examined would be Jesus Christ. Professor Greenleaf agreed to undertake the examination of Jesus Christ and as a result, when he had finished the review, Simon Greenleaf personally accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour.

Professor Greenleaf then sent an open letter to all jurists in the United States saying in part "I personally have investigated one called Jesus Christ. I have found the evidence concerning him to be historically accurate. I have also discovered that Jesus Christ is more than a human being, he is either God or nothing and having examined the evidence it is impossible to conclude other than he is God. Having concluded that he is God I have accepted him as my personal Saviour. I urge all members of the legal profession to use the "Laws of Evidence" to investigate the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and if you find that he is wrong expose him as a faker but if not consider him as your Saviour and Lord"

**HOW CAN I BE SAVED?**

**Salvation is available for all members of the human race.**

Salvation is the most important undertaking in all of God's universe. The salvation of sinners is never on the basis of God's merely passing over or closing His eyes to sin. God saves sinners on a completely righteous basis consistent with the divine holiness of His character. This is called grace. It relies on God so man cannot work for salvation, neither can he deserve it. We need to realise that the creation of this vast unmeasured universe was far less an undertaking than the working out of God's plan to save sinners.

However the acceptance of God's salvation by the sinner is the most simple thing in all of life. One need not be rich, nor wise, nor educated. Age is no barrier nor the colour of one's skin. The reception of the enormous benefits of God's redemption is based upon the simplest of terms so that there is no one in all this wide universe who need be turned away.

**How do I become a Christian?**

There is but one simple step divided into three parts. First of all I have to recognise that I am a sinner (Romans 3:23; 6:23; Ezekiel 18:4; John 5:24).

Secondly, realising that if I want a relationship with Almighty God who is perfect, and recognising that I am not perfect, I need to look to the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Saviour (1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 Peter 2:24; Isaiah 53:6; John 3:16).

Thirdly, by the exercise of my own free will I personally receive the Lord Jesus Christ as my Saviour, believing that He died personally for me and that He is what He claims to be in an individual, personal and living way (John 1:12; 3:36; Acts 16:31; 4:12).

**The results of Salvation**

The results of this are unbelievably wonderful:

My sins are taken away (John 1:29),

I possess eternal life now (1 John 5:11,12),

I become a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17),

The Holy Spirit takes up His residence in my life (1 Corinthians 6:19),

And I will never perish (John 10:28-30).

This truthfully is life's greatest transaction. This is the goal of all people; this is the ultimate of our existence. We invite and exhort any reader who has not become a Christian by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ to follow these simple instructions and be born again eternally into God's family (Matthew 11:28; John 1:12; Acts 4:12; 16:31).

Many other Christian resources are available freely from our internet web site: [www.ebcwa.org.au](http://www.ebcwa.org.au) and [www.orakeibaptist.co.nz](http://www.orakeibaptist.co.nz) for weekly messages. For further information contact Dr Peter Moses at [pjmoses@bigpond.com](mailto:pjmoses@bigpond.com) or email Brian Huggett [brianhuggett@bigpond.com.au](mailto:brianhuggett@bigpond.com.au)

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**NOTE:** As with Volume 1 of Chronicles, we have decided not to insert the Bible Topic Book doctrines at all into the text. The reason for this is that we want you to have the 1 and 2 Kings Commentaries open as you go through this one. In those Commentaries you will have the doctrines laid out to refer to to reinforce Ezra's message in this volume.

We have been struck by the Lord's timing in having us undertake this work only at this time in 2019, when we were also working on the Perfect tense studies in the New Testament. They have drawn our attention to the importance of the eternal life perspective, and that is Ezra's point on every page of this volume also.

Ezra is looking back from the refurbishing of the second temple to the establishment of the first, and he is seeing the dangers that beset Solomon's reign and those afterwards. The key danger is trusting in beautiful buildings rather than walking with God in daily intimate daily fellowship.

God wants us to walk closely with Him, in spirit and in truth. We are left here to worship, work and witness, not to wander about! Ezra hates pointless activity and mindless work; he wants us focused in all the fibre of our being in the passionate Holy Spirit filled service of the Lord our God.

Let's join him again in this second volume and rejoice in the Lord. "The Joy of the Lord is our strength". Nehemiah 8:10.

## 2 CHRONICLES INTRODUCTION

### "Noah's Day Syndrome"

**Matthew 24:32-39, 4-12.**

Ezra was feeling the same desperation and sadness that the Lord had as he gave the Olivet Discourse.

Chronicles begins to be written around 440-420 BC. The second volume is very direct in its application – "Beware Religion". Beware Fake, when only Real Faith-relationship with God will deliver you from disaster and death.

Time line

450 – 445	Ezra Satrap (maybe earlier also)
445-433 BC.	Nehemiah is Satrap – walls and gates re-built
433 – 420	Israelites go back into fake religious nonsense and religious evils
420 – 399	Malachi called and serves as a prophet Ezra may be finishing Chronicles at this time
Circa 420 – 415	Nehemiah back for a time to support Malachi/Ezra

Malachi's Message

**Malachi 1:1-8** Priests you have become like Edomites – Choices....

Religion	Relationship
Ritual	Reality
Fake	Real
Demonic deception	Holy Spirit Faith
Hatred	God's Power, God's Love, Stable Minds...

How quickly good leader's work is undone by satanic counter attack, and it is through religion, not immorality. Question – is Carnality simply a cousin of fake religion? Religious people are the killers of Jesus our Lord!

The Lake of Fire will be filled with angry immoral people, and baffled religious people!

**Matthew 7:13-23**

## 2<sup>ND</sup> CHRONICLES

### CHAPTER 1

**1 And Solomon the son of David was strengthened in his kingdom, and the LORD his God was with him, and magnified him exceedingly.**

**2 Then Solomon spake unto all Israel, to the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and to the judges, and to every governor in all Israel, the chief of the fathers.**

**3 So Solomon, and all the congregation with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon; for there was the tabernacle of the congregation of God, which Moses the servant of the LORD had made in the wilderness.**

**4 But the ark of God had David brought up from Kirjath-jearim to the place which David had prepared for it: for he had pitched a tent for it at Jerusalem.**

**5 Moreover the brasen altar, that Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made, he put before the tabernacle of the LORD: and Solomon and the congregation sought unto it.**

**6 And Solomon went up thither to the brasen altar before the LORD, which was at the tabernacle of the congregation, and offered a thousand burnt offerings upon it.**

**7 In that night did God appear unto Solomon, and said unto him, Ask what I shall give thee.**

**8 And Solomon said unto God, Thou hast shewed great mercy unto David my father, and hast made me to reign in his stead.**

**9 Now, O LORD God, let thy promise unto David my father be established: for thou hast made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude.**

**10 Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, that is so great?**

### REFLECTION

Read the Parallel Passages in 1 Kings 2:12, 2:2-9. Solomon takes over the kingdom, and he gathers all the people at Jerusalem, and then will march them all to the high place at Gibeon, where Saul had lived and where the old tabernacle still stood with the services continuing there, even though the ark was in Jerusalem in the tent David had constructed for it. Solomon will bring the elements of worship all together in the new temple to be built. He gathers all the elements of government, with administration, military and justice all gathered to hear his policy formally and seek the Lord's blessing as a united nation.

Verse 3 reminds us that worship was split between the two High Priests and the two sites at this point, but Ezra won't play up the disunity, he will focus on the bringing of unity by Solomon's temple. While I have earlier mentioned that the original ark may not still be in existence, especially after the Philistine sacking of Shiloh and the damage it sustained, 1 Samuel 4:12ff, Ezra believed that the ark Moses made was still there at Gibeon and operating and was taken to Jerusalem by David, but the tabernacle still operated at Gibeon. The tabernacle was made of things that could be repaired, and so after 400+ years it would have been very battered about, but it certainly appears to have survived at least in restored/repaired form. It will be apparently taken into the new temple and placed in a storage area above the Holy of Holies.

Verse 5 tells us that the bronze altar of Bezaleel was still there in front of the tent. A massive number of sacrifices are now offered on that old altar – establishing the connection between Moses and Solomon. The day is taken up in the sacrifices. Solomon is spoken of as offering the sacrifices, but it is the priests who offer the sacrifice on his behalf – so it is spoken of as if he offered them. Don't look for contradictions here – focus on Ezra's point, and understand that these people think differently to us.

On the night after the offerings, the Lord spoke to Solomon directly in a vision or appearance of the Lord before him. Remember the Lord Jesus is the visible member of the Godhead and he appeared to Moses on the Mount, and to Joshua outside Jericho, as part of the transfer of command. **Joshua 5:13-15**. Solomon is carrying on the work of his father, and needs to hear from the Lord before the great work of temple building begins. It is a reminder that he is a strong believer at this point, but wealth will lead to carnality.

**Verses 7-10.** Solomon is given his first real test and he passes it. The Lord asks what he wants, and Solomon expresses himself perfectly, recognizing that he has grace already from God in being lifted up to rule, but what he really needs is the wisdom to rule well. This is the right choice to make, as he will have all he needs from the Lord, and the testimony as to the wealth he will get is already clear from the offerings made in his father's last year. He seeks real wisdom, and the Lord will grant his request and Solomon will explain what wisdom is for us. **Proverbs 1:7, 3:1-10, 17-26**.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Always seek wisdom believer, for with God's wisdom you will always have what you need to face each and every challenge life brings. We find wisdom by the "washing of the water of the Word". **Ephesians 5:26**. As we saturate our hearts and minds with God's Word, we draw strength and gain focus for all the challenges we will meet on this brief journey through space and time.

### Pastoral

Solomon gathers all the leaders, and in unity he marches to the old high place that Samuel had sanctified and led the people from, with the High Priests serving. He also recognized the Benjamite legacy of Saul that he was also inheriting. He paid attention to the past, to unite all people in the land to their new future. For the next 40 years there would be peace and plenty as a result of his policies.

**11 And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king:**

**12 Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like.**

**13 Then Solomon came from his journey to the high place that was at Gibeon to Jerusalem, from before the tabernacle of the congregation, and reigned over Israel.**

**14 And Solomon gathered chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, which he placed in the chariot cities, and with the king at Jerusalem.**

**15 And the king made silver and gold at Jerusalem as plenteous as stones, and cedar trees made he as the sycomore trees that are in the vale for abundance.**

**16 And Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt, and linen yarn: the king's merchants received the linen yarn at a price.**

**17 And they fetched up, and brought forth out of Egypt a chariot for six hundred shekels of silver, and an horse for an hundred and fifty: and so brought they out horses for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, by their means.**

## REFLECTION

God's answer is as direct as Solomon's request. Note what God will give and what he will not give to Solomon. Riches, wealth and honour is given, but not long life, or the death of his enemies. He will however have the fame of being the wisest man who ever lived, and yet he will become a fool through being enticed after the pleasures associated with the wealth and fame he gets!

Many seek wealth, and millions buy their lotto tickets every week hoping for great wealth, but few understand that wealth without values that are eternal will only unravel the body and mind and destroy the soul over time. **1 Kings 11:1-8**. For the sake of sexual pleasure and the joys of adulation amongst the multitude of beautiful women in his harem he lost all he had gained by way of divine wisdom early on in his reign.

Fame is a fickle master; for once you have adulation you can seek it more and more. It is addictive, and the pleasures of the harem are distracting from the real business of government, and they have led to many deaths in the Middle East when careless men relaxed in the presence of people who were there to kill them.... To become a "fat cat" is to become a lazy cat, and to be set up to be taken advantage of, or worse. Solomon relaxed too much, even though he advised his sons to be alert and careful. God's instructions to his leaders always has as a part of it, be alert to danger! **Proverbs 4:23-27, Ephesians 5:14-18, Philippians 3:13-16, Colossians 4:5.**

Verse 14 records the beginning of the decline, yet to the ancient world it meant he was a great ruler with real power projection and hitting power in his army. He bought the latest in battle tanks (chariots) from Egypt, and they were the best, but came at a cost that would bankrupt the nation. He was given wealth to utilize for the temple and the nation, but he spent it on the best "modern" weapons, rather than trust the infantry that made David great.

Solomon wasn't a soldier, but he had Benaiah as his general and Moses as his guide. **Deuteronomy 17:14-20.** He was not to multiply wives or horses! God wasn't being "funny", he was being directive and safe, for multiple wives were trouble, and multiple horses were bankruptcy. Note the last two verses of our chapter, verses 16-17. The costs of the horses and chariots is way too high to be sustainable. The result was bankruptcy and over taxation. This would be how President Regan defeated the Soviets – bankruptcy...

He also planted cedars rather than trees bearing fruit/food. He had started to think of wealth for its own sake, and forgotten that all he had was to serve the people – he had started to serve himself....and lose the vital connection to the people. His son would lose it completely.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

It is easy to start to believe our own publicity. It is easy to fall into temptations when they are overwhelming and beyond the normal limit others face. Solomon faced temptations that I would be fearful of facing. Do not be too quick to mock this man, for he faced things that most of us would fall over in ten minutes facing; this man will be on track for nearly twenty years and write Proverbs and later Ecclesiastes. He will fail because he stumbles at the temptations of sex, fame and wealth, and all of us would stagger at what he faced – so do not be judgmental at this man, for we would not want these temptations.

### Pastoral

What do we seek as pastors? What is our focus? Solomon's was correct; he wanted wisdom to judge, guide and direct the Lord's people. We need God's wisdom to achieve the same result, and that should be our focus. We have the Holy Spirit as our teacher and the Spirit's desire is to bring us to full Christian maturity, and therefore full spiritual productivity.

We are here to be spiritually productive, not relax and enjoy our wealth, power or fame...

## CHAPTER 2

**1 And Solomon determined to build an house for the name of the LORD, and an house for his kingdom.**

**2 And Solomon told out threescore and ten thousand men to bear burdens, and fourscore thousand to hew in the mountain, and three thousand and six hundred to oversee them.**

**3 And Solomon sent to Hiram the king of Tyre, saying, As thou didst deal with David my father, and didst send him cedars to build him an house to dwell therein, even so deal with me.**

**4 Behold, I build an house to the name of the LORD my God, to dedicate it to him, and to burn before him sweet incense, and for the continual shewbread, and for the burnt offerings morning and**

evening, on the sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the solemn feasts of the LORD our God. This is an ordinance for ever to Israel.

**5 And the house which I build is great: for great is our God above all gods.**

**6 But who is able to build him an house, seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him? who am I then, that I should build him an house, save only to burn sacrifice before him?**

**7 Send me now therefore a man cunning to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in iron, and in purple, and crimson, and blue, and that can skill to grave with the cunning men that are with me in Judah and in Jerusalem, whom David my father did provide.**

**8 Send me also cedar trees, fir trees, and algum trees, out of Lebanon: for I know that thy servants can skill to cut timber in Lebanon; and, behold, my servants shall be with thy servants,**

**9 Even to prepare me timber in abundance: for the house which I am about to build shall be wonderful great.**

**10 And, behold, I will give to thy servants, the hewers that cut timber, twenty thousand measures of beaten wheat, and twenty thousand measures of barley, and twenty thousand baths of wine, and twenty thousand baths of oil.**

## REFLECTION

It is one thing to be told to do a job, and quite another to desire to complete the job yourself. David wanted Solomon to build the temple, and he was publically tasked with the job, but that has never stopped anyone when they had the power to not do a thing, from simply letting the idea die a natural death. Solomon has been spoken to by the Lord after his prayer, and he takes this task as one "as unto the Lord" and he does it.

He will be faithful to the divine vision for at least twenty years, and slowly drift away by millimetres and doesn't notice until his joy in the Lord is gone. So many today slide away from their living fellowship with the Lord and slowly but steadily die spiritually, and carnality destroys them. The "Sin Unto Death" awaits at the end of the "backsliding" sins that deepen "Carnality". All doctrines that are covered in the BTB topics in Kings. Solomon will die this death, and so will all who follow his lusts. **1 Corinthians 3:16-17.**

The labour force required for the work was extensive indeed; for all aspects of it required simultaneously to be done. The timber had to arrive as the stone and the nails and other things had to be there to use. The entire structure was designed as a kit set, so no sound of hammer was heard on site, and so precision was required in everything, with wood pre-cut and stones numbered and ready to fit together without noise or shout of workers. This was an incredibly experienced work force, and such specialists are expensive, and all Solomon had would be used on his house and the temple. His house would take longer to build and be more expensive, most likely covering the area to the west of the temple site.

Solomon's letter to Hiram King of Tyre makes interesting reading. He may be the same man that worked with David, or a son with the same name, we cannot be sure at this distance, but given Solomon's long association with him, I suspect this was the son of the man who helped David. The "help" was at a price, and it was a high price, but mutually beneficial business and political arrangement to the two kingdoms. Solomon's army kept Hiram from attack from the East, and Hiram's navy protected Israel's shore line, and provided dedicated trade. They would work together on a series of major naval expeditions from Ezion Geber later in Solomon's reign.

In verse 4 Solomon tells Hiram things that make no sense, unless he is also a believer and agrees with Solomon's desire to worship. Verse 5 is a challenge to the "gods" of the Phoenicians and would be an insult to most, yet this man is relaxed with Solomon. He really talks up his temple work and underlines the spiritual significance of it and his own humility in the process.

He asks for a cooperative venture, with his men and Hiram's working together in the forests to cut, trim, shape and then sail the rafts of logs down the coast ready to be taken up to Jerusalem for the building. The workers are to be paid in food, which was normal, but more will be required for the king to receive also. It was a lot more than just providing food for workers and their families for the years of labour. The cost would be extremely high, as we will see below.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Are we ready to witness as clearly as Solomon does to the spiritual purpose of the temple building. He is very straight forward in his testimony to what he is doing.



**Pastoral**

One old pastor mentor always used to say, “The wages of sin are death, and Satan always pays his wages...” Three things about Satan you can depend upon – 1. his malice towards you will be consistent all your life long, and 2, his desire to destroy you with temptations to prosperity will be consistently offered to the end also, and 3, he will kill you if you wander off God’s path for your life – he loves to get that opportunity.

Let us be ready to pour our hearts and wallets out for the projects of the Lord, but let us guard our heart and keep thinking all the way, to ensure we do not allow pride or self-centredness to pollute our giving to the Lord.

**2:11 Then Hiram the king of Tyre answered in writing, which he sent to Solomon, Because the LORD hath loved his people, he hath made thee king over them.**

**12 Hiram said moreover, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, that made heaven and earth, who hath given to David the king a wise son, endued with prudence and understanding, that might build an house for the LORD, and an house for his kingdom.**

**13 And now I have sent a cunning man, endued with understanding, of Hiram my father's,**

**14 The son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre, skilful to work in gold, and in silver, in brass, in iron, in stone, and in timber, in purple, in blue, and in fine linen, and in crimson; also to grave any manner of graving, and to find out every device which shall be put to him, with thy cunning men, and with the cunning men of my lord David thy father.**

**15 Now therefore the wheat, and the barley, the oil, and the wine, which my lord hath spoken of, let him send unto his servants:**

**16 And we will cut wood out of Lebanon, as much as thou shalt need: and we will bring it to thee in floats by sea to Joppa; and thou shalt carry it up to Jerusalem.**

**17 And Solomon numbered all the strangers that were in the land of Israel, after the numbering wherewith David his father had numbered them; and they were found an hundred and fifty thousand and three thousand and six hundred.**

**18 And he set threescore and ten thousand of them to be bearers of burdens, and fourscore thousand to be hewers in the mountain, and three thousand and six hundred overseers to set the people a work.**

**REFLECTION**

The response is formal from the king of Tyre. He speaks like a believer, but we have no way of knowing at this distance whether this is diplomatic politeness, or real salvation. The balance of probability here is that he is a believer, and Solomon’s closeness may be credit to David for leading the father of this man to the Lord earlier, as he had so many Philistines and Cretan troops.

The testimony in verse 12 is the reason for my comment above, as I cannot see any pagan king giving God credit for creation, when they had their own pagan creation myths. He praises Solomon and David, and recognizes the task of building as a holy task from God. Verse 13 gives us the answer to the father-son riddle earlier, both were named Hiram (many spellings – “h-r-m”). Hiram of Tyre is sending Solomon a man who can be the project director and he is half Israelite, of Dan and Tyre. He is a master of various trades and able to coordinate them all. He is the ultimate project manager for Solomon.

Verse 14 gives us a list of this man’s CV and it is impressive, as he is a master craftsman and able to ensure that quality is the best in all aspects of the work. This building project needs someone who is able to check stone work, timber roofing and wall framing, metal work and what is required for marble flooring. He has to be able to direct all the trades and this man is unique in his day for multi-skills needed on this job.

Verse 15, is the acceptance of the food offer, and the encouragement to send it now, so that the teams may start work and be fed, with no break in supply. When you promise you had better be able to perform, and Solomon can and he will. Solomon is ready months ahead of the start time. The timber work will begin, or already has begun, and they will raft the timbers to Joppa and then it will go by road up to Jerusalem.

Verses 17-18 is an interesting glimpse of the problem of refugees and what we now call overstayers. Solomon does a census of these people who have no right to stay in Israel and bluntly offers them a choice – stay and work on the project, or leave now! He organizes them in work gangs and puts them to work as the manual labour staff. This may seem a bit harsh, but foreigners in your country could mean you had

agents of a foreign power in your land, and it was (and is at times even now) dangerous; a real security concern when you see the numbers.

Solomon will concentrate them and use them, and thereby neutralize any military threat. Note that there appear to be as many as 153,600 foreigners in the land, and when he gives them the “choice”, he is left with 83,600 “guest workers”, with 3,600 being their own supervisors. This means he can free up his tribal labourers for army duties if needed.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Be ready to lead people to the Lord, as you are led to people, or they are led to you, who the Holy Spirit has opened the door to witness to. We must “earn” the right to speak in today’s world, and that means we must be respected by the person with whom we speak.

Solomon could witness directly to Hiram junior because Hiram senior had known the faith of David and respected him, even though he knew his weaknesses and sins, as all did.

I wonder whether David’s Psalms and Solomon’s Proverbs were distributed around the eastern Mediterranean? I suspect they were, as we get the Greek Philosophers in later centuries saying things that are way too close to the Psalms and later prophets to be accidental or coincidence.

### Pastoral

Pastors, how well do we establish relationship with other CEOs of organizations around us? Solomon was able to speak and witness to Hiram, with respect both ways. We must look to build these relationships with business and community leaders. Be real and be mature! If you promise to perform something be ready to do it before the order to start is given...

### Notes

## CHAPTER 3

**1** Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the LORD appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

**2** And he began to build in the second day of the second month, in the fourth year of his reign.

**3** Now these are the things wherein Solomon was instructed for the building of the house of God. The length by cubits after the first measure was threescore cubits, and the breadth twenty cubits.

**4** And the porch that was in the front of the house, the length of it was according to the breadth of the house, twenty cubits, and the height was an hundred and twenty: and he overlaid it within with pure gold.

**5** And the greater house he cieled with fir tree, which he overlaid with fine gold, and set thereon palm trees and chains.

**6** And he garnished the house with precious stones for beauty: and the gold was gold of Parvaim.

**7** He overlaid also the house, the beams, the posts, and the walls thereof, and the doors thereof, with gold; and graved cherubims on the walls.

**8** And he made the most holy house, the length whereof was according to the breadth of the house, twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof twenty cubits: and he overlaid it with fine gold, amounting to six hundred talents.

**9** And the weight of the nails was fifty shekels of gold. And he overlaid the upper chambers with gold.

## REFLECTION

Parallel passage is 1 Kings 6:1ff. Keep recalling the reason for the choice of the threshing floor of Arunah/Ornan. The Lord Jesus Christ, as the "Angel of the Lord" appeared right on that spot to David. It is the place of deliverance and communication. Can you see the significance of this in light of that? That much battled over hill today has the platform built by Herod the Great, over the earlier site, but it is all still there underneath, and will be built upon again.

It may be the place that Abraham offered up Isaac, although given the proximity of the previous Canaanite city that is unlikely. Don't get side-tracked by "traditions" developed later, focus on the Lord's appearance to Solomon's father David at this spot, for the message of deliverance and hope is the one Ezra wants us to see shining through the darkness of the centuries, and the sadness for Ezra of thinking about the destruction of this temple. Keep remembering that Ezra is writing this in the 440s BC, and the temple was only destroyed in 586 BC, (only 140 years before) and he feels that, because he sees what caused it, and it was the slipping away from all the truths that will be expressed in its building and dedication.

Ezra will be weeping as he writes these words here, for he sees Solomon's heart's desire and the people's joy, and he also knows where the story is going. They back-slid away from this place and so were judged by God. He sees the danger of the same slide for his own generation. He writes these words to lift up his people's eyes to the Lord, as Solomon's eyes are lifted up at this point.

The building project begins on site on the second day of the second month, in the fourth year of his reign. He has taken three full years to ensure all is ready off site to kit-set the temple on site without the sound of hammer. On this day he begins. Ezra can give us the very day, as it is a formal and dedicated day, saturated in prayer when they start.

I have discussed this very fully in the Commentary on 1 Kings 6:1ff, and I want you to go there to read at this point the full description, and pick up the additional detail there. Solomon will be seven years building the temple, and thirteen years building the new palace. 1 Kings 7:1ff. These projects will take his time and energy, and will focus his mind, and keep him from being distracted by the many women who will later be part of his downfall through their paganism.

The decorations of the building were amazing. The white Jerusalem stone was overlaid in pure gold, not just millimetre thin gold leaf. The temple will be stripped of this within a couple of years of Solomon's death through the stupidity of Rehoboam his son, and then it will glow white in the sun, but through the thirty years of Solomon's reign after it is finished it glowed gold for miles around to be seen as a beacon. Gold speaks of the purity and perfection of the Holy Character of God, and that is what people were to meditate upon.

After Solomon's fall into sin, and his death it was quite appropriate that the gold was gone, for indeed the gold was gone from the kingdom, but the white roof and walls now spoke of the purity of God, and that was the message that the people needed to see, and Ezra understood this, for God's judgment was pure and right. The gold soon went due to sin, and this was the danger for his own day, and Ezra wants the people of his day and our own to see that unless we deal with sin and evil we will slide into judgment.

The decoration all speaks of different aspects of what this house was built for. It sat on the place of deliverance, and it was the place of communication where God spoke to man in everything that went on there. Every ritual of the temple spoke of the person, plan and purposes of God. The Feasts of Israel spoke of God's prophetic timetable; the Spring Feasts speaking of his 1st Advent, and all being fulfilled in it, the Autumn Feasts speaking of his 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent, and all of these will be fulfilled then.

The decoration speaks of Israel and God's desire for them. The palm trees in verse 5 speak of God's desire for their production for his glory, and the golden chains speak of God's protection and guidance. Golden Chains figured extensively in the tabernacle. God is in the business of "breaking the chains" of slavery for mankind, but he "binds us with golden chains" of his love and care, and he draws us with golden chains into his will and protects us there. The big question for each Israelite generation was; will you be bound about with the golden chain of glory and authority from God, or the iron chains of your captors when they take you away for your rebellion against God. Gold chain was a potent symbol of glory (around the neck) or slavery/judgment when iron and bound about the arms and legs.

Note the amount of gold here, and check out the calculations in the Commentary of Kings. The lavishness of this building was unlike any other in the ancient world. It was famous, even though only glowing for thirty years. It was built by the 11<sup>th</sup> year of Solomon, and glowed gold for the last 29 years of his life, and in the fifth year of his son Rehoboam the gold was stripped off the roof and walls to pay tribute to Pharaoh of Egypt. It glows gold for only 32-33 full years; there are the years of the Lord Jesus' earthly life!!!

The gold speaks of the deity of the Lord, and he shines amongst the people for a very limited time. The very fate of the gold on the temple is paralleled by the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27. This prophecy starts in 445 BC, in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, and begins to “tick away” towards its fulfilment in the days of the Lord. Messiah will be “cut off”, in exactly the same way as the gold is “cut off the temple”, 33 years after it was put there.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Solomon is careful and prayerful in his early life, and he wants this temple to be a wonder and it will be, but like all the works of men, it will be for a “limited time only”.

All we do, even if “gold plated” will decay and be swept away in time, but what we do for the Lord lasts eternally. The fire of purity of the Lord will burn away all the “wood, hay and stubble” of space-time, but the “gold, silver and precious stones” of spiritual production will last forever. 1 Corinthians 3.

### Pastoral

Pastors, let us speak often of the gold of eternity, and urge God’s people to value spiritual production above all else.

**Chapter 3:10 And in the most holy house he made two cherubims of image work, and overlaid them with gold.**

**11 And the wings of the cherubims were twenty cubits long: one wing of the one cherub was five cubits, reaching to the wall of the house: and the other wing was likewise five cubits, reaching to the wing of the other cherub.**

**12 And one wing of the other cherub was five cubits, reaching to the wall of the house: and the other wing was five cubits also, joining to the wing of the other cherub.**

**13 The wings of these cherubims spread themselves forth twenty cubits: and they stood on their feet, and their faces were inward.**

**14 And he made the vail of blue, and purple, and crimson, and fine linen, and wrought cherubims thereon.**

**15 Also he made before the house two pillars of thirty and five cubits high, and the chapter that was on the top of each of them was five cubits.**

**16 And he made chains, as in the oracle, and put them on the heads of the pillars; and made an hundred pomegranates, and put them on the chains.**

**17 And he reared up the pillars before the temple, one on the right hand, and the other on the left; and called the name of that on the right hand Jachin, and the name of that on the left Boaz.**

## REFLECTION

I comment on these verses significantly in the 1 Kings Chapters 6-7 Commentary, and I encourage this passage be read slowly and prayerfully. The cherubim give us an important detail about the ark, and they tell us fully and finally that the lid, carved by Bezaleel and Aholiab is indeed missing, and has been since the days the Philistines captured and destroyed it, returning its gold weight/value in votive offerings. 1 Samuel 6-8.

Had the original holy ark’s “mercy seat” been intact no such work was required for the temple, but the place to sprinkle the blood was gone. The cherubim will stand over-arching the area of floor where the ark would have stood, but it is placed just back, almost watching on, but still under these vast carved angels, with a new small altar built under the cherubim’s wings, covered in gold, and on that altar the blood is sprinkled, overshadowed by the giant carved cherubim.

In the second temple the ark is gone, and Joshua and Zerubbabel do not carve the cherubim nor make another altar for the Holy of holies; the Holy of Holies in the second temple is a gold covered empty space, and that is appropriate, as it is the empty vessel awaiting Messiah’s arrival. He alone will fill the space. Solomon’s temple was to illustrate the same elements that the Mosaic Tabernacle did, but the second temple is the one Messiah will come to in person, and so it was to be different – empty and expectant.

Remember they all have the timetable now, from **Daniel 9:24-27**, and know when the Messiah is due, and Ezra sees the start of the prophetic clock through Nehemiah's work to rebuild the walls.

The great veil to hang before the partition wall separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies is multi-coloured, blue, purple, and crimson red, with cherubim woven into it. The symbolism is clear; blue for eternity and the sky, eternity touching time. The purple is the colour of the king, and the Messiah is King of all kings. Crimson red; speaking of the blood of Christ, for he comes as the last and only efficacious sacrifice for sin, to defeat sin and death.

The cherubim are the angels of the covering of the holiness of God, and are the symbol of angelic presence, the reminder that the angelic conflict is finding its completion and fulfilment in the person and work of Christ. He comes to his creation a "little lower than the angels" to defeat sin and death as a man, and he does defeat all that Satan has tried to do through the ages of man after the fall. **Psalm 8:4-6, Hebrews 1:4-13, 2:9-15.**

The temple would illustrate in its decoration and its functional activities all the many and varied aspects of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The two pillars are like the statues in front of the pagan temples, but they stand in absolute opposition to everything paganism stood for. One of the pillars is named Jachin (He shall establish), the other Boaz (In it is strength). They were the standing pillars reminding people entering the space, that God alone establishes anything of value, and that in faith alone is strength, but it must be faith in the right object.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Do we have faith in the right object? Are we resting in the Lord's person and completed work, or do we have our faith grounded in our works, or some ritual? Let us rest only in his arms.

### Pastoral

Pastors, is the church a "place of meeting" as it is meant to be? Do people meet the Lord and each other there? Have we done all we can to make it the place it needs to be?

### Notes

## CHAPTER 4

**1** Moreover he made an altar of brass, twenty cubits the length thereof, and twenty cubits the breadth thereof, and ten cubits the height thereof.

**2** Also he made a molten sea of ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass, and five cubits the height thereof; and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about.

**3** And under it was the similitude of oxen, which did compass it round about: ten in a cubit, compassing the sea round about. Two rows of oxen were cast, when it was cast.

**4** It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east: and the sea was set above upon them, and all their hinder parts were inward.

**5** And the thickness of it was an handbreadth, and the brim of it like the work of the brim of a cup, with flowers of lilies; and it received and held three thousand baths.

**6** He made also ten lavers, and put five on the right hand, and five on the left, to wash in them: such things as they offered for the burnt offering they washed in them; but the sea was for the priests to wash in.

**7** And he made ten candlesticks of gold according to their form, and set them in the temple, five on the right hand, and five on the left.

**8** He made also ten tables, and placed them in the temple, five on the right side, and five on the left. And he made an hundred basons of gold.

**9 Furthermore he made the court of the priests, and the great court, and doors for the court, and overlaid the doors of them with brass.**

**10 And he set the sea on the right side of the east end, over against the south.**

## REFLECTION

1 Kings 7:23-50 is the parallel passage. Ezra is noting the extensive apparatus here for the purification of the priests with water in the giant containers that Solomon cast of bronze. It was showy, and as we would consider excessive, and yet it was accepted by the Lord, and was a glory to all who saw it. We are used to the understated in our day, but in this day the extravagant spoke of abundance and overflow of worship.

The rows of cast oxen holding up the water container for purification has been drawn by many, and always differently. We must wait until we get to heaven to see this. Remember all debate on all things is over then, and only then. From eternity we can see all of space-time and any point within it, and so will be able to see everything we have ever had questions about. Let's get excited about that and leave debate and making additional drawings until then. It was glorious, and it was a feat of metal casting not done again until the High Roman Empire and the late Renaissance.

From our modern perspective Solomon went overboard on this, but did he? We have already been told that he received the design from his father David, and that David had received the design from God. Every item he makes has significance, and meaning, and was a pictorial gospel presentation. Read through the commentary on the Kings passage and reflect.

The casting of this item, even in sections and hollow cast was a marvel, and would be difficult today. The only site capable of this was on the flood plains of the Jordan (verse 17) and archaeologists think they may have found it. Everything is on a larger scale than the tabernacle had been. It was a larger space and more could be seen by the people. In the tabernacle, people stood outside and glimpsed activities through the open door, but here they entered the courtyards and observed closely the actions of the priests. Every action in every place, and every item used taught something about God's Plan for Redemption.

There are ten lampstands like the original one from the tabernacle, and ten tables of showbread to replace the one. Ezra is describing things that with the working second temple his people can reflect upon with the present reality to guide them, but we cannot. The contrast of the first to the second temple, as it is at this time, would have been a great challenge to the people. When they reflected upon the glory that was Solomon's temple, they reflected upon what they had lost as a nation.

They were still rebuilding numbers after the Exile, and the city was still nearly empty, and Nehemiah would need to draft a population in to ensure they could man the gates and walls in a crisis. They were a rump "remnant" kingdom of a hundred thousand or so, when there were several millions living under Solomon and David, and they controlled vast lands, and had power and status internationally. They had lost it all due to sin, and Ezra wants them to remember from how far they have fallen, and get their focus back upon the Lord their God. They are now preparing for Messiah to come and "fill his temple".

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Purity was the focus for the priesthood, and it wasn't to just be ritualistic, but real. It was impurity, immorality and idolatry that destroyed them all, and we are challenged to be real in our faith, not just play-acting. Our faith must "work out" into the reality of daily life.

### Pastoral

Pastors, do we take the effort each service to "get it right", so that the Lord's will is actually done each time we meet? Let's be more prayerful and careful, to ensure each of the elements gets the message across.

**Chapter 4:11 And Hiram made the pots, and the shovels, and the basons. And Hiram finished the work that he was to make for king Solomon for the house of God;**

**12 To wit, the two pillars, and the pommels, and the chapters which were on the top of the two pillars, and the two wreaths to cover the two pommels of the chapters which were on the top of the pillars;**

**13** And four hundred pomegranates on the two wreaths; two rows of pomegranates on each wreath, to cover the two pommels of the chapters which were upon the pillars.

**14** He made also bases, and lavers made he upon the bases;

**15** One sea, and twelve oxen under it.

**16** The pots also, and the shovels, and the fleshhooks, and all their instruments, did Hiram his father make to king Solomon for the house of the LORD of bright brass.

**17** In the plain of Jordan did the king cast them, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zeredathah.

**18** Thus Solomon made all these vessels in great abundance: for the weight of the brass could not be found out.

**19** And Solomon made all the vessels that were for the house of God, the golden altar also, and the tables whereon the shewbread was set;

**20** Moreover the candlesticks with their lamps, that they should burn after the manner before the oracle, of pure gold;

**21** And the flowers, and the lamps, and the tongs, made he of gold, and that perfect gold;

**22** And the snuffers, and the basons, and the spoons, and the censers, of pure gold: and the entry of the house, the inner doors thereof for the most holy place, and the doors of the house of the temple, were of gold.

## REFLECTION

The master craftsman Hiram has been the one to oversee at least, if not personally make, the many utensils and it would appear that he was in charge of the intricate bronze castings for a number of areas. Verses 11 – 16 detail the work done in silver, gold and bronze, and it is extensive. We can only guess the shapes and size of the decorations, but they must have been amazing, and each had significance to the ancients.

The pomegranate was the symbol of Life, Marriage, and purity for the ancients. It was a fruit that they believed had 613 seeds in each fruit, and that is the number of Laws in the Mosaic Law, and so it had special significance for the Jewish people, and its significance as the fruit of marriage, reminded them that they were the bride of God and the Lord was their bridegroom.

The gold and the polished bronze would all glow red-yellow in the sun, and the over-all impression would have been to awe and wonder any visitor to the temple. This was an awesome building and was being done to a divine plan, and the Lord expressed His satisfaction with the care taken to the detail demanded by the Shekinah Glory sitting upon it and filling the house when it was dedicated (next chapter).

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Do our works glow like gold? Do we have a fragrance about us that people take note that we have been with Jesus? **Acts 4:12-16.**

### Pastoral

Once again let's meditate on the issue of getting things right before the Lord. Let us take the care that these men took.

### Notes

## CHAPTER 5

**1** Thus all the work that Solomon made for the house of the LORD was finished: and Solomon brought in all the things that David his father had dedicated; and the silver, and the gold, and all the instruments, put he among the treasures of the house of God.

**2** Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion.

**3** Wherefore all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto the king in the feast which was in the seventh month.

**4** And all the elders of Israel came; and the Levites took up the ark.

**5** And they brought up the ark, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle, these did the priests and the Levites bring up.

**6** Also king Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel that were assembled unto him before the ark, sacrificed sheep and oxen, which could not be told nor numbered for multitude.

**7** And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD unto his place, to the oracle of the house, into the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubims:

**8** For the cherubims spread forth their wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubims covered the ark and the staves thereof above.

**9** And they drew out the staves of the ark, that the ends of the staves were seen from the ark before the oracle; but they were not seen without. And there it is unto this day.

**10** There was nothing in the ark save the two tables which Moses put therein at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of Egypt.

**11** And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place: (for all the priests that were present were sanctified, and did not then wait by course:

**12** Also the Levites which were the singers, all of them of Asaph, of Heman, of Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, being arrayed in white linen, having cymbals and psalteries and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them an hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets:)

**13** It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD;

**14** So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God.

## REFLECTION

Parallel text is 1 Kings 7:51 – 8:11. This is an earlier account of the events, and Ezra is what we call doing a “cut and paste” here, for his note in verse 9, that the ark is there “to this day” is not true of the second temple that was rebuilt after the Exile. All that the ark spoke of was indeed “there” in the empty chamber. The ark is lost at some point before the Babylonian Captivity, and till today none apparently know its whereabouts. Some have claimed to be about to reveal the ark, but its always hype without substance.

The ark isn't needed for the tribulational temple, as the second one didn't have it at all and so the third does not need it. The real original, that Moses saw, and that he made the copy of for the tabernacle, is still in heaven. Don't worry what it looks like for you will see it then, and don't waste time on those who today say they are about to reveal it....

Solomon didn't just “give” the items to the temple – he dedicated them to it. It was a formal process to lay things aside from the temporal and monetary, and make them spiritually a gift offering to the Lord. The ark is brought in to the city and temple in the seventh month. This is the month where the Feast of Trumpets occurred on the first day, the Solemn Day of Atonement of the tenth day, and the Feast of Tabernacles is celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup> day until the 22<sup>nd</sup> day. **Leviticus 23:23-44.**

The Levites carry everything as they did in the Exodus, bringing every item from the old tabernacle to the temple – and the fabric of the old tabernacle itself is going to be placed above the Holy of Holies in a chamber designed for its storage in honourable retirement. The ark is placed underneath the vast cherubim's wings, and the note is made of the ark's contents, and after the Philistine's return of the ark, only the two tablets of the Law are there (Intact or broken), the golden pot of manna and Aaron's rod are missing. So is the lid, which is why the tablets can be seen, and which is why the small gold-covered altar is beside the ark, for the blood to be sprinkled each Day of Atonement upon.

The blood wasn't to be sprinkled on the tablets of the Law, but on the gold top of the altar that is built on the floor, and stands right beside the ark. Refer to the Commentary on 1 Samuel 5:1ff for discussion of this, although it is only here and the parallel passage of 1 Kings Chapter 8, that we hear that the Philistines didn't smash the Tablets of the Law, although they broke or lost the rod and probably smelted the golden pot that



held the manna. This is an interesting observation, as my suspicion was that they would have broken the tablets, but they clearly placed them in their god's temple, and then they returned them.

Verse 11 tells us that the courses of the priests were not fully operational at this point, and that all the duty priests were there to put things in their place, and then they all left the inner area. Verse 12 tells us that all the singers and music players were there, and they all burst into song and the entire orchestra explodes in sound as the priests leave the building. As they sang, "Praise the Lord, for He is good and his mercy endures forever", the Shekinah Glory settled on the temple and filled the house, and all the priests had to withdraw from the building, and possibly even the musicians and singers fell back.

They would be mindful of the Exodus experience, and they all knew that God was truly "with his people" again. **Exodus 40:33-38**. Ezra will note the day the Shekinah Glory leaves, for it was only 140 years before, and was seen in the vision of Ezekiel, and recorded in **Ezekiel 11:22-25**. He will also note the vision that describes the final return of the glory when Messiah comes and rules from the Millennial Temple. Ezekiel 43:1ff. Messiah will come to the Second Temple but he will rule from the Millennial Temple.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Do we "lay aside" things for God today in this formal way? Is there an offering to be given believer? Then lay it quite formally aside and dedicate it in prayer. We bless the offering after its in, but the ancient protocol was to lay it aside in prayer, bring it in prayerfulness, and dedicate it in prayer, and then pass it over. It's a great thing to think about and do!

### Pastoral

Ezra notes the arrival of the Shekinah Glory to Solomon's temple, and it must be with a sadness, for the glory did not rest upon the second temple at all, but it would be the one Jesus visited a number of times. The next temple will also not have the Shekinah Glory present, for it will be the one Anti-Christ will come to, and it will be destroyed. It is the first and the last (Solomon's and the Millennial Temple) only that have the glory within them.

We are the temples of the Holy Spirit, and we are meant to be the light bearers to this world, and those who show the power of God. **Matthew 5:14-16, 1 Corinthians 3:16ff**. Pastors, it is our responsibility to make these things clear to the Lord's people. Let us do so, for holiness before the Lord is crucial before the power of the Holy Spirit can really flow through people's lives. Too many of God's people are seeking dramatic signs of the Spirit's presence, but only holiness opens the door to this. **1 Peter 1:12-16**.

### Notes

## CHAPTER 6

- 1 Then said Solomon, The LORD hath said that he would dwell in the thick darkness.**
- 2 But I have built an house of habitation for thee, and a place for thy dwelling for ever.**
- 3 And the king turned his face, and blessed the whole congregation of Israel: and all the congregation of Israel stood.**
- 4 And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who hath with his hands fulfilled that which he spake with his mouth to my father David, saying,**
- 5 Since the day that I brought forth my people out of the land of Egypt I chose no city among all the tribes of Israel to build an house in, that my name might be there; neither chose I any man to be a ruler over my people Israel:**
- 6 But I have chosen Jerusalem, that my name might be there; and have chosen David to be over my people Israel.**
- 7 Now it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel.**

**8 But the LORD said to David my father, Forasmuch as it was in thine heart to build an house for my name, thou didst well in that it was in thine heart:**

**9 Notwithstanding thou shalt not build the house; but thy son which shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house for my name.**

**10 The LORD therefore hath performed his word that he hath spoken: for I am risen up in the room of David my father, and am set on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built the house for the name of the LORD God of Israel.**

**11 And in it have I put the ark, wherein is the covenant of the LORD, that he made with the children of Israel.**

## REFLECTION

Solomon quotes **Psalm 97:2**, and the fact that he cannot have rehearsed this, as no-one knew what would happen at this point, means he knew this Psalm and knew it was appropriate. It is a testimony to his biblical knowledge, and identifies that he sang his father's songs! Solomon's desire is that the Lord will be with the people in this temple forever. His deepest desire is that this moment continues forever – and we can all say "Amen" to his desire, but sin will stop this being fulfilled.

Ezra is hit again and again by what has been lost by the later sin of the kings and the people. They had the very presence of God with them and like Moses and then David, they could talk with their God, but their idolatry lost it all, and they are starting again in Ezra's day. Even after less than 100 years the temple worship and spiritual life of the people was at a low level when Ezra and later Nehemiah arrive. They get things back to where they need to be, but there is no Shekinah glory in the Second Temple period, just ritual pointing to the one who is the true Glory, who was to come to that temple.

Solomon turns to the assembled people and blesses them also. As their leader he includes them in the day, and that is right, for the leader stands before the People on God's behalf, and the people are to be blessed. Solomon uses the moment to remind them that they are blessed in the Choice of God, not their own choices, and God chose this city and chose David as king. Solomon is remembering grace, for he was born a son of David, and God's chosen son of David to rule. It is grace all the way, and at this point in his reign he is soundly established in grace, mercy and truth.

Verses 7 and following remind the people that David was not allowed by God to build the temple. He reminds the people that there are consequences for all behaviours, and some are permanent. We can be forgiven, and restored, and we always will be after confession, **Psalm 103:8-18**, but there may be some disqualification that continues after some activities. Solomon then mentions that he is the one to fulfil the building project and he has. It was God's call and he has answered it, and that is the only reason he could do this. This was not the sort of project that he could have got a great idea and done – this is God's work alone.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

We can lose a great deal by careless sin. While God always forgives, we still may face the flow on consequences of our sin and be barred from future work. Solomon recognized his father was caught by this principle, as are pastors today under the provisions of 1 Timothy 3.

Let us be careful and prayerful as we advance into our service for the Lord, so that each thing done may open the door for another thing to be done. Our Prayer should be, "Lord let us close no doors by our stupidity or sinfulness".

### Pastoral

Solomon stands and involves the entire congregation, and that is our role, to be involving all people in the worship we lead. Our singers and musicians also need to get this message – we are not on the church stage to perform, but to lead worship, and that means facilitate the worship of God's people. It is about them, not us! Let's keep our eyes open and be focused on what we can do to assist God's people to love Him more and serve Him more.

**Chapter 6:12 And he stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands:**

**13 For Solomon had made a brasen scaffold of five cubits long, and five cubits broad, and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court: and upon it he stood, and kneeled down upon his knees before all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven,**

**14 And said, O LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee in the heaven, nor in the earth; which keepest covenant, and shewest mercy unto thy servants, that walk before thee with all their hearts:**

**15 Thou which hast kept with thy servant David my father that which thou hast promised him; and spakest with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day.**

**16 Now therefore, O LORD God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that which thou hast promised him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit upon the throne of Israel; yet so that thy children take heed to their way to walk in my law, as thou hast walked before me.**

**17 Now then, O LORD God of Israel, let thy word be verified, which thou hast spoken unto thy servant David.**

**18 But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!**

**19 Have respect therefore to the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and the prayer which thy servant prayeth before thee:**

**20 That thine eyes may be open upon this house day and night, upon the place whereof thou hast said that thou wouldest put thy name there; to hearken unto the prayer which thy servant prayeth toward this place.**

## REFLECTION

Solomon's prayer is a well known one, but often people have heard it but not known it was Solomon. Read through 1 Kings 8:22-61, the parallel passage. The Masonic organization, that grew up in the 1700s as a Deistic alternative to Biblical Christianity, make a great deal of this prayer, and the person and work of "Solomon the temple builder". If a cultic group make a great deal of the prayer, do not think it is a wrongful prayer, for if it was it would be corrected in Scripture, and it is not. When a cultic group of any sort adopts anything biblical and gives it their "twist" study it harder, for it is so important that the enemy is trying to distract you from it. **2 Peter 3:15-16.**

**Verse 12.** To "spread forth the arms/hands", is to adopt the standing position for speaking to God and to the congregation, but then he does something well planned and shocking to the people. It is well planned as he has made a platform to stand upon so he is visible to all the crowd, but he kneels before the people and spreads out his arms further. It was one of the gestures of surrender in the ancient world. He is not surrendering to the people, but demonstrating in a visible way his surrender to God's will for the nation.

Note how his prayer starts in verses 14-15. The "Lord God of Israel....there is none like you...who keeps his word...who shows mercy to those who walk before Him with all their hearts". In this Ezra is moved nearly 600 years later as he reflects upon the truth and prophetic sadness of Solomon's words. God is unique, for He is the Creator of the universe and all that is in it. There is truly none like God! Satan tries to deceive fools into thinking he can win, but he cannot. No-one standing against God can win.

Ezra also reflects, and he wants his people to reflect upon the fact that blessing is able to be received only on the path the Lord has called us to walk. It is nowhere else, for mercy and grace can only flow in God's channel of grace and that is the channel of wholehearted obedience. God doesn't want us mixed in our values, attitudes, behaviours or thoughts and words. We are to be wholehearted and single-minded – sold out to the one who made us and gave all for us. **James 1:2-8, 1 Peter 1:3-9, 18-22, 2:9-10.**

God has kept his word, and all that David was promised, Solomon has been enabled to do, using the provisions that God has given freely to him to complete the work. Solomon sees the completed work of the temple as a testimony to God's answers to prayer, not any great fund raising and project management triumph of his own. Solomon recognizes the key principle of the Mosaic Law here; namely that each generation is to "choose life" not death. Each generation is to commit to obedience to the Law, to the Word and Heart of God. Deuteronomy 30:14-19.

"If only they take heed" to the Lord's will they will be blessed forever, and there will always be a king upon the throne and the Shekinah Glory in the temple! The choice is their own, and it is a daily choice. "The Lord has walked before" Solomon on this project (verse 16), and he has felt the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit in every aspect of the work. He seeks the physical and palpable verification of the answer to the prayer of David. Verse 17. Now pause, and reflect here, for the Shekinah Glory has filled the house and all have seen it. What does he mean by a further evidence/verification?

Verse 18 reminds us all of a truth that Solomon at this point in his life, grasped and lived out. God's glory was all around and he saw that all he could do was reflect that in the temple, not capture it. God was not to be put into any building or theological "box" made by man. He saw the immenseness of God and the wonder of the Character of God, and was at this point in his life resting in the glory of God's presence with him. That is what he wants for the people – the verification he seeks is the personal relationship with God for each person standing here. It is walking with Jesus in living spiritual relationship that we all need.

Solomon's desire is for the people to take away from this highly emotionally charged day, the message that God is here with them and they are to be the people of God forever. They are to take the presence of God with them, by and through their obedience to all that the Lord asks them to do as a people.

**Verses 19-20.** Solomon pleads for the Lord to hear his prayer and it is heard and will be answered. While the people walk with the Lord they will be blessed, and the kings in Solomon's line will only end because of their total and determined sinfulness. Ezra will reflect upon this at the end of the book. It was most common in the pagan religions of the time that ordinary people didn't expect to pray on their own behalf, but would have to pay for priests to do the work for them.

Kings and priests only prayed, with the rest of the people dependant upon them, but Solomon is opening the door here for all to recognize, each of this crowd can pray towards this temple and be heard. The Patriarchs prayed anywhere and everywhere, just as we do now, but this temple was to be a focal point for their prayer, as the tabernacle had been before. For around a 1000-year period the temple would be the place that people would face towards as they prayed – not in the sense that God was only there, but that here the presence of God was seen and the prophetic program being proclaimed each year. It was here that the person and work of the coming Messiah-Saviour was proclaimed every day of the year

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Let us be wholehearted in our worship and love for the Lord. God doesn't seek ritual anymore for the rituals here spoke of Christ, and He has come and completed his work for the salvation of mankind.

Today we face heaven, where the Lord sits on the right hand of the Father, in the place of victory. **Hebrews 4:16.** All that this temple spoke about salvation has been fulfilled, and all that it spoke about the reign of Messiah over the earth will be fulfilled.

### Pastoral

Let us lift up Jesus, for in his person and work is the complete answer to man's need for a Saviour and King. He has come – let the world hear from us the truth that alone sets them free.

**Chapter 6:21** Hearken therefore unto the supplications of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, which they shall make toward this place: hear thou from thy dwelling place, even from heaven; and when thou hearest, forgive.

**22** If a man sin against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to make him swear, and the oath come before thine altar in this house;

**23** Then hear thou from heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, by requiting the wicked, by recompensing his way upon his own head; and by justifying the righteous, by giving him according to his righteousness.

**24** And if thy people Israel be put to the worse before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee; and shall return and confess thy name, and pray and make supplication before thee in this house;

**25** Then hear thou from the heavens, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest to them and to their fathers.

**26** When the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; yet if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou dost afflict them;

**27** Then hear thou from heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, when thou hast taught them the good way, wherein they should walk; and send rain upon thy land, which thou hast given unto thy people for an inheritance.

28 If there be dearth in the land, if there be pestilence, if there be blasting, or mildew, locusts, or caterpillars; if their enemies besiege them in the cities of their land; whatsoever sore or whatsoever sickness there be:

29 Then what prayer or what supplication soever shall be made of any man, or of all thy people Israel, when every one shall know his own sore and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hands in this house:

30 Then hear thou from heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and render unto every man according unto all his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men:)

31 That they may fear thee, to walk in thy ways, so long as they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers.

32 Moreover concerning the stranger, which is not of thy people Israel, but is come from a far country for thy great name's sake, and thy mighty hand, and thy stretched out arm; if they come and pray in this house;

33 Then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for; that all people of the earth may know thy name, and fear thee, as doth thy people Israel, and may know that this house which I have built is called by thy name.

34 If thy people go out to war against their enemies by the way that thou shalt send them, and they pray unto thee toward this city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name;

35 Then hear thou from the heavens their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause.

36 If they sin against thee, (for there is no man which sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them over before their enemies, and they carry them away captives unto a land far off or near;

37 Yet if they bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive, and turn and pray unto thee in the land of their captivity, saying, We have sinned, we have done amiss, and have dealt wickedly;

38 If they return to thee with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, whither they have carried them captives, and pray toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, and toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for thy name:

39 Then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling place, their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people which have sinned against thee.

40 Now, my God, let, I beseech thee, thine eyes be open, and let thine ears be attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.

41 Now therefore arise, O LORD God, into thy resting place, thou, and the ark of thy strength: let thy priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation, and let thy saints rejoice in goodness.

42 O LORD God, turn not away the face of thine anointed: remember the mercies of David thy servant.

## REFLECTION

The first need of all individuals is the last word of verse 21, "forgive". It is the amazing truth that we are forgiven by Him. **Psalm 103:8-18**. God's forgiveness is absolute when confession is made fully and truthfully, but God is also the God of justice, and there is no "easy believism" here. Verses 22-23 remind us that God is not mocked by sinful men and women, nor is God fooled by liars who cover their sin with deliberate lies. Ananias and Sapphira died before the Lord, **Acts 5:1-14**, and Solomon's prayer is deliberately reminding the people that God is not to be fooled, nor will he forgive those who are dishonest before him.

**Deuteronomy 30:1-19**. In verses 24-25 Solomon can reassure the people that if they are defeated in war, and they see it as a spiritual judgment, and repent and confess, they will be forgiven. They have God's word on this, and they can depend on God's Word, even though He will not be able to always depend upon them.

When drought comes as a result of spiritual apostasy, they will be able to come back before the Lord and confess, and they will be forgiven. What God requires is honesty and direct dealing with him by his people. God always directs us to walk a "good way" (His path – **Matthew 7:13-23**), but when we select "our way" we can always return to God's way.

Whatever the plague people bring on themselves by their disobedience and evil, there is a remedy, but only in their return to the Lord and to holiness. Satan hates goodness and holiness, for he wants distraction from and distortion of the truth. Satan delights in filth and activity that will cause further problems. He hates

mankind remember – for the salvation of one human being proved that he as an angel could have and should have also repented of his great rebellion!

If a weak creature like man can be saved, an angel should have accepted salvation, but he didn't! Saved Mankind is the "evidence for the prosecution" as far as he is concerned and he wants as many of the deceived fools he can gather to join him in eternal judgement – such is his malice! Satan hates God and hates all who stand with God. Do not doubt the malice of him or those who join him, for they do not see the self-destructive nature of evil until sucked to their own deaths. **John 15:18ff.**

**Verse 30.** God knows our hearts and we are not to presume in our prayers, but be honest with the Lord, and true to ourselves, and our deepest desires. God wants worship and obedience to be from the heart. God hates hypocrisy, for it is the devil's tool to delay acceptance of the truth by those who have not thought about the true nature of God. God knows our hearts, and we are to relax into His love and grace and mercy. There is no need for pretence, just surrender to his love and all it can do for and with us.

**Verses 31-33.** The "fear of the Lord" is not a servile cringing fear that paralyzes; rather it is the respect and awe that is right towards the one who rules over all. We are to get our heads and our hearts right towards God. All are welcome to pray in this house Solomon has built. He openly welcomes the foreigner who will come and spread out his/her arms in prayer, and she/he is assured of being heard by God. This house is called by God's name, not men's national names. God is no cult deity of a town, but the Creator-Saviour-God over all of mankind, and as such the door is open to all to fellowship with Him.

**Verses 34-38.** The staggering thing about this prayer of Solomon to many who read it is the prophetic element of it, but it is no surprise to those who have thoroughly read Deuteronomy chapters 29-33, for Moses prophesied the two great exiles of Israel, and described in detail some of the events that will occur in 586 BC, and 70 AD. It always sends a shiver down my spine, for Moses "saw" the events, and in sadness realised that they would occur, and they would occur because the people "forgot" the curses and blessings decision making they were making daily. They forgot the holiness of their God and they thought they could get away with persistent sin and evil!

**Verses 39-42.** Solomon joins Moses to pray for the generations that stretch right down to our own today, as Israel re-gathers, that they might repent truly and be restored fully. The prophets see these things and weep as they understand the cost of disobedience and rebellion against God. They weep for what will occur because these very words are ignored. There will yet be repentance, but in terrible dark days. **Zechariah 12:10ff.**

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Be holy believer! Be honest with God! Do not forget who it is you speak to in prayer!

We are never beyond forgiveness if we are still alive. Our daily challenge is to walk the "narrow path" of God's will in holiness and single-minded focus upon God's called path for us.

### Pastoral

"Let the priests be clothed with salvation". Let us remember our call, and it is to announce the good news of salvation and sanctification in Christ Jesus. **Isaiah 61:3.**

### Notes

## CHAPTER 7

**1** Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house.

**2** And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD's house.

**3** And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.

**4** Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD.

**5** And king Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty and two thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep: so the king and all the people dedicated the house of God.

**6** And the priests waited on their offices: the Levites also with instruments of musick of the LORD, which David the king had made to praise the LORD, because his mercy endureth for ever, when David praised by their ministry; and the priests sounded trumpets before them, and all Israel stood.

**7** Moreover Solomon hallowed the middle of the court that was before the house of the LORD: for there he offered burnt offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings, because the brasen altar which Solomon had made was not able to receive the burnt offerings, and the meat offerings, and the fat.

**8** Also at the same time Solomon kept the feast seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt.

**9** And in the eighth day they made a solemn assembly: for they kept the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days.

**10** And on the three and twentieth day of the seventh month he sent the people away into their tents, glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the LORD had shewed unto David, and to Solomon, and to Israel his people.

**11** Thus Solomon finished the house of the LORD, and the king's house: and all that came into Solomon's heart to make in the house of the LORD, and in his own house, he prosperously effected.

### REFLECTION

1 Kings 8:62-9:9 is the parallel passage to this one, and this one is slightly fuller, as Ezra is making points about God's affirmation of Solomon's work and mental attitude at this point. The Lord's answer to Solomon's prayer is a full and final affirmation of the truth and integrity of his prayer and the Lord's seal upon the heart of the people and the king. This entire process has been good and righteous. Fire falls from heaven, as it did with Moses, Gideon, David on this very same site when it was chosen, and as it will with Elijah later. **Leviticus 9:15-24, Judges 6:11-24, 1 Kings 18:20-40, 1 Chronicles 21:18-30.**

Five men in all history have this experience, and they are "turning points" in history. Two of these men, Moses and Elijah, stand as the representatives of the Law and Prophets, and they are the chosen witnesses of the Great Tribulation to come. They appear together on the Mount of Transfiguration to affirm the First Advent realities, and will announce the Second Advent in Jerusalem itself. **Matthew 17:1ff, Mark 9:1ff, Revelation 11:3-14.**

David and Solomon have the same experience on the same spot because it is God's "spot" for the Holy of Holies, and God affirms his earlier choice of David and his temple placement in this. As father and son they need to receive this affirmation of God's purpose on this site, and it needs to be a public affirmation so that all Israel knows this is the place for God's temple – and remember within one generation Jeroboam will establish a fake temple in the north and the majority of the northern tribes will leave this place and depart

into idolatry and other evils. With this double answer by fire the North is without excuse before God for their later apostasy. Gideon receives this answer also, and it leads to the nation's deliverance and pulls them back from idolatry but only temporarily, and he himself falls, as Solomon will also.

Note the people's cry, echoing the Psalm of David above (and Psalm 18). "Praise the Lord, for He is good, for his mercies endure forever". It is not God's majesty and power that they focus on, but as the fire falls, they see the glory of God's grace and mercy towards them in acceptance of the sacrifices in total. God's presence creates more worship, and it emphasizes grace, mercy and love of God towards those who come with open hearts and hands that are clean. **1 Timothy 2:8.**

After the Lord's acceptance of the initial offerings, the king and people, with the priests officiating, offer up the thanks offerings to the Lord in grateful praise for all He has done, from the establishment of the nation to this day. The numbers may appear excessive, but these sacrifices are going to be eaten by the people in the fellowship meal that will last for the rest of the day, and possibly feed the crowd for the next days. There may be a million people present here (Verse 8 – massive numbers involved) – we have no idea of the full numbers.

Verse six reminds us of the contribution of David to the worship of the nation. His Psalms are sung and the musical instruments that he had made, and possibly developed, are used to provide "the backing vocals" and musical background to the sacrifices. Ezra reminds us, "His mercy endures forever". It is the mercy of God in forgiving the people for their sins all through their history to date that amazes Ezra and as he reflects upon the terrible idolatry of their people in recent centuries, leading to the destruction of this temple here, he must weep and yet also praise God. The Lord was exceedingly patient to his people and he still is.

Verse 7 tells us that there were many altars built to handle the sacrifices needed that day, and so the entire inner court was sanctified and temporary altars built to undertake the sacrifices. Remember when it says Solomon offered up the sacrifices, it means they are offered up under his authority, on his behalf, for all the people, by the several thousand priests working together in relays here. 22,000 oxen, 120,000 sheep as sacrifices are unable to be offered by one man, and even with the entire available priesthood every man will be working and thoroughly exhausted by the end of this process. All Israel will be encamped about the city for miles around, with fires burning completing the cooking process and eating these sacrificial festive meals as family groups; meals that speak of their united fellowship in and through the blood shed for them. It takes them back to the Exodus and looks forward to the Cross. **Exodus 12:1ff, Ephesians 1:7, Colossians 1:14, Hebrews 10:1-25.**

There was a twenty-two-day feast here, with eight days of the Feast of Tabernacles, and then seven days to dedicate the altar, and seven days of feasting afterwards as a nation, with the meat provided by the king in the quantities described above. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> day the people are sent away back to their homes after a unique event in human history. Everyone heads home with a smile on their face. The fruit of the Holy Spirit's genuine presence is always joy in the end. The Spirit will bring conviction and lead to confession, but with wholehearted open confession there is mercy and grace in abundance poured out from God, and joy is the sign of that. **Galatians 5:22-26.** If there is no joy, there is no living presence of Jesus with that person. **Romans 8:9.**

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Let us worship and bow before our Lord and God. Let us praise Him for his grace, mercy and love towards us, for we do not deserve the mercy we have received, and we never will. With our God it is all grace – His undeserved favour shown to us consistently through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us praise the Lord for who He is and what He has done and is doing for us all.

### Pastoral

True worship will always flow from any genuine confrontation with the Holy Character of God. When God speaks directly by any words of action His people will always bow before Him and worship, and grace will be the theme. All else is hypocrisy – play acting and showmanship.

**Chapter 7:12 And the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice.**



**13** If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people;

**14** If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

**15** Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.

**16** For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever: and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.

**17** And as for thee, if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, and do according to all that I have commanded thee, and shalt observe my statutes and my judgments;

**18** Then will I stablish the throne of thy kingdom, according as I have covenanted with David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man to be ruler in Israel.

**19** But if ye turn away, and forsake my statutes and my commandments, which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them;

**20** Then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them; and this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and will make it to be a proverb and a byword among all nations.

**21** And this house, which is high, shall be an astonishment to every one that passeth by it; so that he shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and unto this house?

**22** And it shall be answered, Because they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath he brought all this evil upon them.

## REFLECTION

God directly speaks with Solomon, just as He did with Moses, Joshua, and David his father. It is the reminder that even though he falls later and is set aside under the Sin Unto Death, he is in heaven and is still to be honoured. Ezra does not praise or even speak at all of the kings of the Northern Kingdom in this history of his, because they are not believers at all and have no place in heaven. Ezra is focused on eternal realities and so pause and hear his words, and see the sadness behind them, for this great king was spoken to by God but allowed money, sex, and power to lead him astray, and finally into divine discipline and an early death. He had great temporal pleasures but lost eternal rewards.

Verse 12 answers all Solomon's prayers and he is told that God has chosen this place, as the place of sacrifice. Solomon is now solemnly told that any so called "natural disaster" that God sends upon his people is to be taken seriously and prayer is to be offered about it. All is to be seen as a dynamic interaction between the volition of man and the will of God for his people. This is not a "superstitious world view", but the divine world view. When we are God's people, we are to be alert to all that happens around us, for the Lord speaks, and we are to hear his warnings, his discipline and his blessing, and respond appropriately.

Verse 14 lays out fully and completely the path back to blessing.

1. Affirm that we are God's people – called by His Name.
2. Humble ourselves before the Lord in solemn prayer.
3. Confess our sin, but go beyond and pray about everything being faced.
4. Seek God's face/direction/fellowship in all things.
5. Turn from all sin and evil in our behaviour and life style.

Then they have the firm promise; that they will be heard by God. They will be forgiven, and their land will be healed if they have been disciplined. Anything short of the "full package" here will not bring the healing sought for. It is wholehearted and complete obedience to God that is required.

God's promise is that he will see and hear his people in this place of sacrifice. The promise goes way further than this one however in verse 16. The Lord makes statements here that must have shook Ezra and challenged him to think also, for he has seen the results of 70 years of desolations in Jerusalem, as he and Nehemiah rebuild. However, the promise of the Lord stands firm, and this hill will be his forever (until space-time ends), and it will be his place! This hill is the centre of the world, and the centre of the angelic conflict from this point until the day time ends. Do not doubt the importance of this hill.

**Verses 17-18.** Solomon could not stand before the Lord when he entered Paradise and complain about his judgment, for he had the very clear promises of God that left no doubts about what was required of him. He was to walk as David walked, in confession and desire for holiness. David sinned greatly, but he recovered through his confession and walked with God day by day. Solomon must "walk" with God, not with his pagan wives!

He was to observe all that God's Word to Moses had laid out, and he is already starting to disobey in his pre-occupation with multiple wives, chariots and horses! Deuteronomy 17:14-20. All he had to do was read Deuteronomy and do what was laid out there. It wasn't hard, nor were the Lord's orders onerous; they were the path to blessing and the Lord makes that clear, just as Moses had. **Deuteronomy 27:9 – 28:19.** If Solomon obeyed then he would have a son always on the throne after him, but he will fail and so will his line, and Joseph in humility does what his father Solomon failed to do – he serves in consistent humility and brings up the Saviour.

**Verses 19-20.** Solomon is very bluntly and directly told that if he falls into idolatry and immorality, then his sin of idolatry-immorality will be repeated in his sons and they will be "rooted up" like weeds from the garden of God, and removed from kingship. The last records we have from the Romans are of the sons of James and Jude, and they are poor farmers. The line of Solomon falls to the ground because of this sin of idolatry. Solomon did the very things God personally told him not to!

**Verses 21-22.** Solomon is told that the temple that is a wonder in the world will become an "astonishment" if he rebels against God's clear warning to him. This would occur and Ezra and Nehemiah see its results around them every day. The original platform of Solomon's temple is built upon again, but I suspect the signs of the burning and demolition of the temple were still there to be seen all around the site in Ezra and Nehemiah's day.

Ezra is clear, the message of verse 22 is the message that he and Nehemiah speak, just as the earlier prophets had spoken of judgment as God's strange work, but his necessary work if God's people committed spiritual adultery. **Isaiah 28:7-29.** At Passover even today a child is tasked to ask the question about why they do this. The story of the Exodus is then told. Ezra sees that the Lord wants them to tell the story of the temple's destruction each year also, and warn the people of the dangers of rebellion against the clear will of God as expressed in the Law of Moses.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Do not doubt the importance of Jerusalem and this hill in world history, either looking back or looking forward. God is still interested in this hill and it will be the centre of the last struggles before the Lord's return. Do not be caught on the wrong side of history in this matter.

The third temple will be built in our life-time. I wrote this first in early 2019 and expect to see this temple operational in the 2020s, but I will not be rejoicing in it, for I read the Word and know what will unfold there, and it is great and terrible judgment. The third temple will be flattened, and flattened totally by the earthquakes before the Second Advent. The third temple is the one Anti-Christ will set up his falsehood within. Study the EBCWA Commentary on the Book of Revelation and be encouraged, not dismayed. God has his hand on this presently mosque covered hill, and the story isn't over; its last chapter is just opening in our day.

### Pastoral

Do we warn the Lord's people with the story of Solomon? Have we ever done so in our ministry? This man heard the very words of God and yet after twenty years he grew cold and day by careless day drifted millimetre by millimetre away from God. He ended up in total debauchery, having fallen from intimate fellowship with God to sharing false pagan worship with his sexual partners!

How seriously do we need to emphasize the daily "walk with God"; the daily feeding on the Word and the daily, moment by moment filling of the Holy Spirit? Ezra is quietly weeping before us as he writes these things, for he lives amongst the rebuilt ruins of the consequences of Solomon and his son's sins!

Let us hear our brother Ezra and passionately plead with God's people so that they do what is right and draw closer to God, not drift away. Lift up Jesus pastor – lift up His Holy Word and bring glory to Him by speaking the truth passionately at all times.

### Notes

**CHAPTER 8**

**1** And it came to pass at the end of twenty years, wherein Solomon had built the house of the LORD, and his own house,

**2** That the cities which Hiram had restored to Solomon, Solomon built them, and caused the children of Israel to dwell there.

**3** And Solomon went to Hamath-zobah, and prevailed against it.

**4** And he built Tadmor in the wilderness, and all the store cities, which he built in Hamath.

**5** Also he built Beth-horon the upper, and Beth-horon the nether, fenced cities, with walls, gates, and bars;

**6** And Baalath, and all the store cities that Solomon had, and all the chariot cities, and the cities of the horsemen, and all that Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon, and throughout all the land of his dominion.

**7** As for all the people that were left of the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which were not of Israel,

**8** But of their children, who were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel consumed not, them did Solomon make to pay tribute until this day.

**9** But of the children of Israel did Solomon make no servants for his work; but they were men of war, and chief of his captains, and captains of his chariots and horsemen.

**10** And these were the chief of king Solomon's officers, even two hundred and fifty, that bare rule over the people.

**11** And Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David unto the house that he had built for her: for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy, whereunto the ark of the LORD hath come.

**12** Then Solomon offered burnt offerings unto the LORD on the altar of the LORD, which he had built before the porch,

**13** Even after a certain rate every day, offering according to the commandment of Moses, on the sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the solemn feasts, three times in the year, even in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles.

**14** And he appointed, according to the order of David his father, the courses of the priests to their service, and the Levites to their charges, to praise and minister before the priests, as the duty of every day required: the porters also by their courses at every gate: for so had David the man of God commanded.

**15** And they departed not from the commandment of the king unto the priests and Levites concerning any matter, or concerning the treasures.

**16** Now all the work of Solomon was prepared unto the day of the foundation of the house of the LORD, and until it was finished. So the house of the LORD was perfected.

**17** Then went Solomon to Ezion-geber, and to Eloth, at the sea side in the land of Edom.

**18** And Hiram sent him by the hands of his servants ships, and servants that had knowledge of the sea; and they went with the servants of Solomon to Ophir, and took thence four hundred and fifty talents of gold, and brought them to king Solomon.

**REFLECTION**

The parallel passages to this chapter are in 1 Kings 9:14-28, 4:1-34, 10:26-29. Particularly read the "wedding present section" where Pharaoh gives Solomon the two cities of the Mediterranean Coast, which Solomon has to rebuild after Pharaoh's murder of all the people in them. It is a sign of things to come, and

an open threat to Solomon. He is borrowing money from Hiram king of Tyre, and giving him cities in the far north (that are not that good, 1 Kings 14:10-13).

Remember, we have seen above, that the temple was paid for by David and the people, but Solomon is building fortresses everywhere in response to Pharaoh's threat, rather than saving money and building his faith and power in his infantry forces as his father had done. Ezra will not speak of these things, for they are mentioned in Kings, and his story emphasizes the early achievements, but the shadow is growing with politics rather than spirituality, and Ezra is not hiding that, but dealing with it differently to the author of Kings.

The focus of the early years is the building up of supply bases deep in captured territory, so that his army can be supplied if it has to venture into these places for defence of the realm. He does extensive repairs and strengthening to all the fortified cities, with Beth-Horon getting special mention. This is understandable, but the ease with which Pharaoh has taken the old Canaanite fortress towns and burned them, is the faith challenge to pray and seek the Lord's guidance, but he is starting to think defensively and strategically as a man, not as a faith-filled warrior. It appears he does enter the battle at Hamath-Zobah, but he is impressed by defences, whereas God had urged his people to be mobile and stay with infantry, trusting God not ever trusting walls.

Solomon is a great builder, but this isn't to be praised in the end, and Ezra will let us think (if we haven't read the end yet) that he is "great" in all he does, but he is slipping in the mention of the "chariot cities" and the many fortresses, and the wise reader is thinking "bankruptcy beckons here". **Luke 14:25-35**. Too many today do not stop and "count the cost" of their walk with the Lord, and then wholeheartedly embrace the cost. Sadly, too many Christian groups, churches and organizations embark on building programs that are more about their pride, rather than God's use of the facilities. Let's make the Lord's money work for us, and not take out loans from the "Hiram banking conglomerate" to build monuments to our own greatness.

The pagan remnants in the land of the people Joshua had pushed aside, Solomon forced to pay tribute/tax to the state, and that continued until the end of the monarchy, and possibly also to Ezra's day also. Verse 9 distinguishes between the foreign and pagan inhabitants of the land and the local Israelites. Ezra makes it clear that Solomon didn't enslave or use any Israelite for forced labour on the building projects, but enrolled them in the army only. He is doing the right things here, but sadly the bankruptcy that the building projects and chariot armies caused would lead to over-taxation and collapse.

Solomon has a core management group of 250 chosen men as his key controllers of all the areas and aspects of the local government. It may be that there are 250 administrative areas with one of these men in charge of each area, or that when army and admin people were totalled there were 250 of them. The rounded number makes me think the former suggestion is correct. Whatever the actual structure this is precise organization, and Solomon is wise and brilliant in this, it is just all too expensive for long term sustainability.

As I read these words my heart always sinks. He was tying himself to a kingdom that would destroy his son's power and wealth. All that he had built would be lost to Egypt within three years of his death. This princess is powerful and it would appear a sly spy for her father – not that uncommon at this time. She will undermine Solomon, although he does love her, he allows himself to be distracted by hundreds of other lovers – and I suspect she hates him for it!

Sadly, Ezra's words here indicate that Solomon is unhappy having her living in the old palace of his father due to its proximity to the temple and the ark. This is no concern if she is a believer, but is a worry if she is an active unbeliever. Did she actively undermine the faith of Israel in the One God? The next verse notes Solomon's offering of the sacrifices for sin. We are left wondering, was it her sin, or his compromises that he was offering these for?

Verse 13 notes how careful he was in the early days of ensuring that all the sacrifices were being offered daily and that every Feast of the Lord was Celebrated/Remembered. Ezra is careful to note that Solomon followed David's advice and direction regarding the "Orders/Courses" of the priests, so that the priesthood had shared roles, and were also able to feed themselves back in the home farms. Service was restricted to 28 days a year, with a rotating thirteenth month in the lunar calendar, so that the maximum service in the temple in any 365 days was 56.

The rule over the treasuries by the assigned Levites was thorough and corruption was non-existent. Corruption free administration means trust and integrity is built in a nation. Sadly this will change with the excessive taxation burdens, as increase in tax will always lead to an increase in people trying to beat the

system. God's preferred taxation is given by Moses; 10% for the temple, 10% for the admin of the feasts, 3.3% for social welfare, with all men ready to turn out for the militia, providing their own weapons. When taxation rises beyond 20% corruption will tend to become normal. Check history for this....

Verses 17-18 mentions the major shipping expeditions that Solomon and Hiram conducted around East Africa, to India and beyond to the Spice Islands, and possibly even to China. These were incredibly good money makers for both kingdoms, and imported excessive luxury goods that could be traded further afield through the Phoenician networks. While these were amazing in their impact, they were an indication that money was being hunted for from many sources. Even great ideas and wonderful expeditions can be distractions from spiritual purposes, and "apes and peacocks" (1 Kings 10:22), are of no real use at all.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Let us be "very scared" of over building palaces here on earth and neglecting our eternal mansions. **Matthew 6:19-20, John 14:1-4.** Be careful Christian of distractions that are wonderful and amazing, but not what the Lord has called you to do.

Be very scared when you find your life is money chasing for luxuries and things that have no eternal value – you have lost your eternal life perspective! Get back on your knees...

### Pastoral

Pastors, are we guarding the Lord's money in the church as we should? During the World Financial Crisis, created by the corrupt American banking system, many churches lost their money, because they had it invested in corrupt money making schemes, and they were schemes run by corrupt and immoral people.

We have no business being involved in money making schemes, rather we are to be spending the money given on the Lord's work. Savings for a church are only for a major project, that is clearly the Lord's project, or else we believe they become sinful and a snare to the church quite quickly.

We are not here to make "strategic alliances" with other groups or organizations, but to make disciples and train them into full Christ-like godliness! Let's keep to our Christ given task – protect the sheep and lambs and feed the sheep and lambs! **John 21:15-22.** If any "church cost centre" isn't doing one or the other Christ ordered task, we must ask why we are doing it!

## CHAPTER 9

**1** And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came to prove Solomon with hard questions at Jerusalem, with a very great company, and camels that bare spices, and gold in abundance, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart.

**2** And Solomon told her all her questions: and there was nothing hid from Solomon which he told her not.

**3** And when the queen of Sheba had seen the wisdom of Solomon, and the house that he had built,

**4** And the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel; his cupbearers also, and their apparel; and his ascent by which he went up into the house of the LORD; there was no more spirit in her.

**5** And she said to the king, It was a true report which I heard in mine own land of thine acts, and of thy wisdom:

**6** Howbeit I believed not their words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the one half of the greatness of thy wisdom was not told me: for thou exceedest the fame that I heard.

**7** Happy are thy men, and happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and hear thy wisdom.

**8 Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee to set thee on his throne, to be king for the LORD thy God: because thy God loved Israel, to establish them for ever, therefore made he thee king over them, to do judgment and justice.**

**9 And she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices great abundance, and precious stones: neither was there any such spice as the queen of Sheba gave king Solomon.**

**10 And the servants also of Hiram, and the servants of Solomon, which brought gold from Ophir, brought algum trees and precious stones.**

**11 And the king made of the algum trees terraces to the house of the LORD, and to the king's palace, and harps and psalteries for singers: and there were none such seen before in the land of Judah.**

**12 And king Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, beside that which she had brought unto the king. So she turned, and went away to her own land, she and her servants.**

## REFLECTION

The Queen of Sheba is playing a “game” well known in the ancient world amongst rulers. Most dynasties would seek the best genetic material for their next generation, and the wisest and the most social, and strongest,...etc, were sought out as potential “kings/queens” for other kingdoms. She comes to check out his fame, but she also wants to carry back a child conceived by him if he proves the best, for that, she believes, will increase her power and her dynasty’s power into the future.

The Ethiopian Kings always believed they were that group descending from this woman and Solomon, and so they sent their officials on regular trips to Jerusalem through the centuries, and their treasurer comes to Jerusalem 1000 years later and he meets Philip. **Acts 8:25ff.** Solomon’s many sexual partners do not make his practise correct or good in any way, but this union creates a line that opens the door to evangelism years later. **Romans 8:28?**

1 Kings 10:1-13 is the parallel passage to this one. Read through there and check the doctrines referred to. Read through the single volume 20 in the “Lives” series as it is devoted to Solomon and reflects upon all these issues very fully.

The Queen of Sheba came ready to impress Solomon, with a camel train and vast wealth as a present for him, and the army to protect it with her. This was no small scale, under cover visit, but a “State Visit” with all protocols observed. She tested Solomon to see if he was as great as she had heard and he entered into the debate and discussions, and she was impressed, and left to return to her country pregnant, although Ezra skips around that issue.

Her presents to him are excessive in our eyes, with a talent of gold = 3000 shekels, where each shekel was approximately 1/3 of an ounce. 1000 x value of gold today per ounce at 2019 values, it is \$1300 USD per ounce, so each Talent is equivalent today to \$1,300,000-00! So the queen gives Solomon the equivalent of 156 Million Dollars! This is in addition to spices that were superior to anything discovered before, and jewels and other things. It is a high price to found a dynasty, but it worked for Ethiopia, and Solomon allowed her to ask for anything she wanted to take back and he granted her whatever she desired.

Verse 8 indicates that this woman has become a believer, and that is the Ethiopian tradition, and that she took back a pure form of Judaism to Ethiopia, and it certainly survived there. There was also the establishment of the church there after the Eunuch returns from his meeting on the Gaza Road with Philip. There are strange things happening here, and God is weaving things together for thousands of years after the events described. The Plan of God in this area is way beyond us, but this union is blessed. We can only stand back and ask, “But is it morally right?” The answer is “NO”, but God brings blessing out of it... Ask in heaven...

The sailing expeditions of Hiram are also successful and gold and specialty woods are brought back and Solomon builds special decking and lattice work for the palaces, but also he made special musical instruments that were unique for their time, with unique sounds. He builds things like no other person of his day and he was admired, and lauded by all around as wise and successful – but behind Ezra’s words of praise are the nagging thoughts of the cost of all this, and even though money is pouring in, the whole show of wealth is unsustainable. Ezra wants us to think deeply about all of this in the context of the Exile.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

The life style of the rich and famous is very alluring and when we read of Solomon we pause and reflect, and I wonder, "Lord how come he gets away with this?..." But does he? All will be lost within a few years of his death and all the promise he had was wasted and lost by the end. There is blessing, but there is a price to pay for a life of luxury. One price will be an early and sudden death at around 60, but the other is eternal – his line loses rulership forever and he loses eternal rewards. How much do we value the pleasures of time? We joke about these things, and say of some, "well at least he died happy..." But did he? And did he gain anything or lose everything eternally by way of eternal rewards?

### **Pastoral**

There are big moral questions left hanging by Ezra here. He isn't neat and moralistic, as he wants us to think and pray and reflect. Let us teach this intelligently and get people thinking too about these things.

Solomon is not what he appeared to be, and nor was his success as great as it appeared to be, for it was gone in a heart beat and disaster struck both kingdoms after they split in the reign of his idiot son.

**Chapter 9:13 Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred and threescore and six talents of gold;**

**14 Beside that which chapmen and merchants brought. And all the kings of Arabia and governors of the country brought gold and silver to Solomon.**

**15 And king Solomon made two hundred targets of beaten gold: six hundred shekels of beaten gold went to one target.**

**16 And three hundred shields made he of beaten gold: three hundred shekels of gold went to one shield. And the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon.**

**17 Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with pure gold.**

**18 And there were six steps to the throne, with a footstool of gold, which were fastened to the throne, and stays on each side of the sitting place, and two lions standing by the stays:**

**19 And twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps. There was not the like made in any kingdom.**

**20 And all the drinking vessels of king Solomon were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold: none were of silver; it was not any thing accounted of in the days of Solomon.**

**21 For the king's ships went to Tarshish with the servants of Hiram: every three years once came the ships of Tarshish bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks.**

**22 And king Solomon passed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom.**

**23 And all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom, that God had put in his heart.**

**24 And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and raiment, harness, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year.**

**25 And Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen; whom he bestowed in the chariot cities, and with the king at Jerusalem.**

**26 And he reigned over all the kings from the river even unto the land of the Philistines, and to the border of Egypt.**

**27 And the king made silver in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar trees made he as the sycomore trees that are in the low plains in abundance.**

**28 And they brought unto Solomon horses out of Egypt, and out of all lands.**

**9:29 Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, first and last, are they not written in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer against Jeroboam the son of Nebat?**

**30 And Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years.**

**31 And Solomon slept with his fathers, and he was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead.**

### **REFLECTION**

Now the figures that Ezra quotes here are enormous and had the budget been balanced and the expenditure sustainable, he should have set up his kingdom for the next 100 years. With our 2019 values a talent being 1.3 million dollars, we have the gold coming in to the value of 666 talents (a scary number – and the meaning of three x six, is God's number times the number of man without God – hence the Anti-Christ's number). Is Ezra making a point here, or was this the average? Even though the money coming in was

great, the costs of the various things he did meant he still was operating on credit from Hiram, borrowing to build.

He now makes 200 small shields, and 300 larger shields of solid gold to hang in his palace, instead of paying debt and establishing a truly sustainable economy, not one bolstered by special expeditions. This is wealth for wealth's sake. It is also setting up a sign for a larger kingdom, saying, "come and rob me". Now I am being "boring" here, and yet I am being responsible, and Solomon is showing a desire to show off, and the danger of that is that it isn't to the glory of God! Pause here and reflect, and think about what Ezra's motivation is here – is this ostentatious show of wealth being praised? Ezra wants us to think – so think!

Verses 17 – 18 speak about his carved ivory throne covered in gold; it is luxury on luxury, wonder on wonder. Ezra is giving us the full "Hollywood" write up of the richness and luxury of Solomon's "greatness", and yet is he talking this up, to actually expose Solomon by this. I suspect he is, and we will see it as he describes all that is built lost in a few years. Dr Moses and I were discussing this very fact and he mentioned the disciples' "tourist" type observation about how impressive the Herodian Temple was as they walked back to the Mount of Olives one night. Jesus words are powerful, and we could paraphrase them, "Don't be impressed by great wonders built by men for they don't last, and these stones will be cast down within forty years"! They were in August of 70 AD (the same day the first was burned). **Matthew 24:1-2.**

The golden footstool and the two carved ivory lions would have been amazing to see, but they are just objects, and they will be swept away like the dust they will become. Verse 19 reminds us that no other kingdom known before or since these things were made had anything like this, and Ezra has seen the Persian Throne, and even it doesn't compare to what Solomon had made. Even the drinking vessels were made of gold, and they will end up at Belshazzar's feast. Daniel 5:1ff. Solomon's vessels may have been stored in the temple treasury and hidden from all invaders until the fall in 586, or 597, when they went to Babylon, but there were enough for a feast of several hundred party goers, and my suspicion is that they were these mentioned here.

Joshua and Zerubbabel bring all these vessels back, and so Ezra and Nehemiah knew these objects, as they will still be in the temple treasury, for it was the national bank. I suspect Ezra is nodding his head as he reflects upon these vessels, for they have "been around" since they were Solomon's dinner service! It was thought nothing to eat off gold, and yet it was actually disgraceful, given the real needs of the kingdom and the heavy taxation that would lead to rebellion later. Ezra doesn't need to point out the moral of the story, it's creeping up on us....

Verse 21 sums it up beautifully, as we look at the cargo of the ships that went to Gibraltar and beyond; "gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks..." There is no use for the apes and peacocks except to have them and have others stand in awe, and they did, none were like him on all the earth at the time. He forgot however that we are all here for "a limited time only". The awe of others is fleeting; it is only the praise of God that is lasting forever.

Solomon "had it all" as far as most men and women are concerned, and he sums up the prosperity gospel message, you can have it all and rejoice in it, but Ezra is moving us to his conclusion with quiet and deliberate focus. People came just to hear Solomon's wisdom, and I suspect this is where the proto-Greek peoples get their copies of the Scriptures, for he would have shared David's Psalms, and humbly we would expect his own Proverbs, and possibly the Torah also. Hebrew translates easily into Akkadian, the common language of Solomon's day, and is close to Aramaic the new lingua franca after Daniel's day, and easily translated and understood. The Greeks "discover" philosophy according to Western thought, but I suspect we read here the origin of the Pre-Socratic thinkers' wisdom - it was Solomon.

Verse 25 gives us the "money trail", for the keeping of horses and chariots was a fatal blunder, for he was bound to Egypt for his supplies, and they controlled the price, and they wore the Israelite economy down by it. He loved horses and they brought them from everywhere, and he had an amazing cavalry and chariot force, but the Egyptians were quietly building their strength and would move when ready to take all the gold Solomon had saved. They supplied the equipment, at a price that would bankrupt him over time.

Verses 29-31 give us a tantalizing clue to other material that was around when Ezra wrote. The Persians and the Babylonians loved books and clearly captured the lot when they took Jerusalem, without any looting/burning in 605, and then again in 597 when the elders and leaders went into captivity. At that point all valuable things, including manuscripts would have been scooped up. Ezra and Nehemiah had access to all the Persian archives as Satraps, and so we read here the written sources he is looking at, and that others could read. Nathan's work is I suspect the books of Samuel. Ahijah/Jeremiah may be the author of Kings or



we may have other now lost books. We will know in heaven and be able to read them! Remember, in heaven you are beyond the limits of space and time and so are able to “see” any events you wish to see that happened in the space-time bubble.... The best is yet to come for those of us who are historians.

Solomon's death is quietly told, and yet it clearly was a sudden death, for his son wasn't briefed properly by his father. I cannot believe that Solomon, who wrote Proverbs early in his reign, “forgot” to follow this up and brief his son as he was about to take over, as David had briefed him. Solomon didn't brief his son because his death was sudden and unexpected, with the family weakness for cardio-vascular disease, most likely a sudden stroke, and so the chaos that unfolded is only explained by this. The collapse of all he built was so quick, it is staggering, but it reflects the temporary and fragile nature of flashy wealth.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Let's audit our flashy behaviours. Are we obsessed by things that don't matter? What are our true values? Do we value eternity enough, or are we always speaking about time?

### Pastoral

Do God's people get biblical values and a biblical perspective from our teaching, or would they leave our teaching services still focused on the temporary things of time and space.

It is not the gold on our walls and in our banks that matters, but the gold in heaven laid up for us. Do we hear Jesus words repeated enough? **John 6:27, James 5:1-3, 1 Peter 1:7-18.**

### Notes

## CHAPTER 10

- 1 And Rehoboam went to Shechem: for to Shechem were all Israel come to make him king.
- 2 And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was in Egypt, whither he fled from the presence of Solomon the king, heard it, that Jeroboam returned out of Egypt.
- 3 And they sent and called him. So Jeroboam and all Israel came and spake to Rehoboam, saying,
- 4 Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore ease thou somewhat the grievous servitude of thy father, and his heavy yoke that he put upon us, and we will serve thee.
- 5 And he said unto them, Come again unto me after three days. And the people departed.
- 6 And king Rehoboam took counsel with the old men that had stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, saying, What counsel give ye me to return answer to this people?
- 7 And they spake unto him, saying, If thou be kind to this people, and please them, and speak good words to them, they will be thy servants for ever.
- 8 But he forsook the counsel which the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men that were brought up with him, that stood before him.
- 9 And he said unto them, What advice give ye that we may return answer to this people, which have spoken to me, saying, Ease somewhat the yoke that thy father did put upon us?
- 10 And the young men that were brought up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou answer the people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it somewhat lighter for us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins.
- 11 For whereas my father put a heavy yoke upon you, I will put more to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.

## REFLECTION

The alarm bells are ringing as we read these early lines. 1 Kings 12:1-19. I find it interesting that he went north to Shechem, the place of Dinah's rape and the men of the city's murder, the place where a number of later key events occur, but not like Gilgal, with positivity. David calls the tribes together at Gilgal to restore him, and Solomon went to the old Capital of Saul, but because the tabernacle was close by. It was not the right place for Solomon's son to go, and I am baffled, as Rehoboam should have been the one who called the first meeting, and he should have had a unifying agenda, which all knew in advance.

This young man is an enigma to many commentators who are out of touch with politics, but as he speaks, and as we see who he follows, and see how out of touch they all are with the people's voice, we start to see the possible reasons for this disaster unfolding. Firstly, we need to remember God's Prophet has prophesied this, and that it is a judgment upon Solomon for his sins, as the writer of Kings records. Secondly, we sit with the words and events, and we see a classic picture of a spoiled and out of touch son with narcissistic tendencies, totally self absorbed, sadly like his father in his later years, and so with no grasp of others outside his restricted circle.

The North is seething with discontent, and they have a focus for it in Jeroboam, and he has been the chosen one to lead their revolt well before Rehoboam rides north in pomp and splendour. I still see this occur in businesses I work with, where the owner calls for cost savings and belt tightening and then gets into his \$300,000-00 car and drives home to head off to Aspen for a month's skiing, while his workers can barely make ends meet. I meet such men regularly, out of touch with what they are doing to others, and baffled why they are hated. James warns of such attitudes. **James 2:1-6, 5:1-6.**

It is here that Ezra, quoting the Kings account gives us the dark side of Solomon's reign, for while getting money on his expeditions there was never enough for all his projects, and the people were facing a taxation burden that was too high. The people are blunt and fair, and Rehoboam's intelligence community should have fed this data back to him, as he had his father's 250 leaders to consult, and he should have undertaken that consultation before this point.

Verses 4-5 spells out the picture with the intrigue of international politics clear to be seen, and the North's alternative leader, a traitor to Solomon and an agent of Egypt, is standing there amongst them, and Rehoboam does nothing about this central fact. As soon as he asks for time to answer he has betrayed the fact that he isn't a leader with any "power of command" to lead the people, he is weak by nature and will sadly prove easily led by his pleasure focused friends.

Solomon has been distracted by the harem for the last twenty years of his reign, and this "boy", although fully mature, has not been schooled in kingship and leadership, and has no strength of character, or even idea about what it is to be a true leader. Ezra is very clear about the character of Rehoboam, and very clear that it was a deliberate choice to walk away from the older men who knew what was required, and bring in the "whiz kid cabinet" with new ideas, and new plans to spend the borrowed money in the kingdom.

The young men have clearly been rehearsing the script for a while, for it has the poetic ring of a well-planned move to "enjoy the top table", and wield the power they have seen others wield, and really feel powerful. It remains a truth all through history, that those who need to feel power and order others about nearly always are incapable of lasting and productive rulership, and will nearly always lead the organization into disaster within two to three years.

It is a standard, and all too common business fact that dysfunctional executives always move every two years, and it is a sign of a dangerous person if their CV shows this, for they run just ahead of their "chickens coming home to roost". They move just before their bad calls really are clear for all to see. I want to keep the application points together at the end of the chapter, so read on and keep thinking about these young men as Ezra wants us to. What is wrong in their spirit, and how is it that they do not read the mood of the crowd?

**Chapter 10:12 So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, as the king bade, saying, Come again to me on the third day.**

**13 And the king answered them roughly; and king Rehoboam forsook the counsel of the old men,**

**14 And answered them after the advice of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add thereto: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.**

**15 So the king hearkened not unto the people: for the cause was of God, that the LORD might perform his word, which he spake by the hand of Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.**

**16 And when all Israel saw that the king would not hearken unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? and we have none inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to your tents, O Israel: and now, David, see to thine own house. So all Israel went to their tents.**

**17 But as for the children of Israel that dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them.**

**18 Then king Rehoboam sent Hadoram that was over the tribute; and the children of Israel stoned him with stones, that he died. But king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem.**

**19 And Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day.**

## REFLECTION

By the third day he has already lost the North, even before he speaks really, but a great orator may have swayed things back with the right mix of hope and righteousness in humility and strength, but that is a big ask from a man who is a boy in his emotions and intelligence and has been brought up in a harem.

He speaks “roughly”, with arrogance and a self confidence and apparent ease with the power of being king, that he hasn’t earned and doesn’t deserve. He doesn’t see what is happening and is amazed at the reaction and scuttles away.

Verse 15 reminds us that Rehoboam is fully expressing himself in his actions, just as Pharaoh did, and that in effect the Lord has “hardened this young man’s heart”, forcing him to express his real desires and destiny, rather than let him wobble onwards under good guidance for a time. He must express his sin, as it is Solomon’s sin also, and it is this self-centredness that is to be judged by God. The spirit of rebellion bursts out in power now and the battle cry of the North – “To your tents” is heard.

Rehoboam is slow to hear the reality and still in his arrogance does not “get it”, that he has driven a wedge between God’s people, and so he sends the leader of the “forced labour gangs” to try to argue the people of the north into submission, with threats very likely. They stone him to death and Rehoboam flees for his life. Only the south is left with him; Benjamin, Judah, Simeon and some of Levi.

Verse 19 reminds us that this is a passage from the earlier documents, for Israel ceased to be divided in 720 BC, for when the north was destroyed by the Assyrians the godly remnant amongst them fled south, and then after the return was announced in 535 BC many from the ten northern tribes joined their brethren and returned, some with Joshua and Zerubbabel, others with Ezra and more still with Nehemiah, and were working with Ezra and Nehemiah as Ezra writes this.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Let us always audit our values believers! Are we getting out of touch with the spirit and words of Jesus? Are we drifting away from connection to our community? Do we no longer hear their cries or needs? Are we prayerful and make our plans only when the Lord’s clarity is felt and understood fully?

### Pastoral

Beware of allowing untested leaders into roles where their arrogance will destroy ministries. People who are too quick to change everything are a danger, for the really good leaders pray and reflect and engage with all the people they lead, and they get to know them before they give any orders. Note Jesus’ words in **Matthew 20:25-28, 23:1-12, John 13:12-17.**

We are to be Christ centred, not theology centred, nor special interest group centred, but Christ centred, with His words and attitudes guiding all things we do and say.

### Notes

**CHAPTER 11**

**1** And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he gathered of the house of Judah and Benjamin an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against Israel, that he might bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam.

**2** But the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying,

**3** Speak unto Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, saying,

**4** Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren: return every man to his house: for this thing is done of me. And they obeyed the words of the LORD, and returned from going against Jeroboam.

**5** And Rehoboam dwelt in Jerusalem, and built cities for defence in Judah.

**6** He built even Beth-lehem, and Etam, and Tekoa,

**7** And Beth-zur, and Shoco, and Adullam,

**8** And Gath, and Mareshah, and Ziph,

**9** And Adoraim, and Lachish, and Azekah,

**10** And Zorah, and Aijalon, and Hebron, which are in Judah and in Benjamin fenced cities.

**11** And he fortified the strong holds, and put captains in them, and store of victual, and of oil and wine.

**12** And in every several city he put shields and spears, and made them exceeding strong, having Judah and Benjamin on his side.

**13** And the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to him out of all their coasts.

**14** For the Levites left their suburbs and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem: for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priest's office unto the LORD:

**15** And he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made.

**16** And after them out of all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts to seek the LORD God of Israel came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice unto the LORD God of their fathers.

**17** So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong, three years: for three years they walked in the way of David and Solomon.

**18** And Rehoboam took him Mahalath the daughter of Jerimoth the son of David to wife, and Abihail the daughter of Eliab the son of Jesse;

**19** Which bare him children; Jeush, and Shamariah, and Zaham.

**20** And after her he took Maachah the daughter of Absalom; which bare him Abijah, and Attai, and Ziza, and Shelomith.

**21** And Rehoboam loved Maachah the daughter of Absalom above all his wives and his concubines: (for he took eighteen wives, and threescore concubines; and begat twenty and eight sons, and threescore daughters.)

**22** And Rehoboam made Abijah the son of Maachah the chief, to be ruler among his brethren: for he thought to make him king.

**23** And he dealt wisely, and dispersed of all his children throughout all the countries of Judah and Benjamin, unto every fenced city: and he gave them victual in abundance. And he desired many wives.

**REFLECTION**

God is not without witness, and courageous witness in the case of Shemaiah the prophet, for he stops the arrogance of the king in its tracks. Civil war had decimated the tribes under Saul and David, due to Saul's sin, and the same sin is here. Few stood up to Saul and lived, but God moves to stop Rehoboam, and he does heed the word from the Lord; "this thing was done by me". God takes personal responsibility for the split, and will work his purposes out.

The most important question we can ask is, "What is God doing here?" The answer is only found in prayerfulness and quietness, not in the clamour of the crowd and the oratory of the arrogant wealthy, self important and apparently powerful, nor in majority votes. God seeks humble service, and it is "servant leadership" that is God's leadership style. Refer to the book in the Pastoral File, "Servant Leadership" – Book 120. Rehoboam immediately spends more money on defence, and fortifies the cities noted in verses 5-10. Given Solomon's preparations this is incredible, also it is foolishness as it indicates that he intends to be defensive rather than offensive if a threat emerges.

God's call was always to pray, seek guidance, "Do we fight?", then head out and engage as infantry under God's direction with God's assurance of victory. Do not hold up behind walls! Think Maginot Line in World War 2 – it didn't help at all; indeed, it opened the door to German victory through the use of mobile forces. God wants us moving forward or around the obstacles the enemy places in front of us, and we pause and wait only for God's guidance.

Verses 11-12 tell us that he has considerable military strength, and is able quickly to put the higher value military items into supply centres through the south. Solomon had the hardware in storage. Verses 13-14 tell us that the spiritual battle lines are also starting to be drawn, with God's judgment on Jeroboam and his people beginning in their decision making. The first decision Jeroboam makes is to try to stop the Levites doing any Mosaic Law based judgments, or going down to Jerusalem as their spiritual centre. Those who can, flee south and settle in and around Jerusalem.

By declaring war on the worship of God that is at this point only 35 years old in the new temple, Jeroboam declares war on God. This is the perspective Ezra wants us to see. This new "king" has no lineage, and no spiritual life, for while he has heard the prophet, and heard that God has given him the kingdom he feels no obligation to obey God and do things God's way. Jeroboam thinks in terms of politics not spiritual power, for he has no fear of the drawing power of the temple, if he has been given the north by God. He however thinks as a man, not as God's man, and he will betray his paganism in a very short time.

He very quickly goes back to the "high places" of the Patriarchs and the Judges period, and every community would have had them, and they worshipped God there and heard the prophets and seers like Samuel there. He adds in the Egyptian elements of a visible presence of the sacrifice in god-like idol form, and makes idols of the Goat and Calf, and sets them up to stand for the sacrifices which are undertaken on altars in front of the statues. It is a very short step to open idolatry. This Egyptian form of idolatry was what Aaron fell into under pressure in the Exodus period. God's verdict upon it was clear – this is satanic religion and is evil! Exodus 32, Deuteronomy Chapter 9, 13, 18.

Rehoboam has a mix of intelligence and stupidity, and do not excuse him for he is around forty when he begins to rule, and while "young" in rulership, he is not a child (he is 41!), but he falls into the same harem mentality as his father, and takes 18 wives, and 60 mistresses, and has 28 sons and 60 daughters. He sets up his sons all around the land and gets them involved in government responsibility early, which is a good thing, but he then seeks for multiple wives for them also. These will be women who are brought into the "royal family" to build alliances, but this is not God's way! **Deuteronomy 17:14-20**.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

When any church split occurs, we are to seek God's path through the middle of the angry voices, for anger and hatred and factionalism is not the Lord's directive will, and the good that comes needs to be hunted for. God's people are not to fight each other – that is the fruit of evil. **Galatians 5:22-26**. Debate can occur and be hot at times, as it was in Acts 15, but it is brought to the Lord's place when the Spirit rules the people.

We are to look for the operation of good from evil, in terms of **Romans 8:28**, and that means we are to place ourselves on the right ground – where we love God and seek his calling and purpose.

**Pastoral**

Call people to prayer pastor, do not call for political actions, call for “knee drill”. Get God’s people listening to God’s Word and you will have God’s power leading you forward.

It is all too easy to follow the manuals of men, rather than the “Owners Manual – the Bible”. Let’s be quick to pray and quick to study the Word of God.

**Notes****CHAPTER 12**

**1** And it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him.

**2** And it came to pass, that in the fifth year of king Rehoboam Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the LORD,

**3** With twelve hundred chariots, and threescore thousand horsemen: and the people were without number that came with him out of Egypt; the Lubims, the Sukkiims, and the Ethiopians.

**4** And he took the fenced cities which pertained to Judah, and came to Jerusalem.

**5** Then came Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam, and to the princes of Judah, that were gathered together to Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said unto them, Thus saith the LORD, Ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak.

**6** Whereupon the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, The LORD is righteous.

**7** And when the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves; therefore I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance; and my wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak.

**8** Nevertheless they shall be his servants; that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries.

**9** So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he took all: he carried away also the shields of gold which Solomon had made.

**Chapter 12:10** Instead of which king Rehoboam made shields of brass, and committed them to the hands of the chief of the guard, that kept the entrance of the king's house.

**11** And when the king entered into the house of the LORD, the guard came and fetched them, and brought them again into the guard chamber.

**12** And when he humbled himself, the wrath of the LORD turned from him, that he would not destroy him altogether: and also in Judah things went well.

**13** So king Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem, and reigned: for Rehoboam was one and forty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. And his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess.

**14** And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD.

**15** Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, are they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer concerning genealogies? And there were wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually.

**16** And Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David: and Abijah his son reigned in his stead.

**REFLECTION**

Note Ezra’s very strong points in the first verse. The 1 Kings 14:21-24 passage is far longer, and more harrowing reading, but Ezra is using terms that cover it in summary. The Kings passage uses the political term for the Kingdom of “Judah”, but Ezra reminds us, the remnant of the Northern Kingdom fled south when the Assyrians came, and so the south is now able to be spoken of as “all Israel”, for all twelve tribal remnants were there. It is just a remnant that survives this invasion, and a smaller one the next century when the

Babylonians attack. **Isaiah 6:9-13** tells us that only 10% of the nation will survive the Assyrians, and they will survive in Jerusalem alone, and that is where we find the surviving believers of the North have fled to.

Rehoboam has a very dark side indeed, and two things are noted; he “strengthened himself”, and then he forsook the Law of Moses as his guide, rejecting the prophetic words that his Grand-father David and his Father Solomon had said; Psalms and Proverbs are rejected, and he forgets the reflections of Ecclesiastes that would have focused his mind. He is without excuse! He turned from the Torah instructions to kings, as we saw above with the many wives, but way worse, as our King’s author makes clear, and all manner of paganism was embraced and even homosexuality was encouraged, possibly by the king himself.

When the discipline comes, it comes by the Lord opening the door to Pharaoh Shishak (Sh-S- K), who came, and with inside information from his spies had all the facts about their defences. Rehoboam believed he had “strengthened” the land, but he was a fool who thought he then didn’t need God, but God reminded him, spiritual factors determine political outcomes! Rehoboam has no idea what the resources are that Egypt at this point can still call upon, and all the people groups, even of the Ethiopians, who had come to Solomon and been impressed, were part of the army. Note how straight forward is the summary of events; “he took the fortified cities”. Fortifications are no help against overwhelming odds, when your people spiritually are weak and divided, and satanic religion always divides and weakens.

Why did God’s people turn away so quickly from temple worship? Psychologically this is an interesting question, and theologically we may have the answer in the Divine Institution of the “Free Will” of mankind. Every generation stands alone before God, and must face the question of faith and belief. God has no grand-children! The previous generation had seen the temple filled with the Shekinah Glory, yet within twenty years even Solomon had been distracted with sex and power and wealth and drifted from the truth. His son is forty-one when he takes the throne, so was in his twenties when his father falls into sin, and spends more and more time in the harem; what is Rehoboam learning through these years? Sadly he is not hearing Torah, Proverbs, Psalms, or Ecclesiastes any longer!!!

I suspect Rehoboam grew up thinking kings can, “get away with anything”, and was clearly surprised when the rebellion of the north occurred, and blamed God in some way rather than blame himself! People who select pleasure and feel “entitled” to pleasure and only good things, will never blame themselves for misfortune or suffering, for they are in their own assessment “special”, so it must be someone else’s fault! God can get the blame and the temple also, for not clearly being powerful enough.... Magical thinking is part of satanic religion, because this false logic keeps them from repentance. People very quickly get into immorality, because it feels good, and if it is encouraged from the top it quickly becomes “the thing to do”, and there is neither guilt nor fear of consequences behind strong walls of fortresses, until the overwhelming forces of the enemy arrive and fill the land.

God is not without witness, even with paganism, immorality and homosexuality common in the court and land. God sends the prophet Shemaiah to Rehoboam. The message is a blunt one – “You have forsaken me, therefore I gave you to Shishak”. Verse 6 records the confession of the princes of the land (the leaders of the tribal areas) – recognizing that the Lord is righteous. Maybe Rehoboam’s sons (also princes) also repent – they may do so. God is quick to respond to their humility and confession before him and sends the prophet again. 1 Kings 14:25-31.

Verse 7. The nation and leadership have left it till the last moment to repent, so they cannot expect to get away with things, but will have to face severe financial consequences, as an invader always expected the defeated people to pay for his army’s expenses getting there and home again plus interest. They get “some deliverance”, not total deliverance. The deliverance will involve them being the Pharaoh’s servants/tribute payers from this point onwards. They become a vassal state under Egyptian control, verse 8. God is making a strong point; you decide who you serve, and if it is man rather than God, then you are stuck with the consequences of that. Only spiritual revival that lasts will deliver them, but they will not fully embrace that, and so they are left with a much reduced, gold stripped, but still glorious and beautiful temple!

Verse 9. Shishak doesn’t want Judah being able to raise another army or get powerful again; he wants them dependent upon him, and so he bankrupts their treasury. The shields of gold are gone and fund Egyptian expansion, but he leaves them with their worship intact, while removing even the gold from the temple roof and walls! No mention is made of the ark being taken, and so forget the “Indiana Jones” movie scripts here, for it went well ahead of the Exile. Sadly Rehoboam is still proud and wants to appear wealthy still to his people. This is the moment when he needs to put on sack-cloth and ashes on his head and fully repent and call for national revival, but he doesn’t!

He replaces the gold shields with polished bronze, that will when shined, look like gold. He wants to pretend it's not as bad as it appears, rather than truly "sitting with" the disaster for what it truly is! This is like the corrupt and sinful businessmen I see often, who lose their wealth and home and new BMW to the receivers, but as soon as they are able, they rent back in the wealthy area, and lease a BMW, or buy an older one. They keep pretending they have the wealth, and so they keep locked into their false "prosperity gospel", and as a result never accept truth, and are therefore never transformed by the real gospel.

He "humbled himself" enough to be delivered, but not enough to be spiritually transformed; he held back from the Lord, who, deep down I suspect, he still blamed for the catastrophe. Every thing started to settle after the Egyptians leave, and when we "get back to normal" the memory curve starts to operate and the bad times seem like a dream, and soon drift out of memory. "It won't happen again – we are OK now..." Self delusion is Satan's greatest tool to destroy people and nations and it is strong here.

Rehoboam is reduced to a "rump kingdom", with only Jerusalem intact as a fortress, and he strengthened that city further, but did not strengthen himself in the Lord! Note what Ezra doesn't say, as well as what he does! This king is in denial until he dies and he dies young. He starts to reign at 41 and dies at 58, two years younger than his father Solomon and 12 years earlier than his grandfather David. Verse 14 hits the nail on the head; he "did evil". Evil is simply Satan's Policy, as against "Righteousness" which is God's policy. This king selected his path and walked it to his death. **Matthew 7:13-23.**

God looks to the heart, and Rehoboam did not prepare his heart to follow God. Ezra then mentions that annual fighting occurred between the north and south. He never did need the fortresses, nor did Solomon; what they needed was to quiet their hearts before the Lord and obey his Word, and trust their army only then. No-one won these south-north wars; they simply bleed men and wealth. Shishak's strategy was to have them fight each other, so neither would be able to challenge him, and none would be wealthy enough to survive and would need Egyptian loans and support. Wars are used by satanically inspired large nations even today to keep others in debt to the bigger nations. Satan loves killing people and creating powerlessness – it is only God who sets mankind free! **John 8:32-36, 10:10.**

He dies, and is buried in the tomb of David and Solomon, and his son Abijah rules. He is the son of Maachah, the daughter of Absalom. 2 Chronicles 11:21. He will give a great speech, as we will see in the next chapter, but the heart of the people is still for rebellion against God.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

How quickly revival turns to reversal without genuine change of heart and mind towards the Word of God! Spirituality declines when the spirit is not fed the Word and obedience in daily life. Solomon fell away through massive temptations that most of us would find hard to face successfully, but we each face attack and must walk in the Holy Spirit's power alone, or we too will fall as Solomon and his son did.

### Pastoral

Are we ready Pastors to be like Shemaiah; faithful to the Word and the Lord's command even though all others have gone into immorality? Let's be true to the Lord and so useful!

### Notes

## CHAPTER 13

**1 Now in the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam began Abijah to reign over Judah.**



**2 He reigned three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Michaiah the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah. And there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam.**

**3 And Abijah set the battle in array with an army of valiant men of war, even four hundred thousand chosen men: Jeroboam also set the battle in array against him with eight hundred thousand chosen men, being mighty men of valour.**

**4 And Abijah stood up upon mount Zemaraim, which is in mount Ephraim, and said, Hear me, thou Jeroboam, and all Israel;**

**5 Ought ye not to know that the LORD God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt?**

**6 Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of David, is risen up, and hath rebelled against his lord.**

**7 And there are gathered unto him vain men, the children of Belial, and have strengthened themselves against Rehoboam the son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was young and tenderhearted, and could not withstand them.**

**8 And now ye think to withstand the kingdom of the LORD in the hand of the sons of David; and ye be a great multitude, and there are with you golden calves, which Jeroboam made you for gods.**

**9 Have ye not cast out the priests of the LORD, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and have made you priests after the manner of the nations of other lands? so that whosoever cometh to consecrate himself with a young bullock and seven rams, the same may be a priest of them that are no gods.**

**10 But as for us, the LORD is our God, and we have not forsaken him; and the priests, which minister unto the LORD, are the sons of Aaron, and the Levites wait upon their business:**

**11 And they burn unto the LORD every morning and every evening burnt sacrifices and sweet incense: the shewbread also set they in order upon the pure table; and the candlestick of gold with the lamps thereof, to burn every evening: for we keep the charge of the LORD our God; but ye have forsaken him.**

**12 And, behold, God himself is with us for our captain, and his priests with sounding trumpets to cry alarm against you. O children of Israel, fight ye not against the LORD God of your fathers; for ye shall not prosper.**

## REFLECTION

This is an interesting development, and the first thing to note is the lack of reference to horse and chariots, for all that Solomon built with his "latest military hardware" is gone, back to Egypt that manufactured it! The army is split into "elephs", or "units" and the Israelites outnumber the men of Judah by 2:1. The two armies have "mighty men of valour", they are all professionals and they will waste their strength if they keep fighting each other. These events are not mentioned in the Kings account, and so this is a significant addition to the records.

Note Abijah's message, for it is apparently 100% spiritual, accurate and a serious challenge to Jeroboam and the entire morale and desires of the Northern group, and yet is it on closer examination? The northern group have forgotten David, and as God's promise is through him alone, they are on the wrong side of history. It is a good argument, and he challenges them not to fight God and man. Jeroboam has indeed "risen up in rebellion" but he is also able to quote the prophet of God who said he was the judgment upon Rehoboam and Solomon, and so reference to David is irrelevant, for it is Solomon who is being judged by Jeroboam.

Verse 7 sounds great, but is it true? The really "worthless fellows", who were proven to be the "sons of belial" were the friends of Rehoboam. It was the southern leadership group that was proven to be useless and arrogant. Also remember Rehoboam was 41 years of age – he cannot be spoken of as "young and tender hearted". He was an idiot, but couldn't use youth as any argument for his criminal stupidity!

Verse 8 is on more solid ground. The north is standing in battle array with their golden calves as their worship objects! They are standing in idolatry that is proven demonic nonsense, and there is no hope for those who stand with this sort of evil, for God can only judge them (unless God's people have done the same!). Verse 9 explains how the new paganism worked and how the priests were selected to serve in the new pagan groves and at the new altars. The northern kings had driven the believing priests and Levites out of their lands into the south, and needed a new priesthood, and found one based on wealth and power.

To offer up a sacrifice to become a priest was 7 rams and a bullock; a seriously expensive offering, and one that meant you were a wealthy member of society. This arrangement meant that the new priesthood of the north had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo of government. It meant a "conservative" and power/money hungry "clergy", and it guaranteed corruption.

Abijah's point is clear in verses 10-11; we have maintained the Lord's words and the Mosaic Law, but you have abandoned them, and so God can only judge you and support us. It is the over-confidence of a man who isn't spiritually aware of the deeper issues in the land, for we have already read of the collapse of morality and genuine faith under his father. His appeal in verse 12 is correct however; to fight Judah and her king is to fight against the clearly revealed will of God and they ought to be sitting and talking, not fighting.

**13 But Jeroboam caused an ambushment to come about behind them: so they were before Judah, and the ambushment was behind them.**

**14 And when Judah looked back, behold, the battle was before and behind: and they cried unto the LORD, and the priests sounded with the trumpets.**

**15 Then the men of Judah gave a shout: and as the men of Judah shouted, it came to pass, that God smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah.**

**16 And the children of Israel fled before Judah: and God delivered them into their hand.**

**17 And Abijah and his people slew them with a great slaughter: so there fell down slain of Israel five hundred thousand chosen men.**

**18 Thus the children of Israel were brought under at that time, and the children of Judah prevailed, because they relied upon the LORD God of their fathers.**

**19 And Abijah pursued after Jeroboam, and took cities from him, Beth-el with the towns thereof, and Jeshanah with the towns thereof, and Ephraim with the towns thereof.**

**20 Neither did Jeroboam recover strength again in the days of Abijah: and the LORD struck him, and he died.**

**21 But Abijah waxed mighty, and married fourteen wives, and begat twenty and two sons, and sixteen daughters.**

**22 And the rest of the acts of Abijah, and his ways, and his sayings, are written in the story of the prophet Iddo.**

## REFLECTION

Jeroboam has been cunning and circled part of his army behind Abijah while he spoke, and when the ambush is discovered the army of Judah panics momentarily, but they are indeed "mighty men of valour" and they realise rightly that to make this outflanking manoeuvre Jeroboam has had to thin his troops ahead of them, and they raise a cry and pour 100% into a frontal assault, and they totally destroy the army of northern troops and slay 5/8<sup>th</sup> of them. Priest and soldiers work together and fight to the last ounce of energy and they win.

King Jeroboam doesn't survive the defeat and in humiliation and depression he dies later, under the direct judgment of God. Abijah pushes his advantage and seizes some key cities to make his realm stronger, but it is all just power-politics, and he dies also within three years and is replaced. Political and military power is fleeting and Ezra is noting this king also had many wives and children, but all to no real avail, as death removes him and he loses all he has that is as temporary as space-time things are. What matters? Has he played his part before God, who he stands before after three short years rule as a small king on the earth?

Judah's victory is seen as the sole result of relying upon the Lord at that time, and there is an enigmatic reference by Ezra to the "sayings of Abijah", as if he did a new volume of Proverbs, and he may have, but his early death must be seen as a judgment, and so a veil is drawn over him and his work. The work of Iddo the prophet has not survived and so we must accept Ezra's words here as being definitive – this king did some good and probably was not an evil man in any way, but he didn't play a part in national spiritual revival either, and for that he is eternally judged. He also relaxed into the harem and died there. Pleasure for three years and eternity to regret what he could have done.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

How often have we engaged in a "battle" that has not been properly thought through? Do we need to fight on this issue at this time? Do we have the right people with us? Are we standing for the right principles? Is our spirit right, so that even if out-played we can charge at the right moment? Are we always looking and asking for what God is doing? What could we have done? Were we alert to possibilities?

### Pastoral

Pastors, are we ready to give the important message? Are we ready to lead from the front against the odds? Do we stand ready to serve the Lord, irrespective of the odds? Can we give a better and more truthful speech than Abijah about what the issues are facing the church meeting? Buy up the time....

### Notes

## CHAPTER 14

**1** So Abijah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David: and Asa his son reigned in his stead. In his days the land was quiet ten years.

**2** And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God:

**3** For he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves:

**4** And commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment.

**5** Also he took away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the images: and the kingdom was quiet before him.

**6** And he built fenced cities in Judah: for the land had rest, and he had no war in those years; because the LORD had given him rest.

**7** Therefore he said unto Judah, Let us build these cities, and make about them walls, and towers, gates, and bars, while the land is yet before us; because we have sought the LORD our God, we have sought him, and he hath given us rest on every side. So they built and prospered.

**8** And Asa had an army of men that bare targets and spears, out of Judah three hundred thousand; and out of Benjamin, that bare shields and drew bows, two hundred and fourscore thousand: all these were mighty men of valour.

**9** And there came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with an host of a thousand thousand, and three hundred chariots; and came unto Mareshah.

**10** Then Asa went out against him, and they set the battle in array in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah.

**11** And Asa cried unto the LORD his God, and said, LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O LORD, thou art our God; let no man prevail against thee.

**12** So the LORD smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled.

**13** And Asa and the people that were with him pursued them unto Gerar: and the Ethiopians were overthrown, that they could not recover themselves; for they were destroyed before the LORD, and before his host; and they carried away very much spoil.

**14** And they smote all the cities round about Gerar; for the fear of the LORD came upon them: and they spoiled all the cities; for there was exceeding much spoil in them.

**15** They smote also the tents of cattle, and carried away sheep and camels in abundance, and returned to Jerusalem.

### REFLECTION

This man Asa will have more space with Ezra than he had been given in 1 Kings. He was classified as a believer and “good king”. He did what was “good and right” in the Lord’s eyes. This increases the possibility also that his father at least brought him up as a strong believer and with a hatred of the idolatry that had nearly destroyed the kingdom. The key to his attitudes is seen in the early verses, where he lifts up the Torah, and orders the people to return to the Lord and to the full practise of the Law of Moses.

He was direct in his orders and totally intolerant of the “high places” with their images and idols, and ordered their destruction throughout the nation. The thing that will surprise many readers of this history and the

Kings account, is the ease and speed with which the Israelites went back to idolatry time and again. There is a deep weakness in mankind towards religion, and Satan uses this weakness to the full. People like to feel they are “doing something” to help God, and they delight in rituals that are lovely, and sensual, and if wealth, power, socialization and sex are added the result is an addictive mix. It is also fatal for God’s people and still is today. Spirituality will be killed by religious systems faster than by any sin!

Idolatry and all forms of fake ritualistic religion will fire up the demonic, for they love it, and Satan’s team “do not do teamwork”; they fight each other with vigour! Sectarian violence is always a sign of the presence of the satanic. By clearing away the rubbish of paganism the land has peace within its borders, as holiness before the Lord without distraction, settles the hearts and minds of the inhabitants.

In the major part of his reign he had rest from war. Kings speaks of continual war between him and Basha, but the warfare was mainly through proxies, and he used the Syrians as we will see later in chapter 16. Verses 6 – 7 tells us he used the peace to re-settle the land that had been devastated in the earlier wars and depopulated. The cost of getting things spiritually wrong was high, and many die and cities were left empty.

He rebuilds those places and settles populations in them. He has the additional populations from the North to be able to do this, for the northern king was obsessed about stopping his people going south for any reason, 1 Kings 15:17, and this tells us that the population flow south to the temple hasn’t stopped, and believers who could went south, and Asa settles those who wish to stay in the newly rebuilt cities.

“They built and prospered”. His heart was right before the Lord, and he opens the door to godly settlement to preserve but also to fill the land. He has the Abrahamic and later covenants in mind and is determined to be part of their fulfilment in his own day. Verse 8 tells us that again he has the right mix of foot soldiers, with the men of Judah being the “hoplite armed troops”, and the Benjamites the archers – a winning combination.

Verse 9. The ultimate challenge to this army comes with one called “Zerah” the Ethiopian, who is possibly the second pharaoh of the twenty second dynasty, a “Cushite” from the far south of Egypt. Given the presence of 300 battle chariots, Asa picks his ground and it is a valley where the chariots will be constricted in their movement and his archers and infantry working together can rain down arrows thickly upon them and then jump the drivers. While the strategic thinking shows a great general, his prayer shows a great believer. He is “following his father David”.

Verse 11. He notes in his prayer two vital truths to start; numbers do not matter, and human power/strength does not win victory. They do not draw themselves up with any self confidence in their own power, but they come in the Lord’s name, seeking the Lord’s victory here. He sees and expresses for all to hear that, “the battle is the Lord’s”. **Exodus 14:13-19, Deuteronomy 20:1-7, 1 Samuel 17:47**. No unsaved man or woman prevails against the Lord or against the Lord’s servant!

The result of the prayer was victory in the battle, and the Cushite forces flee the field, and Asa pursues them hard so that they cannot regroup and cut back down the coast road and draw the second battle onto the plains where Asa would be disadvantaged. Following up the victory is crucial, just as teaching the newly saved the Word of God is a crucial part of evangelism.

Gerar was an Egyptian power base in the land after Pharaoh had conquered the land in the 5<sup>th</sup> year of the fool Rehoboam. Asa, through spiritual and military power defeats and destroys that presence in the land, and in God’s time the area is restored to Judah and the spoil taken in gold and animals helps replenish the treasury.

Asa, on his journey back home in triumph, gets a “word from the Lord” through the prophet Azariah. God warns through the prophet that HE wants their worship in their victory, not just their passionate faith expressed in the emotional extremes their idolatry has brought them to. God has punished them, and he seeks to consistently bless them, but only their obedience and wholehearted worship will allow this channel of blessing to open up and stay open. They face that classic Mosaic Law choice: blessing or cursing? Deuteronomy 26-29.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Idolatry is still with us, in fact a businessman reported that his landscaping business “best seller” by far is Buddha statues for gardens. We may think we are “modern” and have defeated idolatry, but we can worship wealth, power, emotion, sex, fame, cars, houses, jobs... The list is endless of the things that the enemy uses to distract us from worship of the Lord – let us be on our guard at all times from distractions.

Let us all stand before the Lord and make a daily covenant to walk before Him in godliness, not emotionalism and pleasant but meaningless rituals.

### **Pastoral**

The pressing need for every generation is revival. Revivals do not last more than a generation of around 20-40 years, and without constant renewal the spiritual state of people will drift backwards, and can go all the way to spiritual death. Let us preach the gospel truth at all times we meet, and draw people to Jesus, that they may find saving faith in Him through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let us prayerfully win the battle the Lord calls us to fight, but let's be sure to follow them up also. Sunday School must be "school", not entertaining non-biblical things. Let us "test the spirits" pastors, and not let anyone speak who isn't Holy Spirit certified by Fruit that is godly. **1 John 4:1-6, Galatians 5:16-26.**

## **CHAPTER 15**

**1 And the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded:**

**2 And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.**

**3 Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law.**

**4 But when they in their trouble did turn unto the LORD God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them.**

**5 And in those times there was no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in, but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the countries.**

**6 And nation was destroyed of nation, and city of city: for God did vex them with all adversity.**

**7 Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded.**

**8 And when Asa heard these words, and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and put away the abominable idols out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken from mount Ephraim, and renewed the altar of the LORD, that was before the porch of the LORD.**

**9 And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and the strangers with them out of Ephraim and Manasseh, and out of Simeon: for they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that the LORD his God was with him.**

**10 So they gathered themselves together at Jerusalem in the third month, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa.**

**11 And they offered unto the LORD the same time, of the spoil which they had brought, seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep.**

**12 And they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul;**

**13 That whosoever would not seek the LORD God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman.**

**14 And they sware unto the LORD with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets.**

**15 And all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them: and the LORD gave them rest round about.**

**16 And also concerning Maachah the mother of Asa the king, he removed her from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove: and Asa cut down her idol, and stamped it, and burnt it at the brook Kidron.**

**17 But the high places were not taken away out of Israel: nevertheless the heart of Asa was perfect all his days.**

**18 And he brought into the house of God the things that his father had dedicated, and that he himself had dedicated, silver, and gold, and vessels.**

**19 And there was no more war unto the five and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa.**

### **REFLECTION**

Azariah comes not only with his own word from the Lord, but also with the words of his father, the prophet Oded. Asa hears all the truths again that his grandfather ignored. He accepts them as “words from the Lord”. He is obedient to the testing of the prophetic words with the truths of the Torah, and he accepts them as genuine and therefore “binding” upon him and his people. **Deuteronomy 13:1-18, 18:9-14, 20-22.** This principle and the concept of testing is still to be applied to all prophetic words – do they resonate with Scripture, and do they lead into godly paths, with genuine spiritual fruit? **Matthew 7:13-23.**

Things had slipped quite seriously in the nation and the temple. The very altar needed repair because it had been neglected, but in response to the prophetic word the altar is repaired. There are also sexualized religion “abominable” statues in the cities of Judah and Benjamin and they are also purged from the nation. It appears he may have done this house to house. As he does this more from the north join Judah and Benjamin in the south. Verse 9. This also answers a question that many believers ask. When their church goes into apostasy or liberal lukewarmness, when no change can be made, do they leave? Answer here = YES! Go where the Holy Spirit has free rein to move through godly worship and biblical teaching.

The people then do another interesting thing; they make a covenant with the Lord before the altar for on-going revival and obedience to the Temple and Mosaic Law. The Scottish believers in more recent times did the same when facing an apostate unbelieving English king, and established the “Covenanters” – a group of people who made a solemn league and covenant to stand for God’s Word against all pressure, but even they fell into dead formal legalism later, making an equally dead church to the king’s church.

All that the Lord gave to Asa by spoil was used for the kingdom or worship, not for self-centred buying of “apes and peacocks”. The people rejoiced in their worship with wholehearted joy that was expressed in loud worship. Do not be afraid of what we can call “Pentecostal fervour”, for we read of it here in verses 14-15. As they worshipped in purity and passion the Lord gave them rest from warfare against others. God was their shield, as they went beyond gratitude and joy to study the Word and do what it said.

Sadly the king had to remove his own grand-mother, the daughter of Absalom from being queen. She had adopted pagan worship herself in her older age, and had her own garden grove planted and an idol erected. Asa did to his grand-mother’s idol what David had done with the Philistine idols captured many years before – they were chopped, smashed, and then burned by the Kidron stream. Not all the high places were destroyed and the enemy is quick to return.

Asa has a very blessed rule for many years, when spirituality is the norm, and idolatry is on the back foot. Satan’s people feel the heat in this period and there is peace, but it doesn’t last, for the enemy only regroupes for his next evil onslaught. There is evil even in the midst of the royal family with the king’s grand-mother an idolater in her later years, and she was the open idolater, for there were many other secret pagans.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

God doesn’t play favourites, and Asa’s own grand-mother must be removed from the royal family and have her title and privileges stripped from her. She keeps her life, but loses her dignity to paganism – we always do if we gravitate towards this evil.

### Pastoral

Test the spirits pastor! Do not allow anyone to speak who is not certified by Holy Spirit produced fruit in their life.

Let us worship in holiness and passion – the two are not exclusive!

### Notes

## CHAPTER 16

**1** In the six and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah, and built Ramah, to the intent that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah.

**2** Then Asa brought out silver and gold out of the treasures of the house of the LORD and of the king's house, and sent to Ben-hadad king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus, saying,

**3** There is a league between me and thee, as there was between my father and thy father: behold, I have sent thee silver and gold; go, break thy league with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me.

**4** And Ben-hadad hearkened unto king Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel; and they smote Ijon, and Dan, and Abel-maim, and all the store cities of Naphtali.

**5** And it came to pass, when Baasha heard it, that he left off building of Ramah, and let his work cease.

**6** Then Asa the king took all Judah; and they carried away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Baasha was building; and he built therewith Geba and Mizpah.

**7** And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand.

**8** Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because thou didst rely on the LORD, he delivered them into thine hand.

**9** For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars.

**10** Then Asa was wroth with the seer, and put him in a prison house; for he was in a rage with him because of this thing. And Asa oppressed some of the people the same time.

**11** And, behold, the acts of Asa, first and last, lo, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel.

**12** And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great: yet in his disease he sought not to the LORD, but to the physicians.

**13** And Asa slept with his fathers, and died in the one and fortieth year of his reign.

**14** And they buried him in his own sepulchres, which he had made for himself in the city of David, and laid him in the bed which was filled with sweet odours and divers kinds of spices prepared by the apothecaries' art: and they made a very great burning for him.

## REFLECTION

The northern king invades, and the year is the 35<sup>th</sup> year. Now I am not going to get into chronological arguments here, for they are all answered well by Keil and Delitzsch. Peace has reigned for a considerable time and when we are not challenged, we can drift spiritually. Satan's best tool is the "prosperity honey trap"; temptations that come in plentiful times, not the days of stress and trauma. When people are needy they bow before the Lord, but when all is well they are easily distracted by their "projects" and pleasures. Then when the major test comes they can opt for a "human viewpoint" solution rather than faith-rest prayer.

Baasha acts to stop the migration of believers south, and seizes a frontier fortress to stop people moving down the highway to Jerusalem and the temple, and then Asa does an inexplicable thing, given his troops have been proven in battle and his faith was strong then. The only reason is that his faith has become weak in the days of plenty, and he thinks like a man rather than a believer in the One True Almighty God. He said the right words a decade or so before, but he acts now as if he doesn't believe them, and he doesn't call for the prophet and ask, "What does the Lord seek for us to do?"

What ever has got hold of him that he would take money from the temple treasury to bribe the Syrian King to help him? It may be that he has a treaty with that king, as often nations did; treaties of "non-aggression". These are pieces of paper as useless to peace as the Soviet-Nazi Non-Aggression pact! Such fake treaties are simply satanic devices for evil men to buy time to prepare for their overwhelming attack on the party stupid enough to believe in them. He needed a real prophet, and real faith, not a political treaty.

In the case before us there is clearly an agreement to help, but the northern Syrian king requires funds to raise his army and pay for the expedition and Asa, not depending on his own army and the Lord as he should, pays the price and sends the messenger. The result is a punitive and loot-taking expedition against

the north and many of the northern tribes are decimated; this is not spiritually a good thing for Asa to have done. Even though most in the north are now pagan, they are relatives, and they do not deserve this evil.

The result looks good for Asa and the fortification work at Ramah stops and the southerners come and take all the military supplies away and rebuild the southern towns with the northern king's assets. There will be rejoicing, but it is premature, for the king has won victory the wrong way. Note that sentence – God wants us to be victorious his way, not in the way of men! When men “do what is right according to their own eyes”, they are back with the judgment days of the Judges. We are to do things God's way alone.

Hanani the “Seer” is sent to the King. Seer is the word used to describe a prophetic gift where the person “sees” into the future and is able to predict things to come. They see outcomes of actions and prophetically warn of consequences of evil paths. The word is interesting – because Asa had trusted Syria rather than trusting God, the host of Syria will grow stronger, and he will later face them, and they will not be defeated by the southern troops!

The judgment/consequence of Asa's foolishness is that from this point onwards he will have wars to face. He has chosen his path by calling for Syria to murder Israelites, and when we don't trust God the consequence is – we get what we have chosen..... Israelites will be murdered by the people he called in.

God seeks to bless his people, but there is a limited time option if they disobey directly. The king is enraged at the truth and imprisons the Seer for a time and oppresses the believers at this time. Note this well, for this man is a believer, but he has “backslidden” and is carnal, and such people will be the worst oppressors of God's devoted people. You will strike the worst hatred from liberal churches, not from mosques! **Matthew 5:10-12, John 15:18ff, 2 Corinthians 4:12-18.**

The disease Asa suffers is clearly to Ezra a judgment, and he directly identifies that he sought the physicians but did not pray. There is nothing wrong with the doctors, but without prayer their help is nothing, especially if the cause of the physical ailment is spiritual. Such problems indicate chronic heart failure and/or diabetes, both of which lead to oedema, cellulitis, and/or gangrene. It is a “stinking” and very painful death, which may explain the excessive use of herbs and spices to mask the smell of his dead body. We are not told by Ezra whether he returned to the Lord in confession/prayer power. He may die in a carnal state; saved but useless and so under the “Sin Unto Death”.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Friendship doesn't need rituals to prove the strength of the friendship, and peace is never guaranteed by treaties, only by strength that makes it pointless to fight against you. Let us not be fooled by fake politics – we are called to trust the Lord alone. Trust and Obey believer.

Don't be casual in your faith, be passionate and wholehearted, walking in “faith-rest” prayerfulness, not physical prosperity. Beware comfortable days, for they can be overturned in a moment with disaster and we need to turn to the right place for an answer – God, not political action!!!

### Pastoral

Be ready for persecution and hatred from the super-spiritual and the pseudo-spiritual.

Depend upon the Lord only – not men or women, no matter how powerful and wealthy they are.

### Notes

## CHAPTER 17



1 And Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead, and strengthened himself against Israel.  
 2 And he placed forces in all the fenced cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim, which Asa his father had taken.  
 3 And the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim;  
 4 But sought to the Lord God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel.  
 5 Therefore the LORD stablished the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents; and he had riches and honour in abundance.  
 6 And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the LORD: moreover he took away the high places and groves out of Judah.  
 7 Also in the third year of his reign he sent to his princes, even to Ben-hail, and to Obadiah, and to Zechariah, and to Nethaneel, and to Michaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah.  
 8 And with them he sent Levites, even Shemaiah, and Nethaniah, and Zebadiah, and Asahel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehonathan, and Adonijah, and Tobijah, and Tob-adonijah, Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram, priests.  
 9 And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of the LORD with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people.  
 10 And the fear of the LORD fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat.  
 11 Also some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents, and tribute silver; and the Arabians brought him flocks, seven thousand and seven hundred rams, and seven thousand and seven hundred he goats.  
 12 And Jehoshaphat waxed great exceedingly; and he built in Judah castles, and cities of store.  
 13 And he had much business in the cities of Judah: and the men of war, mighty men of valour, were in Jerusalem.  
 14 And these are the numbers of them according to the house of their fathers: Of Judah, the captains of thousands; Adnah the chief, and with him mighty men of valour three hundred thousand.  
 15 And next to him was Jehohanan the captain, and with him two hundred and fourscore thousand.  
 16 And next him was Amasiah the son of Zichri, who willingly offered himself unto the LORD; and with him two hundred thousand mighty men of valour.  
 17 And of Benjamin; Eliada a mighty man of valour, and with him armed men with bow and shield two hundred thousand.  
 18 And next him was Jehozabad, and with him an hundred and fourscore thousand ready prepared for the war.  
 19 These waited on the king, beside those whom the king put in the fenced cities throughout all Judah.

## REFLECTION

Jehoshaphat acts quickly with his military, and does the right thing, to stabilize with strength the borders of the land. With his father's illness he would have had time to prepare for the takeover and may already be part of the military and so is ready to act decisively. The key thing is he does so prayerfully. Ezra provides additional material to that in Kings.

Note the spiritually significant actions that Ezra wants us to see clearly. This man sought the Lord's face, not the fake religions of the idols around about. The northern peoples had gone after the Baalim, but he declared war on them and the sexualized religion they encouraged. He smashed their shrines wherever he found them. He "walked in the first ways of his father David". This is the reminder that David walked away in the middle of his reign, and his witness was inconsistent, but this "son of David" followed the spiritual path.

God's promise to his people was that if they followed his Word and kept the Mosaic Law then there would be physical blessing in the land. We do not have the blessing guaranteed of wealth and prosperity, indeed we are warned of facing privation, but we can be assured that the principle here will always apply, until the end of time. Those who do the Lord's will on this earth will never lack the required resources if they walk with God in the tasks God has set them to complete.

Verse 6. "His heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord". **1 Samuel 2:30, Proverbs 3:1-11, John 5:19-26.** He would have understood the later words of Nehemiah, "The joy of the Lord is my strength". Let us find our honour in the Lord's will for our lives, and let us allow the Lord to "lift us up" in his time and manner. **1 Peter 5:5-10.**

Verses 7 – 9. He eliminated the false gods/demon worship, but he did far more than his fathers had done; he sends out preachers and teachers of the Word to all the cities of the land, so that all the people might know the truth of the Law of Moses, and the works of David and Solomon. Ezra will take this to heart and call the people to hear the Word again, and he will teach them. **Nehemiah 8:1-12.**

Verse 10. This is an interesting principle that runs to the end of time – that Holy Spirit filled people will communicate the “fear of the Lord” in different ways to those around them and people will be shocked at times to feel the power that is coming from their lives. This king's testimony and military strength means he is blessed by surrounding nations that value integrity and morality. The Philistines respect strength, and the Arabians purity, and both groups bring gifts. Jehoshaphat kept a strong honour guard of tough soldiers and able commanders close to him at Jerusalem as his “ready reaction force” and they were respected by all as the toughest of the tough!

## **APPLICATION**

### **Personal**

Lift the Lord up in your life believer. If you want to be lifted up, lift up the Word and lift up Jesus in your life and you will be lifted up in all you do....

### **Pastoral**

Let us heed the Word of God and lift up Jesus in and through the teaching of the Word. It is only in systematic Bible teaching that we see churches sustainably grow. Blessing comes as we lift Jesus and His Word up.

### **Notes**

## **CHAPTER 18**

**1 Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance, and joined affinity with Ahab.**

**2 And after certain years he went down to Ahab to Samaria. And Ahab killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people that he had with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramoth-gilead.**

**3 And Ahab king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat king of Judah, Wilt thou go with me to Ramoth-gilead? And he answered him, I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war.**

**4 And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD to day.**

**5 Therefore the king of Israel gathered together of prophets four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for God will deliver it into the king's hand.**

**6 But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might enquire of him?**

**7 And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, by whom we may enquire of the LORD: but I hate him; for he never prophesied good unto me, but always evil: the same is Micaiah the son of Imla. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so.**

**8 And the king of Israel called for one of his officers, and said, Fetch quickly Micaiah the son of Imla.**

**9 And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah sat either of them on his throne, clothed in their robes, and they sat in a void place at the entering in of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them.**

**10 And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah had made him horns of iron, and said, Thus saith the LORD, With these thou shalt push Syria until they be consumed.**

**11 And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king.**

**12** And the messenger that went to call Micaiah spake to him, saying, Behold, the words of the prophets declare good to the king with one assent; let thy word therefore, I pray thee, be like one of theirs, and speak thou good.

**13** And Micaiah said, As the LORD liveth, even what my God saith, that will I speak.

**14** And when he was come to the king, the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And he said, Go ye up, and prosper, and they shall be delivered into your hand.

**15** And the king said to him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou say nothing but the truth to me in the name of the LORD?

**16** Then he said, I did see all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master; let them return therefore every man to his house in peace.

**17** And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would not prophesy good unto me, but evil?

**18** Again he said, Therefore hear the word of the LORD; I saw the LORD sitting upon his throne, and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left.

**19** And the LORD said, Who shall entice Ahab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead? And one spake saying after this manner, and another saying after that manner.

**20** Then there came out a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will entice him. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith?

**21** And he said, I will go out, and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And the Lord said, Thou shalt entice him, and thou shalt also prevail: go out, and do even so.

**22** Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil against thee.

**23** Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near, and smote Micaiah upon the cheek, and said, Which way went the Spirit of the LORD from me to speak unto thee?

**24** And Micaiah said, Behold, thou shalt see on that day when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself.

**25** Then the king of Israel said, Take ye Micaiah, and carry him back to Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son;

**26** And say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I return in peace.

**27** And Micaiah said, If thou certainly return in peace, then hath not the LORD spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, all ye people.

**28** So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead.

**29** And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and I will go to the battle; but put thou on thy robes. So the king of Israel disguised himself; and they went to the battle.

**30** Now the king of Syria had commanded the captains of the chariots that were with him, saying, Fight ye not with small or great, save only with the king of Israel.

**31** And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, It is the king of Israel. Therefore they compassed about him to fight: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him; and God moved them to depart from him.

**32** For it came to pass, that, when the captains of the chariots perceived that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back again from pursuing him.

**33** And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: therefore he said to his chariot man, Turn thine hand, that thou mayest carry me out of the host; for I am wounded.

**34** And the battle increased that day: howbeit the king of Israel stayed himself up in his chariot against the Syrians until the even: and about the time of the sun going down he died.

## REFLECTION

Parallel passage is 1 Kings 22:5-28. Jehoshaphat makes a major error here in marrying into the family of Ahab and Jezebel. No good can come from such a union. It was what was done by kings at the time, but God's people were to be different. **Ezra Chapters 9-10, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18**. This was a big issue for Ezra and so he will point out the error here and really emphasize the importance of being pure and spiritual in our marriage alliances.

Note that he went "down to Samaria". This is because you always "went up to Jerusalem", but the significance was certainly spiritual, as he was "going down" in more ways than one when he joined with Ahab and Jezebel. Ahab suggests a military expedition and in the "spirit of brotherliness" and the emotion of the moment he agrees to join with him. The law of the Lord was clear, that no believer was to join in any intimate relationship with an unbeliever.

This is not just marriage, but any living arrangement and business venture. We simply do not have anything in common with a “devout” pagan, and Ahab was “sold out” to the demons. Remember that at this time Elijah has just gone to heaven, and Elisha is likely still active, and yet Jehoshaphat doesn't personally seek genuine prophetic guidance, nor does he refer the matter to the ark, nor invite Ahab to Jerusalem to worship there rather than continue his paganism. They are wall-papering over the cracks that separate them spiritually, and they are a Grand Canyon!

Verses 4 – 11. Now we have the false versus the true in prophetic truth, and we are reminded that Deuteronomy 13:1-18, and 18:1ff, apply and yet they will not be heeded. The problem with theological liberals or apostates is that they use the same language, but don't mean the same thing. Ahab calls up the 400 Jewish Prophets of Baal (means “lord”), so he now believes in his satanic deception that he is getting a word from the “lord”. Jehoshaphat knows in his spirit that these men are fakes, and probably demon possessed fakes, but they are all Hebrews! He asks for another prophet to confirm the 400.

The next interchange is pathetic on the part of God's man, for he gently chides Ahab for hating the genuine prophet Micaiah, and very reluctantly Ahab sends soldiers for the real prophet. While the two kings wait before the gate of Samaria the 400 prophets “prophesy” before them; they act out what prophets were supposed to do in ecstatic utterances, but it was all fake.

Remember as you hear the words of the fake prophets like Zedekiah, that these men serve and worship Baal, but they speak as if “he” is the God of Israel! The liberals speak this way today, speaking about Jesus, yet their Jesus isn't virgin born, didn't do miracles, didn't rise from the dead and is not coming back! Sorry believer – it's not the same Jesus, and the 400 prophets' “lord” isn't the Lord God of Israel. Satan is a counterfeiter and this is a totally counterfeit operation and being fooled by it will nearly cost the believer here his life. **2 Corinthians 11:10-15.**

I love Micaiah for he plays with the pagan and the stupid believer here; he knows what they want to hear and he plays into their hands, then hits them with the truth. He is prepared to have a smile as he speaks of this, for the men judged by death will all be people who reject the truth, and so their death is “upon their own head”. Joshua 2:19. In verse 15 Ahab is totally hypocritical. He hates the truth from this man, but now he wants it?!!!

Then in verse 16 the true prophet “sees” the truth and describes what he sees. Micaiah then speaks a powerful message that stills the meeting. He sees God in heaven speaking about this very incident. The two kings think they are alone, but they are not; they are in the midst of the angelic conflict, with 400 demon possessed men acting like real prophets for deception, and one true man of God about to give the last word.

God says, use the false prophets to entice Ahab to his death. God has in effect allowed the demons to entice Ahab to his death. God has given his death sentence over Ahab. The key false prophet, Zedekiah then strikes Micaiah and mockingly asks which way the spirit left his hand. He is mocking God in his mockery of the true prophet, but satanic peoples do not see the reality, only their own play acting. The true prophet then sees the false prophet's death and describes it to him. It is a dangerous thing to take on a real prophet, for you declare war on God.

Ahab places the true prophet in prison until he returns in triumph when he will execute him as a false prophet. This would be in accord with Deuteronomy 13, but the reverse will occur – and the 400 false prophets need execution, for they are wrong. Micaiah rightly calls all who hear to witness to the words, for if the king returns in victory then he isn't a prophet and deserves death.

Jehoshaphat doesn't take the warning and joins Ahab on the journey to the battlefield, and it is very nearly his last. Ahab suggests a crazy strategy to avoid death, but it will court death for Jehoshaphat, for him to dress as Ahab. The Syrian King did what all good strategists do – try to kill the leader who rallies the troops. The exception to this rule is when the ruler is useless and every decision he takes is wrong. It was this reason that Churchill forbade anyone to kill Hitler, for he knew that Adolf Hitler was demon possessed and would make the wrong calls as stress of losses built, and he did, and cost his side victory!

Ahab has tried to avoid the arrows aimed at him all through the battle, but he is hit by an arrow not even aimed by the Syrian archer and the wound is fatal. Ahab was many things, but he was brave, and he stays with his men until the end and dies in his chariot standing while dying. It is “noble”, but it is wrongful and he is not to be admired, for he is a pagan and his pagan determination is to prove the prophet wrong and live – but he dies....

**APPLICATION****Personal**

Be very scared of getting it wrong with prophets believer. There have always been more fakes than real, for simply put, God doesn't need many prophets, just one or two every now and again to emphasize certain things. Satan specializes in dramatic religion, but its entertainment, not relationship he wants. Unless it is holy and righteous and true it's not real!

**Pastoral**

We do not fear genuine prophetic words in the church meeting, but we must be sure that the prophet speaking is a tested voice, not a fake.

Be very scared of not stopping the false prophets for they will have God's choicest people doing the worst possible things. I have seen false prophets urge unsuitable people to marry and the fools did, and after several children were produced they divorced and no-one had any ministry through it. Satan gained a great victory by disabling them all!

Expect any true prophet to ruffle feathers. A pastor friend ran a meeting where a genuine prophet was speaking as part of the service. At the end he invited people who wanted a prophetic word to come to the front and up to 100 people came forward and lined up. The first man to approach the prophet was told bluntly and loudly, "Who was that woman you were with on Friday, it was not your wife?" He scuttled away and the crowd disappeared... No-one wanted a real word from the Lord – they just wanted to feel good. Many people want to feel good, but not be good – sadly they are not just the drug addicts, they are the emotional church members also! The genuine will always expose the fake.

**Notes****CHAPTER 19**

**1** And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem.

**2** And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD.

**3** Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God.

**4** And Jehoshaphat dwelt at Jerusalem: and he went out again through the people from Beer-sheba to mount Ephraim, and brought them back unto the LORD God of their fathers.

**5** And he set judges in the land throughout all the fenced cities of Judah, city by city,

**6** And said to the judges, Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment.

**7** Wherefore now let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts.

**8** Moreover in Jerusalem did Jehoshaphat set of the Levites, and of the priests, and of the chief of the fathers of Israel, for the judgment of the LORD, and for controversies, when they returned to Jerusalem.

**9** And he charged them, saying, Thus shall ye do in the fear of the LORD, faithfully, and with a perfect heart.

**10** And what cause soever shall come to you of your brethren that dwell in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and judgments, ye shall even warn them that

they trespass not against the LORD, and so wrath come upon you, and upon your brethren: this do, and ye shall not trespass.

**11 And, behold, Amariah the chief priest is over you in all matters of the LORD; and Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the ruler of the house of Judah, for all the king's matters: also the Levites shall be officers before you. Deal courageously, and the LORD shall be with the good.**

## REFLECTION

“Be sure your sin will find you out”. Numbers 32:23. The context of the sin referred to here is cowardice in the face of the enemy, and that is certainly not what can be said over these kings, for they have both been brave and tenacious in the battle, but fighting spirit is not valued by the Lord unless the battle is righteous and necessary. The spiritual issue here is that the battle should not have been fought.

The information we have here is not in the Kings account and it is crucial, for it tells us that the coup leader from the north is a believer of some sort at least. 1 Kings 16. His words to Jehoshaphat are correct and back up the prophet's words, for the righteous and godly have no business being in close relationships with the determined wicked. Jehu makes it clear that judgment is upon the south because of his alliance with Ahab.

Jehu praises Jehoshaphat for cleansing the land of idols. Jehu sees the king as a “work in progress”, for he has prepared his heart to seek after the Lord, but not completed what the Lord requires. In this he shows the prophetic voice, and the king clearly prays and starts doing what he ought soon after. His travels around the land are evangelistic and teaching trips, where he is calling people back to worship properly. **Psalm 1:1-6**.

The appointment and briefing of the judges throughout the land is a correct and needed step to justice being restored in the Mosaic manner. He must teach the Word first, restore Mosaic Faith, and then get the judges into place with the correct instructions. Jehoshaphat has the order right; spiritual change first, then legal and political second. **Psalm 82:3, 89:14**.

Judges are to be guided by the “fear of the Lord”, for unless they look up, they will look out to the bribes and payments they can get, and the temporary prosperity corruption brings will appear to be permanent. Why do people forget they have an appointment with their maker? The answer appears to be that they get so distracted by the things of this world that they no longer see the eternal things as real. Either eternity is real to you, or the temporary things of this world will fill your space-time; your heart and mind will be distracted.

The Levitical Court is re-established effectively in Jerusalem to handle difficult cases that can be referred to it from the fortress cities. The two qualities required, after they know the Torah; the fear of the Lord, the upward look always, and then a “perfect heart”. This means a “complete, full, peaceful, stable, quiet and calm” heart/emotion, and that means unable to be swayed by non-righteous considerations. It is the Old Testament way of speaking of the filling of the Holy Spirit, and the resultant fruit; no lust centre for any bribery to be possible. Lust alone opens the door for corruption.

Verse 10 reminds us of something that lawyers today do not think about often enough. We are so focused upon the “rights of man” that we forget that the Law, before God, exists for the stability of all society, not just the rights of one. We forget that we exist in association, not isolation and so the acts of one always impact the potential actions of others. The Judges were to weigh all things for the national and societal good in accordance with the provisions of the Mosaic Law.

The Levites are under both the High Priest and the Prime Minister of the State, for both are affected by their judgments; both temple and palace are affected by corruption in law, or self-centred judgments that do not support a stable society. The Judges are to be courageous, and withstand the temptations and the threats that may come to them because of the issues they decide upon.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Political and legal changes in any State make no real difference at all, for unless the people's heart is changed there is nothing valuable that is achieved by the window dressing of politics. Let us call for and work for revival prayerfully, as spiritual changes in our nation will alone help us in the social justice area.

### Pastoral

Pastors, we are the heart of any State, and if enough spiritual people stand for God's Word in our nation it will be stable, even though there is economic or other pressures. I recall a mission visit to Zambia, where unemployment was 40%, and yet the country was stable, because of the strong biblical Christian presence.

Don't be tempted to enter politics or the political arena and support one politician against another, no matter what the morality of the people. All that matters to our call as the Lord's pastors is the spiritual dimension, and so we are called to feed and protect the sheep – nothing else! **John 20:15-23**.

## Notes

## CHAPTER 20

**1** It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle.

**2** Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria; and, behold, they be in Hazazon-tamar, which is En-gedi.

**3** And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

**4** And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the LORD: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD.

**5** And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court,

**6** And said, O LORD God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?

**7** Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?

**8** And they dwelt therein, and have built thee a sanctuary therein for thy name, saying,

**9** If, when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house,) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help.

**10** And now, behold, the children of Ammon and Moab and mount Seir, whom thou wouldest not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them, and destroyed them not;

**11** Behold, I say, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit.

**12** O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee.

**13** And all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children.

## REFLECTION

When a crisis comes we see what we have done beforehand by the way we react to that crisis. If we have been feeding on the Word and walking in faith with our Lord we relax into the crisis, seeking God's way through, but if we have been distracted by the temporary things of space-time, we panic in crises. **Galatians 5:16-26.1 Thessalonians 2:12**.

The attack is a severe one, with the attacking force camped at En Gedi, ready to move up through Jericho to attack Judah and Jerusalem from the south, opening the north to attack by the Syrians or Israel. If Jehoshaphat launches his forces south to engage the Moabites and their allies, he exposes the north. It is his worst nightmare scenario from a military perspective, but he does the right thing; he casts his burden upon the Lord and seeks definite direction. **Exodus 14:13-14, 1 Peter 5:5-10**.

Jehoshaphat's prayer, Verses 3-13, is a masterpiece of mature prayer, and is a good model for us all when under extreme pressure with no human hope. I recall the words of the late Dr De Haan, words that have encouraged me greatly through impossible days. "When God is going to do something wonderful he begins with difficulty, but when he is going to do something spectacular he begins with impossibility".

Verse 3. Note carefully that fear isn't sinful, it is normal when we face impossibility; it is what we do with our fear that determines its spirituality. He declares a fast through the land to pray for deliverance and direction. People are to be prayerful and thoughtful, not careless and escapist. It is easy to use denial and simply lose ourselves in escapism. That is never God's way; HE wants us to face our difficulties and impossibilities in prayerfulness and obedience in all other areas of life. We position for power by "trust and obey" application in/through the Word of God.

Verse 4. The people come to seek the Lord, and they come to the temple at Jerusalem and stand before the Lord. This is not just spiritual, but also military, for the army must come there to group, organize and ready itself for battle, but the orders must come from the Lord alone. The population stands before the Lord and the king prays on their behalf, and the final verse of this section, verse 13, reminds us that the families all stood together on this issue – for all shared the answer to prayer or their death.

Verse 6. Jehoshaphat begins at the right place. He reminds himself and the people of the greatness of God who they serve, and notes that they seek the guidance of the Creator and king over all nations. He begins by placing himself firmly into the Eternal Plan of God, and recognizes that the Lord raises up nations and casts them down. None can withstand the power of God, and it is God's power he seeks, not his own.

Verse 7. The ground the people and king stand upon is "promised ground"; it is the land given to Abraham and the king stands firmly in the promises made to Abraham, and claims them for himself and the people. It is not his righteousness that he stands in, nor the deserving nature of the people, but on the promises of God to Abraham.

We stand also only upon the grace and mercy of God; for it is what God has promised and done that counts, not what we can do or promise to do. It is "walking by faith-rest", where we express our faith in God's Word and rest upon his promises and walk in the reality of them. It is the faith of Abraham, "who went out not knowing where he was going", that we are called to express each and every day. **Hebrews 11:1-8, 3:7 – 4:12.**

Verses 8-9. Just as their ancestors built this house, just so their descendants now stand before this temple and they seek the Lord there, for that is where HE told them to meet him and hear Him. They remind the Lord that they are obedient to the commands they have received and they expect his answers to their prayers.

Verse 10. Jehoshaphat reminds the Lord that he recalls the Exodus story, for Moses and Aaron were not allowed to abuse the people of Edom or Moab, for they were granted their lands by God and they were to hold them before the Lord. They are the ones who have launched this attack and so they are out of the Lord's will – they are on the wrong side of history and for that Jehoshaphat can relax in God's judgment. **Numbers 20:14-21, Deuteronomy 2:1-7.**

Verse 11. This verse remains one for modern Israel to claim and they do, for they are promised the land and any force, from anywhere that tries to cast them out will be destroyed, for they fight God not just men. The final words of the king are to be ours as well; "our eyes are on thee". He may be thinking of the words of David and Solomon, and we also can be helped by hearing their words of encouragement – we "will look up", and we will depend upon the Lord alone. **Psalms 5:1-8, Proverbs 4:23-27.**

## APPLICATION

### Personal

We face the challenge here, and we will face it many times in our lives, to pray or to panic!

Let us pray and look up, not be distracted by the problems around us. **Psalms 4:1-8.**

### Pastoral

Pastors, do we mentor the biblical injunction to "Look Up? Trust the Lord with all your heart and lead the Lord's people into further trust and obedience. **Psalms 7:1-17, 2 Corinthians 1:8-12.**



**Chapter 20:14** Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation;

**15** And he said, Harken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's.

**16** To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel.

**17** Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you.

**18** And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD.

**19** And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high.

**20** And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.

**21** And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever.

**22** And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.

## REFLECTION

Verse 14. When the Holy Spirit falls upon people, it is as God determines, not as people ask or think one may deserve. There is no “deserving” in the Lord’s service, simply obedience to the call upon our lives. It is all “as He wills”. **1 Corinthians 12:7-13**.

Of all the Levites and Priests and nobles one man is chosen by the Lord, of the house of Asaph, to speak on God’s behalf. Ezra is very specific, for he wants us to remember the 400 fakes of Ahab, and recall the truth again and again in history that God does not need numbers, He needs an obedient few, and often one person is enough to turn a nation.

Verse 15. God’s issue is always “His way alone”, not our way. We are to be ready to go anywhere and do anything, but it is God’s narrow/constrained way, not ours, every step of the brief journey we are taking through space-time. **Matthew 7:13-23**. The message is clear, the battle here is not theirs; it is God’s battle, for these people have determined to oppose God.

Verses 16-17. The army will not need to fight this day, for the Lord will cause such discord within the enemy army that they will kill each other. The army of Judah will march down in battle order, but will not need to fight this time, although the nature of God’s order to them is they may need to fight another time. Each time they face a crisis they must pray about it.

Verses 18 -19. The march out from Jerusalem begins with praise and worship. Each person commits themselves to the Lord for survival, and each marches out to face the dangers but with confidence in the Word of the Lord, and expecting to see it play out in front of them, and that is exactly what will occur. Verses 20ff.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Are you ready believer to, “stand still and see the deliverance of the Lord” in any issue you face? Are we ready to look up with expectation, and “Fear not, neither be dismayed” at what we see? Faith-Rest is to be practical and work out on each and every day of our lives.

### Pastoral

Pastors, do we teach the Word of God in such a way as to build God's people up? Are the people of the Lord under our stewardship and shepherd care ready to face crises? How much of the Word do the people know? How much have they heard from you pastor?

**Chapter 20:23** For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another.

**24** And when Judah came toward the watch tower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multitude, and, behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped.

**25** And when Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away the spoil of them, they found among them in abundance both riches with the dead bodies, and precious jewels, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away: and they were three days in gathering of the spoil, it was so much.

**26** And on the fourth day they assembled themselves in the valley of Berachah; for there they blessed the LORD: therefore the name of the same place was called, The valley of Berachah, unto this day.

**27** Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat in the forefront of them, to go again to Jerusalem with joy; for the LORD had made them to rejoice over their enemies.

**28** And they came to Jerusalem with psalteries and harps and trumpets unto the house of the LORD.

**29** And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries, when they had heard that the LORD fought against the enemies of Israel.

**30** So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet: for his God gave him rest round about.

**31** And Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah: he was thirty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi.

**32** And he walked in the way of Asa his father, and departed not from it, doing that which was right in the sight of the LORD.

**33** Howbeit the high places were not taken away: for as yet the people had not prepared their hearts unto the God of their fathers.

**34** Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of Jehu the son of Hanani, who is mentioned in the book of the kings of Israel.

**35** And after this did Jehoshaphat king of Judah join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly:

**36** And he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish: and they made the ships in Ezion-geber.

**37** Then Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the LORD hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish.

## REFLECTION

As the army of Judah marches down the road into the great rift valley of the Jordan River the enemy forces are engaged on an extermination operation against the people of Mt Seir. Such a genocidal thing can only be judged by God. Evil can only destroy, and such people groups who engage in evil are on the wrong side of history, and so it is only a matter of time until they reap what they have sown! **Proverbs 22:8, Hosea 8:7, 1 Corinthians 9:11, Galatians 6:7-9.**

The army heads down into the valley with singers at their head, not with military banners, and they sing praises to the Lord; Psalms that praise the glory of the Lord. Psalm 136:1ff. It is as if they sing the Hallelujah Psalms all the way down – Psalms 146-150. These will be the same Psalms that the Lord and the disciples sing as they head into the Kidron Valley that last night before the Cross. God is doing something and all bystanders will simply watch and praise!

Verses 22-25. The scene they find is staggering in its carnage and pointlessness, for the enemy have murdered the people of Seir and then murdered each other! The piles of dead are enormous and cover the landscape. It took three days to dispose of the dead and the loot they took from the bodies was so excessive that each man of the army was laden down with the spoil. The army pauses in a valley there, and they rename it the "Valley of Berachah, the valley of Blessing", verse 27, for God has blessed them with victory and prosperity.

They re-enter Jerusalem with joy. The “Fruit of the Holy Spirit” is the sign of walking with God, and joy is the fruit of the Lord. They left with worship and praise and they return with song, worship and praise, for they heard the Lord and trusted in God’s power, not their own. The result politically is a “cascade of peace”! Satanic systems of politics call for peace, but they work by means of men, whereas God brings peace and security by means of answered prayer and by means of the deliverance of his people.

The reign of Jehoshaphat is summed up in verses 31-37. He reigns long, and lives until around 70 years of age as king. The verdict is “good”, but Ezra notes that the high places were not all taken away. An attentive reader will say aloud at this point, but I thought I read just a chapter or so ago that the high places were destroyed, and you are right – and they were – but Satan slithers back as soon as he can. To keep the house clean you must sweep daily.

Even though he has led a prayerful revival and achieved an answer to prayer that is amazing, he still joins with Israel again in a business venture, to try to do what Solomon did, and travel to far off places and get incredible wealth. Business ventures are not the Lord’s way of gaining provision for ministry!

Many ministries have business to fund their missions and they trumpet their success, but long term they are a spiritual disaster, for you trust in finance not God. The venture with a “wicked” king violates the “unequally yoked” principle and so the Lord judges the business venture and the ships are broken up without one successful voyage. The base of Solomon at Ezion Geber is rebuilt and the ships are built using expertise from the north, and the plan appears to be to sail to Tarshish. Now that means to circumnavigate Africa!!! Solomon’s fleet may have done that, or may have received from the Phoenicians the information that led them to believe it was possible, but it was with the wrong people and so God ends it.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Are you ready to put all into the Lord’s “pot” and trust Him to guide and direct?

Are you ready to have your business and your spiritual life aligned?

### Pastoral

Pastors, do we teach the business and political principles that emerge from the days of Jehoshaphat?

Let us pray our way through the crises that will come and seek the Lord’s path alone.

### Notes

## CHAPTER 21

**1** Now Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. And Jehoram his son reigned in his stead.

**2** And he had brethren the sons of Jehoshaphat, Azariah, and Jehiel, and Zechariah, and Azariah, and Michael, and Shephatiah: all these were the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel.

**3** And their father gave them great gifts of silver, and of gold, and of precious things, with fenced cities in Judah: but the kingdom gave he to Jehoram; because he was the firstborn.

**4** Now when Jehoram was risen up to the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself, and slew all his brethren with the sword, and divers also of the princes of Israel.

**5** Jehoram was thirty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem.

**6** And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab: for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife: and he wrought that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD.

7 Howbeit the LORD would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that he had made with David, and as he promised to give a light to him and to his sons for ever.

8 In his days the Edomites revolted from under the dominion of Judah, and made themselves a king.

9 Then Jehoram went forth with his princes, and all his chariots with him: and he rose up by night, and smote the Edomites, which compassed him in, and the captains of the chariots.

10 So the Edomites revolted from under the hand of Judah unto this day. The same time also did Libnah revolt from under his hand; because he had forsaken the LORD God of his fathers.

11 Moreover he made high places in the mountains of Judah and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication, and compelled Judah thereto.

12 And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah,

13 But hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, which were better than thyself:

14 Behold, with a great plague will the LORD smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods:

15 And thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day.

16 Moreover the LORD stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians, that were near the Ethiopians:

17 And they came up into Judah, and brake into it, and carried away all the substance that was found in the king's house, and his sons also, and his wives; so that there was never a son left him, save Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons.

18 And after all this the LORD smote him in his bowels with an incurable disease.

19 And it came to pass, that in process of time, after the end of two years, his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness: so he died of sore diseases. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers.

20 Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years, and departed without being desired. Howbeit they buried him in the city of David, but not in the sepulchres of the kings.

## REFLECTION

How quickly do things change, and how quickly is spirituality halted in any group when self-centredness takes charge through the unrestrained exercise of the free will of evil men. The son of Jehoshaphat is determined to follow paganism, and many with him in the land.

This man is ruthless and evil to the core, and he murders his own brothers to stop any trying to seize the throne, but he will die, like all other men, and another will rule. He has forgotten the truth about the temporary nature of men! It always amazes me that people get so quickly distracted by "stuff" in this life, and all is just "stuff" that a match can remove, and yet people act as if they have their things forever. **Psalm 90:12, Proverbs 4:23, Ephesians 5:15ff.**

He married a daughter of Ahab and so embraced the paganism of the north, and turned away from the faith of his fathers, but God did not turn away from him. The words of verse 7 are important to reflect upon, for we also depend upon the Lord alone, and his promises keep us, and at times our choices would disqualify us from blessing and render us worthy of death, but his promises to us will be honoured. **2 Timothy 2:12-15.**

The Edomites, who had been miraculously defeated by divine intervention in his father's reign were able to rise up and defeat his armies in revolt, but then he masters them with a night attack. This indicates his great strength militarily, for such a thing is hard enough with radios and beacons, but he did it with just his well trained troops. He is indeed strong, and ruthless, but he lacks spiritual strength and so no victory lasts long.

Libnah revolts, and clearly he has lost the faith and trust of his princes, and not surprising, for he had murdered them, as he murdered his own brothers. The only thing that is clear when you face such a man is that you cannot trust him, for if he breaks natural bonds, then he can be depended upon to break all covenants made. His very evil nature causes revolt, for all fear and none trust him.

He also actively supported and encouraged the high places pagan worship. These are the fertility religions of demonic origin, where sex and violence were worshipped with drugs, alcohol and immorality. The evils

are great, but the judgment is greater! God uses the prophet Elijah, from the north, to write a prophetic word to him, and it is very specific about the nature of the judgement that will fall.

He will develop bowel cancer and die, and it will be awful, and clearly a judgment of God by its sudden nature. He is only 40 when this occurs, and so it is indeed a judgement, just as it is for Herod Agrippa the First. **Acts 12:20-25**. When God judges it is quick and final, and the job of the believer waiting for such a judgement to occur to set them free, must simply position themselves in the right place of obedience and busy themselves with their spiritual work until the evil man/woman dies. Only then will the next orders be given the believer.

God's judgment is upon his people when they sin, and sadly the people were not all resistant to his paganism. The people are struck with plagues, and he himself is struck with a particular form of cancer that rots him from the inside out. Deuteronomy 27-28 had made it clear that divine discipline would increase as rebellion against God's clear path increased. The very prosperity itself that he enjoyed would rot in his hands. When a person selects goods as his god, he places himself in a dangerously fragile place, and the slightest change of circumstances alters everything.

Verses 16-17 tell us that it is the perfect storm he faces as he sickens, with the southern forces of Arabia, and the western forces of the Philistines being raised up to fight him. These two people groups were by nature raiders, and so they enjoyed the fight and loot gathering.

The disease was awful, and yet gracious, for he had two years of certainty that he was dying and had therefore the time to repent of his evil and even be healed and the nation delivered, but he did not do so! He never faced his sin, even though he could see in his body the cost of it to him! He resisted the Lord until the end, and the people around him hated him. There was nothing but joy when he died, and no mourning was held.

There can be great hypocrisy after the death of an evil man or woman. We are called to be truthful, not stupid or lying in our statements after the death of such people. When Ananias and Sapphira died the church didn't pause for a minute; there was no funeral service to mourn them. The young men were simply sent out to bury them and say a prayer over their grave, and then the church moved forward. **Acts 5:1-16**. Let us be known as people of the Book of Truth, not pious hypocrisy!

## APPLICATION

### Personal

If it decays, rusts, or can be stolen it is not eternal! Do you remember this principle believer, or are you besotted with things that do not and cannot last?

Are you waiting for an evil person to be moved aside? Just position in the will of the Lord and work with wholehearted devotion and attention. God will judge in his time and his way. "Wait upon the Lord". **Psalm 25:3-5, 62:5, 130:5, Habakkuk 2:1-5**.

### Pastoral

We may fail our Lord, but He does not fail us. We may break our promises to Him, but He never breaks his Word to us. Pastors, do we teach enough the doctrine of eternal security?

Pastors, be challenged by the reality of evil, for many will resist the Lord until the end, and when they die there is no "tragedy", just the sadness of their eternal judgment. An unbeliever must work hard to go to hell, there to await the last judgment. If they work hard at evil to the end, we must tell the truth about them and the consequences of their actions.

If we do not tell the truth, evil will always deepen, and that is what we see with the next king and his mother – the true "grandmother from hell". Things can always get worse Pastor – but look up and be part of turning it around – or face the fact that evil grows when unchallenged by truth and spiritual power.

### Notes

## CHAPTER 22

**1** And the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his stead: for the band of men that came with the Arabians to the camp had slain all the eldest. So Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah reigned.

**2** Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Athaliah the daughter of Omri.

**3** He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly.

**4** Wherefore he did evil in the sight of the LORD like the house of Ahab: for they were his counsellors after the death of his father to his destruction.

**5** He walked also after their counsel, and went with Jehoram the son of Ahab king of Israel to war against Hazael king of Syria at Ramoth-gilead: and the Syrians smote Joram.

**6** And he returned to be healed in Jezreel because of the wounds which were given him at Ramah, when he fought with Hazael king of Syria. And Azariah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Jehoram the son of Ahab at Jezreel, because he was sick.

**7** And the destruction of Ahaziah was of God by coming to Joram: for when he was come, he went out with Jehoram against Jehu the son of Nimshi, whom the LORD had anointed to cut off the house of Ahab.

**8** And it came to pass, that, when Jehu was executing judgment upon the house of Ahab, and found the princes of Judah, and the sons of the brethren of Ahaziah, that ministered to Ahaziah, he slew them.

**9** And he sought Ahaziah: and they caught him, (for he was hid in Samaria,) and brought him to Jehu: and when they had slain him, they buried him: Because, said they, he is the son of Jehoshaphat, who sought the LORD with all his heart. So the house of Ahaziah had no power to keep still the kingdom.

**10** But when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah.

**11** But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the king, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons that were slain, and put him and his nurse in a bedchamber. So Jehoshabeath, the daughter of king Jehoram, the wife of Jehoiada the priest, (for she was the sister of Ahaziah,) hid him from Athaliah, so that she slew him not.

**12** And he was with them hid in the house of God six years: and Athaliah reigned over the land.

### REFLECTION

I have already given you the suggested title for this chapter, "The Grandmother From Hell Itself", for such indeed is Athaliah. Her son murders all his brothers, and she approves, and after eight years she sees her power slipping away, and instead of calling on the Lord, she turns to the "lord" of her mother, the daughter of Omri, and her lord is Baal! Even in the midst of this evil family of David there is a good daughter of this evil queen, who will save one of the royal line (below).

Murder is no problem for this woman, and the murder of her own grand-children – no worry at all! We often underestimate satanic malice, but this woman reminds us our enemy Satan hates mankind and his "sold out" people have hatred at a level that many never strike in a lifetime, but it is there, and will take any opportunity it can. **John 15:18ff.**

Ahaziah is the only survivor of one of the battles against the Arabians, who killed all his older brothers. He is 42 when he starts to rule, and his mother is Athaliah, daughter of Omri, one of the pagan kings of the northern kingdom. He goes with another Joram/Jehoram, Ahab's son, to the war against Syria. This is the war that Judah should not be involved in, but he has ignored the prophets and gone anyway. Joram heads down to Jezreel to heal after being wounded in the battle and the foolish southern king goes to wish him all the best for his recovery.

From the writing here it is hard to know if Ahaziah was actually in the battle, but he certainly was there to comfort the king of the North in the summer palace of Ahab in the pleasant Vale of Jezreel. Wrong place, wrong time and the wrong people to be hanging out with, for the household of Ahab and Jezebel was under judgment for their many evils against God's people, and their persistent paganism. If you get too close to a person under judgment you can pick up what they now call "collateral damage", and this man's closeness to evil costs him his life.

Ezra makes the specific point that Ahaziah's death was clearly "of the Lord", for he was totally out of God's plan for his life and for the kingdom of Judah. Jehu had been appointed to destroy the family of Ahab to the last man standing, and Ahaziah must have known of the prophetic word, flowing from Naboth's vineyard and so many other atrocities committed by Ahab. **2 Kings 8:1-11:3.**

Ahaziah is caught with the evil man and Jehu takes the opportunity to eliminate the older members of the household of the Judean kings also. It is clear that this is the king of Judah, but Jehu doesn't discriminate between them and Ahab's family (because of their closeness in belief and behaviour?), and murders them all, and it appears that the sons of the king's dead brothers are also killed here, as they were his attendants. It appears that Jehu's men had to hunt for him in Samaria and they pull him out of hiding and kill him, and while the text isn't 100% clear they do so because he was not like his father; he hadn't sought the Lord with all his heart. It is his association with the hated dynasty of Ahab that seals his fate.

His mother is more ruthless and street smart than him, and sees her power slipping away with her son's death, for then a council of elders may rule and bring back genuine worship and stop her paganism. She is fully implicated in the worship of Baal, and also in encouraging her son to ignore God's prophets and follow after the pagan gods and the pagan northern kings.

As queen mother she had power while her son lived, and with the elimination of all the males she can hold that power until she appoints a successor. She has learned the lessons from Jezebel really well, and is even more evil and ruthless, for she doesn't cover her evil with sexual allure, she is just pure power-hungry evil!

There is one brave woman who knows her mother well, Jehoshabeath (the daughter of the dead king and Athaliah), and she takes the young child Joash from the nursery, and he is the only surviving son of Ahaziah. Jehoshabeath is the wife of Jehoiada the priest, and they hide the child and its nurse. All the other children in the harem nursery are murdered on the orders of their grand-mother, and it appears that the bodies are so many that the guards sent to do Athaliah's terrible work miscount the bodies and think they "got them all".

For six years this godly couple hide the child within the temple, and the evil queen mother does not find out. This story is the origin of the "fairy tale" that we all know, but sadly the "evil queen" is no myth and her reign of terror was thorough and evil to an extreme as we will see, and as the writer of Kings makes even clearer.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Do not underestimate the evil of people who value only their favourite lust. It doesn't matter whether it's lust for sex, wealth, power or collecting stamps; any uncontrolled lust that puts things and experiences ahead of people will in the end kill people. Be very scared of such people and walk prayerfully!

Be ready to take definitive actions to save the innocent in the battle against evil. If a child can be saved from evil people, do all you can to save it.

### Pastoral

Pastors, do the Lord's people under our pastoral care hear enough about evil to know what danger they are in if they are careless for a minute against such as Athaliah? Do we white wash or water down the subject

of Angelology-Demonology? Doi God's people spot evil or are they deceived by it? Do many institutions even teach it any more in Systematic Theology? Sadly most do not, but we believe it is crucial here at EBCWA and it is part of the Diploma Course. Refer to the Diploma File, Book 02, Theology 111. Pages 123- 152.

## Notes

## CHAPTER 23

**1** And in the seventh year Jehoiada strengthened himself, and took the captains of hundreds, Azariah the son of Jeroham, and Ishmael the son of Jehohanan, and Azariah the son of Obed, and Maaseiah the son of Adaiah, and Elishaphat the son of Zichri, into covenant with him.

**2** And they went about in Judah, and gathered the Levites out of all the cities of Judah, and the chief of the fathers of Israel, and they came to Jerusalem.

**3** And all the congregation made a covenant with the king in the house of God. And he said unto them, Behold, the king's son shall reign, as the LORD hath said of the sons of David.

**4** This is the thing that ye shall do; A third part of you entering on the sabbath, of the priests and of the Levites, shall be porters of the doors;

**5** And a third part shall be at the king's house; and a third part at the gate of the foundation: and all the people shall be in the courts of the house of the LORD.

**6** But let none come into the house of the LORD, save the priests, and they that minister of the Levites; they shall go in, for they are holy: but all the people shall keep the watch of the LORD.

**7** And the Levites shall compass the king round about, every man with his weapons in his hand; and whosoever else cometh into the house, he shall be put to death: but be ye with the king when he cometh in, and when he goeth out.

**8** So the Levites and all Judah did according to all things that Jehoiada the priest had commanded, and took every man his men that were to come in on the sabbath, with them that were to go out on the sabbath: for Jehoiada the priest dismissed not the courses.

**9** Moreover Jehoiada the priest delivered to the captains of hundreds spears, and bucklers, and shields, that had been king David's, which were in the house of God.

**10** And he set all the people, every man having his weapon in his hand, from the right side of the temple to the left side of the temple, along by the altar and the temple, by the king round about.

**11** Then they brought out the king's son, and put upon him the crown, and gave him the testimony, and made him king. And Jehoiada and his sons anointed him, and said, God save the king.

## REFLECTION

Here we have the first documented and detailed description of a Coup, and it's run by Jehoiada the priest, and he does exactly what recent coup leaders do, he targets the "captains of hundreds", the professional soldiers, the Captains and Majors, who are the tactical battle leaders, not the higher officers with more links to the power elite political group.

He travels the countryside and gathers the Levites and the natural leaders of the major families of the tribal groups. He has therefore picked the three groups that can communicate quickly to the people who form the militia; the priests-Levites, the professional officers of the army, and the family heads of the tribes.

He is brave and also careful, and he has waited for six full years before launching the coup to be sure the feeling of the countryside is firmly against Athaliah. He gets them all together and around the oath of the Lord to the house of David, they all agree to appoint the little boy as the legitimate king. 2 Samuel 7:12, 1 Kings 2:4, 9:5. With the secret meeting to agree and with all men binding themselves to a death warrant – for they will die if the queen mother finds out!



The plan is carefully laid and gives evidence of careful planning for years in advance as to how to execute this. They must have the soldiers ready to slay the guard of Athaliah and her other "hit men", and they must control the gates and doors into the temple, especially from the palace to the north-west. They can not afford to take prisoners, and must be fast and ruthless, the queen mother and all her supporters must be killed for they all stand and fall together, and will fight to the death to maintain their position.

The coup team divides into three groups. The first group will be Levites on duty manning all the gates and doors. The second group will be at the king's house, ready as an armed block-force to secure the old palace. The third group will be at the largest gate pretending to be arriving for the Sabbath worship service. They pick the busiest day and time for the coup, so there are maximum people in the temple court, as they figure that they will have popular support. Like all coups it is a calculated risk, but well calculated, well equipped with soldiers and arms, and well planned.

The Levites are all to be armed and are the holy guard to the young king, and the others will be in their two groups in the outer court ready to back up and defend the gates and kill the queen mother and her men. They know they must slay anyone who attempts to burst in to stop them. They are not ignorant of the risks, and are ready to die to set the right son of David on the throne.

Jehoiada didn't dismiss the courses who finished their work and were due to go home, but was literally filling the city with the priesthood and Levites, for all were ready to do what he told them. He has access to the weapon rooms with weapons from King David's time and he issues them to the men who need weapons. The reason he has to do this is that Athaliah has control of the main arsenal to try to keep a lid on trouble, but she hasn't thought of the "museum pieces" stored in the temple. They have probably been forgotten by the court, but not by the priesthood. Months of work cleaning and sharpening must have been done.

Jehoiada takes charge on this Sabbath day and lines up the armed soldiers and armed priests, so that they are several lines deep along three inner walls of the temple complex. There must be several thousand men gathered. At that moment they bring the young boy out and anoint and crown him king of Judah in David's line, and with David's ritual used to ensure the blessing over him is the historic connection they are trying to make. It is appropriate, as this is the surviving son of David. Truly they call – "God save the king" – for the Lord must now protect them as they fight for the king's life and their own.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

There is a time to stand against evil, and a time to lie to evil people to secure the good. There is no sin in the rescue of the little boy, and the people involved deceive and lie to Athaliah. God's Word is clear, evil people are not entitled to the truth when the lives of good people hang upon it!

How clear are you of this ethical issue believer? If you are agonizing over this and have trouble in your heart, then you simply don't know enough of God's Word – get growing asap – for you are no use presently in your ethical ignorance and weakness if there is a crisis!

### Pastoral

How well organized are you pastor? Are we ready to co-ordinate a rescue like this? Now we don't have to do this sort of rescue, but do we have connections in our society that could bring together in the church the people needed to assist the city? Are we in touch with the pulse of the city we minister within?

**Chapter 23:12** Now when Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she came to the people into the house of the LORD:

**13** And she looked, and, behold, the king stood at his pillar at the entering in, and the princes and the trumpets by the king: and all the people of the land rejoiced, and sounded with trumpets, also the singers with instruments of musick, and such as taught to sing praise. Then Athaliah rent her clothes, and said, Treason, Treason.

**14** Then Jehoiada the priest brought out the captains of hundreds that were set over the host, and said unto them, Have her forth of the ranges: and whoso followeth her, let him be slain with the sword. For the priest said, Slay her not in the house of the LORD.

**15** So they laid hands on her; and when she was come to the entering of the horse gate by the king's house, they slew her there.

**16 And Jehoiada made a covenant between him, and between all the people, and between the king, that they should be the LORD's people.**

**17 Then all the people went to the house of Baal, and brake it down, and brake his altars and his images in pieces, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars.**

**18 Also Jehoiada appointed the offices of the house of the LORD by the hand of the priests the Levites, whom David had distributed in the house of the LORD, to offer the burnt offerings of the LORD, as it is written in the law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, as it was ordained by David.**

**19 And he set the porters at the gates of the house of the LORD, that none which was unclean in any thing should enter in.**

**20 And he took the captains of hundreds, and the nobles, and the governors of the people, and all the people of the land, and brought down the king from the house of the LORD: and they came through the high gate into the king's house, and set the king upon the throne of the kingdom.**

**21 And all the people of the land rejoiced: and the city was quiet, after that they had slain Athaliah with the sword.**

## REFLECTION

Athaliah is in her palace and hears the noise from the temple next door. 2 Kings 11:13-20. She is on alert, but has been badly let down by her spies, possibly because they now hate her and are not reporting the coup. It is staggering that no-one betrayed this plot.

The group gathered combines all the key members of society, and with the princes of the tribal families present it is clear she has been outplayed. The soldiers are there fully armed, and she screams in frustration, "treason", but they could all scream back "murderer", but they don't waste their breath. It is a waste of time to accuse evil people and expect them to accept their evil, for they believe themselves to be special, and so beyond reproach – it's you who has the problem....

The ranks open to let the queen mother through and she foolishly enters and believes her "power of command" will sway the crowd, much like Jezebel did in the north with Jehu! She is fatally mistaken. The order is given to kill her followers, but the priests are clear – no royal blood is to be spilt in the temple – only her henchmen are to be killed if they follow her, as this is necessary to protect others. They took her out of the temple and killed her by the horse gate of the city.

Revival can now begin, and even though the boy king is too young to fully understand, he is guided by Jehoiada, and so revival can be formally set up with preaching, teaching and prayer, and a full-scale assault on paganism. The first target is the priest of Baal and the entire false worship centre the queen mother has established in the city of God. The boy king gets the temple operating again as David had intended and Solomon had established.

The porters now do their work, and all must be clean when entering the temple courts; nothing was to be casual, all very formal and holy before the Lord. I wonder whether we have erred in these matters today? We are often so casual that holiness is gone from our services and we lose the quietness of worship. The young king is now formally brought into the palace and established there on the throne. The young officers are now I suspect in charge and any of Athaliah's henchmen are eliminated from all power positions.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Believer, are you ready to play a part in great matters if called? Are you ready to do what the Lord requires of you, whatever that is and wherever that may be?

### Pastoral

Pastors, we need to be as well organized as we see Jehoiada. If we do something it should be crisp in its organization, not floppy around the edges, or inefficient. No-one ought to be embarrassed when an event occurs in church!

### Notes

**CHAPTER 24**

**1** Joash was seven years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Zibiah of Beer-sheba.

**2** And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest.

**3** And Jehoiada took for him two wives; and he begat sons and daughters.

**4** And it came to pass after this, that Joash was minded to repair the house of the LORD.

**5** And he gathered together the priests and the Levites, and said to them, Go out unto the cities of Judah, and gather of all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that ye hasten the matter. Howbeit the Levites hastened it not.

**6** And the king called for Jehoiada the chief, and said unto him, Why hast thou not required of the Levites to bring in out of Judah and out of Jerusalem the collection, according to the commandment of Moses the servant of the LORD, and of the congregation of Israel, for the tabernacle of witness?

**7** For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of the LORD did they bestow upon Baalim.

**8** And at the king's commandment they made a chest, and set it without at the gate of the house of the LORD.

**9** And they made a proclamation through Judah and Jerusalem, to bring in to the LORD the collection that Moses the servant of God laid upon Israel in the wilderness.

**10** And all the princes and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end.

**11** Now it came to pass, that at what time the chest was brought unto the king's office by the hand of the Levites, and when they saw that there was much money, the king's scribe and the high priest's officer came and emptied the chest, and took it, and carried it to his place again. Thus they did day by day, and gathered money in abundance.

**12** And the king and Jehoiada gave it to such as did the work of the service of the house of the LORD, and hired masons and carpenters to repair the house of the LORD, and also such as wrought iron and brass to mend the house of the LORD.

**13** So the workmen wrought, and the work was perfected by them, and they set the house of God in his state, and strengthened it.

**14** And when they had finished it, they brought the rest of the money before the king and Jehoiada, whereof were made vessels for the house of the LORD, even vessels to minister, and to offer withal, and spoons, and vessels of gold and silver. And they offered burnt offerings in the house of the LORD continually all the days of Jehoiada.

**REFLECTION**

The parallel text is 2 Kings 11:21-13:10. Joash begins at age seven to rule under the godly priest Jehoiada, and with the godly aunt of the king as his wife to encourage him the old priest rules well. The sad words of Ezra are there to be seen; "he did what was right all the days of Jehoiada the priest". We have a sinking feeling every king we read of will fall, and they nearly all do. This is Ezra's key point; that unless there is constant revival there is carnality and the growth of evil again. The "angelic conflict" doesn't rest, and the satanic forces are constantly looking for opportunity to evil and hurt.

In verses 4-8 we read of the young king's desire to repair the temple of Solomon after the neglect and outright vandalism of Athaliah and her henchmen. The project is delayed by corrupt and faithless priests and Levites, who fraudulently abuse the money collected. Jehoiada is distracted and doesn't see what is occurring, but no work is done – the delay is 23 years!!!

In verse 7 we read of the actions of the "sons of Athaliah", which may be her natural sons and her adopted pagan servants, but they took the golden vessels of the temple and dedicated them to Baal. How many are left? What is left of the originals that Solomon made? We are left guessing if any of the items Solomon made survive. Ezra speaks here and at other places in our history of the near destruction of the things associated with the temple worship, and there may be a very important reason for this. In Joshua and Zerubbabel's day 100 years before Ezra, the surviving vessels from this temple were given by the Persians back to the second temple, and in his own day more items were made to replace worn out items.

Some may have argued that they had nothing “holy” left in their day, and that they were just using “replacements”, not the “real things”. Ezra’s point is that gold was broken up and used for evil and other purposes, and then re-smelted a number of times into new holy items. It was the rededication that mattered, not the evil actions of pagans to items. The item was not “holy” in itself, but was made holy by its dedication, or its re-dedication, and was holy in its dedicated use, not its molecular structure.

The principle later expressed in **1 John 4:4** is applied here. It is the Holy Spirit who makes things and people holy, and the process is a constant one of re-dedication to holy purposes. God makes and unmakes items and people. He is the potter with us and the smelter with vessels of gold. **Isaiah 64:1-8, Jeremiah 18:1-10**. Focus on the purposes being worked out and give thanks for the use of an item, not the item itself. It doesn’t matter whether Bezaleel or Aholiab made something, but it does matter that Holy Spirit filled people use the items to the glory of God. Forget provenance, just dedicate all “things” for God’s glory/use.

Young king Joash has to directly order the old priest to act decisively, and he needs the king’s authority and power behind him to collect and use the money properly. Why has Jehoiada been so slack? The strain of the six years of hiding the boy may have taken their toll, and the legacy of the evil queen may have not been realised. People in a corrupt system get to be very devious to save their own lives, and the Levites who have been stealing the funds, and the workmen not doing their work are indeed devious.

The king makes a formal proclamation, and that means the king’s authority is behind it and death is the penalty now for not doing the king’s will. Fraud by the Levites and priests in charge previously is clearly seen by the massive amount of money now collected - compared to the past 23 years. The King’s men take charge and daily check the totals and properly account for the money and the work.

The work now goes on under royal supervision. The work is done quickly and the building strengthened, and this reference makes me think even the very foundations had been undermined by the evil queen, trying to make the building fall of its own accord. She would not have been able to directly tear down the building as the Babylonians would in 586 BC, but to secretly destroy it from within would have been her plan, and then say that “Baal has judged”. Jehoiada’s actions to have the boy crowned at age seven was clearly the latest time he could afford to wait, but he has lost his moral leadership by allowing the corruption to continue for so long. The young king will doubt his moral legacy....seeing him possibly as a weak man, and maybe his faith as weak and corrupt as a result. Dodgy deacons can turn people away from truth very thoroughly.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Things and people are “holy” in their use only, not their structure/origin. We are to be holy before the Lord, and that means Holy Spirit led and used, so that we bring glory to the Lord in all we say and do.

### Pastoral

Pastors, how careful are we of the Lord’s money? Do we account properly with transparency? When a project is undertaken, are we careful enough of the process, and audit it properly?

**Chapter 24:15** But Jehoiada waxed old, and was full of days when he died; an hundred and thirty years old was he when he died.

**16** And they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God, and toward his house.

**17** Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them.

**18** And they left the house of the LORD God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass.

**19** Yet he sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the LORD; and they testified against them: but they would not give ear.

**20** And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you.

**21** And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the LORD.

**22 Thus Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son. And when he died, he said, The LORD look upon it, and require it.**

**23 And it came to pass at the end of the year, that the host of Syria came up against him: and they came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all the spoil of them unto the king of Damascus.**

**24 For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men, and the LORD delivered a very great host into their hand, because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. So they executed judgment against Joash.**

**25 And when they were departed from him, (for they left him in great diseases,) his own servants conspired against him for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest, and slew him on his bed, and he died: and they buried him in the city of David, but they buried him not in the sepulchres of the kings.**

**26 And these are they that conspired against him; Zabad the son of Shimeath an Ammonitess, and Jehozabad the son of Shimrith a Moabitess.**

**27 Now concerning his sons, and the greatness of the burdens laid upon him, and the repairing of the house of God, behold, they are written in the story of the book of the kings. And Amaziah his son reigned in his stead.**

## REFLECTION

“But” is an awful word at times and it is here, for the old priest dies and sadly there isn’t the strength and power in the next generation of the priesthood to stand before the king with the same respect and admiration/gratitude to make the king pay heed to godly advice. They are all too implicated in corruption.

Jehoiada is given the honour of being buried amongst the kings of Judah, so greatly was he honoured by the present king. Today the same thing occurs in England, where great men and women are given the honour of being buried in Westminster Abbey. Not long after the old priest’s death the younger princes of Judah come and bow low to the king and flatter him, and sadly he hears them without the discernment that Jehoiada had. He has been well guided, but now he must apply the word and walk in Holy Spirit power and refer to the ark when in doubt, but he will pull back from wholehearted faith!

It appears from verse 18 that they all got involved in the more sensual and pleasant worship of the pagan fertility gods and goddesses. Their worship was with grain, wine and tiny cakes...and sex followed. It was the satanic counter stroke to the austere worship of the temple that involved blood sacrifice to remind all people daily of the cost of sin. Satan’s religion has no thought of “sin”, and refers to all “blood sacrifice” as “disgusting and awful”, and “unenlightened” or “primitive religion”, and the satanic preaches acceptance and tolerance of all (except biblical faith) and that, “all will be ok in the end...” so lets not be too fanatical...

God moved to judge the king and the nation for their spiritual apostasy. Prophets were sent, and a number of them, but the rulers wouldn’t heed the voices of the prophets. This is the point that Ezra is making here; that volition is the key to survival in each and every generation. People must decide to follow the Lord, and must do so daily. It is the small decisions that place us on a path of blessing or cursing. People who will not heed the words of the prophets and Moses cannot expect to be blessed by the Lord. **Luke 16:19-31**.

The greatest prophet of God at this time is Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada (not the author of the book of Zechariah – he is post-Exile). He stands up before all the people and prophesies the importance of heeding the words of the Lord. He “tells it like it is”. The issue is clear and he makes it clear; they have forsaken the Lord and the Lord’s Word and so the Lord has forsaken them. This man is stoned to death on the orders of the king, and he is murdered in the very temple court. His dying words will be heard by the Lord, and by history, and the Lord Jesus refers to him and to Abel. **Luke 11:45-54**.

Ezra wants the people to hear the words of God and heed the words of the past prophets. He also wants them to remember that many godly people testified with their lives to this disobedient people, and the Lord will directly refer to this generation. **Matthew 23:34-38, Hebrews 11:32-40, 12:1-3**. God will indeed “look upon this and require it” of the people guilty of this outrage. The writer of Hebrews reminds us in chapter twelve also that the godly dead look on and cheer us on from the stands of heaven.

The Syrians are used to discipline the nation, and the very “princes” who thought themselves strong were proved soft butter in the hands of God, for they melted before the Syrian host, and their goods were taken as loot by the Syrians. It appears that corruption is behind this comment, for the princes’ wealth is specifically targeted, and that indicates God has heard the dying prayer of Zechariah, and He has achieved justice through the princes’ deaths, and their being relieved of their ill-gotten gains.

Jehoiada had been buried with the kings, but Joash would not be. The king is murdered in his own bed by men who were finally ready to revenge the deaths of Jehoiada's sons. Note the plural here, for we hear of Zechariah, but clearly Joash murdered more than just one. Ezra isn't totally unsympathetic towards Joash, for the burdens placed upon him were indeed heavy, but he could have borne them had he followed the Lord alone. The motto Ezra challenges us with is, "No excuses Lord".

The men who murdered the king are mentioned by name, and even though they were right in their hatred, they were wrong in their actions, for the Lord sought repentance not murder. The son of Joash will execute these men, for if they killed one king, then he can be sure they will kill another if they think it right... We are challenged by this, for a wrong act in the right spirit, is still a wrongful act, and it will be judged by God.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Believer, it doesn't matter where we are buried, except that we have chosen our company in the resurrection by being buried with some people. What matters is that we did our task to the utmost until the day we died. Let us pour ourselves out for the Lord. 2 Timothy 4:1-12.

Believer, do not trust people, for Jesus didn't, and we need to heed his words. John 2:24-25. The king owed Jehoiada his life, but he murders the old priest's son, as the son of Hezekiah murders the prophet Isaiah, who saved his father. People cannot be trusted, but we don't look to them, we look to God, for God alone delivers us and keeps us safe.

### Pastoral

Did old Jehoiada fail to teach the king the discernment he needed? We must not rush to blame the old priest, for we see an entire generation in the Exodus fail to heed Moses, and no criticism of Moses' teaching can ever be raised! **Hebrews 3:7 – 4:12**. Also remember the Lord's words over Jerusalem, and recall his words over Capernaum and Bethsaida. **Matthew 11:23-30, 23:37**. None would dare argue that the Lord wasn't a good and clear teacher, and yet most turned away from Him!

The issue Pastor is the volition and the free will choice of the people we speak to. We must be clear, biblical, passionate and sold out for the truth of the Word, but even if we pour our hearts out, and we should, people can still walk away, as they did from the Lord. Let us feel the sadness of this and pray for the lost and lukewarm, and then refocus our minds and bodies and do the work we are called to do. **Ezekiel 3:3-27**.

Do not despair at lack of commitment or lack of belief on the part of God's people; just do your job so that they are without excuse before the throne of God. **2 Corinthians 5:5-20**.

Are we ready to be like Zechariah and give our lives for the Lord and his truth? That is the standard, and that must be met by each of us. We may never be called to this, for the vast majority never are so called, but let us test our heart and be sure we stand with the apostles and the holy martyrs down the ages. **Hebrews 11:32 – 12:3**. The writer to the Hebrews is very clear on this, and in the filling and leading of the Holy Spirit tells us that they are cheering us on from the stands of heaven, and we are called to be worthy of them – let us test our hearts! Let us be worthy of our believing forebears.

### Notes

## CHAPTER 25

1 Amaziah was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem.

2 And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, but not with a perfect heart.

3 Now it came to pass, when the kingdom was established to him, that he slew his servants that had killed the king his father.

4 But he slew not their children, but did as it is written in the law in the book of Moses, where the LORD commanded, saying, The fathers shall not die for the children, neither shall the children die for the fathers, but every man shall die for his own sin.

5 Moreover Amaziah gathered Judah together, and made them captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, according to the houses of their fathers, throughout all Judah and Benjamin: and he numbered them from twenty years old and above, and found them three hundred thousand choice men, able to go forth to war, that could handle spear and shield.

6 He hired also an hundred thousand mighty men of valour out of Israel for an hundred talents of silver.

7 But there came a man of God to him, saying, O king, let not the army of Israel go with thee; for the LORD is not with Israel, to wit, with all the children of Ephraim.

8 But if thou wilt go, do it, be strong for the battle: God shall make thee fall before the enemy: for God hath power to help, and to cast down.

9 And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel? And the man of God answered, The LORD is able to give thee much more than this.

10 Then Amaziah separated them, to wit, the army that was come to him out of Ephraim, to go home again: wherefore their anger was greatly kindled against Judah, and they returned home in great anger.

11 And Amaziah strengthened himself, and led forth his people, and went to the valley of salt, and smote of the children of Seir ten thousand.

12 And other ten thousand left alive did the children of Judah carry away captive, and brought them unto the top of the rock, and cast them down from the top of the rock, that they all were broken in pieces.

13 But the soldiers of the army which Amaziah sent back, that they should not go with him to battle, fell upon the cities of Judah, from Samaria even unto Beth-horon, and smote three thousand of them, and took much spoil.

14 Now it came to pass, after that Amaziah was come from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the children of Seir, and set them up to be his gods, and bowed down himself before them, and burned incense unto them.

15 Wherefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against Amaziah, and he sent unto him a prophet, which said unto him, Why hast thou sought after the gods of the people, which could not deliver their own people out of thine hand?

16 And it came to pass, as he talked with him, that the king said unto him, Art thou made of the king's counsel? forbear; why shouldest thou be smitten? Then the prophet forbore, and said, I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened unto my counsel.

17 Then Amaziah king of Judah took advice, and sent to Joash, the son of Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, Come, let us see one another in the face.

18 And Joash king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying, Give thy daughter to my son to wife: and there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon, and trode down the thistle.

19 Thou sayest, Lo, thou hast smitten the Edomites; and thine heart lifteth thee up to boast: abide now at home; why shouldest thou meddle to thine hurt, that thou shouldest fall, even thou, and Judah with thee?

20 But Amaziah would not hear; for it came of God, that he might deliver them into the hand of their enemies, because they sought after the gods of Edom.

21 So Joash the king of Israel went up; and they saw one another in the face, both he and Amaziah king of Judah, at Beth-shemesh, which belongeth to Judah.

22 And Judah was put to the worse before Israel, and they fled every man to his tent.

23 And Joash the king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Joash, the son of Jehoahaz, at Beth-shemesh, and brought him to Jerusalem, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem from the gate of Ephraim to the corner gate, four hundred cubits.

24 And he took all the gold and the silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of God with Obed-edom, and the treasures of the king's house, the hostages also, and returned to Samaria.

25 And Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah lived after the death of Joash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel fifteen years.

**26 Now the rest of the acts of Amaziah, first and last, behold, are they not written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel?**

**27 Now after the time that Amaziah did turn away from following the LORD they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem; and he fled to Lachish: but they sent to Lachish after him, and slew him there.**

**28 And they brought him upon horses, and buried him with his fathers in the city of Judah.**

## REFLECTION

The son of Joash chosen to rule was Amaziah. He is twenty-five when he starts to rule after the murder of his father, and rules for twenty-nine years. Overall he is “good”, but not with a perfect heart, as we will see. Ezra is careful, but not as full as the author of 2 Kings 14, who notes his heart was not like David’s but more like his father Joash. He was not 100% sold out for God and God’s Word, although he will obey the Mosaic Law regarding only killing the murderers of his father, he did not slay all their families, as other kings did. **Deuteronomy 24:16, 2 Kings 14:5-7.**

He waits to execute these men, securing himself as king first, so he knows he has the support of others, and that he isn’t likely to be the subject of another coup. This shows both street cunning and intelligence, for to act too soon would be to show violence and hot temper, but to stabilize the kingdom first then act against the murderers showed he thought, planned and only moved when he was ready. It shows a ruthlessness also, and it will come back to bite the kingdom and he will not avoid his father’s fate, for the same reason - he doesn’t walk close enough to the Lord.

He is a planner, but does not seek the Lord’s face before battle as David did. He gathers his army, but he also hires Israelites from the north, and these men are mostly pagans in their religion, even though brothers by genetics. The spiritual issue is the key one when going into battle. The Judeans desperately wanted reunification with the North, but paganism stopped this from ever occurring. Our spiritual family connections are more important than genes!

A brave “man of God”, not a prophet, but a mature believer who understood spiritual things, takes the risk and speaks to him about this decision. As this man notes in verse 8, it is not numbers that count in battle, it is the presence of the Lord, for He alone lifts up and casts down. If he as king decides to trust in mercenaries he had better “be strong” for he will die under the Lord’s judgment. He will make the right call, and he will live and be victorious over Edom at Mt Seir, but he will be cruel to the men captured, and this shows a nasty side to him, not like David.

The king is only worried about the 100 talents he has paid to hire the northern army corps, and the man of God reminds him that God is able to provide a lot more than that, if it is needed. The problem with sending an army back home, it means they now hate you, for you have insulted their valour and their spirit is offended. His hasty action in hiring them has laid the ground for trouble later that will kill many Judeans as this angry force heads back north, and then later seeks revenge in a further battle that Judah will lose.

Verse 14 records an incredible thing, but one which ties in with his ruthlessness, for people who are ruthless, are often trying to show how tolerant they are and how good to others beliefs. They are into window dressing and marketing of their image, and perhaps he felt that he would get onside with the pagans in his realm by doing this, BUT he was not to do anything like this as a son of David! Believers were not to play with evil! **Deuteronomy 11:16-21, 13:1-18, 18:9-19.** God couldn’t be clearer!

The prophet who comes to him gives him the logical challenge – if these gods couldn’t even deliver their own people why pay them any credit at all? Amaziah is showing he is not that discerning spiritually, and that means he has not taken God’s Word seriously, for it is Bible doctrine that is the only thing that builds discernment.

Verse 16 sadly proves all my doubts about this man. He is arrogant and hates correction, and has started to think he is “the man” having defeated the Edomites. He attacks the prophet and threatens him with death. “Who made you my counsellor?” The prophet respectfully is silent, but notes that he is now sure that the king is under the “Sin Unto Death” for his poor decision making. **1 John 5:16-17.**

He now makes a mistake in his anger and frustration with his insult to Israel in the north. He challenges the king of Israel to a “face to face battle”. It is this man’s mercenaries who have killed his people – the pagan king of Israel. The problem with asking for a fight, when you have really annoyed his people, is that they just might win. They do win! The reason is not Israel’s great strength, but the sins of the king of Judah.



Judah is humiliated, the king captured, loot taken, hostages seized, and with the demolition of part of the wall of Jerusalem also, they can't defend themselves properly against anyone. After doing the damage the king of Israel leaves Jerusalem and heads home to Samaria. "He who laughs last laughs longest" however, and Amaziah outlived his nemesis Joash of Israel, and outlived him by fifteen years! Time on the planet is not however the issue, it is doing what matters eternally and he fails to repent and do the work of the Lord! He lives just long enough to be murdered....

Sadly he didn't return fully to the Lord, and his subjects got as annoyed with him as they did with his father and a coup resulted. His subjects made a conspiracy against him and he fled to the fortress city of Lachish, but they followed him there, and he was killed there by his own people. They did bury him back in Jerusalem. I find it hard to see what was "good" about this man, but he was not a total pagan, just a "fool" who didn't devote himself to the Lord as he should have. Ezra believes he will be in heaven, but he died a fool, through lack of faith-rest in the Word and the Lord behind the Word. **Hebrews 3:7 – 4:12**.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Be careful in the timing of your actions, especially when definitive actions are called for. Ensure you have good advice, godly counsel, biblically based, and act at the right time, and decisively then. Living long isn't the goal – living powerfully and usefully for the Lord is!

### Pastoral

Leadership must be cautious in its "hiring policies", for to select the wrong person is to select trouble for yourself in the future. Amaziah never "got it" – but we need to - only life lived for God's glory with God's power, within God's Plan is truly blessed!

### Notes

## CHAPTER 26

**1** Then all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king in the room of his father Amaziah.

**2** He built Eloth, and restored it to Judah, after that the king slept with his fathers.

**3** Sixteen years old was Uzziah when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Jecoliah of Jerusalem.

**4** And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah did.

**5** And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper.

**6** And he went forth and warred against the Philistines, and brake down the wall of Gath, and the wall of Jabneh, and the wall of Ashdod, and built cities about Ashdod, and among the Philistines.

**7** And God helped him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians that dwelt in Gur-baal, and the Mehunims.

**8** And the Ammonites gave gifts to Uzziah: and his name spread abroad even to the entering in of Egypt; for he strengthened himself exceedingly.

**9** Moreover Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the corner gate, and at the valley gate, and at the turning of the wall, and fortified them.

**10** Also he built towers in the desert, and digged many wells: for he had much cattle, both in the low country, and in the plains: husbandmen also, and vine dressers in the mountains, and in Carmel: for he loved husbandry.

**11 Moreover Uzziah had an host of fighting men, that went out to war by bands, according to the number of their account by the hand of Jeiel the scribe and Maaseiah the ruler, under the hand of Hananiah, one of the king's captains.**

**12 The whole number of the chief of the fathers of the mighty men of valour were two thousand and six hundred.**

**13 And under their hand was an army, three hundred thousand and seven thousand and five hundred, that made war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy.**

**14 And Uzziah prepared for them throughout all the host shields, and spears, and helmets, and habergeons, and bows, and slings to cast stones.**

**15 And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by cunning men, to be on the towers and upon the bulwarks, to shoot arrows and great stones withal. And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong.**

**16 But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense.**

**17 And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the LORD, that were valiant men:**

**18 And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the LORD God.**

**19 Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, from beside the incense altar.**

**20 And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the LORD had smitten him.**

**21 And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD: and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land.**

**22 Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first and last, did Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, write. So Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the field of the burial which belonged to the kings; for they said, He is a leper: and Jotham his son reigned in his stead.**

## REFLECTION

The last great king of the line of David enters the scene here, and he is a great military leader, but also falls into foolishness and fails the prosperity-power test. As we go on, we find only David really handles the power of kingship without it destroying him, and though he does fall into gross sin and evil he recovers fully from the Bathsheba sinfulness even though through depression, and he does so with power and dignity. Ezra's point as he goes through these kings is to point out just how hard it is to handle real wealth and power – few can do this without starting to deceive themselves and being fools. **Proverbs 1:7, 3:1-8.**

This man is only sixteen when he becomes king and he reigns 52 years, and Judah has its last time of power and influence under this brave warrior king. He did all that was right according to his father Amaziah, but the standard is a low bar, for he cannot compare with David. He did however initially heed the prophet Zechariah, where his father and grand-father either threatened or ignored prophets. Ezra's point is without subtlety; while he heeded the Word of God he prospered, and when he ignored the Lord he went down!

"He strengthened himself exceedingly/mightily". He was a mighty and brave warrior, and he won his battles, as he heeded the Lord. He defeats the Philistines and settles his own people amongst them and incorporates them in his kingdom, and he pushes back the Arabian Tribes so that they bring him gifts rather than fight him. He has the Egyptians respect, but isn't foolish enough to take on Egypt in battle.

He repairs the insulting wrecking of the wall of Jerusalem by Joash of Israel, and does more, by building strong defensive towers around Jerusalem. He also builds customs and watch-towers in the border lands to control movements of people, and get early warning of attacks. Verse 10 tells us his hobby was farming and agriculture of all sorts, and he made sure that the land was prosperous and the agricultural economy strong. People are well fed and content under him.

He organized his army differently to previous kings, with tight knit fighting "bands", led by 2600 professional officers who worked together to form large or small concentrations very quickly. He pioneered a flexible fighting force that could be tailored to any threat, and they were infantry who could move quickly over broken

ground and outflank and outfight a chariot force. He didn't trust static defences, but strong, silent and flexible highly mobile forces. He also pioneered the use of ancient artillery with heavy ballista - arrow shooting crossbows, and trebuchet throwing stones a great distance, and he had mechanical engineers who worked out how to do this better than anyone else at this time.

The sadness is in the end of verse 15, "until he was strong". Our hearts sink as we get the feeling, "here we go again"! He has become strong and now he is starting to trust in himself, rather than God. This is Ezra's strong point, and he and Nehemiah have passed the test as satraps of the Persian Empire, and they have not been corrupted by the power. This is what makes Ezra such a good commentator looking back at the history of Judah. He has faced the power temptations that each of these men faced, and he didn't fall, and he doesn't want future generations to fall either. **Philippians 4:10-13, 1 Timothy 6:6-12.**

Why did he do what was the priest's job only? Was he trying to do what David did and sit before the ark and ask questions? Did he think David could do this, and so I am a warrior like David, David's son, and God has blessed me, so why cannot I offer my own prayers on the altar of incense? He used logic, but he was not David, and since the temple was built the rules changed, and the process for prayer changed, but he had prophets and priests to turn to on his behalf to seek the Lord's face – and God was ready to be found – He always is! **Isaiah 55:6-9, Jeremiah 29:14, Romans 10:20.**

Eighty priests plus the High Priest went in after him to try to wrestle him out of there. They told him the truth, and they tried to save his life, for even two sons of Aaron had died offering strange fire to the Lord (non consecrated). Leviticus 10 taught all the priesthood and the nation a lesson in holiness but this king thought he was special!!!! He was special, he was great, but God isn't impressed by our greatness, only by our obedience. Sadly power had gone to his head, and he has become narcissistic – self-entitled and self-important!

He got really angry with the priests, and got red in the face with the anger, and as he raged, and the priests watched, the leprosy spread over his forehead. The priests formed a cordon to edge him away from the temple to preserve its purity, but he was already going. He knew his leprosy was a judgment. He will never enter the temple again, and sadly his son will be so scared of the temple, that he won't go there either!

He was forced to live separately due to the leprosy, and his son Jotham ruled in his place as regent. Uzziah was king when Isaiah began his ministry, and he begins his visions with the day this king dies and he sees that the Lord still rules. Isaiah 6:1ff. The king is buried in the fields, in the area for the kings, but not alongside or close to his ancestors, because he was a leper.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

"God makes us prosper" – alone we fall and the fall is often a fatal one. I encourage the Bible Study group at the Church by asking them: "How many fatal mistakes do you need to make?" Answer = ONE! Let us be as careful with the things of the Lord as Uzziah should have been.

Be careful not to seek a role in the church that is not yours. Do only what the Lord has led you to do. To step out of the Lord's will for you in the eternal plan is to step into danger in the angelic conflict.

God is always ready to be found if we seek for Him with all our heart. "Let us study to show ourselves approved of God...", not popular politicians with men and women. **2 Timothy 2:15, 3:12-17.**

### Pastoral

Do we teach the plan of God well enough for pastoral trainees to get the importance of doing only what the Lord leads them to, not seeking the roles of others. So much politics is in the local church these days and it ought not to be.

It is rare for the Lord to strike a man or woman down with a fatal disease – they really need to go way beyond their path to have this occur, but I have seen it. The fear of the Lord purifies the mind and soul – judgment is God's strange work, but he will stop us "stone dead" if we get arrogant and do things our way rather than His.

God seeks our obedient service – no politics, no marketing – just prayer-filled and Bible-saturated ministry that honours God and lifts up the Lord Jesus.

## Notes

## CHAPTER 27

- 1** Jotham was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Jerushah, the daughter of Zadok.
- 2** And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Uzziah did: howbeit he entered not into the temple of the LORD. And the people did yet corruptly.
- 3** He built the high gate of the house of the LORD, and on the wall of Ophel he built much.
- 4** Moreover he built cities in the mountains of Judah, and in the forests he built castles and towers.
- 5** He fought also with the king of the Ammonites, and prevailed against them. And the children of Ammon gave him the same year an hundred talents of silver, and ten thousand measures of wheat, and ten thousand of barley. So much did the children of Ammon pay unto him, both the second year, and the third.
- 6** So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the LORD his God.
- 7** Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all his wars, and his ways, lo, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah.
- 8** He was five and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem.
- 9** And Jotham slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David: and Ahaz his son reigned in his stead.

## REFLECTION

This king is also a young man when he starts, possibly being one of Uzziah's younger sons given his age when starting his reign, and his father's length of reign. Was he a surviving son, or was he chosen by his father after the leprosy as the best to rule? We have interesting questions over this man, but we are left in no doubt about the problems he inherited from his father's reign, and his own attitudes. His father had never thoroughly attacked the paganism in the land of Judah, and so the high places remained places of "worship" of the fertility gods/goddesses = read "demons".

This young man never entered the temple as a likely result of his father being struck a leper, and the possible conflicts that were then created with the priests who tried to stop him burning incense. He did however seek the Lord's guidance, and he took it, and so prospered in his battles and in his building projects to strengthen Jerusalem and rebuild cities in the hill country. **2 Kings 15:1-7, 32-38**. Note the things mentioned in the Kings account. The Lord starts to send the foreign kings against Judah, and that indicates Divine Discipline. Leviticus 26.

The war against the Ammonites was incredibly successful and they bank-rolled his kingdom for three years afterwards, but the storm clouds of divine judgment for paganism and idolatry are gathering. Ezra wants to speak well of this man, as he is better than those before, and the nation has victory in the sport of war at the time, but the spiritual rot is setting in and he is not paying attention to the increase of the demonic.

Putting the two accounts together we have an interesting situation described, that the people of Judah were increasing their worship in the old "high places", and also that there were problems in the temple itself, possibly with corruption of the worship there again. The legacy of the 80 priests driving the king from the temple courts may be catastrophic for the reputation of the priesthood, and rather than blaming themselves for the divine discipline and seeking God's face, there was blame towards the priests on the part of the royal family and court, and a subsequent decline in genuine worship. Whatever occurs, Jotham still worships and heeds the messages of the prophets and possibly key priests also, but incompletely and only at times.

He dies at 41 and this cannot be seen as anything other than judgment, given what follows, but Ezra doesn't mention the negatives, and this may tell us that this man was a strong believer in the end. The heart disease that runs in David's line may explain his sudden death at 41, for neither account mention death in battle, or from wounds, as a possibility. The forties for men are called the "death decade" for cardiology problems. It is the age when those with the genetics for heart problems will just drop dead, without warning, even if they are otherwise quite fit. We will only know in heaven when we speak to him, but Ezra indicates that we will be able to, whereas the men on the throne of the Northern Kingdom are all pagans to the end.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

This young man stepped up and acted as regent for his father with leprosy, and we are to praise him for his care for the nation, for he sought the Lord. As a result of his father's condition however he feared the temple, even though he rebuilt one of the major gates into the temple, he never went through it.

We can all be ruled by fears from our family, and whatever their origin we need to break all the negative legacies of our past. Let us ensure the filling of the Holy Spirit is able to remove the stains and anxieties of the past. The "washing of the water of the Word", **Ephesians 5:18-26**, each day is essential to break all bonds that hold us to any dysfunctional patterns from the past. He avoided temple worship but not death...

How do we end our lives? Long life was seen as a blessing by these people, and so death at 41 is seen as a judgment, but he ends well according to Ezra, and is called "good and right" in his faith. As we face the end of our lives we need to draw close to the Lord, and we need to remember as younger women and men, that we are always a millimetre from meeting our Saviour or Judge!

### Pastoral

Are we able to select our replacement in ministry from the people gathered around the ministry? Has the Lord sent good people to us who can be used for his glory? Are we ready at all times to pass the work on to the next generation? Do we have John the Baptist's attitude? **John 3:27-36**.

### Notes

## CHAPTER 28

**1 Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem: but he did not that which was right in the sight of the LORD, like David his father:**

**2 For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim.**

**3 Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.**

**4 He sacrificed also and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.**

**5 Wherefore the LORD his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria; and they smote him, and carried away a great multitude of them captives, and brought them to Damascus. And he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who smote him with a great slaughter.**

**6 For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah an hundred and twenty thousand in one day, which were all valiant men; because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers.**

**7 And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, slew Maaseiah the king's son, and Azrikam the governor of the house, and Elkanah that was next to the king.**

**8** And the children of Israel carried away captive of their brethren two hundred thousand, women, sons, and daughters, and took also away much spoil from them, and brought the spoil to Samaria.

**9** But a prophet of the LORD was there, whose name was Oded: and he went out before the host that came to Samaria, and said unto them, Behold, because the LORD God of your fathers was wroth with Judah, he hath delivered them into your hand, and ye have slain them in a rage that reacheth up unto heaven.

**10** And now ye purpose to keep under the children of Judah and Jerusalem for bondmen and bondwomen unto you: but are there not with you, even with you, sins against the LORD your God?

**11** Now hear me therefore, and deliver the captives again, which ye have taken captive of your brethren: for the fierce wrath of the LORD is upon you.

**12** Then certain of the heads of the children of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, and Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against them that came from the war,

**13** And said unto them, Ye shall not bring in the captives hither: for whereas we have offended against the LORD already, ye intend to add more to our sins and to our trespass: for our trespass is great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel.

**14** So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the congregation.

**15** And the men which were expressed by name rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brethren: then they returned to Samaria.

**16** At that time did king Ahaz send unto the kings of Assyria to help him.

**17** For again the Edomites had come and smitten Judah, and carried away captives.

**18** The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the low country, and of the south of Judah, and had taken Beth-shemesh, and Ajalon, and Gederoth, and Shocho with the villages thereof, and Timnah with the villages thereof, Gimzo also and the villages thereof: and they dwelt there.

**19** For the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the LORD.

**20** And Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria came unto him, and distressed him, but strengthened him not.

**21** For Ahaz took away a portion out of the house of the LORD, and out of the house of the king, and of the princes, and gave it unto the king of Assyria: but he helped him not.

**22** And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the LORD: this is that king Ahaz.

**23** For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him: and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel.

**24** And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the LORD, and he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem.

**25** And in every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger the LORD God of his fathers.

**26** Now the rest of his acts and of all his ways, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel.

**27** And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, even in Jerusalem: but they brought him not into the sepulchres of the kings of Israel: and Hezekiah his son reigned in his stead.

## REFLECTION

The people who will be used to eliminate the northern peoples are now entering the scene, the revived Assyrian Empire, and they are ruthless and believe only in their own superiority. Jonah led a revival amongst them the previous century, but that is now forgotten, and pagan evils have regripped the nation. The son of Jotham is not strong spiritually, and does not do what David did. He does not pray and rest in God's Word and power – he is a politician. Read **2 Kings 15:38 – 16:20**.

Ahaz's length of reign is the same as his father's, at sixteen years, but the slide downhill is accelerating and the dangers are growing. It is important to remember the statistics at this point, as we speak of the Holocaust of 1942-1945, and with a world Jewish population of around 12 million, 6 million are killed. In this holocaust that the Assyrians unleash, 723-701 BC, possibly as many as 90% of the Jewish population are wiped out.

Of around one million people possibly less than 100,000 survive in Jerusalem. Under the Babylonian judgment a century later, fewer survive, with only about 30,000 survivors of the total population! Ezra is

aware of the stats on this, as he is only 100 years after the return from Babylonian Exile, and he wants the people to recall these two catastrophes, and remember their cause – apostasy leading to paganism and idolatry!

**Verses 1 – 4.** Sadly this man will not engage in holy worship at all, but is besotted with pagan worship, and throws himself into the pagan fertility/sexual cults, even to sacrificing his own son in the fires of Molech, the evil demon-god of the Canaanites. These practises were the reason the Canaanites were dispossessed of the land, but he started the trend of child sacrifice up again!!! This great evil would bring terrible judgment from the Lord, and we do well to remember the Lord's words regarding children. **Matthew 18:2-10, 25:40-46.**

There is a clear consequence of such excesses of paganism, and they were made clear by Moses, as we have seen many times before, in Leviticus 26, and in Deuteronomy 27:9 – 28:68. God was not unclear about consequences of such levels of evil, and they were the loss of nationhood. Ezra, writing after this has occurred is determined to point out fully the evils of these kings, for the people of his day lived amongst the grand ruins of their great buildings, and must have at times wondered how they fell so badly! "Evil does this to a people group", is Ezra's message.

**Verses 5 - 8.** Ezra makes it clear that the Lord does the judging by means of the pagans of the north, from both Israel and Syria, and as they persist in sin, the Assyrians join in. Defeat is always because, "they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers". The capture of large numbers of women and children being carried away to the northern capital to potential slavery is a catastrophe, and it is only twenty years before Israel falls to Assyria.

**Verses 9 – 15.** God is not without witness of the prophets in both lands through this time, with Isaiah preaching in the south and Hosea, Micah, Habakkuk, and Nahum all involved in prophetic ministries through these times, and here we read of another Oded, who bravely heads north and gives the word of the Lord to the Northern tribes. The people of both kingdoms are worshipping pagan nature deities/demons "under every green tree", but God increases his urgent call to repent, all through the time of discipline. **Acts 14:17, Romans 1:20.** None have any excuse before the Lord, for the Lord always provides many witnesses to truth in dark days, the only question is, "Will we hear the Word of God?"

Verse 13 tells us that the result of the prophetic words in the North, there are some who have repented and call for godliness. There are not enough to save the nation, but there are enough at this time to save the captives and they are released south. The godly remnant of the north will flee south as the Assyrians move to encircle Israel. The godly amongst the northerners clothed and fed the captives, provided asses to ride upon for the wounded and took them down the Jordan Valley to Jericho to rest and recover, and left them there for their safe return to their own cities in Judah.

Although he has many prophets to call upon, and men with proven track record, the pagan king Ahaz calls on the Assyrians to help him punish Israel and Syria. Even after such a deliverance as Oded has organized Ahaz seeks revenge! By their fruits we know people, and revenge is demonic work. **Galatians 5:16-26.** As these kings follow after their paganism, so they will be judged by their choices, and the pagans they seek help from will hurt them.

Logically all politicians will argue, "John, he is being attacked from all sides, why not call for help?" It's true, but the help he needed was from the one true God, not the demons behind Assyria. Verse 19 makes the issue clear, and Ezra is underlining the issue for us to be sure we do not miss it. He doesn't call for a national day of repentance and prayer as his son will finally do, but he strips the house of God and the treasures of the realm and bribes Assyria to come and help.

Verse 20 makes it clear to us all that evil men do not help any more than their evil plans call for them to help. It doesn't matter what you pay for they will decide what they do! I am always surprised when people learn this the hard way after dealing with criminals and fraudsters who promise to help but never turn up, and who promise to pay, but never do! We call them personality disordered, but the bible just calls them "evil"; they pluck defeat from the jaws of victory by baffling lies, and equally baffling decision making.

Ezra is staggered at the stupidity of Ahaz in all this, for he doesn't see the issue is spiritual and persists in his own evil and adds to it. At the very time when repentance could have made a difference he will not face God, or heed the prophets. Verses 21-22 are Ezra's exasperation expressed aloud – he is totally amazed at this man – why would he do this when he has the divine blessing as an alternative? This is the confronting

truth about evil choices, for they never make sense, but lust “blinds the eyes” so that the foolish people deceived by Satan and his crew do not see! **Romans 1:18-32, Ephesians 2:1-10.**

The king actually destroys the golden vessels in the temple, melts them down and makes Baal statues or uses the gold to pay the Assyrians. Note his logic in verse 23 and Ezra’s answer. There is only ruin in idolatry, for the gods of the nations are demons, **Leviticus 17:7, Deuteronomy 32:15-21.** Only in repentance will the suffering of the people stop, and behind these words there is massive suffering, with death, or torture and slavery for all captured by the Assyrian war machine.

Having destroyed the sacred vessels Ahaz closed and nails up the temple doors, and builds pagan altars everywhere in Jerusalem, on every street corner for people to worship at, and he rebuilds the high places not already in operation, to start paganism again everywhere in the land of Judah. God is clear; the people set their hearts to keep the Mosaic Law or they will be judged. **Deuteronomy 32:46-47, 33:27-29.** Satan doesn’t help human beings for long, for he hates mankind and only assists some of his people against others of his people to play with them! The death and deceit of human beings is sport for Satan and his evil crew.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

When God’s Word is clear on a matter, do not seek for an alternative to obedience!

All people make daily choices and some make us blind and keep us in the dark, and others bring light in. The real issue is what do we want; darkness or light? Do not try to find reasons for sin and evil, for the ones given are always flimsy, and the real one is simply laziness and lust.

God is clear about there being two paths in this life; God’s for blessing and Satan’s for cursing. Even when we have selected the salvation path as God’s children we face the daily choice to be obedient to the Word or not, and in our decision making we set our course, for usefulness or for discipline. **2 Corinthians 5:7-20.**

### Pastoral

Pastors, do we make the truth about these things clear as we ought? **Matthew 7:13-23.**

God’s people need to hear the challenge every week to be attentive to the Word and obedient to the commands of the Lord. If they ignore us we have covered ourselves at least! Ezekiel 3:1ff.

### Notes

## CHAPTER 29

**1** Hezekiah began to reign when he was five and twenty years old, and he reigned nine and twenty years in Jerusalem. And his mother’s name was Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah.

**2** And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done.

**3** He in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the LORD, and repaired them.

**4** And he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them together into the east street, **5** And said unto them, Hear me, ye Levites, sanctify now yourselves, and sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place.

**6** For our fathers have trespassed, and done that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD our God, and have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the LORD, and turned their backs.



**7 Also they have shut up the doors of the porch, and put out the lamps, and have not burned incense nor offered burnt offerings in the holy place unto the God of Israel.**

**8 Wherefore the wrath of the LORD was upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he hath delivered them to trouble, to astonishment, and to hissing, as ye see with your eyes.**

**9 For, lo, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this.**

**10 Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that his fierce wrath may turn away from us.**

**11 My sons, be not now negligent: for the LORD hath chosen you to stand before him, to serve him, and that ye should minister unto him, and burn incense.**

## REFLECTION

This man will make some grave mistakes later but he does what is “righteous”, and he is like David in his heart, rather than his pagan father Ahaz. It is a reminder that no-one is to be judged by their father’s sins, or excused by people because of their father’s evils. We all stand alone before the Lord, and are personally responsible for our actions. There are no “joint-community decisions” to accept Christ, or do what is right, there are only individual decisions each of which has eternal consequences. There are no cultural variations in this! God holds us all personally responsible – not our community, our family, our parents – each stands alone – whatever and irrespective of what their community or culture decides to do!

Hezekiah’s heart is right, even if at times later we will wonder where his brain has gone! In Australia and New Zealand some have said of the acts of this man, “He is not the sharpest tool in the shed”, but Ezra’s note concerning him is to guide us, and we are to dismiss our doubts and flawed opinions – he is righteous and he starts courageously well!

In the first year of his reign he opens the doors of the temple and repairs the doors and the temple itself. He does it properly and with holiness to guide him. He doesn’t make the initial mistake David makes with the ark, he ensures that the Priests and Levites alone enter the temple to purify and sanctify the space again, after so many years of pagan neglect and active vandalism. The temple has deliberately been used as a rubbish dump by the pagan kings. They have simply locked the Holy place doors and piled rubbish against the temple structure, even using the place as a toilet to defile it thoroughly.

He is open about their corporate sin as a nation and the individual sins of their own fathers, both the king’s father and the fathers of many of the Levites present. Their fathers have turned their backs upon the Lord and they are in a mess as a nation as a result. Their religion has ceased operating and Hezekiah wants holy worship restored to the heart of the nation. He recognizes that their fathers have actively turned away from God, and they are all under judgment as a result, and that this day they begin to turn that round, but must do the right thing prayerfully and carefully.

Literally the “lamps of God” are put out, incense has dried up, and no prayers have been offered in this place for years now, nor incense burned, nor blood sacrifices made properly. They can open their eyes and see the judgments that have resulted, for they are severe and there is a very limited time to turn things around before the nation is swept away, as the North will be at this very time. Hezekiah does not duck the unpleasant truths, that many have died, and many are in captivity because of the paganism that has ruled the nation.

He is announcing clearly here, that the days of evil are over as far as he is concerned. He is brave and he is right in this. He is determined to make a solemn covenant with the Lord to turn this around – an open public declaration of intent that he will ask the entire population to commit to also.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

God’s way forward after apostasy is full and wholehearted confession of sin – taking full responsibility for our sins, and even praying for forgiveness for the sins of our ancestors. We will see Daniel do this later. **Daniel 9:1-19.**

Have we prayed for the sins of our fathers? Have we accepted the legacy of our ancestor’s sins against God and other people? Revival begins when we take responsibility for the evils done in the past and the present, and seek God’s face to restore relationships, upwards first, and then outwards to others.

**Pastoral**

Pastors, have we seen the spiritual issues of holiness and cleanliness before the Lord? Are there things that need to be solemnly cleaned out before the Lord? Let us be as careful as Hezekiah is here.

**Chapter 29:12** Then the Levites arose, Mahath the son of Amasai, and Joel the son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites: and of the sons of Merari, Kish the son of Abdi, and Azariah the son of Jehalelel: and of the Gershonites; Joah the son of Zimmah, and Eden the son of Joah:

**13** And of the sons of Elizaphan; Shimri, and Jeiel: and of the sons of Asaph; Zechariah, and Mattaniah:

**14** And of the sons of Heman; Jehiel, and Shimei: and of the sons of Jeduthun; Shemaiah, and Uzziel.

**15** And they gathered their brethren, and sanctified themselves, and came, according to the commandment of the king, by the words of the LORD, to cleanse the house of the LORD.

**16** And the priests went into the inner part of the house of the LORD, to cleanse it, and brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the LORD into the court of the house of the LORD. And the Levites took it, to carry it out abroad into the brook Kidron.

**17** Now they began on the first day of the first month to sanctify, and on the eighth day of the month came they to the porch of the LORD: so they sanctified the house of the LORD in eight days; and in the sixteenth day of the first month they made an end.

**18** Then they went in to Hezekiah the king, and said, We have cleansed all the house of the LORD, and the altar of burnt offering, with all the vessels thereof, and the shewbread table, with all the vessels thereof.

**19** Moreover all the vessels, which king Ahaz in his reign did cast away in his transgression, have we prepared and sanctified, and, behold, they are before the altar of the LORD.

**20** Then Hezekiah the king rose early, and gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of the LORD.

**21** And they brought seven bullocks, and seven rams, and seven lambs, and seven he goats, for a sin offering for the kingdom, and for the sanctuary, and for Judah. And he commanded the priests the sons of Aaron to offer them on the altar of the LORD.

**22** So they killed the bullocks, and the priests received the blood, and sprinkled it on the altar: likewise, when they had killed the rams, they sprinkled the blood upon the altar: they killed also the lambs, and they sprinkled the blood upon the altar.

**23** And they brought forth the he goats for the sin offering before the king and the congregation; and they laid their hands upon them:

**24** And the priests killed them, and they made reconciliation with their blood upon the altar, to make an atonement for all Israel: for the king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for all Israel.

**REFLECTION**

Hezekiah challenges the Levites whose task will be the clean up of the temple courts and buildings, that they are not to be negligent as their ancestors were. There is to be nothing other than 100% wholehearted commitment to the tasks before them. The men involved dedicate and sanctify themselves to the clean up task (verse 15). The priests go in and recover the filth and the Levites carry it away to be dumped. They work together, in holy silence as they cleanse the space.

Note the time frame required in verse 17. It takes eight full days to just get to the porch of the temple!!! It takes a full 16 days to finish the clean up task, and this is with large numbers of men involved. Verse 18 does tell us that the furniture is safe, and so are all the vessels, and the altar is so large and heavy that it has been defiled but left intact. This preservation is a testimony to God's protection, that the pagans were at least scared to enter the temple and defile the vessels and furniture. They appear to have piled up refuse in front of the doors.

King Ahaz had "cast away" many of the vessels from the temple, but he hadn't melted them down or destroyed them so they couldn't be repaired and used. Once again we see God's provision and preservation here. The Levites are able to get everything ready for worship to begin again in the sixteen busy days.

When the area is sanctified Hezekiah gathers all the rulers of Jerusalem, so that they are bound to the reformation also, and so he makes it harder for them to return to paganism later. He then formally enters the temple again, with all the rulers of the city/nation. He provides the important sin offerings for the great sins the people have committed and for the first time in years proper sacrifice is made for the people.

There is no atonement, nor any reconciliation without the shed blood of the sacrifice. From the blood soaked skins of our ancestors Adam and Eve at the gate of the Garden of Eden, through the Patriarchal sacrifices, to Mosaic Law sacrifices, all the blood looked forward to the full and last sacrifice for sins – it spoke of who Messiah was, and what HE would do for all mankind. **John 6:53-56, 1 Corinthians 11:23-34, Ephesians 1:7, Colossians 1:13-20, 1 Peter 1:18-19.**

The wonderful thing about Hezekiah's instructions, is that the sacrifices, seven of each to speak of completion, were offered for all Israel, including the separated brethren in the North. Hezekiah recognized the unity of the entire people, and the sacrifice was offered for all, and many from the North will accept the covering of these sacrifices and flee south. The restored people under Ezra are made up of all twelve tribes as a result. Hezekiah did what Ezra still does – maintain the unity of the people-group under the promises given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. **Ephesians 4:3-18.**

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Let us be careful in our regular self-examination, and remember always that confession is always to be wholehearted and thorough!

### Pastoral

Pastors, call upon the Lord's people to be holy before Him. Do not allow slackness of any form to enter the church worship or function. Let us be holy before the Lord. **1 Peter 1:12-19.**

**Chapter 29:25** And he set the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet: for so was the commandment of the LORD by his prophets.

**26** And the Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets.

**27** And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt offering upon the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the LORD began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David king of Israel.

**28** And all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded: and all this continued until the burnt offering was finished.

**29** And when they had made an end of offering, the king and all that were present with him bowed themselves, and worshipped.

**30** Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the LORD with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped.

**31** Then Hezekiah answered and said, Now ye have consecrated yourselves unto the LORD, come near and bring sacrifices and thank offerings into the house of the LORD. And the congregation brought in sacrifices and thank offerings; and as many as were of a free heart burnt offerings.

**32** And the number of the burnt offerings, which the congregation brought, was threescore and ten bullocks, an hundred rams, and two hundred lambs: all these were for a burnt offering to the LORD.

**33** And the consecrated things were six hundred oxen and three thousand sheep.

**34** But the priests were too few, so that they could not flay all the burnt offerings: wherefore their brethren the Levites did help them, till the work was ended, and until the other priests had sanctified themselves: for the Levites were more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests.

**35** And also the burnt offerings were in abundance, with the fat of the peace offerings, and the drink offerings for every burnt offering. So the service of the house of the LORD was set in order.

**36** And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people: for the thing was done suddenly.

## REFLECTION

Hezekiah re-instructs the Levites in the words of David, Nathan and Gad the prophets, and they worship in the Davidic manner with full orchestra, for the first time in over decade, and sing David's Psalms. The Levites have all the old Davidic era instruments, possibly the originals, if they were secured inside the temple. A great deal has survived the trashing of the temple courts and outer buildings. Satan's people are often not as careful as they should be; in their arrogance they don't think believers will be smart enough...

The full orchestra played until all the sacrifices were completed. There was awe and there was joy this day, for after great evils the worship of the nation was restored, and all sons and daughters of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were being blessed. After all is done the entire congregation adopted the worship position facing the altar – that is possibly at this point the present Moslem position for worship.

The crowd then stand and are led in songs of praise from the Psalms of David and Asaph. The entire crowd sings along and worships with heads bowed and hands outstretched. Both common worship postures appear to be used here. The king then speaks of the thanksgiving offerings being offered up by the people at this point. He opens the worship now to all who wish to bring their own sacrifices. The king has led the way, but rightly he opens the door to full participation by all the people.

Free will offerings can be given now, and many take the opportunity of expressing their own gratitude to the Lord for the restoration of worship in the nation. In verses 33-35 we read with sadness that many of the priesthood had not returned to worship properly. Had they been involved in paganism? We are not told, but they had not responded to the orders of the king and sanctified themselves before the ceremony. It is incredible to me that they were not present, whoever was assigned tasks that day – this was a day to remember, and they were not there!!!!

They clearly were members of the Priestly Courses not assigned to duty that day, but they should have been ready to serve, and they should have been present – it was such a momentous day in the nation's spiritual history! They had to be called when the number of offerings exceeded the capacity of men on duty to complete the tasks. They sanctify themselves and get involved late.

The entire ceremony was done "suddenly", instantly the temple was cleansed, and led by the king. The timing was in the king's hands, and he led the people who were waiting for the day, but many were not waiting for the day. The entire population had sixteen days while the cleaning up was occurring to pay attention, and to prepare themselves for the worship to begin again, and clearly thousands did, but many did not! Are we watching for the Lord's work and are we ready to worship when the opportunity comes, for we notice it, for we have been looking for it?

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Let us be always ready to serve in any task required. Nothing is to be beneath us.

Are we ready to serve, worship or work at a second's notice? Are we looking out for opportunities?

### Pastoral

Are we dressed, clean, tidy and ready to serve at all important times, even if we are not on the program? Readiness to serve is crucial always.

Many missed this worship because they didn't pay attention to what was going on in the temple. **Romans 12:1-8.**

Jesus instruction was "watch", wait for my return....be always ready! How clearly do the Lord's people hear the words of Jesus from our lips? **Matthew 24:42-43, 25:13, Mark 13:33-37, Luke 21:36.** Do the Lord's people know these words of Jesus? If not we are responsible and the Lord will hold us accountable, as he held these kings of Judah!

Note the following instructions to be "watchful" in the Lord's work. **1 Corinthians 16:13, Colossians 4:1-5, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10, 2 Timothy 4:2-5, Hebrews 13:13-19, 1 Peter 4:7.**

### Notes

## CHAPTER 30

**1** And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the passover unto the LORD God of Israel.

**2** For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the passover in the second month.

**3** For they could not keep it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem.

**4** And the thing pleased the king and all the congregation.

**5** So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the passover unto the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem: for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written.

**6** So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria.

**7** And be not ye like your fathers, and like your brethren, which trespassed against the LORD God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see.

**8** Now be ye not stiff necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the LORD, and enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever: and serve the LORD your God, that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you.

**9** For if ye turn again unto the LORD, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him.

**10** So the posts passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh even unto Zebulun: but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them.

**11** Nevertheless divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem.

### REFLECTION

Hezekiah attempts to do something here that none have seriously tried before; to announce to all believers of the northern tribes that the temple is open and they will be welcomed as brethren if they attend. He underlines the unity of the twelve tribes by writing the "open letter" to all the tribes, not a separate one for the north. Ezra is impressed by his attempt at unity and its results, for Hezekiah is mightily used by God to keep a remnant of all the tribes alive through the massacres of the Assyrian Crisis.

He is led to select the closest Feast of the Lord, and it happens to be Passover. Passover was in the first month of the year, but that month had been used to cleanse the temple, and so the king utilizes the provision to celebrate the Passover one month after the due date if death or other catastrophe stopped the proper time being used. Leviticus 23:4-16, Numbers 28:16ff, Deuteronomy 16:1ff.

The entire political and religious authority group gather and discuss this and the king sends out the proclamation to all the tribes. He is blunt in his history lesson, for he directly tells them that all their ancestor's disobedience has created the wasteland they now live in. He is right 100%, but some pull back from this sort of honesty, and this man mentors truth in action. **John 17:19, Ephesians 4:15.**

The invitation requires confession and humility. He doesn't soften the appeal, for he only seeks those who really want to do business with God to attend. He knows from the last years experiences that the people who reject this will die at the enemy's hands. Jesus has the same approach to the Rich Young Ruler. **Luke 18:18-27**. He doesn't call the young man back and offer any "special half price deals". We come to God in humility and confession, or we stay away.

God is gracious and merciful and all invited are assured of a welcome by their brethren, but also by the Lord, and they can know that they will find compassion and restoration. The issue is the Mosaic appeal at the end of the Torah; will God's people "return to Him"? **Deuteronomy 30:2-20**. Choose Life, or select death by default! The letter goes out and is laughed at by the majority in the north, the heralds laughed to scorn, but some repent and do return to the temple from the north. Some from the tribe of Asher come and are saved thereby, and from that remnant one of their descendants is in the temple to welcome Messiah; the prophetess Anna. Luke 2:36.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Are we ready to respond to the call of God to repent, or arise and do something that is needed? Are we fixed on our path through life, or do we think about what it is that the Lord requires of us? Writing from the very time we are looking at, refer to **Micah 6:6-9**.

### Pastoral

How honest are we about the way of salvation? We come to God on God's terms not our own, and those who want special treatment need to reflect upon what they are actually asking for. We are the pot, God is the potter, and we are in his hands or smashed on the deck! No third options! How blunt are we to the lost? Remember, its not the numbers responding, its ensuring all have no excuse before the Lord for refusal.

**Chapter 30:12** Also in Judah the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes, by the word of the LORD.

**13** And there assembled at Jerusalem much people to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month, a very great congregation.

**14** And they arose and took away the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for incense took they away, and cast them into the brook Kidron.

**15** Then they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the second month: and the priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves, and brought in the burnt offerings into the house of the LORD.

**16** And they stood in their place after their manner, according to the law of Moses the man of God: the priests sprinkled the blood, which they received of the hand of the Levites.

**17** For there were many in the congregation that were not sanctified: therefore the Levites had the charge of the killing of the passovers for every one that was not clean, to sanctify them unto the LORD.

**18** For a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim, and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good LORD pardon every one

**19** That prepareth his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary.

**20** And the LORD hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people.

**21** And the children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness: and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day, singing with loud instruments unto the LORD.

**22** And Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the LORD: and they did eat throughout the feast seven days, offering peace offerings, and making confession to the LORD God of their fathers.

**23** And the whole assembly took counsel to keep other seven days: and they kept other seven days with gladness.

**24** For Hezekiah king of Judah did give to the congregation a thousand bullocks and seven thousand sheep; and the princes gave to the congregation a thousand bullocks and ten thousand sheep: and a great number of priests sanctified themselves.

**25 And all the congregation of Judah, with the priests and the Levites, and all the congregation that came out of Israel, and the strangers that came out of the land of Israel, and that dwelt in Judah, rejoiced.**

**26 So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem.**

**27 Then the priests the Levites arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven.**

## REFLECTION

In the tribe of Judah there is what we would call, “a real move of the Holy Spirit”. As a united group they respond to the call to repent and return to the ways of the Lord. The result of Hezekiah’s open invitation is that there is a vast crowd attending, and they will be returning to their tribal camping areas around the city from the brief golden days of Solomon.

All the false altars that were on every street corner in Jerusalem are torn down and thrown into the Kidron brook. We just think pollution here, but the Kidron was the brook that carried away the blood from the temple also, and to place these pagan altars and god-statues in that brook was to cover them with the blood and water, and cleanse them, to be able to then smelt them down, or burn the wooden ones.

Why were the Levites “ashamed”? Possibly this is a reference to the earlier late coming of this group the month before, or it may just be a general reference to their being ashamed of themselves after paganism had so long dominated the city, and maybe even their own involvement in the false worship. There were many who had not been sanctified for service and worship since the days before Ahaz, and so they needed the sprinkling of blood first.

Those from the north arrived without any sanctification, but Hezekiah doesn’t stop them worshipping and eating the Passover, as he realises this is not the time for legalism, it is the time for national healing, forgiveness and for all to learn that God forgives/pardons! Hezekiah stands in the breach for the northern people and prays for them, and God answers his prayer and they are healed.

Hezekiah speaks encouraging words to the Levites who are wilting under the pressure, but also feel guilt many of them, as they were not ready for the revival – possibly not believing it was possible. He is an encourager. The Feast is so successful that the entire people group assembled decide to stay for another seven days of worship after the eight days of unleavened bread.

There is national revival, and Hezekiah picks up the bill for the Feast being extended with thousands of animals being killed for sacrifice and for eating. He is ready to pay for the blessing to be maintained. Note the quantities of sacrifices for the double period here, and then refer back to Solomon’s first great Feast to open the temple in 2 Chronicles 7:4-5. This is a stark reminder of the depopulation of the Assyrian wars to this point, and the numbers will decline further. Within 120 years only about 30,000 will be left alive.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

The worship of the people came up to heaven; it was so loud and joyous. Do we praise God as these people did, and as the Lord deserves?

### Pastoral

Do we mentor great worship? Do we lead worship with power, authority and joy as Hezekiah did? Let’s be challenged by this man, and not make any compromises on the truth told, nor any on the worship held. Let’s be prepared to open the church wallet to enable people to sit with their worship longer when it is needed. How flexible are we if revival breaks out? Would we be ready to camp out in the church, or at least have the building open for meals?

### Notes

## CHAPTER 31

1 Now when all this was finished, all Israel that were present went out to the cities of Judah, and brake the images in pieces, and cut down the groves, and threw down the high places and the altars out of all Judah and Benjamin, in Ephraim also and Manasseh, until they had utterly destroyed them all. Then all the children of Israel returned, every man to his possession, into their own cities.

2 And Hezekiah appointed the courses of the priests and the Levites after their courses, every man according to his service, the priests and Levites for burnt offerings and for peace offerings, to minister, and to give thanks, and to praise in the gates of the tents of the LORD.

3 He appointed also the king's portion of his substance for the burnt offerings, to wit, for the morning and evening burnt offerings, and the burnt offerings for the sabbaths, and for the new moons, and for the set feasts, as it is written in the law of the LORD.

4 Moreover he commanded the people that dwelt in Jerusalem to give the portion of the priests and the Levites, that they might be encouraged in the law of the LORD.

5 And as soon as the commandment came abroad, the children of Israel brought in abundance the firstfruits of corn, wine, and oil, and honey, and of all the increase of the field; and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly.

6 And concerning the children of Israel and Judah, that dwelt in the cities of Judah, they also brought in the tithe of oxen and sheep, and the tithe of holy things which were consecrated unto the LORD their God, and laid them by heaps.

7 In the third month they began to lay the foundation of the heaps, and finished them in the seventh month.

8 And when Hezekiah and the princes came and saw the heaps, they blessed the LORD, and his people Israel.

9 Then Hezekiah questioned with the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps.

10 And Azariah the chief priest of the house of Zadok answered him, and said, Since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of the LORD, we have had enough to eat, and have left plenty: for the LORD hath blessed his people; and that which is left is this great store.

## REFLECTION

God shows them what obedience will produce in the midst of the Crisis they face with Assyria. The first response to the great Passover celebration is the declaration of war upon the idolatry that has nearly destroyed the two nations. The people returning from the Passover detour up every hill where there is a "high place" for pagan worship and they destroy it. Hezekiah sends out his army to do the same and the idols are smashed, trashed and burned. These smashed altars are still being found by archaeologists who misinterpret them as "sites of cultic worship of YHWH".... Pagans are consistent at least...

Hezekiah has done more than anyone since Solomon to unify the twelve tribes in and around temple worship and its looking good at this point. He realises that the Courses of Priests and Levites are in chaos after the years of idolatry and the paganism that some have entered into. He re-establishes the Courses, so they work properly again.

He realises that the temple running costs will need to be bank rolled by the king for a time and he does so, without complaint or worry about balancing the books. Numbers 28-29. He gives the orders for the population to start giving to the temple again, so that there are enough for the daily offerings. Paganism had been cheaper than the temple will prove to be. Paganism and idolatry allow you to pick your own rituals and make them as cheap as you like. It's financially appealing to be a pagan, and the cost of the temple will be a factor for some to walk away! Not counting the cost, and counting the cost are equally important! **Malachi 3:5-10, Luke 14:26-35.**

Verse 5 however makes it clear that all Israel, all the tribes, had enough people who were positive within them to bring in the tithes of all the foods needed for the grain and other offerings. God's Word makes it clear, that whatever HE requires of us will be first provided by him to us. God gives so we can give, and he pours so we can pour, and you will find when you get used to His Amazing Grace that God doesn't hold back, so that you don't have to either. There is enough to feed the people and extra above that.

The goods required are placed in "heaps" (storehouses that are now filled). All give thanks as they see the goods and money flowing in and realise all that is required is there. Remember the population is 1/20<sup>th</sup> of what it was under Solomon but they have to keep the same temple going with less, and they see that God has ensured they can.



**APPLICATION****Personal**

Are we prepared to pay the price for real Bible study and worship? Are we ready for the commitment of our wallet and time, to enable God to really do whatever he wants to do with us? It's 100% for the Lord, or you miss out forever....

Give as the Lord leads, not as the marketing people urge you! Be led to serve and give, and trust the Lord will provide all the resources to complete what He requires you to do.

**Pastoral**

God's provision is always abundant. Whatever is needed for any mission is always going to be there. If you know you ought to go ahead, just advance into the path and the Lord will provide. Avoid marketing and begging letters being sent out to your "supporters"; just do the work prayerfully and you will never be short.

**Chapter 31:11** Then Hezekiah commanded to prepare chambers in the house of the LORD; and they prepared them,

**12** And brought in the offerings and the tithes and the dedicated things faithfully: over which Cononiah the Levite was ruler, and Shimei his brother was the next.

**13** And Jehiel, and Azaziah, and Nahath, and Asahel, and Jerimoth, and Jozabad, and Eliel, and Ismachiah, and Mahath, and Benaiah, were overseers under the hand of Cononiah and Shimei his brother, at the commandment of Hezekiah the king, and Azariah the ruler of the house of God.

**14** And Kore the son of Imnah the Levite, the porter toward the east, was over the freewill offerings of God, to distribute the oblations of the LORD, and the most holy things.

**15** And next him were Eden, and Miniamin, and Jeshua, and Shemaiah, Amariah, and Shecaniah, in the cities of the priests, in their set office, to give to their brethren by courses, as well to the great as to the small:

**16** Beside their genealogy of males, from three years old and upward, even unto every one that entereth into the house of the LORD, his daily portion for their service in their charges according to their courses;

**17** Both to the genealogy of the priests by the house of their fathers, and the Levites from twenty years old and upward, in their charges by their courses;

**18** And to the genealogy of all their little ones, their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, through all the congregation: for in their set office they sanctified themselves in holiness:

**19** Also of the sons of Aaron the priests, which were in the fields of the suburbs of their cities, in every several city, the men that were expressed by name, to give portions to all the males among the priests, and to all that were reckoned by genealogies among the Levites.

**20** And thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good and right and truth before the LORD his God.

**21** And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered.

**REFLECTION**

Hezekiah doesn't want anything given spoiled or wasted. It is vital that people's gifts are not trashed by inattention and/or lack of care. To have money or things given for the Lord's work lost or wasted is more than unfortunate – it is something that the Lord will hold you personally responsible for as a leader. Read Isaiah and 2 Kings Chapter 18-20 for background.

Verse 12 has a good phrase in it, they "brought things into the store houses faithfully". Being faithful in all we are called to do is a critical part of being a believer who is taking the Lord seriously. The porters were tasked with oversight of the items and each knew what they were responsible for and took their tasking seriously, and had men under them to ensure all was done every day to the same standard of excellence.

As we see, these men are keeping the genealogies up to date, and this is vital, as the records will need to be checked when Messiah comes to ensure he is a true "Son of David". The amazing thing is that the Babylonians took the records to Babylon and the Persians release them to men like Ezra and Nehemiah and

so they get the books back that make up the Old Testament, and also the genealogies that are required to ensure they have people in the right places for their family history.

The genealogies were used to ensure that they gathered enough food for the appropriate people, who were entitled to serve in the temple, and needed to have their families fed while they did that work. This sort of organization indicates that Hezekiah is thinking about the things of God and taking care of specifics, exactly as Nehemiah and Ezra had when they took over as satraps of Judea. These two men are true mentors!

## **APPLICATION**

### **Personal**

Whatever we do for the Lord, let's make sure we account for our time, our money and all things associated with the ministry.

### **Pastoral**

"Be very scared" pastor if you are slack on accounting for things given to the Lord, for you are there to honour the giver, and bring glory to the Lord's name, and you do both when you receive and value and use all that is given to God's glory.

Thinking and planning leadership is what we see here operating. These men are following their king, who is seeking the Lord's face and focusing on what will produce a sustainable system to ensure the witness of the temple continues in power.

### **Notes**

## **CHAPTER 32**

**1** After these things, and the establishment thereof, Sennacherib king of Assyria came, and entered into Judah, and encamped against the fenced cities, and thought to win them for himself.

**2** And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib was come, and that he was purposed to fight against Jerusalem,

**3** He took counsel with his princes and his mighty men to stop the waters of the fountains which were without the city: and they did help him.

**4** So there was gathered much people together, who stopped all the fountains, and the brook that ran through the midst of the land, saying, Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water?

**5** Also he strengthened himself, and built up all the wall that was broken, and raised it up to the towers, and another wall without, and repaired Millo in the city of David, and made darts and shields in abundance.

**6** And he set captains of war over the people, and gathered them together to him in the street of the gate of the city, and spake comfortably to them, saying,

**7** Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him:

**8** With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.

**9** After this did Sennacherib king of Assyria send his servants to Jerusalem, (but he himself laid siege against Lachish, and all his power with him,) unto Hezekiah king of Judah, and unto all Judah that were at Jerusalem, saying,

**10** Thus saith Sennacherib king of Assyria, Whereon do ye trust, that ye abide in the siege in Jerusalem?

**11** Doth not Hezekiah persuade you to give over yourselves to die by famine and by thirst, saying, The LORD our God shall deliver us out of the hand of the king of Assyria?

**12** Hath not the same Hezekiah taken away his high places and his altars, and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall worship before one altar, and burn incense upon it?

**13 Know ye not what I and my fathers have done unto all the people of other lands? were the gods of the nations of those lands any ways able to deliver their lands out of mine hand?**

**14 Who was there among all the gods of those nations that my fathers utterly destroyed, that could deliver his people out of mine hand, that your God should be able to deliver you out of mine hand?**

**15 Now therefore let not Hezekiah deceive you, nor persuade you on this manner, neither yet believe him: for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people out of mine hand, and out of the hand of my fathers: how much less shall your God deliver you out of mine hand?**

**16 And his servants spake yet more against the LORD God, and against his servant Hezekiah.**

**17 He wrote also letters to rail on the LORD God of Israel, and to speak against him, saying, As the gods of the nations of other lands have not delivered their people out of mine hand, so shall not the God of Hezekiah deliver his people out of mine hand.**

**18 Then they cried with a loud voice in the Jews' speech unto the people of Jerusalem that were on the wall, to affright them, and to trouble them; that they might take the city.**

**19 And they spake against the God of Jerusalem, as against the gods of the people of the earth, which were the work of the hands of man.**

## REFLECTION

The Assyrians attack the land, and Sennacherib begins to besiege all the fortified cities of the land, with Jerusalem as his final objective. He is systematic and brutal. The Assyrians are without mercy and compassion for their subjects; they exploit and abuse, and celebrate cruelty at a level that other nations had never approached. The Babylonians would murder more, but the Assyrians practised torture on a grand scale against whole populations to terrorize their target people groups.

They practised psychological warfare against people groups, murdering people who they discovered had relatives in the next city they wanted to surrender. They killed people slowly outside the walls, by flaying them alive, and the screams of the dying went on constantly outside the besieged city until they cracked, or the walls fell down to the Assyrian siege engines. They were expert engineers and water engineering was their specialty, and it is water that Hezekiah first focuses upon.

The first action is to build a tunnel under Jerusalem's walls to bring water from the Gihon Stream under the city at all times. It is still there today. Ezra tells us here that Hezekiah's engineers not only built the tunnel but also looked at every way to deny the enemy water in the open ground around their cities, so that the besiegers would be thirsty and leave. He wasn't successful in this, and 39 of his cities fall to Sennacherib and all their people are murdered or taken into captivity. Only Jerusalem will survive, and Isaiah will lead the revival there and through spiritual power alone the Assyrians will leave.

He also strengthens the walls around Jerusalem, and rebuilds the Millo fortress. Both these actions have been proven recently by archaeology, with the Millo wall discovered and the foundations of his monumental wall uncovered. Check on Biblical Archaeology Review website. He has established an army system but is overwhelmed by the size/power of the Assyrian machine. We must pause at this point, for we are left baffled – last chapter they celebrate Passover and this chapter they are hammered to within an inch of extinction!

What has spiritually gone on here? They have re-established the temple, destroyed the idols and high places, led a revival, and set up godly systems, and the Lord has allowed the Assyrians into the land!!!! What is going on we ask? God will only do this when there is rebellion against him and rejection of his Word and way, so what is going on in the wider land outside Jerusalem? It would appear that this question is the right one, although there are still questions and most are only answerable in heaven.....

Jerusalem will have a total revival under siege, but even after the temple is back operating it needs the spiritual revival led by Isaiah, because the people are still playing with secret idolatry in their homes. The major pagan sites are gone, but the people do not have a heart for worship towards God. They will recover in Jerusalem, but only just, and within a dozen years they will follow the next king into idolatry again, and murder the prophet Isaiah who leads this revival!

Ezra is painting a great picture, but the suddenness of the invasion is the clue that all isn't well under the surface. The other clue that things are not well, and lots may have happened between the two chapters, is that Hezekiah hasn't called on a prophet yet! He will however give a great speech to his army locked inside the city. The words are great and true but in the book of Isaiah we find that the morale and spiritual strength of the majority of the people is low.

His points in verses 7-8 are 100% correct, and it is upon the truth of this statement alone that the city will survive, as the people within the walls trust the Lord, and heed the words of Isaiah ahead of the threats of the Assyrians. The issue is indeed the “Angelic Conflict”, and there are more angels with God’s people, and they have more power than the demons with the enemy. **1 John 4:4.**

While the Assyrians have a holding force blocking Jerusalem the main army is besieging Lachish, and they take it. It is a sledge hammer versus an acorn – while the fort is very strong there are simply not enough men to fight the Assyrians off and they are overwhelmed by sheer numbers. The same fate awaits Jerusalem as far as Sennacherib is concerned, but he knows the capital city is large and very well fortified. It will take a year to two to break in, and he doesn’t have that time, so he tries psychological warfare again.

Verses 10-15 give us this powerful king’s first speech and Isaiah explores this interaction more fully in Isaiah 36-37. This king was master of pressure and he has his experts to call upon, Rabshakeh and Rabсарis (both titles for what we would call Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Intelligence). They are used to dealing with pagans, and they have good intelligence about what Hezekiah has done by way of religious reform, but they have talked to captured pagan Israelites and so they don’t understand the spiritual realities – Satan’s people rarely do.

Read through the letter of Sennacherib, for this will be read aloud in front of every city wall and for anyone not resting in Isaiah’s and the other prophets of God’s words, this will unhinge them. These words will be believed by Manasseh and his sons later and they will return to the paganism that destroyed the Northern Kingdom. Mankind, in rebellion against the reality of the One True God will often think that the more religious they are, the more they “cover their options”. If we are sound in Bible doctrine, we understand the Character of God, and we are not easily fooled by those who attack using pagan concepts.

Sennacherib believes that Hezekiah must have been removing all the altars of his god, because that is his frame of reference (and that still believed by modern archaeologists), but in fact Hezekiah has been removing the fake gods and returning to the true God, who will certainly deliver him! Note the enemy’s words carefully, for they will still be used by the satanic forces of today. All Sennacherib’s people attack the king and the Lord God, as they have to break the trust of the people in the king and the Lord, but with Isaiah and the other prophet’s help they do not succeed.

It is Isaiah’s daily sermons inside the walls of the besieged city that strengthen the people and the king in their resistance, and they will stand firm in their faith in God alone to deliver them, and He does. **Hebrews 11:1-3, 33-34.** The “gods/demons” attached to other nations could not deliver them from the king of Assyria, as he was Satan’s “main man” at the time, but he will die and will be cast down to hell, as are all Satan’s servants in the end.

Refer to **Verse 21**, and then **Isaiah 12:1-2, 14:9-11**. Satanic people are “allowed” to operate within the plan of God, but they only have power to sift volition, and the believer holding to God’s Word in faith will be safe until the Lord wants them to die. God’s men do “die in action” at times, as will Josiah, but only as part of the plan to bring glory to God, and remove them from a situation that would be worse than their death in battle. With commitment to the Word of God there is only glory and blessing eternally for us, in life and through death into eternity.

No matter how great the power, authority, and reach of the great man or great power, when they declare war upon God they declare war with death itself and they will surely die! Hezekiah is a true son of David, in that he can sing the Psalms of David, and does so at this time, and he takes David’s promises as his own, for they are, just as they are ours also, as we stand in Davidic faith. **Psalms 13:5, 16:1, 18:1-3, 46, 37:1-11.**

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Let us stand in the faith of our spiritual fathers! When we claim an appropriate biblical promise, we stand with the prophets and kings who delivered them, and we stand with our spiritual ancestors down the ages, and the stands of heaven erupt in praise. **Hebrews 12:1-3.** Let us give our spiritual ancestors something to cheer about.

### Pastoral

Pastors, do we stand where Hezekiah stands at this time. He meets the adversity challenge and is 100% focused upon the Lord's will through this crisis. After his cancer is cured he will buckle at the prosperity challenge and make grave errors, but he is still God's man, and let's not be too quick to criticize! Let us strengthen ourselves in the Word, and so prepare for prosperity as well as adversity!

Pastors, let us teach the Word of God clearly and often, for only people grounded firmly in the Word will stand for God in difficult times, without losing the plot. Only doctrine garrisons the soul against wealth, power and fame, as well as fear, doubt and deception.

**Chapter 32:20** And for this cause Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz, prayed and cried to heaven.

**21** And the LORD sent an angel, which cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he was come into the house of his god, they that came forth of his own bowels slew him there with the sword.

**22** Thus the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all other, and guided them on every side.

**23** And many brought gifts unto the LORD to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah: so that he was magnified in the sight of all nations from thenceforth.

**24** In those days Hezekiah was sick to the death, and prayed unto the LORD: and he spake unto him, and he gave him a sign.

**25** But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem.

**26** Notwithstanding Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah.

**27** And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honour: and he made himself treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels;

**28** Storehouses also for the increase of corn, and wine, and oil; and stalls for all manner of beasts, and cotes for flocks.

**29** Moreover he provided him cities, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance: for God had given him substance very much.

**30** This same Hezekiah also stopped the upper watercourse of Gihon, and brought it straight down to the west side of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all his works.

**31** Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to enquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.

**32** Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his goodness, behold, they are written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, and in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel.

**33** And Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the chiefest of the sepulchres of the sons of David: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honour at his death. And Manasseh his son reigned in his stead.

## REFLECTION

Refer to the accounts in 2 Kings 19 and Isaiah 36-37 to fill in the gaps here. Remember Ezra is drawing attention to the spiritual lessons for his day and our own, not giving a complete political-military history, as we would prefer from our 21<sup>st</sup> century viewpoint.

The first point is that God did indeed deliver. The people prayed and God worked! The entire army of the Assyrians was struck by a plague and died over a night, and the king fled for his life and got back to Nineveh alive, there to be murdered by two of his sons while at worship in a temple to his evil demon-gods. He had threatened Judah with the powerlessness of their God, but his proved totally unable to save him; indeed he is murdered underneath the shadow of their idols. Ezra's humour is similar to Isaiah's when he records Chapter 14:9-11.

God guided the people and kept them safe from all the threats, for the Assyrians were joined by many other powers to try to destroy Judah. Under the Babylonians a century later they would be successful, and it is the quiet contrast to that event that Ezra has in mind as he notes this part of the story of Judah and the house of David. In Isaiah's day they did heed the prophet Isaiah and attended his Bible class, but 100 years later they ignored and imprisoned Jeremiah, and so they were swept away as the idolaters they preferred to be.

The sad slide into his death begins after he has recovered from what appears to be a terminal cancer. He is recovered fully, and has fourteen more years life and it is blessed financially and with peace of sorts with Assyria, although he has to pay tribute. He passes the adversity and “sick unto death” test, but when recovered and prosperous he fails.

Do not mock this man, as this is the toughest test, and I myself have fallen on my face after adversity is over. I thank God it wasn't disgracefully, but it could have been had I not been recovered by my obedience to the Holy Spirit's work. It is easy to trust ourselves when all is going well and make mistakes, but we can be recovered by confession and 100% Holy Spirit empowered commitment back to God's path.

I thank God for my failings that came to light in prosperity and health after near death, for I learned things that could not be learned at any other place. “Panic palace” can be replaced by “wealth and temptation palace”, and after years of toughest adversity it is very easy to relax too much and not “pray and wait upon the Lord” at the very time we ought to. As I read these words in Chronicles, I can see Ezra's heart, for as I have noted before, both he and Nehemiah had to face the prosperity test as satraps of Persia, and they passed. This passing of tests is what makes advanced Bible teachers and mentors!

Many gifts arrive to bless Hezekiah from other kingdoms, and these are not “good will gifts”, they come with strings, for all did in the ancient world, and still do today in Middle Eastern countries. All gifts received come with obligations, and the need to be very careful about how much you relax with the giver, and how much you tell them. Hezekiah will start to believe his own publicity machine and think that he is the reason for the gifts, but actually God has blessed him, and God alone deserves the glory and praise.

Note the phrases in the verses from 23 onwards. “He was magnified”, ....“but he rendered not again according to the benefit done”, ....“his heart was lifted up”.... Sadly this man will fall from a great height, and all his good work will be undone by the last twelve years of his life in which Manasseh is born and grows up doubtful of God and wary of the pure faith, and more drawn to the pleasant paganism his father had previously abolished. Hezekiah's pride opens the door to evil, and Isaiah explains it in **Isaiah 14:12ff**, for pride opens the door to everything stupid and dangerous.

Verse 26 reminds us that he did repent of his sin of pride, and the evil days didn't come in his lifetime, but they did in his son's, and evil was actively encouraged by his son and grandson. I am really saddened as I read these verses, for they lead to the murder of Isaiah as an old man, sawn in half by Manasseh. I am challenged as I read of Hezekiah's gathering and storing of the wealth he gained also. I remember my visit to John Wesley's house in London and looking at his accounts book, in which he made sure he always spent all that came in each week, on mission work. God's people are not to be savers, but once all bills are paid and necessities provided for, we are to be givers to the Lord's work trusting the Lord will provide in the future, as he has provided in the past.

He is gathering all manner of wealth, even down to doves and pigeons for eating in dove cotes. He is gathering wealth so he has plenty, but what he needs is sensible agriculture and passionate spirituality, not passionate wealth gathering! The enemy can take his wealth, and only relationship with God will open the door to sustainable living. He prospered, built his famous tunnel, that you can still pay to walk through, and all looked good, BUT, he was not thinking and praying each day trusting God alone, he has started to think he is “the man”.

Ezra, living 150 years after the Babylonians took all the silver and gold, can really reflect on the stupidity of Hezekiah in showing the Babylonians all he had, but this was a minor failing, for the spiritual decline of the people would seal the fate of all his wealth anyway! God uses all our circumstances to “test/prove” what is in our hearts, to really know what we value.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Have we been “givers”, pouring out blessing to others, or are we starting to become hoarders and savers of things given to us to spend on the Lord's work?

What do we really value? What is our desire and passion on this brief journey through space-time? We have a very brief time on this planet and nothing we get here can be taken from the planet, it all needs to be used up while we are here. Let's not leave without doing what we could to bless others and glorify the Lord.

**Pastoral**

Are we passing the tests of the Lord as they come up before us? We can only lead God's people forward as we identify and deal with the adversity and prosperity tests that come to us. If we cannot pass the daily tests, we cannot lead others into the place of spiritual power.

Let us take heed to our own lives daily and pass the tests that the Lord allows to come to us.

**Notes****CHAPTER 33**

**1 Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem:**

**2 But did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.**

**3 For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down, and he reared up altars for Baalim, and made groves, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.**

**4 Also he built altars in the house of the LORD, whereof the LORD had said, In Jerusalem shall my name be for ever.**

**5 And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.**

**6 And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom: also he observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.**

**7 And he set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen before all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name forever:**

**8 Neither will I any more remove the foot of Israel from out of the land which I have appointed for your fathers; so that they will take heed to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses.**

**9 So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel.**

**REFLECTION**

Manasseh is only 12 years old when he is crowned, but he starts quite early in his reign to practise paganism, rejecting the God of Israel for the more pleasant rituals and activities associated with paganism. He will apparently not be judged by short life or reign here either, for he rules for 55 years, dying at 67, around the age of David and Apostle Paul. 2 Kings 21 is the parallel passage to this one. How do we explain this? Ezra will see this man's reign as God's grace being expressed, for the people were given opportunity to select truly what they wanted – the majority chose idolatry and in doing so they chose judgment and the nation of Judah would share the fate of Israel.

All that the two worst kings did before Hezekiah, Manasseh did, but to a higher level in idolatry. He rebuilt paganism systematically through the land and cities and the temple itself, and the trash heap the temple became under Athaliah and Ahaz will look mild to the total defiling of the temple under Manasseh. The shock, reading between the lines, is that he had no trouble finding dodgy priests to run his system. With Isaiah alive, and Hezekiah ordering godliness the people complied, but it appears that is all they did. The vast majority still really preferred and wanted idolatry, and so when they had the choice they quickly and thoroughly selected the evil option. The majority have always "gone along with" what is "sanctioned" and approved by those in power, or who they think should be followed...

Verses 4-5 make it clear just how far he went, placing within the two temple courts, altars to the pagan gods/demons, even though the temple was dedicated to God alone. Remember Ezra's passionate point here. He sees the danger of tolerance for other religions becoming a synchronistic religion where the truth is lost in falsehood. Manasseh didn't want truth, he wanted pleasant lies, and he got them, and with teenage

enthusiasm he pursued evil, and he murdered Isaiah later, when the old prophet told him the truth! **John 15:17ff**

Verse 6 is the catalogue of pagan practises associated with demonic religion and we do well to pause and note the things that have come back into the world in recent years. We call it the “Occult”, and “New Age” religion, but there is nothing “new” about it – it is old satanic evil repackaged with the same drugs, alcohol and sexual immorality it has always had associated with it. When God’s people get involved in this sort of thing they are judged. Satan’s people are also, but by him over time. Remember the Lord doesn’t “discipline” evil people **for they are not his**, and given Satan’s hatred of mankind, God doesn’t need to punish Satan’s people in time, for Satan kills his own with monotonous regularity! One of the signs of satanic religion is they kill each other! Our job? Keep preaching the truth, just as Isaiah did, even to death.

He went further and placed a large idol by the altar, and thereby claimed all the sacrifices made in the temple for the god statue! He went further than Aaron and the Golden Calf; he replaced the whole concept of godly worship with evil service to the pagan fertility gods, and he even brought in child sacrifice! (Verse 6!)

Ezra’s commentary in verses 8-9 contain the key point for his generation and for our own. God doesn’t do compromises! God’s promises are conditional upon obedience, and we cannot claim protection if we actively reject God’s instructions – blessing does not apply if we have selected cursing! Deuteronomy 26-28, Leviticus 26.

Verse 10 is going to be repeated again and again, with many prophets sent and murdered. We know of Isaiah’s death but there are many good men who die in Manasseh’s reign. He “filled the city of Jerusalem with blood”. This man was homicidal in his actions and he killed anyone who crossed him; he is a good forerunner of the Jewish false prophet of the end times. He hates his own people; anyone disagreeing with him is murdered.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

This story is all about volition; each of our free will choices. If people select evil when they can, and desire it always, they will be given the option to do so. God is testing the volition of his people at this time and he still does daily with us. What will we do?

The shock to us in reading this chapter is how hypocritical and superficial many people’s profession of faith is! They say one thing on Sunday and live another life Monday to Friday. God hates hypocrisy. Let’s be clear on God’s call to holiness. Let’s be dedicated to Him.

### Pastoral

Pastors, do we teach discernment by preaching truth?

Do not doubt the malice of evil men? When people have rejected God’s path with hatred of it, they will stop at nothing!

Keep preaching truth.

**Chapter 33:10** And the LORD spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken.

**11** Wherefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon.

**12** And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers,

**13** And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God.

**14** Now after this he built a wall without the city of David, on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entering in at the fish gate, and compassed about Ophel, and raised it up a very great height, and put captains of war in all the fenced cities of Judah.

**15** And he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the LORD, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city.



**16 And he repaired the altar of the LORD, and sacrificed thereon peace offerings and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel.**

**17 Nevertheless the people did sacrifice still in the high places, yet unto the LORD their God only.**

**18 Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and his prayer unto his God, and the words of the seers that spake to him in the name of the LORD God of Israel, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel.**

**19 His prayer also, and how God was intreated of him, and all his sins, and his trespass, and the places wherein he built high places, and set up groves and graven images, before he was humbled: behold, they are written among the sayings of the seers.**

**20 So Manasseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house: and Amon his son reigned in his stead.**

**21 Amon was two and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned two years in Jerusalem.**

**22 But he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, as did Manasseh his father: for Amon sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them;**

**23 And humbled not himself before the LORD, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more.**

**24 And his servants conspired against him, and slew him in his own house.**

**25 But the people of the land slew all them that had conspired against king Amon; and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead.**

## REFLECTION

The staggering thing about this is the fact of his conversion. No-one would have picked this occurring and it is a reminder that while any person is alive there is hope for them. He is not taken to the Assyrian capital Nineveh, but to the provincial capital of Babylon, under Assyrian rule and control at this time. The Assyrians used the Babylonians to oversee the southern area of their empire, the eastern Mediterranean coast on their behalf, while they focused North, East and West, and the Babylonians would have delight in abusing others, under Assyrian control, and would throw that control off the next century and abuse others on their own behalf!

While in prison he meets the real God and repents and is saved apparently! Nebuchadnezzar will be saved after fourteen years of madness, and Manasseh after several years in prison. He finally "knew the Lord as God". After his return from prison he rebuilt Jerusalem's defences, and these will be used by the later kings to hold the Babylonians off for a time. Verse 15 records the cleaning of the temple and the removal of the foreign gods, but his reform was incomplete. He did get the real sacrifices back and being done daily again.

Verse 17 gives us the heart of the matter. The king has removed the statues of the pagan gods, but the people still prefer the worship of the high places, the family altars they have rebuilt, and the pleasant bloodless offerings offered there. They wanted pleasant and local, not central and blood covered sacrifices. Remember at the heart of worship was the Blood Sacrifice, that reminded people of the cost of sin! They sacrificed to God in the high places, but using the name of God instead of the pagan gods was not good enough, for their hearts were still after the satanic and they will quickly return to full paganism.

Manasseh's prayer is in Kings, and Ezra doesn't record it, and that is a surprise to some, as he is emphasizing the spiritual. Reflect on what has occurred over the last 50+ years! He has murdered all the faithful prophets, and encouraged falsehood, and while he changes and repents of evil at the end of his own life, and is saved like the dying thief, it is too little too late for the nation, for the majority of the people prefer the false to the real and true! His son will follow him in evil. Manasseh is saved, but the nation will not be.

I believe Ezra leaves the prayer out because it may make people reading this believe more has occurred than actually has – there is no heartfelt revival here - the king has simply rejected his earlier paganism – but the people remain the same – just the words are changed. His prayer is heartfelt by him, but to the people it is just words – words they will quickly throw aside, as they recently threw aside the idols he made.

Amon takes the throne, and the shallow nature of the abolition of the idols becomes clear within days. He takes idols his father made that were not destroyed, and worshipped them immediately, and he made others and the paganism is now full blown. He went further into evil than Manasseh had done, and given the fact that his father had to clean out the temple and start again at the end of his reign, this young man must have done some serious trashing of the temple, and in the barely two years he had to do it in before his assassination!

Law and order is starting to break down, and this assassination is evidence of this. The royal guard and courtiers execute the murderers but the chaos that characterised the end of Israel to the north is starting to unfold here in Judah. For the last time God will allow one more good man to test the volition of the people. What do the people really want? Do they want to turn to God and be delivered by him, or are they determined to serve the demon-gods of paganism?

We have seen the grace and mercy of God through this period – with Isaiah, Micah and Nahum pleading with God's people through the Assyrian Crisis. The next century the Lord will appeal to his people again after the murder of the many prophets in Manasseh's day. God will send Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Obadiah, and then after the fall of Jerusalem in 605, he will place Daniel in Babylon, and Ezekiel to lead the revival that will finally save the surviving remnant of the people and bring them back. They will come back with Zechariah and Haggai as the prophets to encourage them, and then Ezra and Nehemiah to lead them into the Word, and Malachi to give the final warnings. How good is God to his people?

## APPLICATION

### Personal

God wants wholehearted and pure worship from us, not compromise and mixtures.

How hard do evil people have to work to go to hell? Can you see just how passionately God seeks for his people to serve him? Can you see how many prophets were sent to the rebellious people! Can you see why Jesus would call Jerusalem the city that kills the prophets!!! Let us hear the Word while there is time.

### Pastoral

Pastors, do not give up on any evil person while they are alive. Keep giving the truth until the end.

Keep praying for the nation and the area you are in, for God seeks total obedience to achieve the things that can be achieved, as the Holy Spirit moves upon unbelievers. Do not doubt what God is capable of doing! Do not doubt the malice of the determined evil people either.

Teach God's people to look up only, not around at the actions of the evil ones. Only the Holy Spirit "saves" people, and so focus prayer upon that work of the Spirit. Look for God's power alone and place yourself in the place where you can be used.

### Notes

## CHAPTER 34

**1** Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem one and thirty years.

**2** And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left.

**3** For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images.

**4** And they brake down the altars of Baalim in his presence; and the images, that were on high above them, he cut down; and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images, he brake in pieces, and made dust of them, and strowed it upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them.

**5** And he burnt the bones of the priests upon their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem.

**6** And so did he in the cities of Manasseh, and Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naphtali, with their mattocks round about.

**7** And when he had broken down the altars and the groves, and had beaten the graven images into powder, and cut down all the idols throughout all the land of Israel, he returned to Jerusalem.

**8** Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land, and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the LORD his God.

**9** And when they came to Hilkiyah the high priest, they delivered the money that was brought into the house of God, which the Levites that kept the doors had gathered of the hand of Manasseh and Ephraim, and of all the remnant of Israel, and of all Judah and Benjamin; and they returned to Jerusalem.

**10** And they put it in the hand of the workmen that had the oversight of the house of the LORD, and they gave it to the workmen that wrought in the house of the LORD, to repair and amend the house:

**11** Even to the artificers and builders gave they it, to buy hewn stone, and timber for couplings, and to floor the houses which the kings of Judah had destroyed.

**12** And the men did the work faithfully: and the overseers of them were Jahath and Obadiah, the Levites, of the sons of Merari; and Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to set it forward; and other of the Levites, all that could skill of instruments of musick.

**13** Also they were over the bearers of burdens, and were overseers of all that wrought the work in any manner of service: and of the Levites there were scribes, and officers, and porters.

**14** And when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiyah the priest found a book of the law of the LORD given by Moses.

**15** And Hilkiyah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiyah delivered the book to Shaphan.

## REFLECTION

Read through the parallel passage first, in 2 Kings 22:1 – 23:20. This last good king is “doomed” to some, but actually, for a military man he has a “good death”, and spiritually he has done all he could. It is too late for the nation now, but Josiah gives Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Obadiah, and Jeremiah the chance to speak openly, and so the people are fully and finally without excuse for what will inevitably follow as a result of their determined evil and preference for paganism.

Josiah's age at 8 years old gives us a clue to the pagan world he grows up within. His evil father Amon is only 22 when he starts to reign and dies at 24. Josiah is 6 years of age when Amon starts to rule and 8 years of age when he is assassinated. Amon is in the harem and having sex to produce children from as young as 15 years of age! His father Manasseh has started him in evil paths and established him with his own “wives” at 14 or 15, and it may have been while he was in jail in Assyria, that Amon acts as regent, we cannot be sure, but he is a thorough pagan and sees the last acts of his father after his conversion as an aberration by his father, not repentance. Amon is determined to do evil and does so until his death.

Josiah will have the last positive impact of any of the kings, and God ensures he has enough time, to be able to test the volition of his people thoroughly. He has 31 years, and while the high priest Hilkiyah plays his part Ezra doesn't praise him for all this, but Josiah for “seeking the Lord while he is young!” He starts clearly focused on holiness, and may have been reading the books of Kings, or hearing the words of Isaiah, certainly singing the Psalms, and maybe even reading Proverbs, for all these were in the archives, but ignored by others. Ezra's point is that material is always available for those with positive volition to God!

The Torah will be discovered again in the temple, and Deuteronomy especially will be a break-through moment for the king, but he is well on the way to thorough personal salvation and national revival before the book is discovered by Hilkiyah. Verses 14-21. This is the path that many have walked down the centuries, and we see God operating this way, testing volition and then providing teaching and mentoring to any who truly seek the Lord with all their heart. God will provide for all with the desire to learn godliness.

God always leads people to the right teachers if they are keen on his Word and want his ways to be their ways. “To those who have, more is given....” Matthew 13:10-17. The parable of the sower is then given to illustrate this – for the seed is always good, it is the “ground” that is being tested! This man will be used as the last word, with Jeremiah and the others to give God's people no excuses as they reject truth and plunge into the “National Sin Unto Death”.

After four years of praying, singing Psalms and reading what he had found available, he is ready and determined to act against what he sees as the rot at the heart of his kingdom, and that is the open paganism. Do not underestimate the youth group as the source of revival power. The prayer of the elderly and the power of the committed youth will transform churches and nations. Most of the martyrs of the early church were teenagers, who were sold out to God. We are challenged by Ezra – are our people ready to spot idolatry and stand for God?

People had been buried close to their favourite shrines, so deluded were they that they thought being buried in these glades was a guarantee of immortality. It was actually – eternally with Satan and his angels in the Lake of Fire. Revelation 20:11-15. Verses 5 and following make harrowing reading, and those who did this to the bodies of the dead after battles were judged by God, but the idolatry was so destructive and the role of the fake priests so disgraceful that the Lord approved their destruction.

These false priests had led people to their deaths, and were at the heart of the satanic religions, and delighted in evil, and led others into more and more disgraceful things. He did this in the cities and in the ruins, wherever there were pagan altars and burial shrines to the false prophets and false priests, he smashed them, and burned the bodies of the priests on the destroyed altars, then scattered their dust. It was a picture of what God had done because of their evils – the entire northern kingdom was “gone like the dust in the wind”.

He went through the entire land he still ruled and visited every shattered city and village and destroyed anything associated with the paganism that had led to its destruction. This was a terrible thing that had happened to the land and it occurred because of the evils. Having cleansed the land he addressed the thorough clean up of the temple that was clearly functioning, but with rubbish and clutter still everywhere.

Josiah is now 26 years of age, and all he has done to date has been thorough, and this clean up will be also, and it will be for the last time before idolatry sweeps the nation away. The Lord Jesus will also cleanse the second temple, at the start of his ministry and at the end, just before the Cross. The Lord begins by cleansing the temple so that it is cleanly portraying his person and work in all the sacrifices being offered. **John 2:13-24.**

Just before the last act, the Cross and Resurrection, he cleanses the temple again, for evil has made its way back in. **Matthew 21:10-16, Mark 11:15-17, Luke 19:45-46.** All Jesus came to do at his First Advent centres around his fulfilling of the Spring Feasts, and they are all fulfilled literally and precisely. His Second Advent will fulfil the Autumn Feasts, and we expect them to be fulfilled literally and precisely also.

Verse 9 tells us that at least all the money hadn't been stolen in the interim. For the first eighteen years of his reign Josiah was saving the money to do the repairs which are clearly needing to be extensive. We have noted in the last 200 years just how many repairs were needed, and remember the temple is now 400 years old, and it has been seriously trashed by idolatrous kings and queens, and invaders, at least four times. There is lots to do, to ensure there is a complete picture of Atonement before the end comes. No-one is with any excuse!

Verse 11 tells us that roofs and floors had been destroyed and needed replacement in many areas. Hewn stone was required, which means the very stone walls and foundations may have been attacked by some of the idolatrous kings. As they work away they discover a copy of what appears to be Deuteronomy and they take it to the king, who they know loves the Word of God.

At this point read through **Deuteronomy 27:1 through to Deuteronomy 30:20.** You are now ready to see the reasons for the king's emotional breakdown – he realises fully the terrible things that have occurred were all prophesied by Moses, and they have been ignored by previous kings! Josiah will not ignore them, and he will preach these things, and with Jeremiah and the other prophet's assistance, he will call on the people and courtiers to obey the Word. The next kings are without excuse – for they hear their father read these words aloud for all the nation to repent and return to the Lord their God. They will only pretend to!

## APPLICATION

### Personal

How serious are we when we hear God's Word? How hungry are we for God's Word?

### Pastoral

Are we as thorough as Josiah was in our planning?

Are we ready to do Josiah's work? He couldn't win in his day, but he could 100% stand for God and preach God's Word, and so he did. He was called to the hard role of last warning. There was no hope for the nation, for they preferred paganism, but this king met his solemn obligation to make the truth clear even if none heard him.

Ezekiel would sum up this requirement that we may be called to undertake for the Lord in our own day. **Ezekiel 3:1-27**. Be ready to fulfil this role pastor – to the end. We have Jesus' comfort on the journey – but we must stand for truth. **Matthew 28:18-20**.

**Chapter 34:16** And Shaphan carried the book to the king, and brought the king word back again, saying, All that was committed to thy servants, they do it.

**17** And they have gathered together the money that was found in the house of the LORD, and have delivered it into the hand of the overseers, and to the hand of the workmen.

**18** Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiyah the priest hath given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.

**19** And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes.

**20** And the king commanded Hilkiyah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king's, saying,

**21** Go, enquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book.

**22** And Hilkiyah, and they that the king had appointed, went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college:) and they spake to her to that effect.

**23** And she answered them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell ye the man that sent you to me,

**24** Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah:

**25** Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched.

**26** And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to enquire of the LORD, so shall ye say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel concerning the words which thou hast heard;

**27** Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the LORD.

**28** Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same. So they brought the king word again.

**29** Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem.

**30** And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, great and small: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the LORD.

**31** And the king stood in his place, 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 with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book.

**32** And he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers.

**33** And Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel, and made all that were present in Israel to serve, even to serve the LORD their God. And all his days they departed not from following the LORD, the God of their fathers.

## REFLECTION

The leaders of the temple are doing all they are asked to do, but I cannot help feeling that there is an undercurrent here, and some of these men will prove unhelpful later to Jeremiah. They are obedient to the king and doing what he wants, but their enthusiasm for religious reform will blow away when the pagan sons of Josiah take over after his death. **James 1:8.**

The book of Deuteronomy (I suspect) is read aloud before the king and he immediately sees the spiritual significance of everything Moses said 800 years before, and sees that all that Moses said has occurred, and they are staring down the road of exile and total destruction unless they pull back from and eliminate thoroughly all the paganism that still exists.

The king tears his clothes in grief, and he is genuine, not histrionic. He sees immediately that he needs a word from the Lord as what more he is to do, for he sees that the disaster unfolding around them has been several generations in the making. He seeks clear direction from the Lord, and the priests are tasked with bringing him information from the Lord on what he is to do next. The prophet Jeremiah and the others can also be called, but they aren't mentioned, and I wonder what sort of power struggle is going on behind the scenes here?

One prophet does speak and it is the prophetess Huldah, and she is very direct, and bold in her answer, backing the veracity of the Word of God, for she knows that the Lord has determined judgment on the nation by this point, and there is nothing more Josiah can do. She makes it clear that the problem is that the majority of the people are still practising paganism, even though the king has declared war on idols. The people do not want the reforms of Josiah, and they will get what they want, and sadly it is judgment!

The prophetess is positive towards Josiah, and assures him that he is heard by God and he is innocent of evil before the Lord, and God loves his determination to do what is right. He is assured of a peaceful death, and that he will be spared the disaster that is coming. There is now no way to avoid the disaster, but his righteousness means he will not live to see the evil unfold. Knowing his death will be in battle, we ask, was the prophetess wrong saying, he would be gathered "in peace", for he dies in war!

The answer is clear – he dies peacefully – even though in a war – with a quick arrow he is "gathered to his godly fathers", and joins them in heaven. He misses the evils to come from his godless sons and the people who have hypocritically accepted his reforms but prefer the old paganism. He has done what he could, and that is what the Lord asks of us! Ezra is grateful that the people of his day have been wholehearted in their acceptance of his reforms, but he must feel great sadness as he writes this, for he knows how close run a thing revival is!

Josiah will do all he can to ensure no-one has any excuse for disobedience and instructs the priests that the Word of God is to be read aloud for all the people to hear, that any who desire salvation may find it, and many will do so, and be saved by their exile. He makes a solemn covenant to obey the Lord and keep the Words of Moses in detail, and he requires all the leadership of the nation to "stand to it" and agree also, but sadly they are doing what they have to, but they will be held responsible by the Lord for their false oaths this day!

Josiah keeps the Lord's word all his life, and unlike Hezekiah he doesn't fall in the end, but maintains his witness to the truth until the day he dies. In the 2 Kings commentary I ask why he went to a war that he didn't need to fight, but he was to die at that time, and the war was the way. God's will was done, but I am sad for this man, but he gets the privilege of a soldier's death, and he embraces God's will for his life. He has done all he could and been faithful to the end. He has played his part, but his people would not... **Matthew 23:37.**

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Have we done all we can, or could do in the task we are given? God doesn't require a certain result from our hearers, other than their free will response, but He does demand our 100% commitment to doing what we are told. If no-one is changed by our work, but we did all we could, that is enough for the Lord – for we are judged by our effort and attention to detail, not the results achieved, for the results are the issue of the hearers not ours!

### Pastoral

Josiah is a great mentor of a difficult ministry, for it is hard to watch your nation slide down hill and be unable to achieve anything other than tell truth that no-one wants to hear.

Remember Pastor, that if we are called to be like Josiah, we are to commit 100% to the task given us and not look to the left or right, but just do the assigned job with praise in our heart for the opportunity to serve. Each person's free will is an important principle – we cannot force people to face truth and save themselves – so Free Will is an important doctrine to remember!

### Notes

## CHAPTER 35

**1** Moreover Josiah kept a passover unto the LORD in Jerusalem: and they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month.

**2** And he set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of the LORD,

**3** And said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, which were holy unto the LORD, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel did build; it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders: serve now the LORD your God, and his people Israel,

**4** And prepare yourselves by the houses of your fathers, after your courses, according to the writing of David king of Israel, and according to the writing of Solomon his son.

**5** And stand in the holy place according to the divisions of the families of the fathers of your brethren the people, and after the division of the families of the Levites.

**6** So kill the passover, and sanctify yourselves, and prepare your brethren, that they may do according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

**7** And Josiah gave to the people, of the flock, lambs and kids, all for the passover offerings, for all that were present, to the number of thirty thousand, and three thousand bullocks: these were of the king's substance.

**8** And his princes gave willingly unto the people, to the priests, and to the Levites: Hilkiah and Zechariah and Jehiel, rulers of the house of God, gave unto the priests for the passover offerings two thousand and six hundred small cattle and three hundred oxen.

**9** Conaniah also, and Shemaiah and Nethaneel, his brethren, and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Jozabad, chief of the Levites, gave unto the Levites for passover offerings five thousand small cattle, and five hundred oxen.

**10** So the service was prepared, and the priests stood in their place, and the Levites in their courses, according to the king's commandment.

**11** And they killed the passover, and the priests sprinkled the blood from their hands, and the Levites flayed them.

**12** And they removed the burnt offerings, that they might give according to the divisions of the families of the people, to offer unto the LORD, as it is written in the book of Moses. And so did they with the oxen.

**13** And they roasted the passover with fire according to the ordinance: but the other holy offerings sod they in pots, and in caldrons, and in pans, and divided them speedily among all the people.

**14** And afterward they made ready for themselves, and for the priests: because the priests the sons of Aaron were busied in offering of burnt offerings and the fat until night; therefore the Levites prepared for themselves, and for the priests the sons of Aaron.

**15** And the singers the sons of Asaph were in their place, according to the commandment of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and Jeduthun the king's seer; and the porters waited at every gate; they might not depart from their service; for their brethren the Levites prepared for them.

**16** So all the service of the LORD was prepared the same day, to keep the passover, and to offer burnt offerings upon the altar of the LORD, according to the commandment of king Josiah.

**17 And the children of Israel that were present kept the passover at that time, and the feast of unleavened bread seven days.**

**18 And there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.**

**19 In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this passover kept.**

## REFLECTION

Parallel passage here is 2 Kings 23. Read it through and reflect upon the joy of this last great Passover, for it speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour seen before judgment comes.

Josiah wasn't to know it but this was to be the last great Passover until the days of Ezra writing these words. Like Hezekiah nearly a hundred years before he had cleansed the temple and wanted to celebrate the archetypal feasts of Israel, celebrating the establishment of the nation coming out of Egyptian slavery, but also Egyptian idolatry. The plagues upon Egypt had judged the gods of Egypt, and the Passover celebrated the superiority of God over all the demon-gods.

Josiah knows the history of this and he wants to really glorify God and honour the real purpose of the temple, to point to Messiah's person and work. He encourages the Levites and all the priests to do their work as unto the Lord. Verse 3 is important here however as it is the last reference we have to the ark, and the fact that the Levites are encouraged to "put it back in the temple". This is intriguing but we cannot speculate further. It appears that the godly Levites had hidden the ark during the paganism of Manasseh and following kings and brought it out when they thought it was safe under Josiah. What did they do with it afterwards?

There are a number of possibilities; that the Egyptian king who killed Josiah took it down to Egypt, but that doesn't make sense, for the men who hid it for a generation were certainly able to hide it again, and that is the Jewish "legend" – that they spirited it away under the temple mount to be found when Messiah came, but of course it has stayed hidden ever since.

Josiah provides 30,000 sheep and 300 bullocks for the Passover. Once again check the numbers against the days of Hezekiah (chapter 29), and the days of Solomon, and you can see the population decline has recovered by Josiah's day; that through the years their numbers are back up. There are enormous quantities of animals, and there is a real spirit of celebration in the nation. Everyone loves a party...

The Levites are looking after the priests, and each is working together in a harmony not seen for decades. Verses 14-15. There is a clear move of the Holy Spirit, with unity the evidence. Ezra believes this was a better celebration than that of Solomon or Hezekiah's day, because the spirit of the people involved was good and righteous. He ties it back to Samuel's day. Now we know that for the majority of the nation there was a fake faith, but we also know that over 30,000 people will go into captivity and be saved there, and this Passover likely was their preparation for their salvation. Many are witnessed to by Josiah's faith, and they are later saved, just as our apparently "fruitless" missions today may later lead many to faith in the Tribulation Period after we have gone.

This Passover was in Josiah's 18<sup>th</sup> year, and in the next section we move straight to his death in his 31<sup>st</sup> year. What has gone on between? We are left with no firm clues here about the events of the next 13 years, but they are financially blessed in many ways, with Assyria falling in this time, Babylon rising as a power, and the arrival of Necho, king of a revived Egyptian Dynasty, who thinks he can dominate his end of the Middle East and take on the rising Babylonians, but he cannot. Jeremiah records many of the court intrigues, and he is faithfully preaching through this time.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Josiah will have over 13 years of blessing in family and nation until his death at the Battle of Megiddo. He played his part in the great drama of redemption and he is the ancestor of Joseph, who will also play his part as the adopted father of the Messiah. Let us play our part as well as this man does, and be as ready to open our wallets to bless God's people as he does at the Passover.

### Pastoral



Pastors let's be ready to stand like Josiah, ready to bless the people, encourage the servants of the Lord and serve the Lord for His Glory. Let us be ready to stand in dark days when people no longer love the Word. Remember the warnings of the Holy Spirit to us today through the Apostle Paul. **2 Timothy 3:1-5, 4:3-8.**

**Chapter 35:20** After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by Euphrates: and Josiah went out against him.

**21** But he sent ambassadors to him, saying, What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? I come not against thee this day, but against the house wherewith I have war: for God commanded me to make haste: forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that he destroy thee not.

**22** Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo.

**23** And the archers shot at king Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Have me away; for I am sore wounded.

**24** His servants therefore took him out of that chariot, and put him in the second chariot that he had; and they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died, and was buried in one of the sepulchres of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah.

**25** And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah: and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel: and, behold, they are written in the lamentations.

**26** Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and his goodness, according to that which was written in the law of the LORD,

**27** And his deeds, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah.

## REFLECTION

This portion covers one of the greatest and certainly the largest battle in the ancient world to this date, the battle of Carchemish. The section below is from Wikipedia and has links built in to explore other subjects, and as this is such a turning point of history its worth pausing and reflecting upon it. It begins what in the Bible is called the "Times of the Gentiles", for no Jewish King in David's line will sit securely on the throne of Jerusalem, until Messiah comes to rule and ends the Gentile Kingdom's dominance.

605BC begins the World Empires that Daniel sees, that lead to the Anti-Christ, and Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold of the Gentile Kingdoms that will oppress the Jews through history until the end, when Messiah returns to rule.

"When the [Assyrian](#) capital [Nineveh](#) was [overrun](#) by the Medes, Scythians, Babylonians and their allies in 612 BC, one army of the Assyrians moved to [Harran](#). When Harran was [captured](#) by the Babylonian-Median-Scythian alliance in 609 BC, the Assyrian Empire effectively ended, but remnants of the Assyrian army joined together at [Carchemish](#), a city under Egyptian rule, on the [Euphrates](#) river. Egypt (a former vassal of Assyria) was allied with the Assyrian king [Ashur-uballit II](#), and marched in 609 BC to his aid against the Babylonians, but arrived too late to defend Harran successfully.

The Egyptian army of Pharaoh [Necho II](#) was delayed at [Megiddo](#) by the forces of King [Josiah](#) of [Judah](#). Josiah was killed, and his army was defeated at the [Battle of Megiddo \(609 BC\)](#), but he delays the Egyptians long enough to create a favourable outcome for the Babylonians.

The Egyptians, when they arrive, and the surviving Assyrians together crossed the Euphrates and laid siege to Harran, which they failed to retake. They then retreated to north western Assyria (in what is today north eastern [Syria](#)) and they formed up finally at Carchemish for the final show-down with Babylon in early 605 BC.

The Egyptians met the full might of the Babylonian and Median army led by [Nebuchadnezzar II](#) here at Carchemish, where the combined Egyptian and Assyrian forces were destroyed. Assyria ceased to exist as an independent power, and Egypt retreated, and was no longer a significant force in the [Ancient Near East](#) ever again."

Babylonia reached its economic peak after 605 BC, and was the biblical head of gold until Media Persia takes over as the chest of silver in 539 BC. Nebuchadnezzar headed south after the victory, chasing the Egyptians to make sure they could not regroup, and even though Necho had placed his king Jehoiakim on

the throne of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar quickly seized Jerusalem and took over, and reappointed the king to be “his man” in the area. Daniel and many other hostages were taken to Babylon at this time. Daniel 1:1-7.

Necho's words appear to be from “God” but are actually his propaganda push, to scare Josiah off. Now practically, Josiah should not have interfered, as he wasn't an ally of Babylonia either, but this was all part of God's plan, and it was Josiah's time to die and he went into battle in a relaxed frame of mind. Necho claimed God's hand, but the battle fatally delayed him, and it led to the Assyrian's defeat, and later Necho's also, and so the Babylonians became the power of the Middle East – God's plan was accomplished.

The Babylonians would be the nation to discipline Judah, as Jeremiah and Isaiah had predicted, but they would set up the survival of Israel also, and as a nation like no other, a nation with all the population in the top 15% of intelligence! Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BC would take the hostages from the top of the nation, and then in 597 BC, after Jehoiakim's stupid revolt he would take all the army officers, and all the artisans, in effect 30,000 of the best people, leaving only the thick and pagan left in the land. They rebelled again, as fools will, and in 586 when the city fell and was destroyed, only a thousand or so of the thick people from the land survive, but what that means is that 95% of Israel's gene pool are the top people, taken in 605 and 597, unlike all other nations on the earth.

Verse 22 indicates that both Necho and Josiah knew a bigger picture was being played out, and Josiah threw himself into the battle trying to fight with Pharaoh himself, but the archers of the Egyptians found their mark and he is mortally wounded. He is greatly mourned, and by none more than Jeremiah, and again we wonder why Ezra hasn't mentioned him more before, but there are more questions here than answers. We need to focus on Ezra's message rather than what he isn't telling us. Ezra believes that Jeremiah's book of Lamentations is in fact a record of Jeremiah's grief at the death of this man. We already know however that the revival he led wasn't deep enough and he had to die to escape the awful reality of the depth of the apostasy of the people of Judah whom he loved.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Josiah throws himself into his role in the plan, and yet he enters a battle he can only die in and disguises himself to try to defeat the Pharaoh – but he cannot defeat the plan of God and he dies, but it is his time. Can we relax into God's plan for our life?

### Pastoral

Let's teach the plan of God more fully and carefully than we do, for we need to answer the questions of some regarding fatalism, but also eliminate the concerns of those who think they are actually in any danger at all from the plan of God for their lives. God wants us relaxed and focused forward, seeking the path of obedience only.

### Notes

## CHAPTER 36

**1 Then the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and made him king in his father's stead in Jerusalem.**

**2 Jehoahaz was twenty and three years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem.**

**3 And the king of Egypt put him down at Jerusalem, and condemned the land in an hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold.**

**4 And the king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and turned his name to Jehoiakim. And Necho took Jehoahaz his brother, and carried him to Egypt.**

**5 Jehoiakim was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem: and he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God.**

**6 Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon.**

**7 Nebuchadnezzar also carried of the vessels of the house of the LORD to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon.**

**8 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and his abominations which he did, and that which was found in him, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah: and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead.**

**9 Jehoiachin was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem: and he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD.**

**10 And when the year was expired, king Nebuchadnezzar sent, and brought him to Babylon, with the goodly vessels of the house of the LORD, and made Zedekiah his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem.**

## REFLECTION

Parallel text for this last chapter is **2 Kings 23-25**, and **Jeremiah 39-43**. Read these chapters first, as more information is given in these sources by those who are there at the time. We start with Jehoahaz, the first of Josiah's sons mentioned and made king by the people after his father's death, and of him it is not stated here that he was evil, but in our kings passage it is. He only had three months to rule and he "messed up". He was twenty-three, and he had seen his father's work, heard the male prophets, and must have heard of the prophecy of Huldah, but clearly he didn't interpret his father's death as a blessing, and feel the obligation before the Lord to be a blessing also.

Is Ezra's comment that "the people of the land took" him to make him king, a clue that they thought he was a man who would stand up for the "old ways" associated with the High Places of paganism, or that he stood for a pro-Babylonian alliance as Jeremiah would consistently urge. We don't know. We do know that he had three months to seek the Lord and discover the right thing to do, and in the first three minutes he could have done so, but he does not.

Ezra isn't negative to him however, for his fate is severe, he is chained by Pharaoh Necho and taken into Egypt. The Kings author notes that they met at Riblah, and that was Pharaoh's HQ after his defeat at Carchemish. Why did he not lock himself in Jerusalem and await developments? Lots of questions here that will only be answered for us historians when in heaven, freed of space-time limitations we can look into the events spread before us.

Necho regrouped his forces at Riblah for a fighting retreat, and another battle may have been fought there, or he just had to flee as the Babylonians approached, but before he did he wanted a man he could trust as king over Judah, as his man in the southern area. Whatever Jehoahaz had as strengths or weaknesses, Necho didn't like or trust him, and selected his brother Eliakim, changing his name to Jehoiakim, and placed him on the throne as his vassal king. Jehoahaz is taken to Egypt in chains and dies there in jail.

Jehoiakim will prove to be a slippery character, who will "bend with the wind" and support the Babylonians while still pretending to be pro-Egyptian, and he may indeed have played a double game, but he does try to gather the tribute money demanded by Necho. Once again that nagging question; why didn't they wait, for a few months until Nebuchadnezzar arrives and takes Jerusalem, for then they need to pay him, not the loser Necho! Egypt is indeed a "broken reed" from Isaiah's day onwards; they have no real great power and Babylon is supreme over them, as will the Persians be later. **Isaiah 36:6**.

"Going down to Egypt" is a sign of human viewpoint being preferred to divine viewpoint, and the chariot forces of the Egyptians were powerful, but they were a nation in decline and supporting them was to be on the wrong side of history. The eyes of faith needed to be used by the kings of Judah, but they trusted their eyes, and went down to the people they thought could defend them against the winners of Carchemish. It was a fatal blunder – and it was active rejection of Jeremiah and the other prophets!

Did Necho pretend he had the power and actually convince the Jews that he was coming back and would defeat the Babylonians? The evidence indicates he did! This will be the belief of many in Judah and they will trust in an Egyptian alliance against Babylon, and Jeremiah will be jailed as a traitor for supporting

Babylon. The Egyptians will certainly try to help Judah against the Babylonians, for they are defeated, but still, the pro-Egyptian feeling was strong, and the survivors of the Babylonian invasion will flee south into Egypt, thinking that is safe, and well away from Babylonian power, but Nebuchadnezzar will conquer Egypt a decade after Judah. **Jeremiah 26:21ff, 37:5ff, Chapters 42-46.**

Jehoiakim has eleven years to rule with God being referred to daily, but God's Word ignored. The carnal king chooses the political path of devious and duplicitous actions, deceiving himself and acting as if he still has power to wield, and thinking he is playing off Egypt against Babylon, and believing no-one knows about it.... He is a fool and he hates God and God's prophet Jeremiah! He has every opportunity to hear God's policy, and he rejects all that Jeremiah says. He fears his counsellors rather than fearing the Lord, as will the last king Zedekiah.

Nebuchadnezzar returns after the rumblings of rebellion are reported to him, and in 597 takes Jerusalem after a siege, during which Jehoiakim dies. He dies at only 36 years of age, and he is replaced by his foolish and pleasure centred son, who is 18 (not 8 – copyist error) who locks him self in the harem and has sex until his mother finally convinces him to surrender. Jeremiah has no time for him, for he has God's Word over this young and arrogant man. **Jeremiah 22:24-30.**

He was born into a great and dangerous time, and he feared Babylon, but did not "fear the Lord". Like Jehoahaz he had three months to face reality, and fall before the Lord God and seek a godly path, but he deals with his fear by sex! He pays a terrible price for it, but he will be saved in jail after 37 years imprisonment. Note Jeremiah's prophecy; "call this man childless". He is placed under the "curse of Coniah", which means no one born of his line will ever sit on the throne of David again. His descendant/son will be Joseph, who will serve the Lord Jesus as his father, and achieve what this young man before us failed to do; be a real man and mentor of godliness.

By the time he listens to his mother it is too late to save himself as king, but it does save his life, and the people's lives, and he will have 37 years in jail in Babylon to regret his actions and lack of prayerfulness, but his grandson Zerubbabel will lead the people back to Judah, then the Persian Province of Judea. He will not be king but satrap of Persia, as Ezra and Nehemiah will later be.

Sadly Jehoiakim did "abominations" (verse 8), and we can only guess what this means, but likely that he entered back into the sexualized fertility religion paganism of his evil ancestors, rather than living and worshipping like David his ancestor did. He didn't heed Jeremiah, he didn't worship God, and he dies in a city under siege and his body is disinterred and dragged behind the Babylonian Army so it falls to pieces under the feet of the captives taken. The captives, 10,000+, were forced to march behind the rotting corpse of their rebellious king and as it bumps along the road it will fall apart and be kicked into the ditches, piece by rotting piece.

All the top of Israelite society is taken into captivity in 597, leaving only the "low end of the IQ bell curve" behind under Zedekiah. This means that the intelligent alone survive, and this makes Israel's DNA so different to all other nations, for the majority of the people are at the top of the bell curve, and the nation remains this way today, leading the world in Nobel prizes and PhD's per capita.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

What do we trust in a crisis? Do we trust our eyes, or do we trust in the Word of God? Is politics our first call, or is prayer?

God wants us to hear Him and we can only do that if we walk close enough to Him, saturated in the Word of Life, and daily in intimate fellowship with the Lord through the Holy Spirit.

Let's walk with Jesus in the filling of the Holy Spirit. There is no other place that is safe.

### Pastoral

Pastors, that word "discernment" comes up again and again. Do we teach enough of God's Word to enable our people to interpret political actions in our world correctly? Do the Lord's people under our care and training really see as God sees, with eyes of faith, or do they think like men?

**Chapter 36:11** Zedekiah was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem.

**12** And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the LORD.

**13** And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel.

**14** Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem.

**15** And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place:

**16** But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy.

**17** Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand.

**18** 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.

**19** And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof.

**20** And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia:

**21** To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.

**22** Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,

**23** Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up.

## REFLECTION

This last chapter makes hard reading, especially as you get older and have drawn close to the Lord through your last years. It is so pleasant to walk with Jesus, that it becomes baffling to even think of those who hate God and His Word, and so walk away from His blessing. We are limited creatures of space-time, and so cannot possibly have the information upon which to make intelligent decisions for our future, and yet we arrogantly try so many times also! Let's not be baffled at Zedekiah too much as older people, but remember how foolish we were in our 20s and 30s also!

He is only 21 when he starts to rule and is blinded and dragged to prison to die by 33. He will end his rule at the same age as the Lord Jesus will complete his earthly ministry. The Lord will end in victory over sin and death, but this man will reap what he sowed in his hatred of Jeremiah and God, and find through his sins a very slow death in darkness, his eyes put out by Nebuchadnezzar. He didn't "see" the truth about the reality of power, and so Nebuchadnezzar said to him, you clearly don't need to see, so your eyes are redundant! Before he dies all his sons will be killed before him! He will have no surviving lineage.

Verse 12 makes the spiritual issue very clear, and verse 13 makes the spiritual-political issue even clearer. He played politics with double thinking and double speaking; he lived and died a lying hypocrite, and he could have heeded Jeremiah and been a great believer! This man proved he hated truth and loved lies. He proved himself unfaithful to God and men and so he dies in his sins, and unlike Jehoiachin (Coniah), there is no indication that he is saved in the end, although he may have been through the things he suffered. He had the two paths that Moses had made clear, Deuteronomy 26-30, 31-32, but he selected the path of death. **Deuteronomy 30:17-20.**

Ezra uses the words that Moses used of pharaoh of the Exodus; "he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart". Exodus 7-14. He responded to every appeal of God by tightening his muscles and closing his heart and mind to God's appeals.

Verse 15 is a strong appeal to the grace of God through all this time, and it is true, and we must pause and reflect upon Ezra's words in this last section of the book of Chronicles. God kept speaking to his people to the end, and even as the curtain fell on Jerusalem for decades of ruin, he still provided prophets who spoke to them in Babylon. In the last forty years God pours his heart out to the people, by Huldah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Jeremiah and Obadiah! We see it again and again – unsaved people have to work hard to go to hell, but the majority chose to do so in every generation.

Jeremiah would be taken against his will down to Egypt, but from there he would complete his book and get it by the hands of Baruch to Daniel in Babylon. Daniel would get it to Ezekiel and he would lead the revival, and both men would train the next generation of prophets to lead the people back to Judea; Zechariah and Haggai. God doesn't give up on his people, but rather increases his appeals to them as they slide back into idolatry, immorality, and paganism of all forms.

Verse 16 reminds us that when we preach truth, we can still be miss-quoted, despised, mocked, and abused. All God's men and women were mocked and abused in this time frame. It is the reminder of the truth about prophets – the majority who call themselves prophets are fakes, and they will be welcomed, for they always have been, but God's women and men are most likely to be abused. Apply **Deuteronomy 13, 18** to them and you will quickly see the fake.

The sadness of Ezra's observation can be seen culminating at the end of verse 16, "until there was no remedy". There is a limited time for grace, and that limit is in God's hands, but when it becomes impossible for repentance to occur the days of grace end and the days of judgment begin. That occurred at the start of the "Times of the Gentiles" in 605BC.

The terrible calamity fell upon them, but it fell upon the "thick/stupid" who had joined their king Zedekiah in arrogant rebellion. They were stupid because they could not possibly hold off the world super-power of their day! It was like Saddam Hussein thinking he could defeat Europe and America! The young men would fight and die in the temple courts, but their sacrifice was pointless and hollow, for they achieved nothing.

When he seized the city for the second time in 597 Nebuchadnezzar took some of the gold vessels of the temple, but left them enough to function in the worship, but this final time he took everything useful back to Babylon. It will be catalogued and returned in 535 when Joshua and Zerubbabel lead the saved Exiles back. Ezra is making his point clearly; the people first rebelled against God and God's prophets, and then against his "hammer" Nebuchadnezzar. They placed themselves firstly on the wrong side for eternity, and then on the wrong side of history.

Nebuchadnezzar took everything, and Ezra especially mentions the wealth stored by the "princes" who had been taken into captivity earlier. Many thought they could leave their wealth in their houses and hide them there, and that they would be allowed to return to Jerusalem later, and the false prophets said that in Babylon and Ezekiel must preach against them. All that they hid was found and taken by the Babylonians as plunder. They took houses apart inside to find hidden treasures, and then they burned the temple and city.

Verse 19 will be clarified by Nehemiah's account from 140 years later as to just what the Babylonians did to the city. The Romans would thoroughly destroy the temple and city in 70 AD and the legions would take months to knock over every wall of the city except the Wailing Wall. The Babylonians didn't take more than a few days and their strategy was to render the city uninhabitable and indefensible until they said, "rebuild". The walls were knocked outwards into the valleys, but Nehemiah is going to be able to winch up the greater blocks and rebuild in a couple of months. The walls of the houses and palaces were left standing, the contents fired, so the wooden roof and flooring burnt, but Nehemiah will be able to rebuild quickly using existing walls and simply re-flooring and re-roofing.

Ezra reminds them that the land lay fallow and had her "Sabbaths" until 70 years were past, and it was Jeremiah who got that revelation from the Lord and when his book arrived in Babylon at Daniel's desk, he was able to understand the time frame he was to live within. Daniel is there in 605 and will be there in 535 when the people return to rebuild the city. **Jeremiah 25:9-12, 27:6-8, 29:10, Daniel 9:1-27.**

God has sent word that a man called Cyrus would redeem his people, and he did. **Isaiah 44:28.** Daniel works with Cyrus, and may have fallen foul of Belshazzar because of his pro-Persian sympathies, but both Daniel and Queen Nitocris survive and live under the Persians with honour. Ezra takes us to his own record here, and the story continues in the same hand in the book of Ezra. Daniel also fills the gaps here, for he is living through these great events in Babylon.

Ezra finishes the account with the full announcement of the “Times of the Gentiles”, with Cyrus’ decree to return, the reminder that the Israelites are under Gentile domination and control now, and will be until Messiah the Prince comes. **Deuteronomy 28:36-48** had announced 800 years before the events that the “Times of the Gentiles” would begin with the Exile from Judah. **Luke 21:24**. Before you move into Ezra and Nehemiah you need to move to Daniel and go through his history thoroughly, then return to Ezra and Nehemiah.

## APPLICATION

### Personal

Are you ready believer to play your part in history; fulfil your called role before the Lord?  
Obedience to the Word is required to the end of your life – there is no second option.

### Pastoral

Pastors, teach the Word, “be instant in season and out of season”, for what men and women think is “flavour of the month” is always lies and deceit. Your task is to preach truth and nothing else, and you have Jesus direct instructions upon it. **2 Timothy 4:2, Hebrews 11:25**.

Let’s reflect upon the three passages that sum up Ezra’s message to us today.

**Ezekiel 3:1ff** You are responsible to the Lord for the truth being told whether people hear or not – just teach and preach truth only!

**John 21:15-25** Feed the Lambs, feed the sheep, protect the flock! No fourth order!

**2 Timothy 4:1-8** Preach sound doctrine and do not stop until you are taken home, and do not be distracted by fools and fakes in the churches – eyes on Jesus alone. No distractions – the Lord’s opinion alone matters to His real servants. Focus on being His servant, even if you appear alone at times.