



DAYBREAK

UNIT
11

**1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah,
Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi**



<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 1:1 —8:40	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 10:1-19	<input type="checkbox"/> Ezra 6:1-22
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 9:1-44	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 11:1-23	<input type="checkbox"/> Ezra 7:1-28
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 10:1-14	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 12:1-16	<input type="checkbox"/> Ezra 8:1-36
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 11:1-47	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 13:1-22	<input type="checkbox"/> Ezra 9:1-15
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 12:1-40	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 14:1-15	<input type="checkbox"/> Ezra 10:1-44
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 13:1-14	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 15:1-19	<input type="checkbox"/> Nehemiah 1:1-11
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 14:1-17	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 16:1-14	<input type="checkbox"/> Nehemiah 2:1-20
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 15:1-29	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 17:1-19	<input type="checkbox"/> Nehemiah 3:1-32
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 16:1-43	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 18:1-34	<input type="checkbox"/> Nehemiah 4:1-23
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 17:1-27	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 19:1-11	<input type="checkbox"/> Nehemiah 5:1-19
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 18:1-17	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 20:1-37	<input type="checkbox"/> Nehemiah 6:1-19
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 19:1 —20:8	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 21:1-20	<input type="checkbox"/> Nehemiah 7:1-73
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 21:1-30	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 22:1-12	<input type="checkbox"/> Nehemiah 8:1-18
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 22:1-19	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 23:1-21	<input type="checkbox"/> Nehemiah 9:1-38
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 23:1-32	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 24:1-27	<input type="checkbox"/> Nehemiah 10:1-39
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 24:1-31	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 25:1-28	<input type="checkbox"/> Nehemiah 11:1 —12:47
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 25:1-31	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 26:1 —27:9	<input type="checkbox"/> Nehemiah 13:1-31
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 26:1-32	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 28:1-27	<input type="checkbox"/> Haggai 1:1-15
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 27:1-34	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 29:1-36	<input type="checkbox"/> Haggai 2:1-23
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 28:1-21	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 30:1-27	<input type="checkbox"/> Zechariah 1:1 —2:13
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles 29:1-30	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 31:1-21	<input type="checkbox"/> Zechariah 3:1 —4:14
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 1:1-17	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 32:1-33	<input type="checkbox"/> Zechariah 5:1 —6:15
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 2:1-18	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 33:1-25	<input type="checkbox"/> Zechariah 7:1 —8:23
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 3:1-17	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 34:1-33	<input type="checkbox"/> Zechariah 9:1 —10:12
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 4:1-22	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 35:1-27	<input type="checkbox"/> Zechariah 11:1-17
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 5:1-14	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 36:1-23	<input type="checkbox"/> Zechariah 12:1 —13:9
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 6:1-42	<input type="checkbox"/> Ezra 1:1-11	<input type="checkbox"/> Zechariah 14:1-21
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 7:1-22	<input type="checkbox"/> Ezra 2:1-70	<input type="checkbox"/> Malachi 1:1 —2:16
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 8:1-18	<input type="checkbox"/> Ezra 3:1-13	<input type="checkbox"/> Malachi 2:17 —4:6
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 9:1-12	<input type="checkbox"/> Ezra 4:1-24	
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles 9:13-31	<input type="checkbox"/> Ezra 5:1-17	

Daybreak is a personal Bible study continuum for the high school and adult levels. Scripture references are taken from the King James Version of the Bible. A companion series of Sunday school lessons, titled Discovery, is also available. All of the material is available on our website, as well as in printed form. The print version is designed to be stored in a binder; subsequent modules can then be easily inserted. Daybreak is an official publication of the Apostolic Faith Church. All rights are reserved.



Overview for 1 Chronicles

Purpose: To trace the lineage from Adam to David as an encouragement to God's people, to emphasize their heritage and remind them of doctrinal and moral truths, and to provide a record of David's reign.

Author: No author is cited, but Jewish tradition holds that the priest and scribe Ezra was the author.

Name: The Hebrew name of this book, *Dibre Hayamim*, literally means "the words of the days," or "daily matters." In the Greek version of the Old Testament, the name of the book is *Paralipomena*, which means "omissions" (referring to matter not included in the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings). *Chronicles*, the English name given to the book in about the fifth century, refers to a chronological account of events. While all of these titles reflect portions of the book, none of them fully describe it.

Time Period Covered: Much of the material in 1 and 2 Chronicles repeats and adds to the historical record found in the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, and spans several centuries of the history of God's chosen people. The historical section of 1 Chronicles begins with the death of Saul around 1010 B.C. The last event noted is the death of David and the onset of Solomon's reign forty years later in 970 B.C.

Date Written: If the author is Ezra, he probably wrote 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah sometime after he came to Jerusalem around 457 B.C., likely between 450 to 425 B.C.

Key People: David and his son Solomon

Setting: 1 and 2 Chronicles were written in the post-exile era, after the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity. The remnant of God's people

needed constant encouragement to keep their faith and traditions alive. They needed to have hope that the God of David had not forsaken them, and that a king from his royal line would some day rule once more. Following the example of prophets such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the author of Chronicles endeavored to help the people see that God had not forsaken them.

Unique Features: The Books of 1 and 2 Chronicles were originally one (as were Samuel and Kings); it was divided into two books in the fifteenth century. Whereas the Books of Samuel and Kings include the history of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, Chronicles is concerned primarily with the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, which made up the Southern Kingdom.

In 1 Chronicles, there is an emphasis upon the Ark of the Covenant, the Temple, the participants in Temple service, and other aspects of worship, thus providing history from a priestly viewpoint. Both 1 and 2 Chronicles were written with a selective rather than comprehensive historical framework. The author highlighted spiritual lessons and taught moral truths by focusing primarily on positive aspects of the nation's history and leaders. For example, in 1 Chronicles no mention is made of David's sin, Absalom's rebellion, or Adonijah's usurping of the throne.

Summary: The Book of 1 Chronicles has two main sections. The first nine chapters are genealogies, or family histories, that trace the descendants of Adam down to David. Chapters ten through twenty-nine provide a record of the reign of David from his coronation and capture of Jerusalem to his final words and death.

Timeline

Some dates are approximate, as reference materials differ.

See “The Divided Kingdom” four-page timeline included in this unit.

Outline

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A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.*

- I. The genealogies (1:1 — 9:44)
 - A. From Adam to Noah's descendants (1:1-27)
 - B. From Abraham to Isaac's descendants (1:28 — 8:40)
 - C. The record of the returning remnant (9:1-44)
- II. The reign of David (10:1 — 29:30)
 - A. Background: Saul's death (10:1-14)
 - B. The establishment of his kingdom (11:1 — 22:1)
 - C. The organization of the Temple ritual (22:1 — 26:32)
 - D. The organization of the civil affairs (27:1-34)
 - E. The final acts of David (28:1 — 29:30)



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“These are the sons of Israel; Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun, Dan, Joseph, and Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher.” (1 Chronicles 2:1-2)

Several years ago, I was browsing through an online ancestry site and on a whim, typed in the names of my grandparents. To my surprise, when I entered my maternal grandfather’s name, I found a treasure trove of family information. That led me to a distant cousin who had done extensive research into our family roots and had traced our shared ancestors as far back as the late 1700s. She graciously shared the historical materials she had gathered, including a family tree and a transcription of my great-grandfather’s handwritten diary from the early 1900s.

What fun our family had looking at the names, birth and death dates, and biographical details of our predecessors! It was interesting to note how many had the same given name (James and Mary were common, but I also found an Ambrose and an Artimesia), and how many children each one had (the great-grandfather of my great-grandfather had nine!). I pulled out a United States map and traced where different branches of the family had settled—they were scattered all the way from New York on the East Coast to Washington on the West. I learned that we have Revolutionary and Civil War veterans among our ancestors, along with schoolteachers, farmers, lumberjacks, and millers. The thought came to me: I wonder how many of the individuals on our family tree were born-again Christians? How exciting it will be to meet them one day in Heaven!

While the ancestral data we acquired about our clan was intriguing, the genealogical records in our text today go back further than any other family tree in existence. This record begins with Adam, the first man ever to inhabit this earth. The lengthy list of his descendants reminds us that God is interested in every individual.

It is amazing to consider that although billions of people have lived on earth since the time of Adam, God knows every name and remembers the most seemingly insignificant details about each one. He knows all about John Hulce, the great-grandfather of my great-grandfather, who “received a good common school education” and later married Abigail, the daughter of a Revolutionary War general. He knows what happened to blacksmith Jerome Maxwell, who was last

heard from in 1862; his family assumed he was killed by Indians on the trail between Fort Walla Walla and Sacramento. He knows all about Silas Maxwell, whose three sons were nearly destroyed financially when the Chicago Fire of 1871 consumed their lumber business. He knows about me! He knows about you! We are more than just names on a list; we are unique individuals known and loved by God.

From cover to cover, the Bible reveals what immense concern God has for His whole creation and for each one of us individually. Today, make it a point to reflect upon God’s very personal interest in you. How heart-warming it is to know that, no matter what our ancestral line and heritage, we matter to Him! He cares for us, He has a plan for us, He will not forsake us, and He wants us to spend eternity with Him.

BACKGROUND

The genealogies in the first eight chapters of 1 Chronicles are an official record—though incomplete and selective—of the families of Israel and Judah prior to their captivity. Not every descendant or generation is included because the records were not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to establish family lines. Chapter 1 lists the descendants of Adam to Noah and his sons, and then from Shem to Abraham to Jacob. Chapters 2-8 provide genealogical records for Jacob’s descendants, the tribes of Israel. Throughout these chapters, the word “son” can also be translated as “descendant.”

The author of Chronicles conveyed a brief historical account of Israel’s history and evidence of the continuity of God’s involvement in Israel’s past. For post-exile Jews facing the challenge of resettling the Promised Land, history would provide a reliable basis for reconstruction. Genealogical records would ensure that rightful heirs be allowed to repossess their inheritance in the established tribal areas. In addition, these records would provide a basis for reinstating the provisions of the Year of Jubilee and hereditary requirements of the Levitical worship system.

These chapters have theological as well as historical significance. The lengthy genealogies substantiate Old Testament prophecies that the Messiah would descend from Abraham and David (see Genesis 12:1-3 and 2 Samuel 7:12-13). These records, along with Jesus’ lineage given in the New Testament (see Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38), confirm that Jesus descended from David as prophesied. Thus, the genealogical record of 1 Chronicles was later used in the New Testament to substantiate the lineage of Christ.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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I. The genealogies

A. From Adam to Noah's descendants (1:1-27)

1. The genealogy to Noah's sons (1:1-4)
2. The families of Noah's sons (1:5-27)
 - a. The sons of Japheth (1:5-7)
 - b. The sons of Ham (1:8-16)
 - c. The sons of Shem (1:17-27)
 - (1) From Shem to Joktan's sons (1:17-23)
 - (2) From Shem to Abraham (1:24-27)

B. From Abraham to Isaac's descendants (1:28—8:40)

1. The family of Ishmael (1:28-31)
2. The sons of Keturah (1:32-33)
3. The genealogy of Isaac's sons (1:34—8:40)
 - a. The sons of Esau (1:34-54)
 - (1) The genealogy (1:34-42)
 - (2) The kings of Edom (1:43-54)
 - b. The sons of Israel (Jacob) (2:1—8:40)
 - (1) Summary (2:1-2)
 - (2) Judah (2:3—4:23)
 - (a) From Judah to Hezron (2:3-8)
 - (b) The clan of Hezron (2:9-55)
 - [1] Ram's descendants (2:9-17)
 - [2] Caleb's descendants (2:18-24)
 - [3] Jerahmeel's descendants (2:25-41)
 - [4] Other descendants of Caleb (2:42-55)
 - (c) The sons of David (3:1-24)
 - [1] David's sons (3:1-9)
 - [2] David's line (3:10-16)
 - [3] Jeconiah's sons (3:17-24)
 - (d) Other clans of Judah (4:1-23)
 - (3) Simeon (4:24-43)
 - (4) The Transjordan tribes (5:1-26)
 - (a) Reuben (5:1-10)
 - (b) Gad (5:11-17)
 - (c) Their accomplishments (5:18-22)
 - (d) Half of Manasseh (5:23-24)
 - (e) Their demise (5:25-26)

(5) Levi (6:1-81)

- (a) The high-priestly line (6:1-15)
- (b) The Levitical genealogy (6:16-30)
- (c) The chief musicians of David (6:31-48)
- (d) The sons of Aaron (6:49-53)
- (e) The land assignments (6:54-81)
 - [1] To the Kohathites (6:54-61)
 - [2] To the Gershonites (6:62-76)
 - [3] To the Merarites (6:77-81)
- (6) Issachar (7:1-5)
- (7) Benjamin (7:6-12)
- (8) Naphtali (7:13)
- (9) Half of Manasseh (7:14-19)
- (10) Ephraim (7:20-29)
 - (a) The genealogy (7:20-27)
 - (b) The settlements (7:28-29)
- (11) Asher (7:30-40)
- (12) Benjamin (8:1-40)
 - (a) The genealogy (8:1-28)
 - (b) The lineage of Saul (8:29-40)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. The genealogies in today's text not only list names, but also give insight regarding some of the people. Based on 1 Chronicles 4:10, what is Jabez remembered for?

2. What do you think this genealogical record supports?

3. God not only knows every biographical detail about us, but He also knows the thoughts and intents of our hearts. In what ways should this motivate our behavior before Him?

CONCLUSION

We are not just names on a list. God views us as real individuals with real histories and real futures. He sees each one of us with specificity and detail, and He cares about us!



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And they lodged round about the house of God, because the charge was upon them, and the opening thereof every morning pertained to them.” (1 Chronicles 9:27)

Have you ever thought about who opens your church before each service? In Portland, one of several faithful men goes to the building early on Sunday morning to unlock inner doors and turn on some lights in preparation for Sunday school. Then he returns ahead of everyone else to unlock the outside doors and be a security person. Most of these men live nearby.

Generations of my family have lived on or near the Apostolic Faith campground across the street from the church. During my early childhood, my grandparents lived there in a small house, and my grandfather helped with maintenance. Later, my uncle and his family moved into that house, and he also did maintenance. When I was grown, my parents lived in houses that were adjacent to the campground property.

Why did my family members live where they did? They had a heart for the work of the Gospel and wanted to help with the day-to-day maintenance and operation of the church properties. Serving God was their joy.

Having a heart for the work of the Gospel will mean being willing to perform “small” tasks in God’s service. One minister told of an occasion when he stopped by his home church and was a little frustrated because there were no paper towels in the restroom dispenser. He wondered who had cleaned the church last and why the paper towels had not been replenished. Then the Spirit of God spoke to his heart, and he realized he knew where the supply of paper towels was kept, where the key to the dispenser was, and how to resupply it. He did the task himself! The Lord was helping him see the importance of doing his part, even in small matters.

Today’s text tells of Levites and gatekeepers who stayed near the house of God so they could take care of the daily details. It seems many of them lived in different villages, but they came in rotation to participate in the maintenance and care of the Temple and surrounding grounds. These people were dedicated to the service of God, and are examples to us today.

Have you ever thought about what role you can have in service for God? Many seemingly insignificant efforts are needed for a church to operate, and a successful organization has people behind the scenes who

are regularly doing their parts. If God is calling you, be willing to say yes and be faithful in whatever you do.

BACKGROUND

This chapter mentions several specific groups of inhabitants in Jerusalem following the exile. In addition to the family heads and tribal remnants (verses 1-9), there were three groups of individuals who were responsible for the religious duties: the priests (verses 10-13), the Levites (verses 14-16), and the Nethinims (verses 17-34). At the close of the chapter (verses 35-44), Saul’s genealogy is repeated in preparation for the writer’s focus on King David. A genealogy similar to the one in this chapter can be found in Nehemiah 11, but the names differ. Scholars have varying viewpoints for this, but it is possible that this list was made shortly after the exiles returned, and Nehemiah’s list was made later.

“The book of the kings” in verse 1 does not refer to 1 and 2 Kings in the Bible. Rather, it was a reference to records from the Jewish archives.

A distinction was made between “the Israelites” mentioned in verse 2, who were the general inhabitants of the land, and the three groups who had religious duties. The priests were assigned to deal with sacred matters, and the Levites were to help them. Nethinims means “given ones” and their responsibility was to help the Levites with the menial duties of Israel’s worship. While there were many priests who returned to Israel after the exile, for an unknown reason very few Levites came back. Also, the number of returning Nethinims was not large, and consequently, the duties of those who did come became greater and their names were included in this list.

The three names in verse 10 could have been families of priests. During David’s reign, twenty-four groups of priests were organized to serve in rotation. There were many priests who were committed to the service of God (see verse 13).

Porters in verse 17 were the gatekeepers who opened and closed, as well as guarded, the sanctuary entrances. Additionally, they helped with other worship duties. According to verse 20, their genealogy traces back to Phinehas, son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron. David instituted the organizational system of the priests and Temple workers, but preliminary organizing may have been started by Samuel, or he may have given some concepts to David.

Verses 25 and 27 indicate that these people may have also worked in rotation, staying near the sanctuary during their time of service and then returning to

their villages. Their responsibilities included supervision of the tithes and also of the “ministering vessels,” which were counted before and after their use (see verse 28). These may have been particularly expensive items.

Verses 35-44 restate Saul’s lineage. They start the writer’s transition from Saul to David, which is developed in subsequent chapters.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- I. The genealogies
 - C. The record of the returning remnant (9:1-44)
 - 1. The restoration (9:1-2)
 - 2. The inhabitants of Jerusalem (9:3-44)
 - a. The tribal remnants (9:3-9)
 - b. The priests (9:10-13)
 - c. The Levites (9:14-16)
 - d. The duties of the Levites (9:17-34)
 - (1) The Temple guards (9:17-27)
 - (2) The Temple servers (9:28-32)
 - (3) The Temple singers (9:33-34)
 - e. The house of Saul (9:35-44)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 13, how did the writer of Chronicles describe the priests?

2. In verses 28-33, some of the porters were given other responsibilities besides being “over the chambers and treasuries of the house of God” (verse 26). List three of these.

3. What might be some indications that God is prompting you to do a service for Him?

CONCLUSION

Dedicated people can be an inspiration to help us be willing to serve God in whatever capacity He chooses.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him, and he was wounded of the archers. Then said Saul to his armourbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. So Saul took a sword, and fell upon it.”
(1 Chronicles 10:3-4)

Recently my husband and I attended the memorial service for a friend and fellow believer. What a joyous occasion it was as friends from church, the school where she worked, and the community where she lived gathered to celebrate her life. Among the many tributes given that day, we heard two thoughts expressed repeatedly: she loved people and she was an example of faithfulness in her service to God. She clearly had been a friend to many both young and old, and the abundant comments about her constant smile proved it was legendary. All who labored with her in the work of the Lord spoke of her consistency and dedication to every task given her. What a beautiful testimony! When our friend stepped from this world into the next, we know it was a glorious and triumphal entry into her eternal Home.

What a contrast to the death of Saul that we read about in today's text. Saul's last years were marked by periods of depression and gloom. While he had tried sporadically to please God, his life was characterized by inconsistency, disobedience, and self-will. Enraged by jealousy, he had tried to kill David a number of times. And this chapter reveals that he faced death the same way he had faced life—he took matters into his own hands. When Saul's army was defeated and he was wounded in battle, he took his own life. What a tragic end for this first king of Israel, who had started his reign with such great promise! And how different from the end of our friend's earthly life—one who was faithful to her God from the day she gave her heart to Him until she stepped into Heaven.

Pondering how we will leave this earth highlights the importance of how we live on this earth. A glorious entry into Heaven at the *end* of life's road requires a faithful walk with God as we *travel* that road. Godly lives are built by faithfulness one day after another. Each obedient action may seem small in itself, but it takes us one step closer to our heavenly goal.

Let's purpose that by the help and grace of God, the end of our lives in this world will be triumphant rather than tragic, so we can spend eternity with Him!

BACKGROUND

After establishing Israel's ancestry in the genealogies presented in previous chapters, in chapter 10 the author of Chronicles turned to the history of the Hebrew kingdom. The account of Saul's death is provided as a preamble to the narrative that focuses on David for the remainder of the book. A brief overview of the battle on the slopes of Mount Gilboa is given in verses 1-3, followed by a description of the mortally wounded Saul taking his own life (verses 4-6). The dark aftermath of battle, the desecration of Saul's body, and the respectful actions of the “valiant men” of Jabesh who buried his remains are described in verses 7-13. The closing verse of this chapter is a transition, as the writer took up his purpose to recount David's kingship.

Mount Gilboa, where Saul's army assembled for battle, was deep in Israel's territory. The victory the Philistines won there was so significant that the people fled in terror before the Philistines, allowing the invaders to come in and occupy their cities. The Philistine victory effectively cut Israel in half from west to east. The remainder of the nation then became extremely vulnerable to complete overthrow by the Philistines.

Saul's sons were impacted by the judgment of God against their father. Even courageous Jonathan was slain, but he died as he had lived—loyally fighting to the very end for God and country.

The men of Jabesh-gilead, mentioned in verses 11-12, had reason to honor Saul. Many years earlier, Saul had delivered the people of their city from Ammonite invaders (see 1 Samuel 11:1-11). No doubt it was gratitude that motivated the “valiant men” of Jabesh to retrieve the remains of Saul and give his body an honorable burial. According to 2 Samuel 2:4-7, after David took the throne, he rightly thanked these men for their kindness on behalf of Saul, Jonathan, and Saul's other sons.

Because of Saul's disobedience and rebellion, God had stated He would take the kingdom from him and give it to “a man after His own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14). Though many years passed before this happened, after the death of Saul, God “turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse” (verse 14).

Much of the material in chapter 10 is also found in 1 Samuel 31:1-13.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- II. The reign of David
 - A. Background: Saul's death (10:1-14)
 - 1. The death of Saul (10:1-6)
 - 2. The burial of Saul (10:7-12)
 - 3. The cause of Saul's decline (10:13-14)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 2, which sons of Saul did the Philistines slay in the battle on Mount Gilboa?

2. Since Saul was mortally wounded by archers, what do you think is meant by the statement in verse 14 that the Lord slew Saul?

3. What do the actions of the valiant men of Jabesh-gilead teach us about what our attitudes should be toward those in authority over us?

CONCLUSION

Saul's tragic end teaches a vital lesson: if we want a triumphant end to our time on earth, we must consistently live in obedience and faithfulness to God.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Therefore came all the elders of Israel to the king to Hebron; and David made a covenant with them in Hebron before the LORD; and they anointed David king over Israel, according to the word of the LORD by Samuel.” (1 Chronicles 11:3)

“Pick me! Pick me!” I remember hearing those words shouted many times when I was younger. Have you ever been the last one chosen for a team? For me, elementary school physical education classes were not my favorite part of the day. That was especially true when two captains took turns selecting their teams for the game we were going to play. Not being very good at sports, you can guess that I was never one of the first few called. It seemed like the time waiting to hear my name was endless, and at times, humiliating!

Our text today tells of David becoming king over Israel. David had not been waiting to be chosen for that role. Probably such an idea had never crossed his mind before Samuel came to his father’s house to anoint the next ruler of Israel! However, while David did not wait to be chosen, waiting was required after his anointing by Samuel. God’s Word records that it was twenty years before David was finally crowned! That was a long time to look for the fulfillment of God’s promise. However, this chapter of 1 Chronicles demonstrates that God holds the timing of every event in His control.

In William Buel Stevens’ well-known hymn, “Farther Along,” he expressed some thoughts about waiting. The lyrics contain these words that can encourage us when we need to wait for God’s timing.

*Farther along we’ll know all about it,
Farther along we’ll understand why;
Cheer up, my brother, live in the sunshine,
We’ll understand it all by and by.¹*

David learned that God’s promises are worth waiting for, even if His timetable doesn’t match our expectations. We want to learn that lesson too, and wait patiently for God to fulfill His promises to us according to His perfect plan.

BACKGROUND

This chapter records how David was crowned king by the elders of Israel and subsequently took control of Jerusalem and made it his capital city (verses 1-9). The remainder of the chapter, verses 10-47, provides a list of David’s bravest warriors.

At the time of the text, it had been over twenty years since the Prophet Samuel had come to Jesse’s home and anointed David to be king. While Saul had continued to reign for most of those years, the Lord was preparing David for his future responsibilities. (Additional details of how David came into power are found in the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel.)

David and his supporters were living in the city of Hebron, approximately eighteen miles southwest of Jerusalem, when news came that King Saul and his son Jonathan had been killed in battle (see 1 Chronicles 10). Jonathan was David’s closest friend, and although Saul had been David’s adversary for years, David honored Saul as God’s anointed king, so he grieved the loss of both men.

Following Saul’s death, David reigned over Judah for seven-and-one-half years (see 2 Samuel 2:4,11). This period of David’s reign is not recorded by the writer of Chronicles.

At the beginning of today’s text, all of Israel was looking to David for leadership, remembering his deeds of valor when Saul was king. The elders of Israel came to David in Hebron, David made a covenant with them “before the LORD,” and they anointed David king over all of Israel, “according to the word of the LORD by Samuel” (verse 3).

Verses 4-8 tell how David and his soldiers went to Jerusalem and overcame the Jebusites who were the inhabitants there. David chose Jerusalem as the capital for his government. Politically, it was ideal since it was geographically near the center of the kingdom. Although it rested on a tribal border, it was in a neutral territory. Militarily, its location on a high ridge made it easier to defend. Still today, Jerusalem is at times referred to as the “City of David.”

David’s power and fame increased as a direct result of his devotion to and trust in God, his faithful dedication in following the Lord’s will, and the fact that he gave God the glory for his accomplishments. Verse 9 records that “David waxed greater and greater: for the LORD of hosts was with him.”

The remainder of the chapter is a record of “the chief of the mighty men” of David’s army and a list of some of their accomplishments. Of note was Eleazar, whose actions changed the course of a battle against the Philistines (verses 12-14). Though the people fled from before the Philistines, he stood his ground and was saved by God’s deliverance.

Verses 15-19 tell of the three captains who risked their lives to obtain water from the well of Bethlehem for David. David was so honored by their courage

that he felt unworthy to drink the water, and instead poured it out before the Lord.

Verses 20-40 record several other victories that were won by these valiant men, followed by a list of those who led the military forces that supported David's reign.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- II. The reign of David
 - B. The establishment of his kingdom
 - 1. The securing of David's throne
 - a. The anointing of David (11:1-3)
 - b. The capture of Jerusalem (11:4-9)
 - c. The list of David's warriors (11:10-47)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Today's text tells us that in contrast to Saul's reign, David "waxed greater and greater." Based on verse 9, why was that so?

2. Why do you think three of David's men risked their lives to bring him water from the well of Bethlehem?

3. David's power and fame increased as a direct result of his obedience and trust in God. How should we conduct ourselves when offered recognition for our actions?

CONCLUSION

God fulfilled His promise and David became king of Israel according to His timetable. Just as God was sovereign over history, He is still directing events today to accomplish His will. Let's live "according to the word of the LORD," patiently waiting to see His plan unfold in our lives.

NOTES

1. Stevens, William, "Farther Along," *Selected Hymns* (Anderson, Indiana: Gospel Trumpet Publishing, 1911), <http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/f/a/r/t/farthera.htm>



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“For at that time day by day there came to David to help him, until it was a great host, like the host of God.” (1 Chronicles 12:22)

Leaders cannot be successful without supportive followers, and as the complexity of a leader’s task grows, ideally the support team around him or her will grow as well.

Here in the United States, the word “leader” may bring to mind the president of our country. Today, the president has a cabinet that includes the vice-president and the heads of many federal executive departments, thousands of people who work under them, and a White House staff that numbers more than five hundred. However, that was not always the case.

The first President of the United States, George Washington, had just four men who served as advisors and assisted him in carrying out his duties. Thomas Jefferson had one messenger and one secretary at his disposal, and he personally paid both of their salaries—in fact, it was not until 1857 that a U. S. President was provided with a personal secretary. Abraham Lincoln responded to his own mail, while Grover Cleveland often answered the White House telephone. Until the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt, there were never more than six people working in the White House.

From 1933 to 1939, in response to the Great Depression, Roosevelt expanded the scope of the federal government’s powers. In 1939, he asked Congress to approve the Reorganization Act of 1939, which created the Executive Office of the President. In the decades since, the presidential support staff has grown exponentially to the bureaucracy it is today.

This chapter of 1 Chronicles continues the record of King David’s support staff—the valiant and courageous men who pledged themselves to David and proved their loyalty to him. Our focus verse relates that men from around the country continued coming to David until the number supporting him was like “the host of God.”

Many of us will never be called upon to be leaders, but we can be brave and determined supporters! Just as God drew the men of Israel together and aligned their talents, abilities, and resources behind David, each of us has a supporting role to fill in God’s service. No matter what task is assigned to us—no matter if our names are listed on the ledger of “mighty men” or not—we know that God keeps a record. He

notes every deed done for His cause. And one day, those who have been faithful to God and done their best for the advancement of His Kingdom will be rewarded.

BACKGROUND

After listing in chapter 11 the key military men who had accomplished heroic deeds on behalf of David, the writer of Chronicles expanded the record in chapter 12. This chapter provides two lists of military personnel who joined themselves to David and helped him weld together a powerful nation: those who came to David at Ziklag (verses 1-22), and those from each of the tribes who came to Hebron to make David king over a united Israel (verses 23-37). The chapter concludes with a description of the three-day celebration that took place when David was crowned king (verses 38-40).

Ziklag, referred to in verse 1, was the Philistine city where David fled for sanctuary when he was pursued by Saul. According to 1 Samuel 27:5-7, King Achish gave the city to David and his army of six hundred, and it became David’s military base.

Notably, among the soldiers who came to Ziklag to pledge allegiance to David were some from the tribe of Benjamin, Saul’s own tribe (verse 2). Even Saul’s own “brethren” had deserted him and had determined to aid David in becoming the next king of Israel. These men of Benjamin were trained in the use of bows and slings, so they would have been a valuable addition militarily.

The Gadites, listed in verses 8-15, were impressive warriors who were expert in the use of shield and spear—in other words, they were skilled in both defensive and offensive combat. The comment that their faces “were like the faces of lions” (verse 8) means that they were unafraid, fierce, and terrifying to their enemies. Perhaps as proof of the courageous valor of these men, the writer described in verse 15 an instance when these brave warriors had crossed the Jordan at a dangerous time.

In verses 16-22, David received soldiers from Benjamin and Judah at his stronghold. The precise location of this hold is uncertain, but it may have been the cave of Adullam described in 1 Samuel 22:1. Alternatively, it may have been one of the strongholds of En-gedi where David sometimes sought refuge during his flight from Saul (see 1 Samuel 23:29—24:10), or it may have been Ziklag itself as his home base. The fact that David “went out to meet them” (verse 17) is an indicator of his trust in

God, because he had justifiable reason to doubt their loyalty. Then “the spirit came upon Amasai,” the chief captain, and he declared the group’s favorable intentions toward David. With that validation, David received them and gave them leadership roles in his army.

Verses 23-37 give details regarding the military men representing each tribe who came to David in Hebron. Special mention is made of the representatives of Issachar in verse 32; the statement that they “were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do” means they were capable of determining the right course of action for the nation.

David spent seven and one half years in Hebron, and during that time, his power and military support continued to expand.

The final three verses of the chapter describe a great national feast in Israel. The people were so elated at the crowning of their rightful and anointed king that they contributed abundantly by sending in supplies for the celebratory event.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- II. The reign of David
 - B. The establishment of his kingdom
 - 1. The securing of David’s throne
 - d. The soldiers of David against Ziklag (12:1-22)
 - e. The list of those who sought to crown David (12:23-40)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 8, what animals’ characteristics did the writer use in his description of the warriors from Gad?

2. Why do you think such detailed lists are given of the men who joined themselves to David?

3. Although most of us will not engage in physical combat, what attributes of the men described in this chapter would be good for us to emulate in our lives?

CONCLUSION

God assembled a band of men to support David. Just as each of them had unique talents and roles to fill, each of us has a place in God’s service.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And when they came unto the threshingfloor of Chidon, Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark; for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzza, and he smote him, because he put his hand to the ark: and there he died before God.” (1 Chronicles 13:9-10)

“Human error” is a label given to an action that produces unintended negative consequences, when the outcome cannot be attributed to chance or mechanical failure. Sometimes human error results in tragedy.

That was the case on the hazy, moonless night of July 16, 1999, when the single engine plane John F. Kennedy, Jr. was piloting crashed into the Atlantic Ocean near Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts. Though Kennedy was a licensed pilot, he had limited flying experience and had not been cleared for instrument flight. When his scheduled takeoff time was delayed until after dark, Kennedy should have waited for daylight or asked for the help of an experienced pilot. Instead, he turned down an offer by one of his flight instructors to ride along, saying he “wanted to do it alone.”

Tragically, the plane carrying Kennedy, his wife, and her sister never reached its destination. Investigators later determined that Kennedy likely became disoriented while flying over water without any landmarks or visible horizon. At that point, his lack of experience in instrument flying may have led him to take instinctive action, in spite of what his instrument panel was telling him. The result was that all three in the plane perished.

In today’s text, we read of another occasion when human error brought tragic consequences—when the oxen transporting the Ark of the Covenant stumbled, making the Ark tilt, and Uzza instinctively reached out to steady it. While the intentions of David, Uzza, and the others accompanying the Ark were honorable, they were not following the prescribed method for moving this sacred symbol of the presence of God. The Lord had ordained that the Ark was to be carried on the shoulders of the priests who were from the tribe of Levi of the family of Kohath. It was never to be touched—doing so was in direct violation of God’s law and would result in death. Those regulations were seemingly either forgotten or ignored, and the result was that Uzza instantly perished.

David and those present on that fateful day were reminded that obedience to God’s laws is vitally

important. The Ark had been virtually ignored for years during Saul’s reign; perhaps the people had become lax in paying careful attention to God’s instructions regarding it. On that day, they were reminded of the Ark’s significance. The death of Uzza was a means of preserving an awareness of God’s awesome holiness and the necessity of absolute obedience to His commands.

Though we may be sincere in our desire to serve the Lord, we too must learn His requirements and follow them. While God in His mercy does not always immediately punish those who disobey Him, judgment will come someday unless repentance occurs. Let’s learn from the tragedy that befell Uzza that we need to give careful heed to what God says to us, and strive to do all He commands.

BACKGROUND

The events recorded in today’s text did not occur immediately after the events described in chapter 12, but took place sometime after David captured Jerusalem and purposed to make it his capital (chapter 11). In chapter 13, verses 1-8, David determined to make Jerusalem the religious center of the nation and gathered Israel to ask for their help and blessing. Verses 9-14 describe David’s first attempt to transfer the Ark of God to Jerusalem and the death of Uzza (spelled Uzzah in the parallel account in 2 Samuel 6) when he failed to observe the requirements for handling of the Ark.

The “ark of our God” mentioned in verse 3 is also referred to elsewhere in Scripture as the Ark of the Covenant. The word *ark* means “box” or “chest.” God had commanded Moses to make the Ark more than four hundred years before David’s era. At times, it contained the tablets of the Law that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai, a jar of manna, and Aaron’s rod that miraculously budded as a verification of his leadership. It is unclear exactly what was in the Ark at this time. However, 1 Kings 8:9 indicates that later, when King Solomon brought the Ark to the Temple, it only contained the two tables of stone.

Made of acacia wood, the Ark was covered with gold and had an ornate gold lid, referred to as the Mercy Seat. According to Exodus 25:10, its length was two and a half cubits, and its width and height were one and a half cubits. The exact length of a cubit is debated by scholars.

The Ark had been in Kirjath-jearim for about seventy years after its capture by the Philistines. While David’s intention to relocate the Ark to Jerusalem

and the center of Israel's life was good, transporting this sacred symbol by cart was against God's specific command. The Ark was designed to be carried by the priests, consecrated Levites from the family of Kohath (see Numbers 4:15).

For some period of time, the Ark had been at Abinadab's house where Abinadab's sons, Uzza (also spelled Uzzah) and Ahio, may have become accustomed to its presence (see 2 Samuel 6:3). These two men were the ones who guided the cart as the Ark began its journey. The procession was initially joyous; verse 8 of today's text indicates that musicians sang and "played before God with all their might" on harps, psalteries (stringed instruments), timbrels (tambourines), cymbals, and trumpets.

Verses 10-11 record that when Uzza put out his hand to steady the Ark, "the anger of the LORD was kindled" against him, and he died before God. The word *breach* in the statement that the Lord had made "a breach upon Uzza" means "to break in upon." This is the same Hebrew word used to describe God's destruction of the Philistines in 2 Samuel 5:20; it graphically portrays the destroying power of God.

Because of the death of Uzza, David had the Ark temporarily placed in the house of Obed-edom. According to 2 Samuel 6:11, it stayed there for a period of three months, and brought prosperity and blessing to Obed-edom.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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II. The reign of David

- B. The establishment of his kingdom
 - 2. The prosperity of David's reign
 - a. The establishment of God's presence in Jerusalem
 - (1) The Ark removed from Kiriath-jearim (13:1-14)
 - (a) The removal of the Ark (13:1-8)
 - (b) The failure of Uzza (13:9-10)
 - (c) The fear of David (13:11-14)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 7, what term is used to describe the cart? What do you think this implies about the intentions of those who were moving it?

2. Although David had consulted with the captains and leaders of Israel about moving the Ark, who did he *not* consult? Why was this significant?

3. After placing the Ark in the home of Obed-edom, David waited before making a second attempt to move the Ark to Jerusalem. What are the benefits of waiting on God before we make an important decision or life change?

CONCLUSION

Blessings will come to those who obey God's commands, but judgment will come to those who disregard them.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Therefore David inquired again of God; and God said unto him, Go not up after them; turn away from them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And it shall be, when thou shalt hear a sound of going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt go out to battle: for God is gone forth before thee to smite the host of the Philistines.” (1 Chronicles 14:14-15)

Both contemporary and Biblical examples verify that God’s guidance is perfect. It pays to obey even when we do not understand why or what He is doing.

Some years ago, a team of Gospel workers who smuggled Bibles into China waited at a pickup point in a village square. They were supposed to meet a contact who would say a password as proof they could safely deliver the Bibles to him, but the contact did not show up. Finally the team left the area. Stopping at a park for a drink of water, rest, and prayer, they were puzzled. Why had their mission failed when they had looked to God for direction?

After a time, the team became aware of three shabbily dressed men seated a short distance from them. One member of the team felt the Lord leading him to offer these men some water. To his amazement, as he approached, one of the three spoke the designated password in clear English!

Some of the team members spoke a little Chinese, and they were able to piece together the story told by the three men. Two years earlier, God had revealed to these men, who were Christians, that if they would be at this park on this date, they would meet some white people who would have Bibles for them. In faith, they had begun preparing to make the journey, but since they were poor farmers, it had taken a long time to save enough money.

When the needed provisions had finally been obtained, the three had walked for two and a half months from the far north of China. Traveling mostly at night to keep from being arrested, they had climbed mountains, journeyed across a desert, and forded several rivers without a compass or any knowledge of the countryside. All they could explain was that God had shown them where to go. How did they know the password? How could they speak it in English when they knew no English? Their guidance could only have come from God. What rejoicing occurred when the three Chinese men saw the Bibles! Many tears were shed as the team prayed for the Chinese farmers

and gave them food and money for their return journey.¹

In today’s text, David looked to God for guidance about engaging in battle with the Philistines, who had arrayed themselves against Israel. God honored David’s dependence upon Him and gave him detailed instructions regarding how to combat this threat. In our focus verses, David was told to outflank the enemy by coming against them from a grove of mulberry trees, and to listen for a particular sound in the tops of the trees that would signal it was time to attack. David did as God commanded, and the result was a decisive victory for Israel.

Today, are you in the process of seeking God’s guidance about circumstances you face? Are you sincerely seeking the will of God? He does not always answer our prayers for guidance in as detailed a way as He did for the team of Bible smugglers, the Chinese farmers, or David. However, guidance will come if we seek Him for it. As we submit ourselves to Him, we can be assured that He will direct our paths. And His direction is always the best and surest way to go—whether we fully understand or not!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 14 records events early in David’s reign, including God’s blessing through the cooperation of Hiram (verses 1-2), a record of David’s children born to him in Jerusalem (verse 3-7), and David’s victories over the Philistines (verses 8-17). This chapter is inserted between the accounts of David’s two attempts to move the Ark of God to Jerusalem.

In verse 1, the timber and workmen sent to David by Hiram king of Tyre signaled Hiram’s recognition of David as ruler of Israel. The Jewish historian Josephus recorded that Hiram reigned for thirty-four years, and greatly enhanced the city of Tyre through his municipal projects. Bible scholars concur that such a powerful king would not have assisted David in the building of his “house” unless he considered David a significant and legitimate ruler. King Hiram later sent lumber and craftsmen to help Solomon in the construction of the Temple at Jerusalem (see 2 Chronicles 2:3-16).

The list in verses 3-7 of the thirteen children born to David while he was in Jerusalem repeats the list given in 1 Chronicles 3:5-8. Solomon was the fourth of David’s sons to be born in that location.

The account of David’s two victories over the Philistines parallels the record given in 2 Samuel 5:17-25. The Valley of Rephaim mentioned in verse 9

was southwest of Jerusalem and formed part of the boundary between Judah and Benjamin. After gaining the victory over the Philistines in the first battle, David was wise enough to inquire again of the Lord before the second battle, and God directed him differently the second time.

The Philistines brought their idols to the battle, presumably thinking these would help them defeat the Israelites. David's command that the Philistine idols be burned following the battle (verse 12) was an indicator of his purpose to lead the people in worshipping the true God, and was in obedience to God's command recorded in Deuteronomy 7:5.

The "mulberry trees" in verse 15 are thought to have been a species of poplar.

Because David looked to God for his strategy, he was able to beat back the Philistine offensive. According to verse 17, the victory that resulted from David's obedience to God's instructions made him respected and feared among neighboring nations.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- II. The reign of David
 - B. The establishment of his kingdom
 - 2. The prosperity of David's reign
 - a. The establishment of God's presence in Jerusalem
 - (2) The encouragement of David (14:1-17)
 - (a) The friendship of Hiram (14:1-2)
 - (b) The blessing on his family (14:3-7)
 - (c) The defeats of the Philistines (14:8-17)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did King Hiram send to David, and for what purpose? (verse 1)

2. What lesson regarding how God works can we learn from David's two battles with the Philistines?

3. How should we go about obtaining God's direction in our lives?

CONCLUSION

God is able and willing to give clear direction to those who follow Him and seek His guidance.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And David made him houses in the city of David, and prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched for it a tent. Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the LORD chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever.”
(1 Chronicles 15:1-2)

In our text today, David was preparing to move the Ark of God back to Jerusalem, and he was intent on ensuring that this would be done correctly.

When I think about taking care to ensure preparations are done right, I think about Sandra. For nearly a century, the Portland church family has gathered on the Apostolic Faith campground each Memorial Day to prepare for our annual international camp meeting. Sandra is one of many faithful participants. For decades, while others cleaned the tabernacles chairs, wiped down the altars, raked up debris, trimmed bushes, and accomplished various maintenance tasks, Sandra’s role was to help get cabins on the campground ready for occupancy, and she provided a great example of doing cabin preparation right.

If you stayed in a cabin that Sandra worked on, you would have immediately recognized that whoever cleaned your campground “home” did a super job. Every surface would be spotless, having recently undergone a thorough scrubbing. No cobwebs or stray pine needles escaped Sandra’s attention—she would get down on her knees to inspect every nook and cranny! Were the curtains over the windows hanging straight? Was the mirror polished? Had every piece of furniture been wiped down and carefully placed? Sandra made sure those tasks were done. She knew how a cabin should be prepared for occupancy, and she accomplished that task with great care.

In David’s previous attempt to relocate the Ark, as described in 1 Chronicles 13, he had failed to be scrupulously careful. God had given specific instructions about how this symbol of God’s presence was to be transported, and those instructions were not followed. The results had been tragic—a man had died! So this time, as preparations were made for the move, David made sure that every detail was accomplished in accordance with God’s instructions. In our focus verses, he insisted that only Levites were to carry the Ark of God. In verse 12, he instructed the Levites to ensure that each one of them sanctified themselves according to the regulations in the Law. This journey

was to be made with proper reverence, respect, and obedience to what God had commanded.

We can learn several lessons from today’s text. First, it is vitally important to follow God’s instructions precisely. We may not understand the “why” of all He asks us to do, but we should still obey. In addition, we should always do our best in any task we undertake for God. Details matter to Him! When we are careful to obey God and do everything for Him to the best of our abilities, it shows that we value Him above all else.

When David and the elders and people of Israel brought the Ark of God to Jerusalem in the right way, they had joy! We will experience the same when we offer our obedience and best efforts to God.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 15 records David’s transfer of the Ark of God from its temporary location in the house of Obed-edom, to the dwelling place prepared for it in Jerusalem. David’s earlier attempt to move the Ark, as recorded in chapter 13, had not been done according to God’s instructions and had resulted in the death of Uzza. At that time, the Ark was temporarily placed in the house of Obed-edom. According to 2 Samuel 6:11, it stayed there for a period of three months and brought prosperity and blessing to Obed-edom and his household. This time, David ensured that the move was done precisely as God had commanded. Verses 1-24 describe the careful preparations for the move, and verses 25-29 the actual transfer.

The tent that David prepared for the Ark of God was not the Tabernacle itself. The Tabernacle of Moses was located at Gibeon (see 1 Chronicles 16:39).

In verse 2, David instructed the Levites to carry the Ark as God had commanded (see Deuteronomy 10:8). According to verse 5, among the assembled Levites were the sons of Kohath who were specifically given charge of the Ark of God (Numbers 3:29-31) and were responsible for carrying it on their shoulders (Numbers 7:1-9). Prior to undertaking this task, the priests and Levites had been told to “sanctify themselves” (verse 12), meaning they were to purify themselves from every form of uncleanness and avoid anything that would defile. All of this reveals that David had learned from his past mistake. At the first attempt to bring the Ark into Jerusalem, Uzza, who was not a Levite, had touched the Ark with unsanctified hands, and was struck dead. David further acknowledged his earlier errors in verse 13, when he

In addition to carrying the Ark, Levites were responsible to provide music on sacred occasions. Verses 17-24 indicate that David organized four groups of Levites to provide music in the great procession toward Jerusalem. The first group played the cymbals, the second used psalteries, the third had harps, and the fourth consisted of seven priests with trumpets who preceded the Ark. The words *Alamoth* (verse 20) and *Sheminith* (verse 21) probably were references to the tonal range of the instruments being used. Also listed as part of the procession were two sets of doorkeepers, whose role likely was to open and close gates or doors ahead of and behind the procession.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- B. The establishment of his kingdom
- 2. The prosperity of David's reign
 - a. The establishment of God's presence in Jerusalem
- (3) The Ark brought to Jerusalem (15:1-29)
 - (a) The preparations (15:1-15)
 - (b) The procession (15:16-24)
 - (c) The presence (15:25-29)

1. According to verse 13, what was the reason the first attempt to move the Ark to Jerusalem ended in failure?

CONCLUSION

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.”
(1 Chronicles 16:29)**

I grew up during the Great Depression, when times were hard and money was scarce. One day, someone stole the morning’s milk that had been delivered to our front porch. My sister was just a baby, and the milk was needed for her. That day, my father went to work at the sawmill, where his job was to pull slab wood off the conveyor chain that went up to the scrap burner. As he was pulling the slab wood, he spotted a ten-cent piece, and with that dime he was able to buy the necessary milk for my sister. We did not know where that dime came from, but God knew and we gave Him the glory. Over the years, God graciously provided for us many times, blessing us in so many ways that our needs were more than met.

While money is not everything, it is still our medium of exchange, and at times, we have opportunities to “bring an offering” of some of the material blessings God has given us. For example, some years ago my wife became very ill, but the Lord stepped in and helped us through that crisis. We were so thankful for His goodness to us! Not long after that, there was a need for funds to support a youth camp in Romania, and we saw it as an opportunity to give an offering as a token of our appreciation for His goodness. We knew we had been blessed, and we wanted someone else to be blessed as well.

That must have been how David and the people felt in the account recorded in our text today. After many years, the Ark of the Covenant—the symbol of God’s presence and glory—was in its proper place in Israel. What a reason to rejoice! David offered burnt sacrifices and peace offerings to the Lord, and appointed Levites to honor God before the Ark in an ongoing ministry of thanksgiving. Then he delivered a psalm that began with a call to praise. He challenged the people with the words of our focus verse, “Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.”

In his psalm, David listed a number of ways individuals can praise and glorify God. He told the people to “give thanks,” to “make known his deeds,” and to “sing unto him.” He admonished them to “talk . . . of all his wondrous works” and to “glory in his holy

name.” They were to “rejoice” in him, to “seek his face continually,” and to “remember his marvelous works.”

We can never do enough to repay God for all He has done for us, but it is a good idea to try to show our appreciation by giving offerings. In this way, we can be used by God as He fulfills His promise to supply His children’s needs. One time a minister told his congregation, “If God blesses you or answers a prayer, put some shoes on a poor child’s feet or help to feed them!” While shoes and food are not always the specific need, the principle is good advice, and one way we can show our appreciation for God’s goodness to us.

BACKGROUND

Following the description in chapter 15 of David’s moving of the Ark to Jerusalem, chapter 16 of 1 Chronicles covers the celebration that took place when the Ark was placed in its new location (verses 1-6). That was followed by David’s psalm of thanksgiving (verses 7-36), and the appointment of ministers who would serve before the Ark continually (verses 37-43). Additional details about this event are given in 2 Samuel chapter 6.

King David and the people commemorated the placement of the Ark of the Covenant with a celebration that included burnt sacrifices and peace offerings. These sacrifices possibly had been neglected in the first attempt to bring the Ark to Jerusalem, as no mention is made of sacrifices in that account. The burnt sacrifices represented atonement, and the peace offering alluded to reconciliation and the enjoyment of harmony with God.

Verses 2-3 indicate that a distribution of food was made to the people. In verse 3, the word translated “flagon of wine” is *ashiyshah*, which literally means, “something closely pressed together.” Bible scholars generally agree this was actually a reference to dried, pressed cakes made of raisins or grapes.

At the conclusion of the day of celebration, David appointed Levites to provide music and praise to God before the Ark in ongoing ministry (see verses 4-6). This marked a significant transition in the history of Israel’s worship. Prior to that time, songs had been created and performed at special occasions; at this point, David implemented continual worship through music. Although the Levites had been set apart for service at the Tabernacle from the time of Moses, they were more fully organized

by David. From this time forward, there was more system and efficiency in the Levitical ministrations.

David compiled the psalm/song given in verses 8-36 from four psalms already known: Psalms 96, 105, 106, and 107. It includes an admonition and summons to praise the Lord, a record of God's goodness, praise for God's attributes and character, a prayer for salvation, and a closing doxology.

The final verses of this chapter record those who were to lead the worship at Jerusalem and Gibeon. Zadok, who likely had been the high priest under Saul, would serve at the Tabernacle in Gibeon, while Asaph would minister before the Ark in the tent David had prepared at Jerusalem. Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun (called Ethan in 1 Chronicles 15:19) represented the three families of the Levites (see 1 Chronicles 6:33, 39, 44).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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II. The reign of David

B. The establishment of his kingdom

2. The prosperity of David's reign

- a. The establishment of God's presence in Jerusalem
 - (4) The thanksgiving for the Ark (16:1-43)
 - (a) David's sacrifices (16:1-3)
 - (b) David's choir (16:4-6)
 - (c) David's psalm of thanksgiving (16:7-36)
 - (d) David's appointed ministers before the Ark (16:37-43)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 3, after blessing the people in the name of the Lord, what did David give to each man and woman of Israel?

2. What characteristics about David are revealed in this chapter?

3. What are some specific ways we can express our thanks to God?

CONCLUSION

David offered sacrifices to God as a way of expressing his devotion and appreciation for God's blessing. We too can express our thanksgiving to God through offerings of our time, resources, and worship.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And it shall come to pass, when thy days be expired that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be of thy sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build me an house, and I will stablish his throne for ever.” (1 Chronicles 17:11-12)

Promises are a big deal to most children. They certainly were to me when I was young. I remember asking my parents, “Do you promise?” when tentative plans were mentioned regarding a coming event. I figured if I could get my mom or dad to make a promise, the plans assuredly would come to pass.

When it came to commitments made by my siblings or friends, I felt—often rightly, as it happens—that many of them were made a bit too casually. Even when the commitment maker said yes to my question, “Do you promise?” I frequently demanded additional reassurance. “Do you mean it? Do you really, *really* promise?” I would ask. I was not allowed to say the childhood chant my school friends used to verify promises, “Cross your heart and hope to die?” but I sometimes wished I could come up with an equivalent avowal that would provide certainty.

A promise is a declaration or pledge that something will or will not be done . . . but when made by a fallible human being, it is not a guarantee. Even when the person making the promise has every intention of honoring it, circumstances can intervene and cause the most sincere of pledges to be broken.

God’s promises are different. When God makes a promise, we can be absolutely, positively, confidently sure it will happen! Numbers 23:19 tells us, “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible records commitments that God made to people, and every one of those promises has been or will be fulfilled.

In today’s focus verses, God made a wonderful promise to David—that David’s son would build a “house” for God, and that God would establish a hereditary monarchy from David’s descendants that would endure. God was guaranteeing the permanence of David’s line upon the throne!

At a casual glance, we might wonder at the second part of this promise. History tells us that while the descendants of David did rule over Israel for more than four centuries, the nation eventually crumbled

and the Israelites were taken into captivity because of their disobedience. However, God’s promises are true. Although the nation of Israel disappeared for a time, out of the lineage of David came a Son who will one day rule forever—Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

The English pastor and author Charles Spurgeon once said, “Do not treat God’s promises as if they were curiosities for a museum; but believe them and use them.” We use them by learning what God declares in His Word, putting His promises deep into our hearts, and then giving Him space to work them out in our lives day by day. We can depend on God’s promises; they will never fail!

BACKGROUND

This chapter records David’s desire to build a house for the Lord (verses 1-2), God’s denial of that desire and His covenant with David concerning his descendants, as communicated through Nathan the prophet (verses 3-15), and David’s humble prayer of acceptance (verses 16-27). A parallel account of these events is found in 2 Samuel chapter 7. Most Bible historians agree that chronologically, chapter 17 should be placed after the end of the wars described in chapter 18.

Verse 1 relates that David was troubled when he compared his “house of cedars” with the “tent” where the Ark of the Covenant was located. Cedar was especially valued in that era, and the inference is that David lived in a fine, elaborate home.

David shared his desire to build a Temple for God with the Prophet Nathan, and the prophet initially gave his approval. However, that night “the word of God came to Nathan” and he was instructed to tell David he would not be permitted to carry out his plan. Other places in Scripture indicate this was because David was a man of war (see 1 Chronicles 28:3 and 1 Kings 5:3).

God followed that denial with a great promise: that He would build David a “house”—a hereditary monarchy that would endure forever (verses 11-12). In addition, though David would not build a place of worship for God, his son would do so.

David responded to God’s denial and subsequent promise with acceptance and gratitude. He acknowledged his unworthiness and praised God for His greatness, His promises, and His instructions. David’s humble reception of God’s gracious promise is revealed by his repetition ten times of the phrase “thy servant” in his prayer. He concluded by boldly asking that God’s promise be fulfilled as spoken.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- II. The reign of David
 - B. The establishment of his kingdom
 - 2. The prosperity of David's reign
 - b. The promise to the Davidic line (17:1-27)
 - (1) The desire of David toward God (17:1-6)
 - (2) The promise of David's perpetual throne (17:7-15)
 - (3) The prayer and praise of David (17:16-27)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Where did God say He had dwelt since He brought Israel out of Egypt? (verse 5)

2. Why do you think David was able to accept God's denial of his desire with such grace and thanksgiving?

3. What elements do you identify in David's prayer, recorded in verses 16-27, that you can incorporate into your own prayers?

CONCLUSION

God's promises are true. Even though we may not see how they can come to pass, we can rely upon them as David did.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And he put garrisons in Edom; and all the Edomites became David’s servants. Thus the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went.”
(1 Chronicles 18:13)

It is wonderful to know that God is with us. In this focus verse, the word *preserved* implies being safe, and can also mean getting the victory. The phrase “the LORD preserved David” could be translated that the Lord “gave victory to David.” What a blessing!

Antonio Castilho from Angola has also experienced the power of God to keep him safe from harm and give him spiritual victories. Brother Antonio felt the call of God when he was in elementary school, and he responded. From then on, his life was different from his peers because God had made a change in him. As the years passed, the Lord helped him to learn how to live a Christian life, and in time, he became a church leader in another religious organization.

When Brother Antonio was thirty years old, he found a tract from the Apostolic Faith Church and began to study the Bible doctrines. He was hungry for more of God, and in 1991, he visited our church in Lagos, Nigeria. There he received sanctification and the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Those experiences greatly helped Brother Antonio when he returned home with a purpose to establish a church in Angola under the auspices of the Apostolic Faith organization.

The country of Angola experienced a civil war from 1975 until 2002, and the years from 1992 to 1994 were an especially dangerous period. Once, Brother Antonio was in front of the church building when two bombs dropped on the property, damaging one of the buildings, but God helped him escape safely. On two occasions, enemies planted landmines at his entrance gate, but again, he was not harmed.

The church people saw and experienced great suffering during that period. “We saw people dying of hunger and many other terrible things, but God sustained us. Those who came out alive know that it was only due to the grace of God and His divine protection,” Brother Antonio recounted. The church had a baptismal tank in the altar area, and people took refuge there when they needed a place to hide. When some had to flee the city, they stored their belongings in the tank until they could return.

For a while, there was a refugee camp on the church grounds. More than five thousand internally displaced people were accommodated there, which

gave the church workers an opportunity to share the Gospel with them.

Brother Antonio testified that the Lord “preserved” him—gave spiritual victory and kept him safe. Most of us can look back on a point where God intervened for us as well. There is great benefit in doing our best to be obedient and live in God’s will so that we can lean on Him even when circumstances around us are not favorable.

BACKGROUND

Chapters 18-20 summarize the military victories of David and his armies as God helped them conquer Israel’s enemies. Consequently, David’s reputation was enhanced throughout many nations as well as among the Israelites themselves.

The Philistines lived to Israel’s west; they had been Israel’s primary opponent for over fifty years. Gath was the capital, so when David took it along with the nearby towns, Philistia no longer had any strength.

The Moabites were to the east, and more details of this victory are given in 2 Samuel 8. The Moabites who survived this conquest became servants, and the phrase “brought gifts” means they paid tribute, or a type of tax.

The writer of Chronicles gave more details regarding the victory over Syria and its neighbors than he had provided regarding the previous nations (verses 3-11). Syria was to Israel’s north, and control of this area increased the size of Israel. Zobah was an independent kingdom at the time, and was north of both Israel and Syria. Zobah and Syria allied against Israel but were defeated. Hamath was a small kingdom nearby that was an enemy of Zobah and Syria. Hamath’s king, Tou (or Toi in 2 Samuel 8:9), gave gifts to David and congratulated him.

Israel’s military conquests, which brought spoil and tribute from conquered nations, resulted in wealth for the nation. Verses 8 and 11 state that David dedicated this wealth to the Lord. The brass was used later when Solomon constructed the Temple.

Edom was to the south of Israel. In verse 12 the credit for this victory is given to Abishai, while 2 Samuel 8:13 says it was David. As king, David no doubt commissioned Abishai to lead in this battle, and thus the victory is attributed to both.

Verse 14 points out that David “executed judgment and justice among all his people.” He was fair and honored God, and God “preserved him” (verses 6 and 13).

The closing verses of this chapter note some of David's leaders. Scholars state that the name Abimelech in verse 16 is spelled Ahimelech in 2 Samuel 8:17 and 1 Chronicles 24:3.

The Cherethites and Pelethites are thought to be foreigners, perhaps Philistines, who had joined with David when he was escaping from Saul. When David became king, these men were among his bodyguards.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- II. The reign of David
 - B. The establishment of his kingdom
 - 2. The prosperity of David's reign
 - c. The wars of David
 - (1) The military conquests of David (18:1-17)
 - (a) The defeat of the Philistines (18:1)
 - (b) The defeat of the Moabites (18:2-4)
 - (c) The defeat of the Syrians (18:5-8)
 - (d) The gifts from Tou of Hamath (18:9-11)
 - (e) The defeat of the Edomites (18:12-13)
 - (f) The administration of David (18:14-17)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What prompted Tou, king of Hamath, to send gifts to David? (verses 9-10)

2. What are some of the ways a leader shows that he "executed judgement and justice"?

3. When difficult situations come, how can we know that God is preserving us?

CONCLUSION

God has promised to never leave or forsake His people, so He can be trusted to take us through whatever we face.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people, and for the cities of our God: and let the LORD do that which is good in his sight.” (1 Chronicles 19:13)

Courage is an admirable quality. At the Battle of the Bulge during World War II, over twenty thousand United States soldiers were captured. Roddie Edmonds from Knoxville, Tennessee, was among more than one thousand non-commissioned officers who were taken to a prisoner-of-war camp called Stalag IX-A in Ziegenhain, Germany. As the highest-ranking non-commissioned officer of the group, Roddie was their commander.

One evening, the prisoners were told that the next day those who were Jewish were to present themselves. Roddie told his fellow prisoners that they would all stand together in formation, and they did. When the camp commandant, Major Siegmann, saw this, he was furious and said they could not all be Jews. Roddie said, “We are all Jews here.” The Major aimed his Luger pistol at Roddie and ordered him to have the Jewish men step forward. Roddie replied, “According to the Geneva Convention, we only have to give our name, rank, and serial number. If you shoot me, you will have to shoot all of us, and after the war you will be tried for war crimes.”¹ One survivor said Roddie “wasn’t even shaking, but the commandant was.”² Siegmann put away his gun, turned around, and walked away. Before long the war ended and the prisoners were rescued.

Roddie Edmonds died in 1985 without receiving acclaim for his courage. In February of 2015, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Israel recognized him as “Righteous Among the Nations” and the award was delivered to his son on January 27, 2016, in Washington D.C.

Today’s text recounts a battle where Israel’s army was surrounded by their enemies. In the focus verse, Joab was exhorting the warriors to have courage. It is important to note that he also encouraged them to look to God for help, and the Lord miraculously gave the victory.

Maybe today you are facing a situation that requires courage. Perhaps you feel insufficient, unsure what to do, or that you lack the necessary strength. Look to God! He is the source of true courage, and He has promised to give His people help in their time of need.

BACKGROUND

Today’s text continues the summary of the military victories for David and Israel’s armies.

Chapter 19 is a parallel to 2 Samuel 10. The Ammonites were from east of the Jordan River and were long-time foes of Israel. However, at some point Nahash the king of Ammon had extended kindness to David. When Nahash died, David wanted to give condolences to Hanun, Nahash’s son. The princes of Ammon were suspicious of this effort, and they humiliated David’s messengers by cutting off half their beards and part of their clothing. The Israelites wore full beards, and shaving off half was extremely insulting and offensive. These demeaning actions made David angry. The word *odious* in verse 6 means “to be abhorred” and the parallel passage in 2 Samuel 10:6 says that “they stank before David.”

Seeing war was imminent, the Ammonites spent a “thousand talents of silver” to hire allies. This was an enormous amount of money, since on another occasion, one hundred talents was the wage given to 100,000 warriors (see 2 Chronicles 25:6).

When Joab, David’s army captain, saw that Israel’s warriors were between their enemies, he divided his army, putting one group under the leadership of his brother Abishai. God gave Israel the victory, and the Syrians who had been hired as mercenary forces fled. The last verse of chapter 19 says, “Neither would the Syrians help the children of Ammon any more.”

Chapter 20 begins almost exactly as 2 Samuel 11. However, the writer of Chronicles did not include the account of David’s sin regarding Bathsheba. This likely was because the writer was focusing on encouraging the Jews who had returned from Babylonian captivity by reminding them of how God had used David and blessed Israel under his leadership.

In chapter 20, Israel was again fighting the Ammonites. Rabbah was the capital of Ammon. It consisted of two areas—a lower portion along the river, and an upper fortress that protected the city. The parallel text in 2 Samuel 12:30-31 indicates that Joab had overcome the lower part of the city, and then called for David to come for the battle against the fortress so that credit for the victory would go to David.

Verses 4-8 of chapter 20 are a summary of conflicts with giants and their descendants. Similar information is found in 2 Samuel 21:18-22.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- II. The reign of David
 - B. The establishment of his kingdom
 - 2. The prosperity of David's reign
 - c. The wars of David
 - (2) The rebellion of the Ammonites (19:1 — 20:3)
 - (a) Hanun's insult and insurrection (19:1-9)
 - (b) Joab's rout of the Ammonites (19:10-15)
 - (c) David's defeat of the Syrians (19:16-19)
 - (d) David's revenge at Rabbah (20:1-3)
 - (3) The defeat of the Philistine giants (20:4-8)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to 1 Chronicles 19:5, what did David tell his humiliated messengers to do?

2. How should we react when our efforts to show kindness are misunderstood?

3. What are some situations today where we might need to "be of good courage"?

CONCLUSION

God can provide courage in situations that seem hopeless if we look to Him.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Then David said to Ornan, Grant me the place of this threshingfloor, that I may build an altar therein unto the LORD: thou shalt grant it me for the full price: that the plague may be stayed from the people.” (1 Chronicles 21:22)

Early in our married life, my husband and I lived for a time in Southeast Asia. One of my favorite activities during our stay there was walking to the nearby street market, with its sidewalk vendors, carts, and open-front shops. The variety of goods fascinated me. Women vendors squatted beside huge rubber tubs of live fish and dried squid, and piles of fruits, vegetables, and spices. Small storefronts displayed kitchen pots and pans, plastic containers of every size, and all kinds of household utensils. Eager merchants gestured to stacks of folded fabric, colorful dresses, men’s suits, shirts, and t-shirts. There were mountains of handbags, wallets, and shoes, and an unending array of street food.

What made excursions to the market especially intriguing was watching the process involved in making a purchase. Bargaining with vendors was an accepted part of the culture, and the discussions regarding potential sales were energetic. Though I had only limited understanding of the language, the facial expressions and gestures that accompanied these exchanges were self-explanatory! Back and forth the words flew, until the would-be buyer either produced payment or walked away. Negotiating a price that was acceptable to both buyer and seller clearly was a skill.

In today’s text, a very different type of buyer and seller negotiation took place. When David wanted to purchase land from Ornan the Jebusite to build an altar to the Lord, no bargaining took place. In fact, the reverse was true! Ornan generously offered to give David his threshingfloor free of charge, along with his oxen for burnt offerings, his threshing instruments for wood, and wheat for the meat offering. However, David was not looking for a bargain. He insisted on paying the full price for what he purchased from Ornan because he knew that it would not be a worthy offering to the Lord if it cost him nothing.

For Christians, this is a principle worth pondering. What sacrifices of time, resources, or praise are we offering to God? What is the personal cost to us? The true value of what we offer is known only to God, because He reads our hearts.

Let us follow David’s example and be sure that we are not subtly looking for a bargain, or offering God something we do not particularly value. God deserves our best!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 21 describes David’s sin in taking a census of Israel (verses 1-6) and the plague that came as a punishment (verses 7-17). David’s purchase of land for an altar is recorded in verses 18-27, and verses 28-30 describe the offering to the Lord made there. Later, the Temple was built upon that site, so chapters 21-22 are regarded as an introduction to David’s Temple building preparation.

The numbering of the people took place after Israel’s great victory over the Ammonites in chapter 20. This suggests that David’s census may have been based in sinful pride, and reflective of a dependence on the size of his military rather than in God’s ability to protect His people.

In ancient cultures, a man only had the right to count what belonged to him. Israel did not belong to David but to God, so counting should have taken place only at God’s command. In verse 3, David’s military commander, Joab, objected that the proposed action was both unnecessary and “a cause of trespass,” inviting trouble for Israel. The parallel account in 2 Samuel 24:4 states that the captains of the army also warned David against such a step, but David went ahead with the census, and his action impacted all of Israel.

According to the total that Joab delivered to David in verse 5, there were 1,570,000 fighting men “that drew sword” among the twelve tribes, suggesting that the total population of Israel may have been about six million at that time.

God was displeased with what David had done. At His direction, Gad the seer told David to choose from three judgments:

- Three years of famine. While this would cause the death of some in Israel, the wealthy would survive. This would have included David and his household.
- Three months of defeat at the hand of Israel’s foes. This loss would occur primarily among Israel’s soldiers.
- Three days of pestilence in the land at the hand of God. The other two options could have insulated the king and his family from the punishment, but David knew that he deserved the chastisement of God. He chose

this option, knowing it was preferable to be in the hand of God rather than his enemies, “for very great are his mercies” (verse 13).

Had the pestilence caused David’s death, it could have brought chaos throughout the land, invasion by Israel’s enemies, and perhaps even the complete overthrow of the nation. However, David’s life was spared, though the plague that swept through Israel caused seventy thousand deaths. When David cried out to God in repentance, God relented and the plague was stayed.

Through Gad, David was instructed to set up an altar to the Lord on the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite (referred to as Araunah in the parallel account in 2 Samuel). In verse 25, “the place” may have included the whole area of Mount Moriah. This location had both a rich history and a significant future. According to Genesis 22:2 and 2 Chronicles 3:1, it was the spot where Abraham offered Isaac and where Solomon’s Temple soon would be built. Although Ornan offered to give David the land, David insisted on paying six hundred shekels of gold for the site because he wanted to make a sacrifice to God that came at a personal cost.

The final three verses of the text serve as a connecting link between this account and David’s preparations to build the Temple, as described in chapter 22.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- II. The reign of David
 - B. The establishment of his kingdom
 - 2. The prosperity of David’s reign
 - d. The failure of David in numbering the people (21:1-30)
 - (1) David’s sin in the census (21:1-6)
 - (2) God’s anger and David’s confession (21:7-8)
 - (3) God’s message and David’s option (21:9-17)
 - (4) David’s altar and the end of the pestilence (21:18-30)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Verse 1 indicates that Satan incited David into taking the census. Considering that, why do you think David was held responsible?

2. According to verse 6, which two tribes were not included in the numbering of Israel?

3. How can we ensure that the sacrifices we make to God reflect a sincere commitment?

CONCLUSION

God knows our hearts and is aware of how we value what we sacrifice to Him. Let us make sure we always offer Him our best.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD your God; arise therefore, and build ye the sanctuary of the LORD God, to bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and the holy vessels of God, into the house that is to be built to the name of the LORD.” (1 Chronicles 22:19)

What does it mean to “set” ourselves to accomplish something? I pondered that question as I read today’s focus verse, which begins with the instruction to “set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD your God.”

Initially, the word “set” made me think of setting the font specifications on the word processing program I am using to write this devotional. Like most software applications, my program came with established defaults. Its default font is *Times New Roman* and the font size is twelve points. However, I can change those specifications to a sans serif option like *Arial* or *Futura*, or a script such as *Lucida Calligraphy* or the ever-so-elegant *Scriptina*. I can increase the font size from twelve points to ten times that, or more. Until I do, though, this document and any others I compose will appear in *Times New Roman*, size twelve, every time. Action is required to make a change.

“Set” sometimes is used as a verb—a word that indicates action. In our focus verse, the instruction to “set your heart and your soul” implied an action that needed to be taken. David was encouraging the national and tribal leaders of Israel to fix their hearts upon seeking the Lord for strength and a determination to focus upon fulfilling His instructions. This would enable these leaders to assist David’s son Solomon in the construction of a sanctuary for the Lord—a monumental task in spite of the preparatory steps David had taken.

Have we set our hearts and souls on seeking the Lord? Have we resolved to pursue His purpose in our lives? That will not just naturally happen. We come into this world with spiritual “default settings” that determine nearly every aspect of how we operate, and those settings reveal an innate compulsion toward sin and self-will. Until the sinful nature we were born with is changed, our focus will not be upon God and the furtherance of His Kingdom, but upon our personal needs, desires, and preferences. To be able to do God’s will or accomplish His plan for our lives will require a reset! And while we have the ability to

change defaults on our software applications and electronic devices, only God can change hearts.

The national leaders of King David’s day had to make a choice as to whether they would do as he instructed. Today, we too must choose. Are we resolved to set our hearts to seek God and fulfill His purpose for our lives? We can be!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 22 of 1 Chronicles continues the description of David’s preparations for building the Temple that began in chapter 21. In verses 1-5 of this chapter, David chose the Temple site (the parcel of land he had purchased from Ornan the Jebusite in the previous chapter) and began preparing materials for construction of the house of the Lord. He charged his son Solomon with the task of building the house (verses 6-16), and exhorted the national and tribal leaders of the land to assist his son with the project (verses 17-19).

The “strangers in the land” referred to in verse 2 were non-Israelites, probably the Canaanites who were servants and paid tribute to Solomon as he began the building project (see 2 Chronicles 8:7-9). The Zidonians, alluded to in verse 4, were from Sidon, now part of southern Lebanon. The “cedar trees in abundance” mentioned in verse 4 likely came from Hiram, king of Tyre, which is also in southern Lebanon now. The cedar trees of Lebanon were renowned for their excellent timber. This indicates that David (and Solomon after him) wanted to build the Temple out of the best materials possible.

In verse 5, the fact that David accepted God’s pronouncement that he would not be the one to oversee the construction of the Temple is seen in the fact that he still “prepared abundantly” for the project—he amassed great stockpiles of materials. His determination that “the house . . . must be exceeding magnificent, of fame and of glory throughout all countries” is evidence of his desire to honor God.

The prophet Nathan had revealed earlier that one of David’s sons would build the Temple (see 1 Chronicles 17:11-12). Verses 5-6 of this chapter indicate that the son chosen for this task was Solomon, whom David commissioned in verses 6-16. This was not a suggestion or an idea offered to Solomon for his consideration; it was a sacred responsibility for him to fulfill. This was an initial charge; David’s formal and public charge to Solomon is recorded in chapter 28.

After David gave his charge to Solomon, he spoke to civil and military leaders of Israel and exhorted

them to give their full support to Solomon as he undertook the task of building the Temple.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- II. The reign of David
 - C. The organization of the Temple ritual
 - 1. The preparation for the Temple's construction (22:1-19)
 - a. The gathering of materials (22:2-5)
 - b. The instructions to Solomon (22:6-16)
 - c. The command to the leaders (22:17-19)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What natural materials did King David gather for building of the Temple? 1 Chronicles 22:3-4, 14

2. Verses 17-19 record David's instruction to the princes of Israel. Why do you think he felt it advisable to command them to help Solomon in this endeavor?

3. What actions can we take to help inspire in others a total dedication and purpose to please God and serve Him wholeheartedly?

CONCLUSION

Doing God's will requires total dedication—a focused determination to obey Him with all our hearts and souls. When we set ourselves to seek Him in that way, He will provide the strength, grace, and abilities we need to accomplish whatever tasks He has given us.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Now concerning Moses the man of God, his sons were named of the tribe of Levi.” (1 Chronicles 23:14)

In today’s text, which records David’s assignment of duties to the Levites, we find a brief mention of Moses. Our focus verse alludes to the man who led the Israelites out of Egypt simply as “the man of God”—only four short words, but what a profound description!

Over the years, I have been blessed to know many individuals who could be described that same way. One in particular comes to mind—my father’s cousin, George Hughes. I was just a small child when “Uncle George,” as my siblings and I called him, passed away on a flight home from the mission field in Nigeria. However, my young heart had developed a deep affection for this kind and gentle man, so when the news came of his sudden death, I was heartbroken.

As I grew older, memories of Uncle George lingered. Frequently I heard him mentioned by people in the church—they would reminisce about sermons he had preached and how he had been a personal inspiration to them. One woman who attended his Sunday school class said, “During some of his classes, the Spirit of God was so powerful that many went to their knees in prayer before the class was over. It was through this class that a hunger for more of God grew within me.”

References like that put a growing desire in my heart to understand, on an adult level, more about Uncle George. So I began a personal investigation to learn about him. I asked family members to share their memories, and each one, without fail, spoke of his deep love for the Lord. Reading his testimony revealed he had a desire to do anything he could in the service of God. I read letters he had written to our family and discovered words of spiritual encouragement woven into each of them. I listened to audio recordings of his sermons, including inspiring messages on consecration, holiness, and doing the will of God. I borrowed his missionary trip diaries from my aunt—three loose-leaf notebooks that provided a detailed record of the months he spent in Africa—and read them from cover to cover.

Studying the accounts and pictures of Uncle George during the time he served as an army chaplain during World War II gave me a glimpse of that period in his life. Especially touching was a letter written by

an army chaplain he had worked with, after he heard of Uncle George’s death. That man wrote, in part, “For almost three years of army service, George and I were together constantly under the most trying, exasperating, and dangerous situations. We trudged the trails of the South Pacific jungles together; climbed up ships’ ladders from bobbing boats in the Guadalcanal Harbor together; we preached, sang, baptized new converts, buried the dead, comforted the injured, and pleaded with sinners together. . . . There was no duplicity, no double-dealing, no deceit in him. He was an exemplar of the faith he professed and preached. George Hughes was a Christian statesman, a beloved brother, and a true friend. I am a better person because I knew him.” What a tribute!

Gradually, I realized that it was Uncle George’s deep, personal connection to his Maker that drew people to him, and caused them to remember him so warmly. He was a person whose devotion to God never lessened. From the time God saved him as a boy, he lived with integrity the faith he professed and taught. Like Moses of old, he truly was a man of God!

We want our lives to inspire and encourage others. However, even more importantly, we want to be people of integrity, faithfulness, and dedication because of our love for God and our desire to please Him! That was how Moses lived, and that was how Uncle George lived as well. May God help us to learn from their examples, and live in the same way.

BACKGROUND

Chapters 23-27 of 1 Chronicles describe the organization of the Temple rituals, and provide a listing of various worship participants and their duties. Chapter 23 focuses on the arrangement of the Levites.

The chapter is introduced in verse 1 by the summary statement that David was old and made Solomon the king. Then he called together a national assembly of the princes, priests, and Levites. Having previously made preparations for the building of the Temple, at this point David laid out how worship was to be conducted, and by whom worship was to be administered.

Verses 3-5 describe the census taken of the Levites—those set apart for the service of God. This was based on the command found in Numbers 4:1-3, which indicated that a Levite’s service was to begin at thirty years of age. The resulting total of thirty-eight thousand Levites were divided into four groups.

- Twenty-four thousand would “set forward the work.” These were the skilled people needed

to take care of the practical aspects of Temple sacrifice and service to God.

- Six thousand would serve as officers and judges—the civil servants in charge of governmental records, decisions, and administration.
- Four thousand were to be porters—the gatekeepers in charge of security.
- Four thousand would lead the worship with voices and musical instruments. They did this both to honor God directly and to encourage others to worship God.

Verse 6 indicates that David then separated the Levitical family groups of Gershon, Kohath, and Merari (as described hundreds of years before in Numbers 3 and 4) into “courses” (meaning “divisions”). The courses of the sons of Gershom are given in verses 7-11, of the sons of Kohath in verses 12-20, and of the sons of Merari in verses 21-23.

A change of the age when a Levite’s duty began is noted in verses 24-26. No reason is stated in the text, but Bible scholars suggest that the rituals of Temple service would have entailed increased work, even though the occasional duty of transporting the Ark was abolished.

Verses 27-32 describe the new duties of the Levites. Their primary function would be to assist the priests, the sons of Aaron, who were authorized to perform the sacrifices. While both priests and Levites were of the tribe of Levi, the priests were also required to be descendants of Aaron (see verse 13). Three specific duties are noted: the Levites were to care for the Temple and its grounds (verse 28), help prepare the offerings (verse 29), and participate in the musical part of the worship (verse 30). Based on 2 Chronicles 29:25, it is evident that these arrangements were put in place at the direction of God, through the prophets Gad and Nathan.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- II. The reign of David
 - C. The organization of the Temple ritual
 - 2. The preparation of the Levites and priests
 - a. The arrangement of the Levites (23:1-32)
 - (1) The number of the Levites (23:1-6)
 - (2) The sons of Gershom (23:7-11)
 - (3) The sons of Kohath (23:12-20)
 - (4) The sons of Merari (23:21-23)
 - (5) The service of the Levites (23:24-32)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 13, what tasks were Aaron and his descendants given?

2. In verse 30, David instructed the worship participants to “stand [be present] every morning to thank and praise the LORD, and likewise at even.” What do you think is implied by that?

3. Consider what part you have in God’s service. What are some steps you can take to be an example to others as you participate in that capacity?

CONCLUSION

Faithfully fulfilling our roles in the Lord’s work will be both an example and an encouragement to others when it is based on true love and commitment to God.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“These were the orderings of them in their service to come into the house of the LORD, according to their manner, under Aaron their father, as the LORD God of Israel had commanded him.”
(1 Chronicles 24:19)

The visitor who comes into a church sanctuary and enjoys a Sunday morning service probably gives little or no thought to the labors of love that make such a service possible. However, the many behind-the-scenes tasks done for the Lord in preparation for a Gospel meeting require organization. Consider what a different experience that visitor would have if no one came to provide music or operate the sound system. What if no one were assigned to drive the Sunday school van, vacuum the carpets, turn on the lights, or make sure the furnace was working? What if no preacher showed up? Any group of believers who meet on a regular basis must have some form of organization in order to function successfully.

In today's text, the author of 1 Chronicles gave us a glimpse into the operational structure put in place for duties in the Temple at Jerusalem. King David understood that the religious leaders of Israel must be organized to fulfill their particular tasks, just as organization was necessary for civil leaders. So, at the direction of God, he established an orderly system for those who served in Temple worship. Descendants of two sons of Aaron, Eleazar and Ithamar, were divided into twenty-four groups. Each priest was assigned to one of these groups, and the groups fulfilled responsibilities in the house of the Lord on a rotating basis.

Inherent throughout Scripture is the concept that God's people should participate in local gatherings of believers. For such gatherings to occur, everyone involved must work together to ensure harmony, order, and successful functioning. What was true in David's day is still true today: it takes organization to provide a setting where the truths of God's Word can be presented on a regular basis. When organization is done at the Lord's leading, the combined efforts result in Gospel services where the congregation can worship in unity and feel the presence of the Holy Spirit.

BACKGROUND

Chapters 23-27 of 1 Chronicles describe the organization of the Temple rituals and provide a listing

of various worship participants and their specific duties. Chapter 24 concerns the division of the priests (verses 1-19) and the remaining Levitical assistants (verses 20-31).

David took the descendants of Aaron, who was of the tribe of Levi—the man God had ordained as the first priest of Israel—and divided them into twenty-four “courses” (meaning “divisions”), to serve as priests in the Temple on a rotating basis under the direction of Zadok and Ahimelech. Zadok and Abiathar were co-High Priests under David, with one serving at Jerusalem where the Ark of God was located, and one serving at Gibeon in the Tabernacle. Ahimelech (mentioned in verses 3 and 6) was the son of Abiathar, and was evidently assuming some of his aging father's duties at that time.

Verse 2 states that two of Aaron's four sons had “died before their father.” God judged Nadab and Abihu because they dared to bring strange fire before the Lord, disobeying God's commandments for sacrifice (see Leviticus 10:1-2). These two men had no children, so the priestly courses established by David were the descendants of Eleazar and Ithamar, the two remaining sons of Aaron.

Because there were more “chief men” numbered among the descendants of Eleazar than the descendants of Ithamar, sixteen courses were established from Eleazar's line, while eight courses were established from Ithamar's line. The service rotation was decided by drawing lots, with Shemaiah writing down the heads of the divisions as their names were drawn (see verse 6). Each group served at the Temple for two weeks out of the year; the remainder of the year they served in their hometowns. This system was still in place in Jesus' day.

The “rest of the sons of Levi,” who were descended from Kohath and Merari, are listed in verses 20-31. They were organized in the same manner as the priests.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- II. The reign of David
 - C. The organization of the Temple ritual
 - 2. The preparation of the Levites and priests
 - b. The arrangement of the priests (24:1-31)
 - (1) The twenty-four courses for services (24:1-19)
 - (2) The remaining sons of Levi (24:20-31)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Based on verses 5-6, as the lots were drawn to establish the order for Temple service who was present?

2. What phrase in verse 19 stands out to you as being especially significant, and why?

3. What actions can we take to support and preserve order in our church services?

CONCLUSION

Following the example of David, church leaders today look to God for guidance, and make every effort to establish an orderly system of worship under His direction and anointing.

NOTES

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“All these were under the hands of their father for song in the house of the LORD, with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, for the service of the house of God, according to the king’s order to Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman.” (1 Chronicles 25:6)

My invitation to church came from a young lady who played flute in the high school band where I was a percussionist. It did not take me long to learn that both music and faith in God ran deeply in her family. Her father was a high school choir director and also a church music director, and her grandfather played in the church orchestra for many years. Her mother played piano, and her three siblings were proficient on a variety of instruments including flute, trombone, French horn, piano, harp, violin, viola, and recorder, and ultimately all pursued musical careers and activities. In fact, after the young lady and I were married, I used to joke that in order to be considered as a candidate for marrying into the family, you had to present not only your spiritual credentials, but also your musical credentials! Over the years at family holiday gatherings, everyone was expected to bring their instruments to play together.

Decades later, the focus in our family is still on faith and music. Our children are all musicians and participate in the music of the church. Their children are taking music lessons too, so the family musical heritage continues to be intertwined with a heritage of faith and trust in God. Someday, when our grandchildren are a bit older, we hope that their talents and training will be used for God’s glory as well.

Today’s text describes the duties of three families of the tribe of Levi—Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun—who were chosen to participate as musicians in the worship of the Lord in the Temple. This guild of musicians was divided into twenty-four teams, each headed by a son of one of the three leaders. According to our focus verse, each served “under the hands of their father” on a rotating basis. This method of division and sharing of responsibilities mirrors the pattern given the priests for their duties in the Temple.

It is interesting to note that the family guilds consisted of musicians both old and young, as well as those of varying skill levels. Likely the purpose behind this was to sustain the music used in worship from generation to generation, just as my wife’s family (and many other families as well) have done through the years in our churches.

God continues to use music to bless hearts, and He often inspires older musicians to commit to teaching, training, and mentoring younger ones. Yet, music is just one of the many types of gifts and talents God has given to His followers to develop for His service. No matter what portion of God’s work we are privileged to be a part of, may we all be inspired by the Holy Spirit and commit ourselves to offering God our best.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 25 describes King David’s organization of the Levites for musical service in the Temple worship. The system he put in place mirrors the way the priests were organized for their official duties in the Temple (see chapter 24). King David, a musician himself, along with his military leaders, appointed the families of Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman to lead the music. Individuals within those three families were then appointed to lead twenty-four teams of twelve each, for a total of 288 musicians who participated on a rotating basis.

The text indicates the musicians used various instruments including harps, psalteries, horns, and cymbals. Verse 1 notes they were to “prophesy” with these instruments, which suggests they were to play under the inspiration and direction of the Holy Spirit, while maintaining the established order of worship under the direction of their leaders (verse 6).

The harp mentioned was a lyre, which was a stringed instrument consisting of a body, crossbar, and sometimes a sounding box. The psaltery was a zither, an instrument with thirty to forty strings placed over a shallow soundboard and played with a pick and fingers. Cymbals were two round, slightly concave metal plates that were struck together; they came in a variety of sizes, enabling them to produce differing tones and volumes during times of worship and celebration (see Psalm 150:5). The horns mentioned in verse 5 were a type of wind instrument that projected a powerful sound. All of these instruments provided the backdrop and accompaniment for human voices singing in unity. “Words” and “songs” in verses 5-6 suggest a choir made up of both male and female voices singing before the Lord.

In verse 5, Heman is called “the king’s seer” while Asaph and Jeduthun are titled similarly in 2 Chronicles 29:30 and 35:15. Asaph is also noted as the composer of twelve of the Psalms—Psalm 50 and Psalms 73 through 83.

Verse 8 indicates that the order in which the various teams were to serve was determined by casting

lots. David did not allocate the choice worship assignments only to the most talented. He let God do the choosing, and this method provided both a protection against pride for the talented and a learning opportunity for those who were still novices.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- II. The reign of David
 - C. The organization of the Temple ritual
 - 3. The preparation of singers and musicians (25:1-31)
 - a. The choice of the sons of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun (25:1-8)
 - b. The division into twenty-four courses (25:9-31)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 7, how many musicians were appointed by King David to serve in the Temple?

2. Why do you think the musicians were divided into “courses” (or “teams”)?

3. How can we assist in preparing others to carry on the musical aspect of worship?

CONCLUSION

The talents given by God and returned to Him in faithful service will certainly result in God’s glory and our benefit.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Also unto Shemaiah his son were sons born, that ruled throughout the house of their father: for they were mighty men of valour.” (1 Chronicles 26:6)

Our neighbor mowed his lawn, going back and forth across it in straight lines. There was nothing particularly unusual about that. What caught our attention was that his three-year-old son was walking right behind him, back and forth across the lawn in straight lines, with his toy lawn mower. Children learn by doing what they see their parents do.

They also learn from family members who take every opportunity to teach them. One of our ministers purchased each of his grandchildren a fishing pole before those grandchildren were born, indicating that he had every intention of showing his grandchildren how to catch fish. He recounts that when he was growing up, his grandparents would drive a couple hours just so he could go fishing for a short time. One time they went to a lake, and although he was only about six years old at the time, he knew the lake was too shallow around the edges to fish effectively. So he said, “I need a boat,” and his grandfather rented one and rowed him around the lake. He knows he was spoiled, but along with this special treatment, his grandparents and parents took every opportunity to teach his young, moldable mind about the Gospel. And he has the same plan in mind for his grandchildren.

Children learn by example. They may learn more by what they see than by what they hear. From generation to generation, it is important that they not only hear the truths of God’s Word taught, but also see those truths lived out before them. They are watching their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and the people at church. The faithfulness of all those around them will have an impact.

Today’s chapter gives the names of many families who labored in Israel’s worship services one generation after another. The children learned to do what their parents did before them. And the Bible says they were “mighty men of valour.” They had courage to do what was right in God’s eyes.

In our time, it can still take courage to do what God wants, and the strength to do that comes from Him. The next generation learns in part by observation. Children and young people are watching each of us, even when we are not aware of it. It is important that they see us faithfully doing our parts, whatever that may be.

BACKGROUND

This chapter details the responsibilities of those who guarded the Temple, were in charge of the treasures, and fulfilled civil duties.

Verses 1-19 are about the porters, who could also be called gatekeepers or doorkeepers. There were four thousand of them (see 1 Chronicles 23:5) and they were divided into four groups. During the time of David, these men guarded the Tabernacle that he had set up for worship of God. Later, after Solomon built the Temple, the porters guarded there. Some of their duties included opening and closing the Temple doors, making sure those who entered were qualified (not unclean per 2 Chronicles 23:19), and confirming that items and equipment were not removed from the area.

The sons and grandsons of Obed-edom are noted in verses 4-8. Obed-edom was a Levite, and David had appointed him to house the Ark of the Covenant after Uzza died when he touched the Ark as it was being moved on a cart. The Ark was cared for by Obed-edom and his family for three months, and God blessed them (see 1 Chronicles 13:13-14). Then Obed-edom was among those who helped transport the Ark to Jerusalem and was one of the porters at the tent there (see 1 Chronicles 15:24, 16:5, 38). God blessed him with sixty-two sons and grandsons (verse 8).

The porters did not have a choice regarding where they guarded. “As well the small as the great” in verse 13 means the families were not chosen by size, wealth, or prestige. Their areas were assigned by casting lots.

Verses 17-18 indicate that twenty-four porters were on duty at the same time. The Jewish historian Josephus stated that opening and shutting the Temple doors took twenty men.¹

Verses 20-28 tell about the treasurers who were responsible for the donations given by the people, as well as the spoils from the nation’s battles. There was a treasury during the time of Joshua (see Joshua 6:24), but nothing more is said of it until Samuel’s time when it must have been reinstituted (verse 28).

Officers and judges are noted in verses 29-32. These Levites were magistrates and handled legal and civil matters, as well as ensured that religious laws were kept. Also, they may have collected taxes. Seventeen hundred officers were assigned to the area west of the Jordan River, which included Jerusalem and the central portion of Israel’s government. Twenty-seven hundred were assigned to the area east of the Jordan River. David made some of these appointments during the last year of his reign.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- II. The reign of David
 - C. The organization of the Temple ritual
 - 4. The preparation of other Temple officers (26:1-32)
 - a. The gatekeepers (26:1-19)
 - (1) The naming of the attendants (26:1-11)
 - (2) The division of the attendants (26:12-19)
 - b. The treasurers (26:20-28)
 - c. The officers and judges (26:29-32)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What was one of the uses for the spoils won in battle (verse 27)?

2. Why do you think lots were cast to determine assignments, rather than naming families for specific tasks? (verse 13)

3. What childhood impression has helped you in serving God?

CONCLUSION

Someone is watching how you live. You can be a good example today for the next generation.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Now the children of Israel after their number, to wit, the chief fathers and captains of thousands and hundreds, and their officers that served the king in any matter of the courses, which came in and went out month by month throughout all the months of the year, of every course were twenty and four thousand.” (1 Chronicles 27:1)

The accounts of men and women who have served their countries have a special place among the narratives that shape a nation’s collective heritage. Often, these individuals are remembered for their exceptional bravery, determination, and sacrifice. In some cases, statues have been erected in their honor, medals awarded them, or battlefield memorials created to celebrate their deeds of valor. However, for many who have honorably served their nation, the only place they are recognized is on a list of names.

Here in the United States, a list of names appears on one of the most frequently visited sites in our nation’s capital: the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Located on the northwest corner of the National Mall, the Memorial is a black, V-shaped granite wall, with a nearly 247 foot “arm” stretching toward the Lincoln Memorial and the other identical arm toward the Washington Monument. On the face of the wall are etched the names of 58,318 men and women who gave their lives during the Vietnam War (marked by a diamond shape) or were missing in action (marked by a cross).

Visitors to the memorial are allowed to make rubbings of names on the wall’s surface. Many surviving family members bring tributes and photos, and place them against the wall. Fellow veterans leave artifacts, flags, and dog tags in memory of comrades who gave their lives. Whether or not visitors have a personal connection to any of the names on the wall, this memorial is an ongoing reminder that those who served in the U. S. military—and especially those who gave their lives for their nation—deserve respect and appreciation.

Perhaps honoring and preserving the names of faithful soldiers was David’s intention when he listed the names of his military commanders in today’s text. Very likely, the names Jashobeam, Perez, Dodai, and Mikloth are not familiar to us. Who was Shamhuth the Izrahite or Helez the Pelonite? For most of the men mentioned in this chapter, we are told nothing more than their names and in some cases, the names of their

fathers or their places of origin. However, these men served David and Israel! And their names are listed for us in Scripture—a record that has been preserved for thousands of years.

While our names may never be inscribed on a medal or a battlefield memorial, there is one record of “those who served” that all our names can be on: the roll of names in the Lamb’s Book of Life. If our names are found there, it will not matter in the least whether we were ever acclaimed as a military hero. We will not care if we received national recognition for our bravery or were remembered for our heroism long after we departed from this world. If our names are on the one list that will matter throughout eternity, we will have all the reward we will ever desire!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 27 deals with the civil organization of Israel, listing names of individuals who served under David in three categories: commanders of the army (verses 1-15), officers of the tribes (verses 16-22), and administrators of the kingdom (verses 25-34). David’s organization of his military and civic leaders was as careful and systematic as his arrangement of those who served in the Temple worship (see chapters 23-26 of 1 Chronicles).

During the reign of David and most of the kings of Israel and Judah, the nation did at times use hired mercenary soldiers as troops. However, the “officers that served the king in any matter” were Israelites. David’s army courses (or divisions) were organized into twelve groups of 24,000 men, each group serving for one month of the year. This was an effective way to keep the army always ready and the inactive troops regularly trained. Captains presided over each of the twelve courses. These were distinguished military leaders who were listed among David’s “mighty men” in 1 Chronicles 11.

Of special note in this list of military officers are two names: Benaiah and Asahel. Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada (verse 6), was recognized as a great hero in Israel because he killed two mighty Moabites, a lion in a pit on a snowy day, and a formidable Egyptian (see 2 Samuel 23:20-21). In verse 7, Asahel the brother of Joab was killed in battle by Abner, commander of the army of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul who attempted to succeed him on the throne of Israel (see 2 Samuel 2:18-23).

David’s greatness as king was apparent in his peacetime administration of kingdom affairs as distinctly as in his victories on the fields of battle. The

officers of the tribes of Israel, listed in verses 16-22, were tribal leaders who were not priests or military leaders, but participants in the civil service of the Kingdom of Israel.

The administrators of the kingdom (verses 25-34) were trusted men David appointed to oversee his treasures, storehouses, work of the field, vineyards, olive and sycamore trees, cellars of oil, herds, camels, asses, and flocks, and these men were just as important to the kingdom as the more obvious spiritual and military leaders. David carefully arranged for organized cultivation of crops, cattle raising, and production of the commodities that would sustain the people. No doubt, each of the men on this list was particularly qualified for the area entrusted to his care.

In verse 33, Hushai the Archite probably was initially a “companion” to King David on an informal and personal basis. During Absalom’s revolt, Hushai had remained faithful to David, and became a spy for him in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 15:32-37).

Joab, mentioned in verse 34, was known for his military exploits, but he later joined the cause of Adonijah against Solomon, and was eventually put to death by Benaiah.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- II. The reign of David
 - D. The organization of the civil affairs (27:1-34)
 - 1. The twelve captains of Israel (27:1-15)
 - 2. The officers of the tribes (27:16-24)
 - 3. The other officers (27:25-34)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 23, what age group was included in David’s list of leaders?

2. Why do you think David had such meticulous lists made of those who served the nation of Israel?

3. Are there areas in your service for the Lord that could be more efficiently organized? If so, what steps can you take to improve?

CONCLUSION

Earthly lists, medals, and memorials honor faithful individuals who served their nations, but if our names are recorded in the Lamb’s Book of Life among those who served the God of Heaven, we can have no greater reward.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD.” (1 Chronicles 28:20)

At times in our lives, God asks us to take steps of faith—to undertake some task for Him that we consider far beyond our abilities. Cynthia White, a retired pastor, acknowledged that it took a step of faith for her to agree when her husband felt they should move to Chicago. She testified, “We were living in the Virgin Islands at the time, and I was comfortable there, but God helped me be willing to move.

“In our devotions on the day we left, God gave me the words, ‘Go to the heathen, and remember the poor.’ That puzzled me. I said, ‘Heathen? In the United States?’ Yet, after we arrived in Chicago, I realized there were many souls around us, including boys and girls, who did not know Jesus. We began to have Sunday school with them in our own home, and God started to work.

“Then God took my husband to Heaven, and I was at a loss. By that time, we had a few souls in the Gospel with us in Chicago, and my heart was there in that city. Still, I wondered what I could do—a widow getting up in years. God laid it on my heart to wait upon Him, and I was willing to hear what God would say to me. I prayed and waited, and God, in His wonderful way, began to open doors.

“For a time, I continued to make excuses to Him. I said, ‘Lord, You know I am afraid of even speaking in front of people. How can I take a leadership role?’ However, my excuses would not stand in the presence of God. Finally, God helped me be willing to do what He asked. That was another step of faith for me! Today there is an Apostolic Faith Church in the city of Chicago—a lighthouse for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

In today’s focus verse, David counseled his son Solomon not to fear regarding the tasks facing him as king of Israel and builder of God’s Temple. David had learned that when God is with us, we can “be strong and of good courage.” God will enable us to do what seems impossible when we are following Him, and David wanted his son to understand that as he considered the task ahead.

Sometimes when God asks us to take a step of faith, we may be tempted to focus on our own

limitations instead of the sufficiency of God. We should be careful to respond affirmatively when the Lord speaks to our hearts, even if our first response is to suggest reasons why we are inadequate. If we are willing to obey, God will not fail us nor forsake us. As He was with Solomon in the Temple construction process, He will be with us and give us the strength and wisdom that we need.

BACKGROUND

The final two chapters of 1 Chronicles provide a transition from the reign of David to the reign of Solomon. In chapter 28, David crowned Solomon as his successor (verses 1-8), gave Solomon instructions and plans for the construction of the Temple (verses 9-19), and offered encouragement to his son (verses 20-21).

David had previously called together the princes, priests, and Levites of Israel (see 1 Chronicles 23:2), explaining to them how and by whom worship was to be conducted. Additional national leaders in attendance at the assembly are listed in this text. Crowning Solomon as king was the final task of the convention.

It is noted in verse 2 that David “stood up upon his feet” to address the assembly. Since this happened near the end of David’s life, he was in declining health (see 1 Kings 1:1-4). David’s standing posture would have added emphasis to a dramatic scene.

In his address, David made two points that emphasized God’s sovereignty over Israel. First, he stated that he had wanted to build a house of worship for God but God had refused his request (verses 2-3); and second, that God himself had chosen Solomon to be his successor (verse 5).

David charged Solomon to serve God “with a perfect heart and with a willing mind,” and admonished him to accept the responsibility of building a house for a sanctuary. The statement in verse 12 that David gave his son and successor “the pattern of all that he had by the spirit” indicates that although Solomon was to be the builder of the Temple, the divine blueprint for it had been given to David by God himself. This pattern seemingly was not merely an oral communication, but a written document that was presented to Solomon in this public ceremony (see verse 19).

Verses 14-19 describe the ornate furnishings for the Temple, mentioning nine items to be fashioned from gold and silver. Clearly, David had amassed an amazing amount of precious metals for the implements of worship.

David's personal words to his son are recorded in verses 9-10 and 20-21. His counsel included a warning, the commission, encouragement, and a promise of support. His closing words are similar to God's encouraging words to Joshua (see Joshua 1:7,9).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- II. The reign of David
 - E. The final acts of David
 - 1. David's address concerning the Temple (28:1-21)
 - a. David's words to Israel (28:1-8)
 - b. David's address to Solomon (28:9-10)
 - c. David's Temple plans delivered to Solomon (28:11-19)
 - d. David's encouragement of Solomon (28:20-21)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What were the instruments of worship to be made from? What do you think this signified?

2. Why do you think David gave Solomon personal encouragement to perform the tasks God had assigned to him?

3. What practical principles do you find in these verses that could be helpful guides in your Christian life?

CONCLUSION

If we serve God willingly and obediently, He will be with us and help us accomplish the tasks He assigns us.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Thus David the son of Jesse reigned over all Israel. And the time that he reigned over Israel was forty years; seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem. And he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour: and Solomon his son reigned in his stead.” (1 Chronicles 29:26-28)

The passing of a loved one stirs many memories, and it can be difficult to choose just the right thoughts to share when planning a funeral or memorial service. How can the essence of a life lived well be captured effectively? Some families choose to put together a video featuring pictures of their loved one—a visual portrayal of the significant, happy, or even silly moments of the individual’s life. At other times, family members or close friends speak at the service, recounting special moments and sharing fond recollections of the individual. Sometimes families prepare a printed program that includes a biographical summary of the individual’s life and testimony. Whatever method is chosen, the desire is to preserve and memorialize the character of the one who is no longer with them.

As we consider end of life issues on a personal level, how can we ensure that we leave our loved ones with memories that will benefit them? When people consider what they will leave to family members, they often think of material assets such as an insurance policy, the family home, or physical possessions. I remember my mom putting small stickers on furniture and other personal mementos with the name of the person she thought would enjoy the item. While the mementos and heirlooms left behind may be treasured, a spiritual legacy is far more important than any earthly possessions we might leave to our families.

C.T. Studd’s wise words in a poem he wrote many years ago has two familiar lines that can guide us in ensuring that we leave a spiritual legacy. He wrote, “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past; only what’s done for Christ will last.” Yielding our hearts to God and following Him faithfully will not only bring the greatest blessing in our own lives here on earth, but the example set will also be the greatest treasure we can leave for our loved ones when we go to our eternal reward.

In today’s text, the life of King David was coming to an end. David had failed at times in his spiritual

walk, but his deepest desire had always been to please God. He had done all he could to restore the Kingdom of Israel and, in his older years, to prepare for the building of the Temple. His closing instructions to his son Solomon were not about wealth, fame, or accomplishments. Rather, they were an admonition to serve God with a perfect heart and a willing mind, and to keep His commandments and statutes. He assured Solomon that if he would do this, he would prosper in all that he did (see 1 Chronicles 28:9 and 1 Kings 2:1-4).

David’s admonitions to Solomon are applicable for us as well. There will be a glorious reward for those who dedicate their lives to the Almighty God, and the memories and spiritual legacy they leave behind will inspire and encourage those who follow them.

BACKGROUND

The last chapter of 1 Chronicles summarizes several main events at the close of David’s life. Verses 1-5 record David’s final address to the people of Israel, and verses 6-9, the people’s willingness, material support, and commitment to build the Temple. David’s final prayer for his nation and Solomon is recorded in verses 10-19, and the people’s prayer in verses 20-21. Verses 22-25 provide details regarding the anointing and crowning of Solomon as the new king of Israel, and David’s death and burial are described in verses 26-30.

Having obeyed God’s instructions not to build the Temple himself (see 1 Chronicles 28:3-6), David stated in verse 2 that he had “prepared with all my might for the house of my God.” This was certainly true: he provided the land, money, materials, supervisory staff, workers, and plans—clear evidence that he gave this work of preparation his best efforts.

David amassed a huge quantity of materials to prepare for the building of the Temple by his son Solomon. Converting the list given in verses 2-5 into today’s measurements, the collected materials included 188 tons of gold, over 375 tons of silver, 675 tons of bronze, and 3,750 tons of iron, plus a staggering amount of jewels and marble that could only be described as “in abundance.” These were partially the spoils obtained from war, but in addition, David willingly offered gold and silver from his own personal resources “because I have set my affection to the house of my God” (verse 3).

King David then asked the leaders and people who was willing to consecrate their service unto the

Lord (verse 5). The Hebrew word translated *service* in this verse literally means “to fill the hand” and implies giving what is needed liberally and voluntarily, in this case towards building a house for worship. In response, the people not only committed to assist in the labor involved, but they also contributed generously of their personal treasures to finance the project (verses 6-9).

In verses 10-19, David rejoiced in prayer to God. His concern and love for his nation coupled with his love for the Lord and his desire for Israel to follow in His ways were all evident in the words he used. He included a prayer for Solomon to have a perfect heart, to serve the Lord faithfully, and for the completion of the house of God.

Following the prayer, the people made sacrifices, and during the celebration of gladness before the Lord, a public announcement and anointing of Solomon as king of Israel was done (verses 22-25). This was the second anointing of Solomon; the first is noted in 1 Chronicles 23:1. This follows a pattern of repeated coronations that began with Saul (1 Samuel 10:1; 11:15) and continued with David (1 Samuel 16:13; 2 Samuel 2:4; 5:3). In each case, the second coronation was a public confirmation of the first anointing.

According to verse 27, David reigned over Israel for forty years—seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. He passed on to his reward in 970 B.C., dying at “a good old age” (verse 28). Bible scholars believe he was seventy years old at the time of his death.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- II. The reign of David
 - E. The final acts of David
 - 2. David's final words and death (29:1-30)
 - a. The exhortation of David to Israel (29:1-5)
 - b. The response of Israel (29:6-8)
 - c. The prayer of David (29:9-19)
 - d. The worship of Israel (29:20-21)
 - e. The crowning of Solomon (29:22-25)
 - f. The death of David (29:26-30)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Among the precious jewels gathered for the building of the Temple, what one gem was mentioned by name? (verse 2)

2. In verse 11, why do you think that David prayed things that God already knew, like “all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine”?

3. What legacy or advice do you want to leave for your children and your children's children?

CONCLUSION

Like King David, we want to leave those who follow us an example of serving the Lord with perfect hearts, submission to God's will, and a desire to do all we can to promote the spread of His Kingdom. Then one day when we enter Heaven, we will hear our Lord's words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant!”

NOTES



Overview for 2 Chronicles

Purpose: To encourage God's chosen people, the Jews, to keep their faith and traditions alive by emphasizing the righteous kings of Judah and the revival that took place during their reigns.

Author: No author is cited, but Jewish tradition holds that the priest and scribe Ezra was the author.

Name: The Hebrew name of this book, *Dibre Hayamim*, literally means "the words of the days," or "daily matters." In the Greek version of the Old Testament, the name of the book is *Paralipomena*, which means "omissions" (referring to matter not included in the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings). From about the fifth century, the English name given to the book, *Chronicles*, refers to a chronological account of events. While all of these titles reflect portions of the book, none of them fully describe it.

Time Period Covered: Much of the material in 1 and 2 Chronicles repeats and adds to the historical record found in the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, and spans several centuries of the history of God's chosen people. The Book of 2 Chronicles continues the historical record that began in chapter 10 of 1 Chronicles, opening with the onset of Solomon's reign in 970 B.C., and continuing to 538 B.C. when the decree by Cyrus allowed the exiles in Babylon to return to their land.

Date Written: If the author is Ezra, he probably wrote 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah sometime after he came to Jerusalem around 457 B.C., likely between 450 to 425 B.C.

Setting: 1 and 2 Chronicles were written in the post-exilic era, after the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity. The remnant of God's people

needed constant encouragement to keep their faith and traditions alive. They needed to have hope that the God of David had not forsaken them, and that a king from his royal line would some day rule once more. Following the example of prophets such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the author of Chronicles endeavored to help the people see that God had not forsaken them.

Key People: Solomon, the queen of Sheba, Rehoboam, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Uzziah, Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah

Unique Features: The Books of 1 and 2 Chronicles were originally one book (as were Samuel and Kings); it was divided into two books in the fifteenth century. The Book of 2 Chronicles parallels and provides a commentary on 1 and 2 Kings.

As in 1 Chronicles, the author highlighted spiritual lessons and taught moral truths by focusing primarily on positive aspects of the Jewish nation's history and leaders. In 2 Chronicles, little mention is made of the faithless kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, evidently to highlight that Judah was the nation which had remained somewhat faithful to God. This would have been significant to the exiles who returned to Jerusalem with the purpose of rebuilding the Temple there.

Summary: Like 1 Chronicles, the Book of 2 Chronicles has two main sections. The first nine chapters cover the reign of Solomon, whose most significant accomplishment was the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. Chapters 10 through 36 describe the reigns of selected kings of Judah, with emphasis given to the righteous kings and the revivals that took place during their reigns. The book concludes with a record of the decree of King Cyrus of Persia, which allowed the Jews to return from exile to Jerusalem to rebuild their Temple.

Timeline

Some dates are approximate, as reference materials differ.

See “The Divided Kingdom” four-page timeline included in this unit.

Outline

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A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.*

- I. The reign of Solomon (1:1 — 9:31)
 - A. The wealth and wisdom of Solomon (1:1-17)
 - B. The construction of Solomon's Temple (2:1 — 7:22)
 - C. The character of Solomon's reign (8:1-9:28)
 - D. The death of Solomon (9:29-31)
- II. The division of the kingdom (10:1-19)
 - A. The folly of Rehoboam (10:1-15)
 - B. The secession of the ten tribes (10:16-19)
- III. The history of the kings of Judah (11:1 — 36:16)
 - A. The reign of Rehoboam (11:1 — 12:16)
 - B. The reign of Abijah (13:1-22)
 - C. The reign of Asa (14:1 — 16:14)
 - D. The reign of Jehoshaphat (17:1 — 20:37)
 - E. The reign of Jehoram (21:1-20)
 - F. The reign of Ahaziah (Jehoahaz) (22:1-9)
 - G. The usurpation of Athaliah (22:10-12)
 - H. The reign of Joash (23:1 — 24:27)
 - I. The reign of Amaziah (25:1-28)
 - J. The reign of Uzziah (26:1-23)
 - K. The reign of Jotham (27:1-9)
 - L. The reign of Ahaz (28:1-27)
 - M. The reign of Hezekiah (29:1 — 32:33)
 - N. The reign of Manasseh (33:1-20)
 - O. The reign of Amon (33:21-25)
 - P. The reign of Josiah (34:1 — 35:27)
 - Q. The reign of Jehoahaz (36:1-3)
 - R. The reign of Jehoiakim (Eliakim) (36:4-8)
 - S. The reign of Jehoiachin (36:9-10)
 - T. The reign of Zedekiah (36:11-16)
- IV. The captivity of Judah (36:17-23)
 - A. The destruction of Jerusalem (36:17-21)
 - B. The decree of Cyrus (36:22-23)



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“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?”
(2 Chronicles 1:10)**

In my third year of high school, I was invited to church by a friend, and soon after, I was saved. While my parents were loving and supportive, they had not experienced real salvation and were somewhat at a loss regarding their newly converted teenage son. I purchased a Bible and one evening, I laid it on my bed and knelt to pray. I told the Lord that He would need to teach me since my parents were not Christians and I could not go to them for spiritual counsel. God was certainly faithful to do just that.

Early in my Christian walk, godly people in the church encouraged me to memorize portions of Scripture. At first this seemed like a daunting task, but someone suggested that I learn Matthew 6:33 as a start—“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” Over the years, that verse has become foundational for me in making the many decisions that have come my way since those days as a new believer.

Today’s text makes it clear that at the beginning of his reign, King Solomon sought for God’s help, direction, and wisdom. He began with worship, offering a thousand burnt sacrifices upon the brazen altar. That immense number of offerings may seem extravagant, but they illustrate the sincerity and earnestness of King Solomon’s heart. In response, God appeared to Solomon at night and asked what He should give the new young king. Again, Solomon’s response indicated a heart that was seeking God. He recalled God’s faithfulness and mercy toward his father, King David, and acknowledged it was God who had given him the task of reigning in his father’s stead. Solomon’s request, noted in our focus verse, is indicative of his humble spirit and his desire for God to guide his rule as the new king.

It has been decades since I first knelt before my open Bible as a teenager, but I believe that seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness is still the best and wisest advice I ever received. As I have grown older, I look back and see how God has added bountifully to my life in many ways, both in good times and difficult situations, as I have done my best to keep my focus on Him.

Sadly, as Solomon aged, his trust began to waiver, and his focus shifted to his wealth and physical wants and desires. However, that does not have to happen to us. By God’s grace, we can seek His help and wisdom when we are young, and continue to do so as we go through life. We do not have to falter in our walks with God. Challenges and responsibilities will change over the years, but God’s Word and wisdom never change. Seeking God’s Kingdom and His righteousness will provide us with an anchor in the storms of life, as well as in times of health and prosperity.

BACKGROUND

The Book of 2 Chronicles opens with Solomon taking the throne of Judah in 970 B.C. as the divinely appointed successor to his father, David. (Further details regarding Solomon’s rise to the throne can be read in chapters 1 and 2 of 1 Kings.) This first chapter of 2 Chronicles describes Solomon gathering Israel together at Gibeon (verses 1-6), his opportunity to request of God what he desired (verses 7-13), and the wealth he acquired as king (verses 14-17).

Even though David had taken the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, the Tabernacle was in Gibeon, about six miles northwest of Jerusalem, when Solomon began his reign. This was the center of religious worship for Judah, so the new king went there to invoke God’s blessing upon his rule.

The brazen altar mentioned in verse 5 had been made by Bezaleel as the Israelites journeyed in the wilderness between Egypt and the Promised Land (see Exodus 36:1-2). Since it was nearly five hundred years old, likely tens of thousands of sacrifices had been offered upon it. The thousand burnt offerings Solomon sacrificed there was the last recorded act of worship to take place at the Tabernacle.

The offerings Solomon made to God indicated the new king’s dependence upon God and devotion to Him, and that very night, the Lord appeared to Solomon. God’s offer in verse 7, “Ask what I shall give thee,” was an invitation for Solomon to request whatever he desired from God. Before doing so, however, Solomon rehearsed God’s faithfulness to David and himself. When he did make his request, it was exemplary, revealing both his humility and his deep sense of responsibility regarding his task of leading God’s people. Verse 12 indicates that in response, God not only granted Solomon the wisdom he requested, but also promised him “riches, and wealth, and honour” in greater measure than any king before or after him.

Verses 14-17 give details of the great wealth Solomon acquired; a parallel record of his riches can be found in 1 Kings 10:26-29. It is noteworthy that in his later years, Solomon testified to the vanity of riches in the Book of Ecclesiastes, where he eloquently showed that there was no ultimate satisfaction to be found in material gain.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- I. The reign of Solomon
 - A. The wealth and wisdom of Solomon (1:1-17)
 - 1. Solomon's vision at Gibeon (1:1-13)
 - 2. Solomon's wealth (1:14-17)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 6, how many burnt offerings did King Solomon offer at the brazen altar?

2. Why do you think God appeared to Solomon in the night after Solomon offered his sacrifices?

3. How will seeking God's wisdom and direction benefit our lives today?

CONCLUSION

God blessed Solomon by strengthening his kingdom and exalting him before the people. Seeking wisdom and understanding from God was the key to this blessing. Let us purpose to seek God's wisdom, that we may also obtain the blessing of God.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And now I have sent a cunning man, endued with understanding, of Hiram my father’s, 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.” (2 Chronicles 2:13-14)

God equips individuals for tasks in His Kingdom, and the craftsman in today’s focus verses is an example. The man sent to King Solomon by King Hiram of Tyre to assist with construction of the Temple clearly was an individual of extraordinary talent! Reading of his artistic skills brings to mind a woman named Liliias Trotter, who also used her artistic talents for God—though in an entirely different way.

Isabella Liliias Trotter was born on July 14, 1853, into a wealthy family, and grew up in the privileged surroundings of London’s West End. Her artistic talent became noticeable when she was just five years old. When Liliias’ parents had to be away from the home for a time, her mother would leave a sketchbook in which she was to draw important events during her parents’ absence. The first drawings were of the docks, and the people and ships were drawn with a skill and perspective uncommon for such a young child.

Liliias’ spiritual sensitivity was also evident in her childhood. However, it grew deeper in her early twenties as she learned from notable Bible teachers like Hannah Whitall Smith and D. L. Moody that closeness with God prepares individuals to show God’s love through service to others. Liliias became active in the London Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA). She became known for fearlessly canvassing the streets alone at night, looking for prostitutes who needed to hear about the love of God, and who might be persuaded to learn an employable skill.

About the same time, Liliias’ artistic talent came to the attention of John Ruskin, a renowned art critic, when her mother showed him her daughter’s work. Ruskin immediately began informally teaching Liliias. In time, Ruskin became convinced she could be one of the best artists of the nineteenth century. He told Liliias that if she would devote herself to art, “she would be the greatest living painter and do things that

would be immortal.”¹ However, there was a condition: she must dedicate herself wholly to her painting.

While Liliias was attracted to the idea of a life devoted to art, she went to prayer, asking God what He wanted her to do. God helped her see, clear as daylight, that she could not give herself to painting in the way Ruskin meant and still seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Liliias threw herself into her London mission work with renewed passion and joy, but before long, God pointed her in another direction. In May of 1887, when a missionary to North Africa asked at a religious meeting if God was calling anyone to service in that part of the world, Liliias stood to her feet and said, “He is calling me.” When the mission board turned her down for health reasons, she and two acquaintances prayed about it and felt led to go to North Africa on their own. In March of 1888, Liliias and her friends set off for Algeria. Even though they knew no one in the country and could not speak a word of Arabic, they found lodgings in the poorest Arab section in the city of Algiers and set about learning the language.

For the next forty years, Liliias and her team established mission outposts all along the coast of North Africa and south into the Sahara Desert, sharing God’s love through words and deeds. She often went door to door, gaining access to the normally secluded women by first befriending their children. Over the years she won many Algerian Muslims to Christ through her love.

While Liliias had given up her opportunity for fame in the art world, God still had a plan to use her artistic talent. During her life in Algeria, Liliias kept journals—a page for each day, illustrated with watercolors to record the messages she received as she meditated on Scripture and observed nature. She also published a collection of beautifully handcrafted Gospel materials in Arabic, illustrated by her own paintings. In the years since her death, those paintings and illustrated devotional thoughts have been published and have touched thousands of lives.

God calls people to serve Him in different ways. We may not have the skill to work “in purple, in blue, and in fine linen, and in crimson” or to illustrate our devotional thoughts with beautiful paintings. However, we can all have a willingness to use our talents for God. Let’s follow the example of the craftsman of Solomon’s day and Liliias Trotter of the 1800s and use whatever talents God has given us in the building up of His Kingdom!

BACKGROUND

Chapters 2-4 of 2 Chronicles describe the construction and furnishing of Solomon's Temple. The task was made easier by the extensive preparations already made by David, who had purchased the land, acquired much of the material needed for construction, and delivered the plan for the Temple to Solomon. Chapter 2 records Solomon's request to Hiram, the king of Tyre, (called Hiram in the Books of Samuel and Kings) for skilled laborers and supplies (verses 1-10). The chapter continues with Hiram's answer and promised help (verses 11-16), and Solomon's numbering and organization of his laborers (verses 17-18).

Verse 1 of this chapter offers a heading for the verses that follow, as it relates Solomon's purpose to fulfill the assignment given to him by God. Two requirements were necessary for carrying out the building project: personnel and materials. Solomon's negotiations with Hiram and his request for Hiram to help with these needs are found in verses 3-10. Solomon's humble attitude before God and careful approach to Hiram is evident in verse 6.

The phrases "cunning to work in gold" and "skill to grave" (or engrave) in verse 7 indicate that Solomon was requesting the help of a superior craftsman who was accomplished in working with fine metals. The cedar trees grown in Lebanon (verse 8) were renowned for their excellent quality. The fact that Solomon wanted to incorporate superior materials and the work of professional artisans is an indicator of the care he intended to take in accomplishing his God-given task.

The Jewish historian Josephus records that Hiram reigned in Tyre for thirty-four years. During his reign, he greatly enhanced and expanded the city of Tyre. He had maintained a friendly relationship with David, supplying him with cedar from Lebanon and laborers to assist with the building of David's palace, so it is not surprising that Solomon turned to him for laborers and supplies for the Temple building project.

King Hiram responded in writing, granting Solomon's request for material and skilled laborers. Verse 15 indicates that the two negotiated a form of payment. This makes it clear that the goods Hiram supplied and the service of his people were not a gift or a sacrifice, though he showed respect to the God of Israel (see verse 12).

Verses 17-18 record that the labor force mentioned in verse 2 of this chapter was comprised of "strangers [citizens of other countries] that were in the land of Israel." These were descendants of the heathen nations that the Israelites of Joshua's day had not fully driven from the land (see 1 Kings 9:20-21).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- I. The reign of Solomon
 - B. The construction of Solomon's Temple
 - 1. The preparations (2:1-18)
 - a. Solomon's message to Hiram (2:1-10)
 - b. Hiram's aid to Solomon (2:11-16)
 - c. Solomon's division of the labor force (2:17-18)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 4, what was Solomon's purpose in building the Temple?

2. What kind of attitude of heart is reflected by Solomon's statement in verse 6?

3. What are some ways you could develop the talents or abilities God has given you so they could be used for Him?

CONCLUSION

God has a role for each one of us to fill in the work of His Kingdom. Have you consecrated to Him the abilities and talents He has given you?

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“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 Chronicles 3:1)

After much prayer, and months of exploring options, drawing plans, and obtaining permits, a groundbreaking ceremony on July 4, 1982, initiated construction of a new Apostolic Faith church in south-east Portland. I remember that day very well!

The site for the new building was a four-acre piece of ground across Duke Street from the campground, and it formerly had been used as the church parking lot. In my early childhood, I had joined other children on the huge steel merry-go-round that stood on the southeast corner of that lot. I remember watching the “big kids” play baseball there after our annual Memorial Day campground cleanup and picnic. Later, my dad taught me to drive on that wide-open space, away from objects that would have been endangered by my unskilled attempts to maneuver a vehicle.

Those are good memories, but what took place on that hot summer day in 1982 and in the months that followed is special to me in a different way. On the day of the groundbreaking, a brass ensemble stood on a wooden platform at the center of the lot and played “How Firm a Foundation” and “Move Forward.” A male quartet sang “Be strong, O men, be strong.” Brother Elmer Luka, who was to supervise the project, commented at the ceremony, “We can put the boards together, drive the nails, mix the concrete, and lay the stones, but we are looking for something greater than that. We are looking for God to come down and put His seal of approval and blessing upon this building.”

Actual construction began on August 1, and I joined many from the Portland congregation who frequently stopped by to watch as the project progressed. Over one thousand yards of concrete went into the foundation, and eight huge pillars were poured to anchor the main framework of the building. Gradually, the project moved through the various phases. Walls were erected, wiring and plumbing installed, sheetrock applied, and cabinets put in place. Workers from the Portland congregation and many of our branch churches worked side by side, putting up the exterior brickwork, painting walls, crafting interior railings, laying carpet, and installing pews.

By the spring of 1984, the one-time parking lot was the site of a beautiful new church for the Portland congregation.

As I read today’s text about the construction of the house of the Lord in Solomon’s day, I thought about the people who undoubtedly watched with great interest as the Temple began to take shape. Like those of us who observed the construction of our Portland church, did they think ahead to the day when they would worship there? Did they anticipate the blessing of the Lord coming upon that beautiful structure?

Although the churches where most believers worship cannot compare with the grandeur of Solomon’s Temple, the size or magnificence of a church building is not what is truly important. Even the care and craftsmanship by dedicated workers is not what matters most. What hallows the house of God is the presence of God Himself! Wherever the Spirit of God dwells is a blessed place.

In the decades since our Portland church was dedicated, we have been blessed to feel God’s presence meet with us there—and that is true wherever the people of God gather with grateful hearts to honor Him. Let us thank God for our churches and for our freedom to worship. And may we always come into God’s house with a mindful awareness that we are there to meet Him!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 3 relates how Solomon began the construction of the permanent “house of the LORD” on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. Dimensions for the structure are recorded in verse 3. Details are given regarding the outer porch or vestibule and the Holy Place (verses 4-7), followed by a description of the inner Holy of Holies (verses 8-14). The chapter concludes with a depiction of the two pillars that stood before the porch (verses 15-17). These verses are some of the many descriptions in Scripture that emphasize the magnificence of the Temple.

Mount Moriah, where the Temple was to be constructed, was the place where God had instructed Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice (see Genesis 22:2). It was also the site of the threshing-floor of Ornan where David sacrificed to the Lord and prayed for an end to the plague which came upon Israel after he sinned by taking a census (see 1 Chronicles 21).

The date given in verse 2 for when Solomon began to build is not an indication that he delayed the start of the construction project for four years. He

likely began organizing to fulfill his God-ordained task in the first year of his reign. However, it would have taken some time to request and obtain timber from Lebanon, as well as the other needed materials for building, as described in the previous chapter.

The measurements given in verses 3-4 for the Holy Place are comparable to those noted in 1 Kings 6:2. The Jewish historian Josephus recorded that the building was divided into the two sections by a partition of cedar-wood with a door overlaid with gold and covered by a costly curtain.¹ The statement in verse 6 that Solomon “garnished the house with precious stones for beauty” may mean the floor was an inlaid mosaic. The location of Parvaim, where gold for the Temple was obtained, is unknown, but it was probably somewhere in eastern Arabia. The engraved cherubim on the walls (verse 7) were patterned after the designs of cherubim woven on the inner covering of the Tabernacle.

Special attention was given to the Holy of Holies (or Most Holy Place) described in verses 8-17. It was a perfect cube shape with each gold-overlaid side measuring twenty cubits in length. Inside were two large cherubim, which were also overlaid with gold. The phrase “image work” in verse 10 likely indicates that the cherubim were carved sculptures.

The pillars mentioned in verses 15-17 were impressive adornments at the front of the Temple. The parallel description in 1 Kings 7:15 indicates these pillars were made of brass. Jachin means “He shall establish” and Boaz means “in strength.” They were a reminder to worshippers that the Temple was established by God and built by His strength.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
Used by permission per WORDsearch

- I. The reign of Solomon
 - B. The construction of Solomon's Temple
 2. The construction
 - a. The Temple structure (3:1-17)
 - (1) The location (3:1)
 - (2) The dimensions (3:2-3)
 - (3) The porch and Holy Place (3:4-7)
 - (4) The Holy of Holies (3:8-14)
 - (a) The room (3:8-9)
 - (b) The cherubim (3:10-13)
 - (c) The veil (3:14)
 - (5) The pillars (3:15-17)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 1, what is significant about the site chosen for the Temple?

2. What do you think the quality of materials and craftsmanship used in the Temple construction indicates?

3. What are some areas in your life where your care and attention to detail could bring glory to God?

CONCLUSION

It does not really matter whether a house of worship is simple or elaborate. What matters is that God meets His people there.

NOTES

1. Flavius Josephus. *Antiquities of the Jews*. Translated by William Whiston, M.A. (London: William Whiston, M.A., 1737) VIII, 3, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2848/2848-h/2848-h.htm>.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And Hiram made the pots, and the shovels, and the basins. And Hiram finished the work that he was to make for king Solomon for the house of God.” (2 Chronicles 4:11)

Today’s focus verse refers to Hiram, a skilled and able artisan from Tyre, who made many of the implements for use in the Temple worship. That verse reminded me of Roy Allen, a veteran of the Apostolic Faith work, also a skilled craftsman, whose handiwork is still being used in our churches today.

As a young boy of twelve or thirteen, Brother Allen came from Minnesota with his family to eastern Oregon, where they settled in the small farming community of Cove. He grew up to be a strong-willed young man with a taste for liquor and a terrible temper, often taking out his frustrations on the farm animals. However, after his sister moved to Portland and was saved at an Apostolic Faith camp meeting, she sent her family literature that told of victory over sin. God began to deal with Brother Allen’s heart.

The little church in Cove where the family attended was having special services, and he went to one of them. There, such a terrible darkness came over him that he knew he was lost. “God cornered me up,” he recounted. “I am so thankful that I went to the altar that night, got on my two knees, and prayed to God with all my heart. As I knelt there, I heard the minister holding out one of God’s promises to me: ‘Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon’ (Isaiah 55:7). I was ready for that pardon, and thank God, I surrendered.

“You talk about a surprise! I didn’t have any idea that God could be so real to a person on this earth, but I felt the burden of sin roll off and God filled my heart with joy and peace. He broke the habits and appetites that had me bound—the chewing tobacco, cigarettes, and booze. I had cursed, got mad and threw things around, and frequented the dance halls on Saturday nights. But in a moment of time, God took all that out, slick and clean. He made me as free as if I had never had those habits. What a miracle!”

That was in 1916, and from that day forward, Brother Allen was a changed man. He made restitution, confessing to violating the Oregon Game Laws and sending money back to a storekeeper he had cheated. In 1917, he and his wife and two small boys

moved to Portland. He received his sanctification while on the job in 1917, and in 1918, the baptism of the Holy Ghost. His heart’s desire became to offer his talents and time to the Lord. He played a horn in the first Apostolic Faith orchestra and sang in a male quartet for many years. A faithful participant in the street work and jail services, he even learned to sing one song and give his testimony in Chinese.

Brother Allen was a master carpenter. In those early years of the Apostolic Faith work, there was much construction work to be done: the tabernacle to be built, benches and altars to be constructed for the tabernacle, and tent frames put up for the congregation who came to stay on the campground during the annual camp meetings. Through the years, Brother Allen was always on hand to do his part.

Among his accomplishments were the beautiful wooden pulpits he designed and built for use in our Apostolic Faith churches. They were engineered with a counterweight mechanism that allows them to be raised or lowered as the minister needs. For many decades now, those pulpits—including one in the Portland church and another in the campground tabernacle—have been used by our ministers in many locations as they preach God’s Word. Like Hiram of old, Brother Allen invested his efforts for the house of God. One day, he too “finished the work” God had assigned him, and stepped into eternity to receive his reward.

What can you do for the work of the Lord? Has the Lord blessed you with time, resources, or skills that could be offered back to Him? Whether or not we have the talents of gifted artisans, we can all pray for lost souls to respond to God’s call. Who knows, your prayers might have a part in bringing a Hiram or a Roy Allen into the family of God!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 4 of 2 Chronicles describes the furnishings prepared for Solomon’s Temple. Verses 1-8 indicate that these included the altar for burnt offerings, the molten sea for the priests’ ceremonial washing, the ten lavers for washing the sacrifices, the candlesticks, and the tables. Verses 11-18 describe the implements Hiram made from brass, while verses 19-22 cover the items fashioned by Solomon’s workers.

The bronze altar in verse 1 was patterned after the altar made by Bezaleel for the Tabernacle (see Exodus 27:1-8) but was much larger, measuring approximately thirty feet square and fifteen feet high. Its height would have necessitated a means of ascent,

which probably was steps or an incline ramp. It was located in the courtyard in front of the Temple (see 1 Kings 8:64).

The “molten sea” mentioned in verse 2 was a large basin for water set upon twelve sculptured oxen. Made of cast bronze, it was more than fifteen feet across. According to Exodus 30:20-21, if priests did not wash their hands and feet to make themselves ceremonially clean before ministering, they would die. Five lavers, or basins for washing the sacrifices, stood on each side of the molten sea (verse 6).

The candlesticks referred to in verse 7 were large lampstands, with five of them positioned on each side of the Holy Place. The ten tables mentioned (verse 8) held the shewbread—bread that represented the continual fellowship of Israel with God. The one hundred basins in verse 8 held the blood of sacrificed animals that was sprinkled about the altar when making sacrifices of atonement.

The “court of the priests” in verse 9 was a reference to the inner court, which was open only to the priests. The “great court” was the outer court, which was open to the assembly of Israel as a whole.

Huram, who made the brass instruments of worship described in verses 11-18, was a master craftsman of Tyre who was born of a Jewish mother and Gentile father (see 1 Kings 7:14). He is not to be confused with Hiram the King of Tyre, though both men are referred to as Hiram in 1 Kings.

The list of golden implements in verses 18-22, which included tongs, snuffers, basins, spoons, and censers, is also given in 1 Kings 7:48-51.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
Used by permission per WORDsearch

- I. The reign of Solomon
 - B. The construction of Solomon's Temple
 - 2. The construction
 - b. The Temple furnishings (4:1-22)
 - (1) The bronze altar (4:1)
 - (2) The cast-metal sea (4:2-5)
 - (3) The ten basins (4:6)
 - (4) The ten candlesticks (4:7)
 - (5) The ten tables (4:8)
 - (6) The court (4:9-10)
 - (7) The work of Hiram (4:11-18)
 - (8) The work of Solomon (4:19-22)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 5, what flower was engraved around the brim of the molten sea?

2. Why do you think the author of Chronicles gave such detailed information about the implements to be used in the Temple worship?

3. Every service performed by willing hearts for the work of the Lord is important to Him. What are steps we can take to equip ourselves?

CONCLUSION

Each of us has something to do in the work of the Lord. What contributions are you making? While we may not have the skills of a Hiram or a Roy Allen, we can all participate through prayer.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“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 music, 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.” (2 Chronicles 5:13)

As a school band director, choosing instruments to purchase is part of my job. There are certain important aspects to consider in making a selection, such as tone, valve speed, metal quality, and other factors that affect sound and durability. Everyone wants an instrument that will last a long time and produce a warm tone.

Once, when looking to buy a particular instrument for myself, I gave special attention to the intonation, or accuracy of pitch, because that type of instrument has a reputation for tonal inconsistencies. As I was playing and comparing several models, there was one with a note so bad that nothing I did could get it in tune. All the other notes were fine, but that one note was awful—it felt like I might break the reed in half trying to get the pitch up! It would be horrible if that note came out in a performance, so I did not purchase that instrument. It had many good notes, but I could not buy it because of the one bad note.

Today’s text tells of when the Temple was completed and the Ark of the Covenant brought into it, along with the instruments and items that David and Solomon had prepared. On that day, the focus verse says, “The trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD.” Everything had been made ready with great care, and there were no bad notes!

In our lives, we want to be certain that we are righteous instruments in God’s hands so He will be glorified as He was at the Temple dedication. If we choose to hold something back from God—maybe a consecration or restitution He has asked of us—we become like instruments with a bad note until we yield that area to Him. That one “note” could be the reason we are not receiving a deeper experience or the answer to prayer that we are seeking.

We want to be willing and usable for God, and we do not want to hinder His work in any way. It can

be beneficial to ask ourselves, “Am I holding on to something that God has asked of me? Is there one thing standing between me and receiving from Him?” When we give our lives to God, we want to give Him everything. Then, as today’s focus verse describes, we can participate in His work “as one” with our fellow Christians. When we are all in tune, praising and thanking God with no “bad notes,” His Presence will inhabit our praises and He will be glorified.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 5 begins with a statement that Solomon’s work on the Temple was completed. Then the furnishing and implements he had prepared, along with the gifts that David had dedicated, were brought into the Temple treasury. The moving of the Ark of the Covenant into its new location is described in verses 2-10, and the musical praises of the Levites and trumpeters in verses 11-12. As their praises were ascending, the glory of the Lord came down and filled the Temple (verses 13-14).

The Temple building project was the capstone achievement of Solomon’s life. He began this great work shortly after he came to the throne, and according to 1 Kings 6:38, it was finished in his eleventh year as king. Upon completion, Solomon called together the elders and tribal leaders of Israel for the ceremonial dedication of the Temple and the moving of the Ark from its temporary tent in Jerusalem to its new location.

Verse 5 indicates that both priests and Levites transported the furnishings and the Ark to the Temple, but the priests themselves placed the Ark into its resting place in the Holy of Holies.

Verse 10 states that the Ark contained only the two tables of stone on which God had written the Ten Commandments. At different times in Israel’s history, other articles were also in the Ark, such as a pot of manna (Exodus 16:33-34) and Aaron’s rod that budded (Numbers 17:10).

Verses 11-12 describe the praise offered by the Levites at the installation of the Ark. It is noteworthy that all of the twenty-four courses (divisions) of priests were present for this sacred occasion, rather than just the normal rotation. As the whole group sang together accompanied by 120 trumpeters, making “one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD,” God came down and consecrated the Temple by filling it with His glory to the extent that “the priests could not stand to minister” (verses 13-14).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- I. The reign of Solomon
 - B. The construction of Solomon's Temple
 - 3. The dedication
 - a. The Ark placed in the Temple (5:1-14)
 - (1) The Temple finished (5:1)
 - (2) The procession with the Ark (5:2-10)
 - (3) The ministry of the singers (5:11-14)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 5, what did the Levites bring to the Temple from the Tabernacle?

2. What can we learn from the fact that the people were worshipping God in unity when the Temple was filled with God's presence?

3. What steps should we take if God's Spirit reveals a consecration that the Lord wants us to make?

CONCLUSION

God sees when we have the desire to be fully yielded to Him, and He can help our lives to glorify Him in what we say and do.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“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: 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).” (2 Chronicles 6:29-30)

When I was growing up, we always had chickens on our farm. One year, Mom and Dad bought huge incubators and filled the small living area of our house with them. The lamps of those incubators warmed the eggs—and us as well—night and day as the eggs developed into hatching chicks.

The incubators had double shelves holding trays with rows of eggs, which had to be turned every day. The part that fascinated us children was the “candling.” That was when each egg was held up to a light so we could look into it and determine if a chick was developing inside. If it was, we could actually see the embryo growing in the egg! If there was no life evident in the egg, it was discarded.

Anyone can see through an eggshell if they hold it up to a bright light, but there is only one who can see into the hearts of men, and that is God. Today’s focus verse says, “Thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men.” When a sinner is longing for salvation, though you and I might not think that one would ever surrender, God can see through the facade and pretense. He sees past the false bravado of a soul that is crying inside for Him, and can melt the hardness of that heart. Then, when that person surrenders, God gives a new heart, removing all the confusion, guilt, and turmoil, and replacing it with peace, joy, and confidence in Him. How thankful we are that while we were still sinners, He looked past our sinful actions to our longing for deliverance!

Even after we are saved, it is important for us to allow God to keep searching our hearts. He watches to make sure we are developing properly and nurtures us each day. He knows when we hurt, when we are lonely, when we are discouraged, and when we are faithful. No matter what challenges we face, God knows how to help us through because He sees what we need—even when we do not.

It is a comfort to know that God can see past what others see to the innermost thoughts and intents of our

hearts! As we walk with Him, let’s remember to ask Him to look into our hearts, that we might grow to be more like Him each day.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 6 continues the description of the dedication of Solomon’s Temple that began in chapter 5. This chapter describes Solomon’s blessing upon the people who had assembled for the event (verses 1-11) and then records his prayer of dedication and request for God’s blessing upon Israel (verses 12-42).

Solomon’s address to the congregation that stood before him centered on gratitude to God for fulfilling His promises to David. His comment in verse 4 about God “who hath with his hands fulfilled that which he spake with his mouth” was recognition that the Temple was the fulfillment of God’s plan rather than David’s or his own. David and Solomon were human instruments, but the design was God’s. In verse 5, Solomon referenced Israel’s history by mentioning the exodus out of Egypt. Though that event had occurred some five hundred years earlier, it was important that it remain as real in Israel’s national awareness as it was on the day it happened. In verses 10-11, Solomon presented the newly finished Temple to the Lord.

Solomon’s prayer of dedication (verses 12-42) took place on a high brazen scaffold that would have enabled the entire assembly to easily see him. His posture of kneeling before the Lord in view of the whole assembly (noted in verse 13), was unusual for a king because it denoted submission to a higher authority. Both by words and actions, Solomon demonstrated his respect for and acknowledgement of God as the ultimate authority.

Solomon began his prayer by expressing gratitude to God for His past fulfillment of promises, and then asked the Lord to fulfill the promises He had made to his father, David. In verses 22-39, Solomon made seven specific petitions to God, and each was directly associated with worship at the Temple. His petitions were:

- That God would confirm the innocence of the just and condemn the guilty (verses 22-23).
- That God would forgive and restore the nation (verses 24-25).
- That God would forgive and send rain when Israel’s sins would bring drought (verses 26-27).
- That God would forgive and heal the land of famine, pestilence, and other afflictions (verses 28-31).

- That God would hear the prayer of foreigners who would seek Him (verses 32-33).
- That God would grant His people victory in any God-directed battles (verses 34-35).
- That God would hear and forgive those who would pray for their sins while in captivity (verses 36-39).

Solomon concluded his prayer in much the same way as he began — with an expression of his desire for God to fulfill the promises He had made to David.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- I. The reign of Solomon
 - B. The construction of Solomon's Temple
 3. The dedication
 - b. The address and prayer of Solomon (6:1-42)
 - (1) Solomon's address to Israel (6:1-11)
 - (2) Solomon's dedicatory prayer (6:12-42)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 10, what promise to David did Solomon say was fulfilled?

2. Why does God sometimes allow difficulties to come into the lives of those who do not serve Him (verses 26-27)?

3. What can we learn and apply to our lives from the opening of Solomon's prayer in verse 14?

CONCLUSION

God is looking at hearts today. What does He see when He looks at yours and mine? By His grace we want to be developing just as He desires.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“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.” (2 Chronicles 7:14)

One night some years ago, our congregation had a wonderful experience of God’s healing power. At the time, I was the pastor of a branch church, and for some reason I had become extremely fatigued. When the phone would ring, it was an effort for me even to answer. That Sunday night, I gave the message with what little strength I had, and after going to prayer, a sister indicated that she wanted to be prayed for. Just to get up and walk across the platform to anoint her was a strain.

The sister was sitting on the altar. I did not know her entire story, but apparently some time prior, she’d had a surgery to remove a tumor, which recently had returned. Now she felt like she was in the midst of a real trial, and needed prayer. Another minister joined me, we anointed her with oil according to the instructions in James 5:14, and began to pray. In my tiredness, as I sought God, I simply asked Him to come. And He did! With my eyes closed and my face Heavenward, I felt the glory of God. While I do not remember everything that happened in that prayer meeting, by the end that sister was saying, “I’m healed! I’m healed!” and my fatigue was gone as well. What a victory!

Thinking about what happened that night, I realize that a simple prayer asking God to come is the best prayer for any situation. Sometimes we have a tendency to seek for certain outcomes, rather than simply seeking God. But in our focus verse, God said that if we will humble ourselves, follow His prescribed steps, and seek Him, He will take care of the rest. He knows our needs, and it is not necessary to beg Him for help. If we just seek to be in His presence, asking Him to come into our midst, He will take care of any problem we may have. The Holy Spirit cannot come into a place and leave the lives there unchanged—He will have an impact! And it will be the best one possible.

When we have a need, let’s seek God first. It will require humbling ourselves, obeying God’s instructions to us, and then simply asking for His presence in our lives. He has promised to answer.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 7 concludes the description of the dedication of Solomon’s Temple that started in chapter 5. This chapter begins at the close of Solomon’s prayer (recorded in the previous chapter), when fire came down from Heaven in a dramatic and visible proof of God’s approval, and the glory of the Lord filled the Temple (verses 1-3). Then the Temple was dedicated and sacrifices made upon the brazen altar (verses 4-7), and the dedicatory feast and subsequent Feast of Tabernacles took place (verses 8-11). The final section of the chapter, verses 12-22, provides an account of God’s second appearance to Solomon and His divine blessing and warning.

The fire that consumed the sacrifices at this dedicatory assembly is one of several instances in the Old Testament when that occurred. Other occasions included the inauguration of the Tabernacle in the wilderness, when David sacrificed on Mount Moriah, and when Elijah prayed in the contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.

The manifestation of God’s presence that “filled the LORD’s house,” noted in verse 2, probably appeared as radiant light and is referred to as the *Shekinah* in rabbinic literature. The people responded with reverence and worship, glorifying God and praising His goodness and mercy.

Although the ceremony and the praises of the people were fervent, God still had to be honored through blood sacrifices, both for atonement and as a demonstration of fellowship with God. One portion of each sacrificed animal was dedicated to the Lord, and shares were given to the priests and the people. The immense number of sacrifices on this occasion provided enough meat to feed the vast multitude for two weeks. This account of offerings parallels the description given in 1 Kings 8:62-66. The assertion in verse 8 that the people attended “from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt” meant that people came from all parts of the country; it is similar to the phrase “from Dan to Beer-sheba” that is used elsewhere in the historical records of Israel.

In verses 12-16, God responded once more to Solomon, appearing to him in the night and assuring him that his prayer had been heard. However, the blessings promised were conditional. In verse 14, God told Solomon that when trouble came upon the people because of their sins, four conditions would need to be met to obtain forgiveness and forestall judgment: they would need to humble themselves, pray

for forgiveness, seek God continually, and turn away from their sinful behavior. When these conditions were met, God said He would hear from Heaven, forgive their sins, and heal their land. God also promised special attention to the prayers offered from the Temple.

In verses 17-22, God laid out for Solomon the conditions he would need to meet personally if his kingdom were to prosper. Again, the promises were conditional. If Solomon walked before God in obedience, there would be divine blessing on his reign and the reigns of his descendants. However, if he or his descendants turned away from God, then God would correct their disobedience by “pluck[ing] them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them” (verse 20). In addition, the Temple itself would be cast out of God’s sight and made a byword among the nations.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
Used by permission per WORDsearch

- I. The reign of Solomon
 - B. The construction of Solomon’s Temple
 - 3. The dedication
 - c. The Lord’s presence in the Temple (7:1-22)
 - (1) The Lord’s glory fills the Temple (7:1-3)
 - (2) The dedicatory sacrifices (7:4-7)
 - (3) The observance of Tabernacles (7:8-9)
 - (4) The Lord’s message to Solomon (7:10-22)
 - (a) Blessing for obedience (7:10-18)
 - (b) Scattering for disobedience (7:19-22)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did the Children of Israel do when they saw God’s glory come down upon the Temple? (verse 3)

2. God’s promises in this chapter were conditional. What might be some of the conditions we need to meet in order to benefit from the promises in the Bible?

3. What are some ways we can humble ourselves before God?

CONCLUSION

We want to humble ourselves and seek God’s presence in our lives. When we do so, He has promised to hear from Heaven.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Also he built Beth-horon the upper, and Beth-horon the nether, fenced cities, with walls, gates, and bars; 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.” (2 Chronicles 8:5-6)

Have you ever stood at the base of a skyscraper and marveled at its height as you looked up? Perhaps you wondered who designed and engineered such a structure. If the skyscraper is located in the United States, American architect Louis Henry Sullivan (1856-1924) deserves a great deal of the credit, even if the building is a relatively recent addition to the city skyline.

In today’s architectural community, Louis Sullivan is acclaimed as the developer of some of the most significant concepts in modern architecture, including that of the skyscraper. In fact, he is frequently referred to as “the father of skyscrapers.” Another famous architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, once said of his friend and mentor, “Louis Sullivan gave America the skyscraper as an organic modern work of art. While America’s architects were stumbling at its height, piling one thing on top of another, foolishly denying it, Louis Sullivan seized its height as its characteristic feature and made it sing; a new thing under the sun!”¹

Although Sullivan lived many centuries after King Solomon, the two men no doubt would have had fascinating discussions if they had lived in the same era! They were both creative, intelligent, and ambitious builders. Today’s focus verses list some of Solomon’s accomplishments in the field of construction, noting that he built and settled new fortified cities, storage cities, and cities to house his military equipment and cavalry. In other chapters, we read of him building the ornate Temple in Jerusalem, his personal palace, and the palace in the forest of Lebanon.

We may admire the intelligence and talent of these two men—and countless other brilliant innovators through the ages—but man’s creative instinct is just a pale reflection of God’s creative power. After all, He is the Creator of this amazing universe and all the wonders in it! While we were made in the image of God and thus have a desire and ability to create, the most elaborate marvels made by man do not come close to the wonders of God’s creation.

Think of Jesus’ words, recorded in Matthew 6:28-29, “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”

Most of us will never design a building. Our construction efforts may not go much beyond installing shelves in a closet, and our creative endeavors may be limited to knitting a baby blanket or helping our eight-year-old build a birdhouse. However, we can all be energetic, dedicated, and ambitious for the spread of God’s kingdom! God has given each one of us abilities He wants to use. We can put our best efforts into the work of the Lord, with the desire that whatever we do will bring glory to Him.

Although we likely will never receive the worldly acclaim awarded to creative giants like Solomon and Louis Sullivan, God will be pleased when we do our best for Him. And *that* is what matters most!

BACKGROUND

This chapter summarizes Solomon’s achievements as king, primarily noting his building accomplishments (verses 1-11), his establishment of religious protocols when the Temple was completed (verses 12-16), and his sea-trading ventures (verses 17-18). It reveals the great enterprise and productivity of Solomon’s administration.

The phrase “at the end of twenty years” in verse 1 indicates that it took Solomon seven years to build the Temple and thirteen years to build his palace (see 1 Kings 6:38 and 7:1). At the end of these twenty years, his kingdom was secure, stable, and blessed.

The word “restored” in verse 2 indicates that King Hiram returned some cities (or villages) to Solomon. Perhaps these were among the cities that displeased Hiram in his exchange with Solomon (see 1 Kings 9:11-12). The military action against Hamath-zobah, noted in verse 3, was likely a response to the breaking of a peace treaty made earlier by David. The locations of the cities named in verses 4-6 reflected Solomon’s interest in building “throughout all the land of his dominion.”

Verses 7-10 refer to the descendants of tribal nations conquered by God’s people in earlier years, whom Solomon used as his labor force. Israelites served in positions that were honorable or managerial in nature, as indicated by the phrase “that bare rule over the people.”

Solomon’s marriage to the Egyptian Pharaoh’s daughter, mentioned in verse 11, was the first of his many unwise marriages (see 1 Kings 11:1-3). While his union with idolatrous women was disobedience to God, the fact that he did not want Pharaoh’s daughter to reside in close proximity to holy places shows some degree of spiritual sensitivity.

Verses 12-16 reveal that the worship procedures Solomon instituted after the completion of the Temple followed the pattern originally organized by King David (see 1 Chronicles 24).

Ezion-geber, mentioned in verse 17, was a port city established by Solomon on the northern tip of the Red Sea—a location that would have provided him with strategic access to southern trade. The implication is that Hiram supplied ships and skilled mariners for Solomon’s fleets. According to 1 Kings 10:11-12, gold, precious stones, and specialty woods were transported to this port. The exact location of Ophir (verse 18) is uncertain, though it possibly was in southern Arabia or the eastern coast of Africa.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- I. The reign of Solomon
 - C. The character of Solomon’s reign
 - 1. Solomon’s building activities (8:1-11)
 - a. The list of accomplishments (8:1-6)
 - b. The labor force (8:7-10)
 - c. The house for Pharaoh’s daughter (8:11)
 - 2. Solomon’s religious zeal (8:12-16)
 - a. His sacrifices (8:12-13)
 - b. His attention to Temple affairs (8:14-15)
 - c. His completion of the Temple (8:16)
 - 3. Solomon’s Ophir expedition (8:17-18)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Based on verse 1, how many years was Solomon engaged in building the Temple and his own palace?

2. Why do you think Solomon was so careful to establish the Temple worship procedures “according to the order of David his father”? (verse 14)

3. Who has influenced you by setting a godly example in dedicated service to God? What actions can you take to follow in their footsteps?

CONCLUSION

The reward we seek is an *eternal* one: we want to please God by doing whatever we can for Him, and by performing every act of service to the best of our abilities.

NOTES

1. Craven, Jackie. “About Louis Sullivan, Architect.” ThoughtCo., <https://www.thoughtco.com/louis-sullivan-americas-first-modern-architect-177875> (accessed December 2, 2023).



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Happy are thy men, and happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and hear thy wisdom.” (2 Chronicles 9:7)

I remember taking a history class in college that was fascinating. My professor told us that he studied three to four hours before delivering each of our one-hour lectures. His dedication showed, and it was the best college course I’ve ever taken, both in information and enjoyment.

Imagine living in the day of Solomon, however! An interesting college course pales in comparison to what someone could have learned from Solomon. God gave him the gifts of wisdom and discernment he had asked for as a new king, along with the riches and wealth he had not asked for. This wisdom was more than great intelligence; it was a divine gift. It went beyond natural abilities and achieved a breadth of understanding that only God could give. The Queen of Sheba was so amazed at Solomon’s wisdom, wealth, and kingdom that she was literally breathless.

The Queen of Sheba offered high praise to Solomon when she had seen all his kingdom and had communed with him. She proclaimed that all his people—even his servants—were happy and blessed by his wisdom. Today we hear many innovative ideas presented in books, blogs, and various other types of media. They may present new philosophies and new insights into the human mind, but nothing can compare to the words of Solomon that came from the wisdom of God.

Thankfully, some of Solomon’s words were preserved for us to read. The Books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon make available just a few of the wise words given to him by God and kept through the ages. As the Queen of Sheba proclaimed, we will be happy as we read his words.

We can go much deeper than merely reading words, however. We too can seek divine wisdom! In the New Testament, the Apostle James tells us that if we lack wisdom, we can ask of God, who “giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not” (James 1:5). No matter what vast amounts of knowledge we acquire in this world, if we do not have the wisdom from above, it will benefit us very little. We may enjoy temporary pleasures, including possessions and money, but employing godly wisdom in

our daily decisions will bring a far greater return in eternity.

BACKGROUND

The first twelve verses of 2 Chronicles 9 describe the royal visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon’s kingdom. This visit is also described in 1 Kings 10:1-13, and the Gospel writers Matthew and Luke recorded that Jesus Christ himself referred to it (see Matthew 12:42 and Luke 11:31).

Most scholars agree that the kingdom of Sheba, also known as Saba, was in the southern part of ancient Arabia where Yemen is today. Because Sheba had control of the international trade routes through its land, it was a wealthy kingdom that produced much gold, spices, perfumes, incense, and precious woods.

The Queen of Sheba was not the wife of a king but rather, the ruler of the kingdom; secular historians concur that queens rather than kings ruled kingdoms of that region at times. Her journey to Solomon was lengthy—about 1,500 miles—and she traveled with “a very great company” and camels heavily laden with precious gifts and possibly goods for trade.

Solomon’s kingdom was not only legendary for its material prosperity, but also for the king’s great wisdom. When the Queen of Sheba heard of that, she came to Solomon with great and difficult questions. According to verse 2, “Solomon told her [answered] all her questions.” The word translated “hard questions” is the same one used for the riddles with which Samson tested the Philistines; seemingly such tests of intelligence and wisdom were common in ancient courts.

The Queen of Sheba was not only impressed with Solomon’s wisdom, but also with the prosperity and splendor of the buildings she saw in Jerusalem, the feasts hosted by the king, his servants, and the elaborate apparel his ministers and servants wore. The meaning of the phrase in verse 4, “his ascent by which he went up into the house of the LORD,” is unclear, but it may refer to an elaborate, private entryway that only the king used, or to the splendid entourage that accompanied King Solomon when he went to the Temple. While the Queen was obviously familiar with the world of royal splendor and luxury, she was completely overwhelmed by the glory of Solomon’s kingdom.

When the Queen of Sheba returned to her homeland, verse 12 states that she took with her many gifts from the treasury of Solomon.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- I. The reign of Solomon
 - C. The character of Solomon's reign
 - 4. Solomon's visit from the Queen of Sheba (9:1-12)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 6, what was the reason for the queen's visit?

2. Why do you think the Queen of Sheba gave glory to "the LORD thy God" in verse 8 when expressing admiration for King Solomon? Why didn't she give all of the glory to Solomon?

3. We may not be wealthy in material goods or be the head of a kingdom, but what steps can we take to be a witness like Solomon was to the Queen of Sheba?

CONCLUSION

Like King Solomon, we can ask for divine wisdom that will enable us to live wisely and be witnesses to others.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred and threescore and six talents of gold; beside that which chapmen and merchants brought. And all the kings of Arabia and governors of the country brought gold and silver to Solomon.” (2 Chronicles 9:13-14)

A couple of years ago, my husband and I had the opportunity to visit the Winter Palace in Russia, located on the bank of the Neva River in St. Petersburg. From the 1760s until 1917, the Winter Palace was the main residence of the Russian tsars. Today, this marvel of Baroque architecture houses the Hermitage Museum and an incomparable collection of artifacts numbering over three million items.

While the furnishing and artifacts were impressive, it was the amount of gold that amazed me beyond words. Never in my life had I seen or imagined so much gold in one place. The opulence was quite literally staggering!

The palace is huge: 700 feet long and 100 feet high, with 176 sculptured figures along the roofline that add to the building’s striking appearance. While we did not begin to see them all, we were told that the palace has 1,786 doors, 1,945 windows, 1,500 lavishly decorated halls and rooms, and 117 staircases! Built in the shape of a rectangle, with inner windows and doors opening onto an enclosed garden courtyard, it truly is an amazing sight.

On the day of our visit, we joined a stream of other tourists being rapidly ushered from one ornate area to the next by guardians of the palace. Elaborate features of gold and other precious materials dazzled our eyes. However, the second largest room in the Winter Palace, the Armorial Hall, stands out in my memory. The walls of this enormous chamber—originally the place where official ceremonies and weddings were held—are lined with immense fluted columns of gold. The magnificent inlaid floor, made from sixteen varieties of rare wood, is polished to an almost mirror-like gloss. Huge crystal chandeliers hang from the coffered white and gold ceilings, and ornate matching sconces adorn the walls.

The luxury we viewed that day made me think of Solomon’s wealth, described in today’s text. King Solomon’s fortune dwarfed that of every person who lived before him; he was the richest person in the world of his day. He reigned for forty years, and we are told that every year he received 666 talents of

gold. This did not include income derived from business and trade, nor the annual tribute paid to him by the kings and governors of surrounding nations. His wealth was so tremendous that during his reign, silver was no more valued than common stones.

Pondering this kind of wealth made me think of the testimony of Bill Cripps, a veteran in our church. As a young man, Bill began to count the cost of serving God. He thought to himself, “If I should gain the whole world, live to be a ripe one hundred years old without an ache or a pain or a care of any kind, and then spend all of eternity in that lake of fire and brimstone where the Bible says the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched, I would have missed everything.”

The Winter Palace in St. Petersburg was built for the Empress Elizabeth, the daughter of Peter the Great, but she died before the palace was completed. The workers who maneuvered the huge fluted columns in the Armorial Hall into place have long since stepped into eternity. The artisans who crafted the sculpted figures along the roofline are gone. Even the tsars who lived in this amazing structure have departed from this world. Where are they spending eternity?

Bill Cripps had the right perspective, and it is one we should all strive to keep in mind. Wealth like that of Solomon or the Russian tsars may last for a lifetime . . . but after a lifetime comes eternity. Let us purpose to live our lives for God, and then when we step into eternity, we will forever enjoy blessings that are truly beyond description!

BACKGROUND

This concluding portion of chapter 9 gives several examples of Solomon’s revenues, trade ventures, and immense wealth (verses 13-28), and completes the summary of Solomon’s forty-year reign with an account of his death (verses 29-31).

Verse 13 relates that 666 talents of gold came to Solomon in one year. The weight of a talent varied by region, date, and type from 65 to 135 pounds.¹ At a minimum, Solomon’s annual salary would have surpassed 43,000 pounds in gold or about one billion dollars at current prices.² Added to this, the “kings of Arabia and governors of the country” brought gold and silver to Solomon. The word *chapmen* in verse 14 means “traders.”

The writer of 2 Chronicles went on to provide further examples of Solomon’s wealth and prosperity. Verse 16 states that he made three hundred shields of beaten gold. We are told in 1 Kings 10:17 that “three

pound[s] of gold went to one shield” so the value of just one of these shields perhaps would have been comparable to that of an expensive car in our day. The “targets” mentioned in verse 15 were even larger shields, probably designed to cover the whole body, and Solomon had two hundred of them. While these shields no doubt made awe-inspiring displays in the house of the forest of Lebanon, they were merely ornamental. They would have been of no use in battle, as gold was both too heavy and too soft a metal to provide effective protection.

Solomon’s “great throne of ivory” overlaid with gold, described in verses 17-19, would have been a spectacular sight. It had six steps as an ascent to the seating area, and was flanked on both sides by six lions representing the twelve tribes of Israel.

At the conclusion of the description of Solomon’s great wealth, the statement is made in verse 28 that they “brought unto Solomon horses out of Egypt.” This was in direct disobedience to God’s command in Deuteronomy 17:16, which stated that the king of Israel “shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the Lord hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way.”

In the closing verses of this chapter, the writer omitted any reference to Solomon’s idolatry, his multiple marriages, and the heavy taxation he imposed upon the people. He simply reported that Solomon reigned for forty years, that he died and was buried in the city of David, and that his son Rehoboam succeeded him on the throne.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- I. The reign of Solomon
 - C. The character of Solomon’s reign
 5. Solomon’s riches (9:13-28)
 - a. His yearly revenue (9:13-16)
 - b. His ivory throne (9:17-19)
 - c. His gold utensils (9:20-21)
 - d. His fame and wisdom (9:22-24)
 - e. His horses (9:25-28)
 - D. The death of Solomon (9:29-31)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 15, how many shekels of gold were used in each of Solomon’s targets (large shields)?

2. Why do you think God blessed Solomon with such an abundance of riches?

3. What are some ways you can invest the material resources God has given you in a manner that will result in eternal profit?

CONCLUSION

While we do not have the material wealth of Solomon or the tsars of Russia, we can obtain treasures beyond compare in eternity if we stay true to God through our lifetime on earth.

NOTES

1. Emil G.Hirsch et al., “Weights and Measures,” *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1905), vol.XII, 483-84, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Jewish_Encyclopedia_volume_12.pdf.
2. “Live Gold Price,” kitco, August 17, 2023, <https://www.kitco.com/charts/livegold.html>.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“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? 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.” (2 Chronicles 10:6-7)

Good advice can make a significant impression on an individual. Shortly before Mother’s Day here in the United States, I saw a magazine article in which readers answered the question, “What was the best advice your mother ever gave you?” The responses ranged from heartwarming to hilarious. A few were practical, like “Always park your car so you can get out quickly.” Others focused on helpful social skills, such as “If you don’t have something nice to say, don’t say anything at all” and “Be on time or be early. Being late implies other people’s time isn’t as important as yours.” Some were presented in the form of a question: “If all your friends jumped off a bridge, would you jump off too?”

As I pondered the value of good advice, my mind went to individuals in our church family who testify about how a few words of godly counsel had an impact on them spiritually. A retired pastor tells about receiving his sanctification at the altar of prayer after a camp meeting service. As he stood up to leave, intending to go out and tell his friends what had happened, a brother who had been praying with him suggested, “Why don’t you stay and get your baptism?” He followed that good advice, and as he knelt back down and began praying once more, God filled him with the Holy Spirit.

A veteran missionary recounted some good advice he received shortly after getting saved. He said, “I remember going through my first trial after receiving salvation. Until then, it seemed that the Lord had blessed me from day to day. I expected it to be like that all the time, but all of a sudden, it wasn’t that way anymore. I felt like a weight was on my shoulders, and I did not understand what was happening. I looked up one of the young men from the Bible class and said, ‘Pray for me!’ He said, ‘Go and pray for yourself. You are young and healthy!’ I didn’t crawl into a corner and say, ‘Well, Lord, I guess You don’t love me and he doesn’t either.’ I just did what he said! I got down and did a little praying, and the Lord lifted me right back up.”

In today’s text, the young king Rehoboam needed advice. His father, King Solomon, had imposed burdensome demands upon his subjects, and the people wanted relief from them. When Rehoboam began his reign, they came and offered loyalty to him if he would agree to ease the “heavy yoke” that his father had put upon them.

Our focus verses indicate that Rehoboam initially went to the elders who had served his father to seek advice. They suggested, “If thou be kind to this people, and please them, and speak good words to them, they will be thy servants for ever” (verse 7). However, Rehoboam rejected this wise counsel and turned to his young contemporaries for input. They recommended an approach that was even more harsh and severe than that of Solomon. Sadly, that was the advice Rehoboam followed—a decision that led to disaster. The young king forfeited the possibility of leading a peaceful and united kingdom because he rejected good advice.

The value of advice depends on its source. If we heed the suggestions of individuals whose knowledge is based on personal ideas or worldly wisdom, we are at best wasting our time. At worst, we may be steered toward disaster, as Rehoboam was.

The ability to give good advice stems from a strong connection with the Source of all wisdom. A person whose life clearly demonstrates a close walk with God will be in the right position to give good counsel. And when we receive such admonition—advice that aligns with the principles of God’s Word—let’s be careful to follow it rather than rejecting it and looking for another option

BACKGROUND

This chapter covers the period when Israel, which had reached its zenith under David and Solomon, divided in two. For more than two centuries following (until the Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C.), there were two nations. The division was precipitated by the actions of Rehoboam, who succeeded his father Solomon on the throne. Verses 1-15 describe the foolish counsel Rehoboam received from his peers and his harsh response to the leaders of Israel, and verses 16-19 tell of the resulting revolt of the ten northern tribes.

For his coronation, Rehoboam chose to assemble Israel in Shechem, a city about thirty-five miles to the north of the capitol city of Jerusalem, because he hoped to win support in that region for his rule.

Verse 2 refers to the return of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. According to 1 Kings 11:28-40, he was a

“mighty man of valour” who had previously served Solomon in a key position. However, the prophet Ahijah had foretold that the nation of Israel would be divided and that Jeroboam would rule over ten of the tribes. When Solomon became aware of this prophecy, he attempted to kill Jeroboam. Jeroboam then fled and was granted political asylum in Egypt, remaining there until after the death of Solomon. After being called back by the people to his home nation, he was part of a group of elders who addressed Rehoboam.

The people of Israel wanted relief from the heavy taxation and forced service that Solomon required during his reign, and they offered allegiance to Rehoboam if he would agree to this. Verses 6-8 indicate that Rehoboam sought advice concerning their request from the elder counselors who had served his father, but ultimately ignored it. Instead, he took the advice of his young and inexperienced peers, who suggested a harsh and adversarial approach that they suggested would make Rehoboam more feared than Solomon (verses 9-14).

As a result of Rehoboam’s harsh declaration regarding the course of action he planned to take, ten of the tribes of Israel revolted, leaving only Judah and Benjamin under the control of Rehoboam. According to verse 16, they not only rejected Rehoboam, but also the entire dynasty of David.

Rehoboam sent Hadoram, his chief tax collector, to the people, perhaps to quell the rebellion or to punish those who opposed him. Hadoram would have been the embodiment of the oppression that brought about the rebellion, and the people responded by stoning him.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- II. The division of the kingdom (10:1-19)
 - A. The folly of Rehoboam (10:1-15)
 - 1. Jeroboam’s request (10:1-5)
 - 2. Rehoboam’s answer (10:6-15)
 - B. The secession of the ten tribes (10:16-19)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 1, where did the coronation of Rehoboam take place?

2. What errors do you think Rehoboam made in seeking advice?

3. What are some steps we can take to evaluate whether or not the advice we receive is good?

CONCLUSION

Following poor advice can lead to problems for ourselves and others. Let’s take time to prayerfully consider who we go to for advice, and be sure that any counsel we choose to follow aligns with the principles of God’s Word.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“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.” (2 Chronicles 11:16)

After Israel divided into two nations, Jeroboam brought idolatry into the Northern Kingdom. The people living there who longed to serve God according to the Law of Moses began to move to the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

In the centuries since that time, many people have moved so they could worship God with like-minded individuals. That’s what my grandparents did. My grandmother testified, “God called me to be a Christian when I was just a child, but I lived under conviction for years because no one told me that I could get down and pray my way through to an experience that I would know about and that would keep me every day.

“In 1915, an Apostolic Faith paper was brought to my door in Murphysboro, Illinois. It was good news to my hungry heart. There were testimonies of people who really knew they were saved, and that put a hope in my soul. I was twenty-six years old and so afflicted that I was unable to do my housework. There was a testimony of a person who had been healed, and I prayed, ‘Lord, If You have healed that person, You can heal me.’ He did!”

My grandparents began to attend cottage prayer meetings, and God saved, sanctified, and baptized them with the Holy Spirit. They wanted to go to a camp meeting in Portland, Oregon, and meet the people who had published the paper they had received. After selling their property in Illinois, they came to camp meeting in 1917, and they never went back to Illinois to live, although they made trips to visit their families. They loved worshipping and serving God with the people they had met in the Apostolic Faith work. Today their great-great-grandchildren are being raised in this congregation of believers. They made a good decision!

Wherever we live, it is important to be united in spirit with fellow believers, and to worship God according to the instructions given in His Word.

BACKGROUND

Three significant events are covered in this chapter of 2 Chronicles: the Lord instructed Judah not to engage in civil war with Israel (verses 1-4),

Rehoboam fortified cities for the defense of Judah (verses 5-12), and the priests and Levites in the Northern Kingdom of Israel relocated to Judah (verses 13-17). The chapter concludes in verses 18-23 with a record of the royal family of Rehoboam.

Rehoboam’s ill-advised harshness toward the people of Israel had divided his kingdom, and he determined to reunite it by waging war against the seceding tribes. However, after he had gathered his best warriors at Jerusalem for this purpose, God spoke to him through the prophet Shemaiah and forbade taking such action. To Rehoboam’s credit—or perhaps due to a lack of courage—he obeyed the divine directive. This preserved the Davidic line in Judah.

In verses 5-12, Rehoboam turned his attention to the defense of Judah. The word translated *built* in verse 5 has the meaning of “repaired” or “fortified” in this passage, since these cities already existed. Judah needed fortification as its two tribes were greatly outnumbered by the ten tribes of Israel. In addition, these cities gave Judah protection from the Philistines in the west and the Egyptians in the south.

The Levites and other true worshippers of God who migrated to Judah from Israel did so because the northern king, Jeroboam, had instituted idolatrous worship practices. According to 1 Kings 12:25-33, Jeroboam had fashioned two calves of gold for the people to worship, had relocated the center of worship away from Jerusalem, and had appointed priests who were not from the tribe of Levi. The godly servants of the Lord refused to live in a kingdom where worship practices were thoroughly corrupted, so they “resorted to him [Rehoboam] out of all their coasts” (verse 13).

The phrase in verse 15, “he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils,” refers to Jeroboam. The word “devils” is thought to be a reference to he-goats that were used in conjunction with the worship of the golden calves.

Rehoboam obviously did not learn from his father Solomon’s error in taking many wives; according to the concluding verses of this chapter, he too married multiple times. However, verse 23 indicates that dispersing his sons throughout his kingdom as his agents was a wise move.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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III. The history of the kings of Judah

A. The reign of Rehoboam

1. The forbidden war against Jeroboam (11:1-4)

2. The fortification of Judah and Benjamin (11:5-12)
3. The protection of the priests and Levites (11:13-17)
4. The prosperity of Rehoboam's family (11:18-23)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 4, what was God's direction to Rehoboam when he prepared to go to war against the Northern Kingdom?

2. What will be some of the evidence when people "set their hearts to seek the LORD"?

3. What do you appreciate most about worshipping in unity with others?

CONCLUSION

God honors those who purpose to worship Him as His Word instructs. We want to be among those who are wholehearted and faithful.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“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.” (2 Chronicles 12:7)

God’s mercy is amazing toward those who humble themselves. Today’s text relates that Rehoboam and the people of Judah chose not to follow God and His laws. They knew what God wanted them to do, but they did not do it. Yet when God said their enemies would overcome them, they humbled themselves, and God reduced the judgment.

Many years ago, Lois Allen also knew about God and chose to go her own way. She said, “My mother taught me the right way, but at an early age I turned it all down. I said, ‘Oh, that life is too tame for me.’ I gave my all—my health, my strength, my all—to sin. Some people of God held special services where my parents lived, and my mother told the minister about her daughter who was over in the city wasting her life in riotous living. She said, ‘I wish you would pray for that girl, that God would save her at any cost.’

“When they started praying, God began to deal with me. He permitted a terrible affliction to come upon my body. I went from a well, strong, robust woman to a very shadow of my old self. I was sick from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet. My mind was gone for hours at a time; I couldn’t even tell you my own name. I was married and had two little children. One day the census taker came to my house and asked me the names of my children. I just looked at her; I couldn’t remember their names.

“One April night in an old farmhouse, I got out of bed and knelt on my knees. God in His infinite mercy and love let real Holy Ghost conviction come down into that room, and I saw myself slipping into Hell. I cried out from the depth of my heart. For the first time in my life I became honest. Oh, how I thank God that He came down and transformed my heart and life! Jesus came into this poor life of mine that sin had ruined. Thank God for His wonderful salvation!

“I began to read the Word of God, and He showed me that He was able to take care of my body as well as my soul. My affliction affected my mind, heart, stomach, and nervous system. I was a total wreck and

only twenty-six years of age. Yet God healed me of every trace of that affliction.”

Sister Allen humbled herself, and God intervened in her life. Unlike Rehoboam, who did not follow through but instead chose to do evil, Sister Allen served God wholeheartedly all the rest of her life. She became a minister of the Gospel and loved to encourage others to also make a full commitment to God.

Humbling ourselves before God is the route toward His help, and then if we purpose to stay fully yielded to Him, His blessings will follow.

BACKGROUND

This chapter is a record of the reign of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, who began reigning in Judah at the age of forty-one and ruled for seventeen years. Although Rehoboam seemingly leaned on God to a certain degree as he began to reign, when his kingdom prospered, he “forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him” (verse 1). Further details of Judah’s apostasy are given in 1 Kings 14:21-24.

As punishment “because they [Judah] had transgressed against the LORD” (verse 2), God allowed Shishak, the king of Egypt, to invade the nation. The word “transgressed” in this phrase is a key term used frequently in 1 and 2 Chronicles. It refers to denying God the worship due to Him, usually on a national level, and is the main reason given in Chronicles for the exile.

According to verses 2-3, Shishak the king of Egypt, with the help of the Lubims (allies from Libya), the Sukkiims (thought to have been cave dwellers who lived near the Red Sea), and Ethiopians, captured many of Judah’s fortified cities, and then came against Judah’s capital city of Jerusalem. A record of this invasion has been verified by archaeological finds in Karnak, located in southern Egypt.

Shemaiah, referred to in verse 5, was the prophet who had counseled Rehoboam not to attack the ten tribes of Israel when they rejected his leadership and formed the Northern Kingdom of Israel (see 2 Chronicles 11:1-4). When Egypt invaded, Shemaiah spoke to all the leaders of Judah, telling them that Shishak had overcome them because they had forsaken God. In response, the leaders humbled themselves before the Lord. Their statement in verse 6 that “the LORD is righteous” indicated they understood that their treatment at the hands of Shishak was deserved. In response to their repentance, God granted Judah “some deliverance,” (verse 7), meaning He did not allow the nation to be completely destroyed by the

Egyptians. However, the people of Judah did have to serve Shishak, likely by paying tribute.

Verse 9 indicates that Shishak took away the treasures from the Temple and the king's house, along with the shields of gold that Solomon had made. King Rehoboam later had bronze shields made to replace them. This substitution of bronze for gold illustrates the decline that took place under the rule of Rehoboam. Though Solomon had left great riches to his son and successor, that wealth was greatly diminished after only five years because Rehoboam and Judah turned away from God.

Verse 14 provides a sad summary of Rehoboam's rule: he did evil, "because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD." Verse 15 indicates that repeated wars took place between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, king of the ten tribes that separated from Judah. Some sources indicate that these were probably border disputes over the territory occupied by the tribe of Benjamin, which was located between the two kingdoms. Verse 16 records that Rehoboam died, apparently of natural causes, and was buried in Jerusalem.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- III. The history of the kings of Judah
 - A. The reign of Rehoboam
 - 5. The apostasy of Rehoboam (12:1-12)
 - a. The apostasy (12:1)
 - b. The invasion of Shishak (12:2-4)
 - c. The humbling of Rehoboam (12:5-8)
 - d. The punishment on Rehoboam (12:9-12)
 - 6. The death of Rehoboam (12:13-16)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did the Egyptians take away from Jerusalem (verse 9)?

2. What does the fact that God eased His judgment in response to the king and princes of Israel humbling themselves indicate about Him? (verse 7)

3. What are some ways we can be sure that our hearts are humble before the Lord?

CONCLUSION

Today's text is an illustration of God's mercy to those who humble themselves before Him. May that be the attitude of our hearts!

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“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: 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.” (2 Chronicles 13:10-11)

The summer before I started sixth grade, the Lord baptized me with the Holy Spirit. Looking back and considering how young I was, that seems truly amazing. But God knew I needed it, and I sincerely had surrendered my young heart to Him. I’d told Him I’d do whatever He wanted with my life. Of course, at eleven years old I had no idea what that would mean, but I meant it with all my heart. And that prepared me for the battle that was ahead.

I believe now that the moment I walked into my sixth-grade homeroom class, my teacher was reminded of the faith of her childhood and the upbringing she had resoundingly rejected. Later, she directly told my parents she “was raised that way.” That entire year Mrs. Smith seemed set on convincing me to turn from the faith. It was a multitude of little things. One time we were creating self-portraits and she used me as an example to show the class that they could add jewelry to their picture—in essence pointing out to my classmates how odd it was that I didn’t wear jewelry, one of the many ways I didn’t fit in with most of my peers. Another time when my parents had me excused from a classroom activity, she flat-out told me I was old enough to make my own decisions, to which I replied that I *had* made my choice: that was why I was following their request!

As a very shy girl who would have preferred not to have any attention on me, that year was challenging. Yet, I remember feeling bold and almost defiant as I went to school each day wondering, *What will she try today?*

One might say I was “outnumbered.” My teacher was an adult; I was a child. She was educated and persuasive; I was still learning basic reading, writing, and arithmetic. She had the crowd on her side; I was essentially alone. But like the people of Judah who won their battle when they “shouted” (verse 15), I had

confidence because I was doing what God wanted. Abijah basically told Jeroboam in our focus verses that Judah had continued following God’s instructions while Israel had turned to idols. I had the same testimony. I was doing my best to follow God while my teacher had turned away from the truth she had been taught.

There is a special confidence that comes from being consecrated to God. The people of Judah were outnumbered two to one (800,000 to 400,000), but they won the battle because they had God on their side. That’s what makes the difference every time—in events as big as national war and as small as a sixth grader standing up to an ungodly teacher.

BACKGROUND

Following the death of Rehoboam, his son Abijah succeeded him on the throne of Judah. (Abijah is referred to as Abijam in the parallel account in 1 Kings 15.) Chapter 13 describes a battle that took place between the armies of Abijah and those of Jeroboam, ruler of the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The reason for the battle is not given, but seemingly Abijah felt that the flagrant idolatry being practiced in Israel deserved judgment. While God had instructed Rehoboam in 2 Chronicles 11:4 not to fight against his brethren, in this case warfare was permitted.

When the two armies assembled, verse 3 indicates there was a clear numerical advantage for the Northern Kingdom. Verses 4-12 record Abijah’s forceful appeal to Jeroboam and the army of Israel. While 1 Kings 15:3 indicates that Abijah was not a righteous king, he did try to induce the northern tribes to reunite with Judah.

Mount Zemaraim, mentioned in verse 4, was located in the territory of Benjamin between the two kingdoms. Standing upon that mountain, Abijah rebuked Jeroboam and Israel for three specific sins against God.

- Israel had broken the “covenant of salt” (indicating an everlasting commitment) in which God had decreed that David and his sons would rule over Israel forever. Abijah asserted that the dynasty of David was the only legitimate ruler over the tribes of Israel, including these ten northern tribes that had rebelled and separated themselves from the two southern tribes (verses 5-7).
- Israel had brought the golden calves, the man-made objects of their idolatry, with them into

battle—an indicator that they had forsaken the true God (verse 8).

- Israel had substituted non-Levites for the true priests that God had chosen to be Israel’s religious leaders (verse 9).

In verses 10-12, Abijah concluded his appeal to Jeroboam and Israel by stating that in contrast to their actions, Judah had maintained the true priests and sacrifices as commanded by God. He warned Israel that they should not fight against the God of their fathers, because if they did so, they would not prosper.

Verses 13-20 describe the battle in which God fought for Abijah and the armies of Judah. Although greatly outnumbered by Israel, Judah won the conflict and Israel suffered a tremendous loss of life. In addition, Judah took control of three cities: Beth-el, Jeshanah, and Ephraim. Jeroboam’s death is briefly mentioned in verse 20, although details explaining the phrase “the LORD struck him” are not given.

The concluding verses of the chapter record the family of Abijah. In verse 22, the “story” (in Hebrew, *midrash*) of the prophet Iddo is a reference to an ancient rabbinic interpretation of Scripture.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- III. The history of the kings of Judah
 - B. The reign of Abijah (13:1-22)
 - 1. Abijah’s war against Jeroboam (13:1-20)
 - a. The battle array (13:1-3)
 - b. The words of Abijah to Jeroboam (13:4-12)
 - c. The defeat of Jeroboam (13:13-20)
 - 2. Abijah’s acts and death (13:21-22)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 14, what did the people of Judah do when they realized they were surrounded?

2. Why did God help Judah even though Abijah was not a righteous king?

3. How has God helped you in times when you felt outnumbered?

CONCLUSION

If you find yourself in a situation where you’re outnumbered, take courage! You can be confident of victory when God is on your side.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“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 not man prevail against thee.”
(2 Chronicles 14:11)

In October of 1973, while the people of Israel fasted for Yom Kippur, a coalition of Arab nations led by Egypt and Syria made a surprise invasion into their country. The armed conflict—later known as the Yom Kippur War—began on October 6 and ended with Israel’s victory on October 25. Israel’s rapid triumph was unquestionably miraculous, since the nation was caught off guard and the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) was massively outnumbered.

Twenty-one-year-old Lieutenant Zvika Greengold played an important role in the victory. Greengold was home on leave on October 6 when he heard the familiar sound of Israeli fighter jets roaring through the sky. Knowing that no military exercises would ever take place on a high holy day, he rushed to his radio to find out what was going on. What he heard confirmed his fears: the nation had been invaded and Syrian armored troops were engaged in an all-out assault on the Golan Heights.

Greengold immediately hitched a ride to a nearby command center, only to find that all the tanks had been deployed. However, he located two damaged tanks sitting unmanned at a repair depot. After hastily assembling a crew from back-up staff left on the base, he radioed the brigade commander that he had a “tank force” ready to go. He was cleared for battle and received the code name *Koah Zvika* (Zvika’s Force).

IDF troops in the area heard the radio report that “Zvika’s Force” was joining the action. They were encouraged, thinking that reinforcements were coming to their rescue. They had no idea that Greengold had only two damaged tanks, nor did the brigade commander. Greengold did not dare report that fact over the radio for fear the information would be intercepted.

Greengold and the men with him immediately engaged the Syrian tanks that were advancing unopposed on a nearby road. They destroyed six of the Syrian tanks, but Greengold’s vehicle was damaged, so he switched to the other tank and sent the damaged one back for repairs. Taking advantage of the darkness, and moving constantly from one spot to another to find

good firing positions, he managed to fool the Syrians into thinking the opposition was a significant threat.

Joined at times by a few other tanks, Greengold displayed an astounding knack for repeatedly showing up at precisely the right moment to shift the momentum in favor of the Israelis. In one such encounter, enemy fire hit the tank he was in. The tank driver was killed and Greengold’s uniform was aflame. Though he was severely burned and wounded by shrapnel as well, he jumped out of the burning tank and hopped into the only other operational tank with him at that point. Then the one-man Zvika Force continued driving to various strategic positions in the area, firing on the approaching Syrian tanks with deadly precision.

Over the next hours, in what came to be known as “The Battle of the Valley of Tears,” the Zvika Force and a handful of other tanks held off the advance of hundreds of Syrian armored vehicles. After three days of battle, the combined forces defending the Golan Heights had just seven tanks left out of the original one hundred. There were no reserves behind them, only an open road to the center of the country. Miraculously, on the fourth day of the battle, the Syrians began to retreat—just as the Israeli defenses were about to collapse.¹

In our text today, a similarly “impossible” military victory took place. The army of King Asa of Judah was about half the size of the force from Ethiopia that confronted them when they “set the battle in array” in the valley of Zephathah. We do not know if Lieutenant Greengold prayed when he faced his enemy, but Asa did! Our focus verse relates that the king “cried unto the LORD his God.” He knew that God’s might was not limited by man’s weakness, so he proclaimed his trust in God and said, “In thy name we go against this multitude, O LORD” (verse 11).

In response to Asa’s prayer, God gave a mighty victory to Judah, and the enemy forces fled before them. Verse 13 relates that “the Ethiopians were overthrown, that they could not recover themselves; for they were destroyed before the LORD, and before his host.” Not only were the armies of Judah victorious, but they obtained “much spoil” from their vanquished enemies.

There is a lesson for us in Asa’s actions. When we face battles that seem impossible to win, we need to remember Who is on our side. When we turn to God for help, acknowledging our helplessness but trusting in His mighty power, He will come to our aid. There is no need for us to feel overwhelmed or afraid, because there is *no* foe that He cannot conquer. When our trust is in God, victory is sure!

BACKGROUND

Asa followed his father Abijah in reigning over Judah, and chapter 14 begins a three-chapter summary of his rule that spanned forty-one years, from 911 to 870 B.C. Verses 1-8 provide a description of Asa's character and the reforms he instituted in Judah, and verses 9-15 record his victory over the invasion of Zerah the Ethiopian.

The statement in verse 2 that Asa "did that which was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God" is remarkable, given that he was raised in an ungodly environment. The Kingdom of Judah benefitted from Asa's obedience to God, and the first ten years of his reign were peaceful and prosperous. Throughout 1 and 2 Chronicles, this pattern is repeated: when the king followed God, the people did as well, resulting in national peace. When the king turned from God, the people also rebelled, and suffered the consequences.

Like Hezekiah and Josiah, Asa is frequently classified by Bible scholars as a "reformation king." Verses 3-5 describe the specifics of his reform. The "high places" mentioned in verse 3 were places of worship on elevated platforms or high altitude ground. These shrines often included an altar and a sacred object of worship, such as an idol, stone pillar, or carved wooden pole. Activities that occurred in the high places included animal sacrifices (1 Kings 3:2), prostitution (Jeremiah 3:2), the burning of incense (1 Kings 3:3), and human sacrifices (2 Kings 23:20). The "groves" (in Hebrew, *asherah*) were typically a wooden image or pillar representing Ashtoreth, a Canaanite goddess.

Verses 6-8 indicate that Asa used the ten years of peace in Judah to strengthen the military preparedness of the nation by building cities for defense and raising a standing army.

Judah's victory over Zerah of Ethiopia is recorded in verses 9-15. Zerah's army of a million men and three hundred chariots was almost twice as large as Asa's army, so it obviously posed a tremendous threat to the Kingdom of Judah. However, Asa called upon the Lord for help, acknowledging that the numerical advantage of their enemy made no difference to God. God responded by fighting for Judah, and the armies of Zerah fled before Asa's soldiers. Ultimately, the Ethiopians were overthrown and the people of Judah "carried away very much spoil" (verse 13).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- III. The history of the kings of Judah
 - C. The reign of Asa
 - 1. The character of Asa's reign (14:1-8)
 - 2. The defeat of Zerah the Ethiopian (14:9-15)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 4, what instruction did Asa give the people of Judah?

2. According to verse 7, Asa recognized that a time of peace was a good time to build defenses against potential attacks in the future. What spiritual lesson can be derived from this?

3. How can we ensure that when we engage in a spiritual battle, we have the blessing and help of the Lord?

CONCLUSION

The secret to victory in spiritual battles is to call upon our mighty God. No matter how impossible the situation may seem, He will never fail us!

NOTES

1. Team Mighty, "How One Israeli Tanker Held Off the Entire Syrian Army in 1973," We Are the Mighty (September 8, 2022), <https://www.wearethemighty.com/articles/how-one-israeli-tanker-held-off-the-entire-syrian-army-in-1973/>.
Note: Original report was by Renen Schorr for Bamahane Magazine in 1974 (an IDF magazine written in Hebrew).



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law. But when they in their trouble did turn unto the LORD God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them.” (2 Chronicles 15:3-4)

In today’s focus verses, the Prophet Azariah reminded King Asa of Judah that the people of Israel had been without God for a long time, but when they turned to Him in a time of trouble, God responded. Over the centuries since Azariah spoke those words, God has proved many times that when a person sincerely turns to Him for help, He hears and answers. Richard Clarke, a minister in the Apostolic Faith work in the early part of the twentieth century, was one who testified to that.

“I want to thank God for the truth that makes men free. Quite a few years ago, the National Cash Register Company sent me to the West Coast as a sales representative for that company. I made good money, and I spent it trying to find the satisfaction my heart longed for, but I never found it. I bought diamonds and beautiful clothes, stayed in fine hotels, rode the luxury cars on the trains, and attended the theaters and dances, and yet there was sorrow in my heart. While traveling, I met men who were older than I was, and they taught me many things that did not do me any good. I began to lead a fast and wicked life.

“One night, in my hotel room in Portland, Oregon, I realized that I was a failure—a ruined man. My reputation was gone and my character was destroyed. I had religion, but that hadn’t helped me. From the time I was seven years of age, my mother had sent me to the priest to confess my sins. As the years passed, I continued to tell my sins to a priest, because I thought man could forgive them. I would take the penance the priest gave me, say the prayers, step up to the communion table and take the wafer, and then go home brokenhearted, miserable, and discouraged. My performance of those rituals never changed me or brought me peace.

“Remorse settled down on my life, and that night I wondered where I would spend eternity. I was tempted to take my own life to get rid of the sin and shame that was bearing me down. In desperation, I got down upon my knees and cried out to God. Do you know what He did? The very next afternoon, He sent a man to my room. I heard a knock at my door,

and when I opened it, a Christian man was there. He said, ‘I have seen you in the hotel, and I wonder if you are saved?’ I didn’t know what he was talking about. Then he repeated his question in words I understood: ‘Do you know that you are right with God?’ He went on to tell me that I would go to Hell unless I was born again. His question went deep into my heart and took root.

“The man invited me to a service at the Apostolic Faith camp meeting. There, I heard testimonies of a former drunkard, an ex-convict, a doctor, a lawyer, and a preacher, all of whom God had saved. Their faces were lit by the power of God. They told me that if I confessed my sins to Jesus Christ, He would wash them away and make a change in my life.

“That night, I went forward to an old pine bench to pray—I was the first one there. Tears of repentance poured down my face as I confessed my sins to Jesus Christ. I lifted an honest heart to Him, and thank God, He had mercy. He came into my heart and broke the shackles of sin that had bound me for so many years. That night the sunlight of another world flooded over my soul. It was the most glorious day of my life! I had prayed to the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist, the Apostles, and Michael the archangel, and never received an answer, but when I cried out to Jesus Christ, He responded. I have never smoked, gambled, taken a drink of alcohol, or been to a show or dance since. I broke up my pipe, burned my deck of cards, and began to read the Bible. The joy of the Lord has been in my heart since that day, and I thank God for what He has done for me!”

Do you have a need in your life today? The God who saved Richard Clarke so many years ago still answers prayers today when individuals turn to Him.

BACKGROUND

This chapter continues the summary of Asa’s reign over Judah that began in chapter 14. Verses 1-7 describe the Prophet Azariah’s warning to Asa, while verses 8-19 record Asa’s reform of Judah’s worship practices.

Azariah the son of Oded, who brought the warning to King Asa recorded in verses 1-7, appears in Scripture only in this passage. However, he delivered an important message from God. The phrase “he went out to meet Asa” implies that the prophet approached the king as the armies of Judah returned from the victory over Zerah and his Ethiopian forces. Asa had sought God’s help in that battle (see 2 Chronicles 14:11) but there was a danger that he would not

continue seeking Him. So Azariah warned Asa of the importance of remaining firm in his loyalty to God.

Some Bible scholars view verses 3-6 as a reference to the period of the judges when the people of Israel went through repeated cycles of sin/oppression/repentance/deliverance. Others suggest that these verses allude to the more recent past of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. In either case, the result was that God “did vex them with all adversity.” Azariah used this example of Israel’s failures to warn of the evil that would come upon Judah if they turned away from God.

“Oded the prophet” in verse 8 may have been a reference to Azariah; earlier versions of the Scriptures include the name Azariah here. Alternatively, Azariah’s warning could have been a restatement of an earlier prophecy given by his father, Oded.

In response to the warning, Asa took courage and began to institute reforms. His first recorded act was to “put away the abominable idols” throughout the land. The phrase “abominable idols,” *shiquts* in the original Hebrew, has a literal meaning of “detestable things” and refers to anything related to the practice of idolatry. Asa also “renewed” the altar of the Lord, implying that some type of desecration had occurred that necessitated a cleansing or restoration process.

The king’s next step, as stated in verse 9, was to gather all of Judah together. This assembly included some from the northern tribes who observed Asa’s bold obedience to God and wanted to be part of a committed return to Him. The people rightly recognized that their victory over the Ethiopians had come from God, so they gave back to Him from the spoil. Then they “entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul” (verse 12). This was an allusion to past covenants, and indicated the people’s desire to have the same relationship with God that their forefathers had enjoyed. The covenant was reinforced by the institution of capital punishment for failure. Then the assembly swore a public oath, making all of the people accountable to keep their commitment to God. As a result, verse 15 records that “the LORD gave them rest round about.”

In verse 16, Asa extended the reform into his own household when he removed Maachah from her position of queen-mother because of her idolatrous practices. (According to 1 Kings 15:2, Maachah was the mother of Abijam, and thus the grandmother of Asa. In the Bible, “mother” and “father” can refer to any direct ancestor.) While Asa did not remove the high places out of Israel, his loyal heart at this point in his life was shown in his reforms against idolatry, and in his restoration of certain silver and gold utensils to the Temple (verses 17-18).

The final verse of the chapter states that the nation enjoyed freedom from war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa’s reign.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- III. The history of the kings of Judah
 - C. The reign of Asa
 - 3. The reformation under Asa (15:1-19)
 - a. Azariah’s ultimatum (15:1-7)
 - b. Asa’s reforms (15:8-19)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 3, how did Azariah summarize the spiritual state of Israel?

2. What details provided in verses 12-15 indicate that the repentance of the people was genuine?

3. Asa and the people declared themselves clearly and decisively for God. What are some ways you can follow their example and show by your actions your wholehearted commitment to God?

CONCLUSION

When the people of Judah and Israel turned to God in a time of trouble, He honored their sincere commitment and “was found of them.” Today, too, those who come to Him in sincere repentance will find him.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“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.” (2 Chronicles 16:9)

In today’s text, the prophet Hanani rebuked King Asa for failing to rely upon God in a time of need. However, in the midst of that reproof, he gave a beautiful promise of divine protection for those who *do* put their trust in God. That promise is part of today’s focus verse, and it brings to mind an incident in my father’s life.

Dad and a couple of others had flown in a private four-seater plane from Portland, Oregon, to Port Angeles, Washington, to work on a church project. However, when the task was completed and the group was ready to start for home, a storm was brewing. They postponed their departure for one day, and by late afternoon on the following day, the storm appeared to be headed east and the pilot thought it would be safe to fly.

The first part of their return flight was uneventful, but then their small plane caught up with the storm. The pilot took the plane around and up over the top of the clouds but my dad could tell that he was becoming concerned. Twice he asked the three people with him for prayer that he would find a hole in the clouds. Dad became concerned too, when he looked over the pilot’s shoulder at the plane’s gauges: there was not much fuel left.

The pilot kept in radio contact with air control, and after many tense minutes, their little plane neared Portland. However, by then the fuel situation was urgent and the pilot reported this to the Portland aviation tower. The air traffic controllers asked him, “How much time do you have?” When he responded perhaps fifteen minutes, they asked, “Do you wish to declare an emergency?” He responded yes.

After a few more tense minutes, the air controllers pinpointed the plane on their radar and began to issue instructions for an immediate descent to a small airport outside of Portland, as it was the nearest airstrip. However, the pilot continued to look for a hole in the clouds and did not start into the downward approach. Then the left engine of the plane sputtered and died—it was out of fuel. They had only one engine left! My dad was acutely aware that each moment they

remained at their current altitude made the situation more critical. He said later, “I knew from my experience with planes in military service that a ‘dead-stick landing’—without fuel and without a motor—is a most dangerous situation to be in.”

Dad prayed that enough fuel remained in the right tank to get them down safely, and no doubt the others in the plane were praying as well. He told God, “You see us and You care. You understand the spot we are in.” Then he heard a quiet Voice say to him, “I note the sparrow’s fall.” That simple statement gave him courage. He knew that whatever happened, the challenge they were facing was not out of God’s knowledge and control.

A few minutes later, a break in the clouds appeared and the pilot began to nose the plane down. When their wheels touched the runway, an ambulance and a fire truck were there waiting for them. Thankfully, their help was not needed. When the pilot taxied the aircraft over to a place where he could refuel, the mechanic shined his flashlight into the right tank—the one that supposedly still had fuel—and said, “There is no gas in this tank. It is empty.” God had worked a miracle!

How grateful my dad was that day that “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.” Many times in the years that followed, Dad recounted this story and gave praise to God for His divine protection.

In our text today, Asa’s perception that God could not be relied upon to defend Israel was both foolish and wrong. The prophet Hanani’s message was clear: God comes to the aid of those who are committed to Him. God wanted to show His strength on behalf of His trusting people, but Asa sought the help of man instead. The issue was not a question of the ability of God to help, nor of His willingness to use that strength on behalf of His people. The issue was the loyalty of Asa and the people of Judah.

Where do we turn in a crisis? When challenges come our way, we want to be careful not to forget God and look only for human solutions. How heartwarming the promise is that the eyes of the Lord are upon us! He takes in our situations at a glance. No crisis, sorrow, or temptation comes our way without His notice. And He is standing by to give the help we need—if only we will turn to Him!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 16 relates the sad failure of King Asa of Judah, who drifted from God after a good beginning.

Verses 1-6 describe the treaty he made with Syria to strengthen himself against Israel's King Baasha in the continuing struggle for dominance between the two nations. God's rebuke of Asa through the prophet Hanani and Asa's response are covered in verses 7-10. The final part of the chapter, verses 11-14, tells of the closing months of Asa's life, and his death.

Ramah, mentioned in verse 1, was positioned on the border between Israel and Judah, about five miles north of Jerusalem. Baasha gained the upper hand by fortifying Ramah because he effectively blocked a main trade route into Judah. He no doubt hoped the resulting economic pressure on Judah would force Asa into significant concessions.

In response, Asa hired Ben-hadad, king of Syria, to thwart Baasha's plans by withdrawing support from Israel. Asa used the "treasures of the house of the LORD" (verse 2) as part of the payment. God had covenanted to protect the nation, so the fact that Asa put his trust in a pagan king was evidence of spiritual decline. However, God allowed "success" of this venture; because of the intervention of Ben-Hadad, Israel stopped the work on Ramah (verse 5).

Verses 7-10 record that when Hanani the seer rebuked Asa for relying on Ben-Hadad instead of God, Asa was enraged and had Hanani imprisoned. This is the only time in Scripture that Hanani is mentioned, other than noting that he was the father of Jehu, a prophet who spoke to Baasha the king of Israel (1 Kings 16:1,7) and to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah (2 Chronicles 19:2). Asa not only retaliated against Hanani, but verse 10 reveals he also oppressed others in his kingdom—perhaps those who were concerned about breaking their recent covenant (see 2 Chronicles 15:12-14).

The last years of Asa's life were marred by ignoring and resisting God, oppression against his people, and disease. According to verse 12, when Asa contracted a disease in his feet in the thirty-ninth year of his reign, he did not seek the Lord, but consulted physicians instead. This was not an indictment of medicine in general; Asa's problem was that he failed to look to God for help. The medicine practiced at this time was a mixture of superstition and folk remedies, and it did not provide a remedy for Asa. Verse 13 indicates that he died in the forty-first year of his reign, and was buried in Jerusalem.

"A very great burning" mentioned in verse 14 refers to a kindling of fragrant spices in honor of the dead king. Aromatic fires of this nature were customary for royal funerals (see Jeremiah 34:5). They were not done to cremate the body, but as a sign of honor.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- III. The history of the kings of Judah
 - C. The reign of Asa

4. The failure of Asa (16:1-14)
 - a. Asa's foreign alliance against Baasha (16:1-6)
 - b. Asa's oppression (16:7-10)
 - c. Asa's death (16:11-14)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verses 2-3, what did Asa give Ben-hadad of Syria to induce him to provide help?

2. Verse 12 states that when Asa was afflicted, "he sought not to the LORD, but to the physicians." How do you think his actions when he faced affliction were related to his actions earlier in this chapter when he faced a military challenge?

3. What are some ways you can memorialize times when God has helped you physically or spiritually? Why is doing so important?

CONCLUSION

We do not have to face the challenges that come our way alone. God sees every detail of our lives, and He cares! As we look to Him for help in every situation, He will not fail us.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“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.” (2 Chronicles 17:9)

Today’s text tells how Jehoshaphat assigned princes and Levites to teach the people of Judah about the Law of Moses. In the centuries since that time, the desire to teach and help others live for God has been a hallmark of those who serve the Lord.

Cato Bush described himself as a rough young man who developed a love for gambling and would always find the time and place to do it. When he was eighteen years old, he married and then had a child. He said, “I left my wife and baby at home and went out to gamble all night. But one night the Lord began to speak to my heart about the way I was living, and I lost my desire for gambling. I wanted to change my way of living but did not know how.” Step by step God led him to a group of people who taught him about salvation, and he was wonderfully born again. Then he received the experiences of sanctification and the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

Brother Bush did not want to be a preacher, but God worked with him until he was willing to yield. In 1924 he began to preach going from house to house in Alabama and Florida. He said, “It was not an easy road to travel. Many times I would have to walk because I didn’t have carfare. Some time later, the Lord blessed me with a car, but then it was difficult to buy gasoline and to cover the other expenses of travel. Often I had to sleep in my car. At times I had only a baked potato to eat. I would never give up, because I had the desire to spread the Gospel that I had found to other people.”

Over time, God blessed the efforts of Brother Bush, and he became a pioneer of the Apostolic Faith work in the southeast part of the United States. He was a man with an evangelist’s heart, and he did much traveling for many years because of his insatiable desire to spread the Gospel. He went through many cities, towns, and states, preaching and instructing believers.

God is still calling people to teach others about Him. We may not be called to be a traveling evangelist, but we can tell the Good News to our children, grandchildren, and the people we come into contact with. People today need the Lord just as much as those of past generations. May God help us to do our part in spreading the Gospel.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 17 begins a record of the reign of King Jehoshaphat that continues through chapter 20. This chapter describes the reforms that Jehoshaphat instituted in the land after he succeeded his father, Asa, on the throne of Judah. Specifics are given regarding the nature of Jehoshaphat’s reign (verses 1-6), the actions he took toward national reform (verses 7-9), and the prosperity and power that Judah enjoyed because of the king’s commitment to God (verses 10-19).

According to the details given in 1 Kings 22:41-50, Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years of age when he began to reign, and he ruled for twenty-five years. (Some historians believe that he served as co-regent with his father for about three years.) Jehoshaphat’s determination to institute reforms in Judah likely was influenced by Asa, who sought God and wanted to be part of a committed return to Him, especially during the early part of his reign.

Verse 2 records that Jehoshaphat strengthened Judah’s defenses against external threats by placing troops in the border cities and establishing “garrisons” or military outposts in strategic locations. This included the cities that his father had captured from the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Verse 4 recounts that Jehoshaphat “sought to the LORD God of his father” and did not follow “the doings of Israel”—a reference to the widespread idol worship in Israel (see 1 Kings 16:29-33). Because of this, God lifted him up and exalted him as a king, and allowed the nation of Judah to prosper (verse 5).

Verse 6 indicates that one of Jehoshaphat’s reformatory actions was to remove the high places and groves from Judah, probably by means of royal decrees. “High places” referred to shrines used for idolatrous worship. The word “groves” is *asherah* in the original Hebrew, and it referred to the female goddess who was the consort of Baal, her idols, and wooden poles and trees dedicated to worship of her.

The group of princes and Levites sent out by Jehoshaphat to instruct the people in the Law, noted in verses 7-9, is the first recorded instance of religious education taking place in Israel outside of the home and the Temple.

The prosperity and relative peace that Judah enjoyed during this period is attributed to the “fear of the LORD” that fell upon the surrounding nations (verse 10). This was true even of Philistia and Arabia, who were longtime antagonists (see verse 11). Jehoshaphat built “castles” (fortresses) and “cities of

store” (locations where the wealth and treasures of Judah were kept) and “had much business” that promoted economic prosperity (verses 12-13). He also had a vast army that numbered about 1,160,000, based on the record in verses 14-18.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- III. The history of the kings of Judah
 - D. The reign of Jehoshaphat
 - 1. The reformation under Jehoshaphat (17:1-19)
 - a. The character of his reign (17:1-5)
 - b. The reform during his reign (17:6-9)
 - c. The prosperity during his reign (17:10-19)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What were some of the results of Jehoshaphat’s purpose to serve God?

2. Why is it valuable to teach people God’s Word?

3. How might a purpose to serve God be demonstrated in our lives?

CONCLUSION

Perhaps there is someone you can share the Gospel with today. God wants to help each one of us to tell the Good News to others.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“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.” (2 Chronicles 18:7)

My employment is with my county government in the fleet division, where I purchase vehicles, heavy duty road construction equipment, and also emergency vehicles for the Sheriff’s Department. During my first year in that position, I needed to order a fleet of new patrol cars. I wanted everything to be absolutely right, so I went over and over the paperwork and specifications, triple-checking my work. Finally, I placed the order.

Several months later the patrol cars arrived. Someone called me and said, “They’re here! The only problem is, they’re the wrong color.” My heart sank. The vehicles were supposed to be the same color as what we had purchased in the past, but they were different. Digging into my paperwork and following up with research, I learned the automobile manufacturer had changed the color but did not change its code and name. Once that was explained to the Sheriff’s Department, they were happy and didn’t seem too concerned about the difference in color.

That is, everyone was happy except one sergeant. He did *not* like that color at all! We explained what had happened, and several of us suggested that he take the new car for a drive. We told him, “We think you’ll like it. There are upgrades.” He refused; he had decided positively that he was not interested.

Finally, someone proposed, “Why don’t you drive one of your deputy’s older patrol cars that is the color you like, and have your deputy use the new one?” The sergeant thought that was a brilliant idea. Then it was suggested, “Before you make a decision, take the keys and just try the car.” Reluctantly, he accepted the keys and left to do a test drive. About a half hour later, he called and said, “This is a nice car. I really, *really* like it!” We had tried to tell him, but he had been determined to stay with his original opinion until he finally relented and drove the vehicle.

A decision about whether to drive a car with an unsatisfactory color is trivial. However, in today’s text, Ahab’s determination was much more far-reaching. He was resolved to pay attention only to people who said what he wanted to hear. Jehoshaphat

asked if there was a prophet of God available who could offer counsel. Ahab knew of Micaiah, but as noted in the focus verse, he did not like Micaiah’s messages. As predicted, Micaiah warned Ahab that defeat would be the outcome if he followed his plan to enter into battle. Ahab refused to heed that warning, which ultimately resulted in his death.

It can be easy to become determined about a matter. However, we need to be sure that we are determined to follow God’s will and not our own inclinations. We want to heed any warnings God gives. These may come through a variety of ways—for example, His Word, the checks of the Spirit, a sermon, or someone’s godly counsel. Whatever the method, may God help us to be sensitive to His guidance and not be determined to go on in our own ways. We want our lives to glorify Him, and that will happen when we pay attention and follow Him closely.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 18 continues the account of the reign of King Jehoshaphat of Judah, which began in chapter 17 and continues through chapter 20. This portion of the narrative describes the unwise military alliance Jehoshaphat made with the wicked King Ahab of Israel. Verses 1-3 explain how the arrangement between the two kings came about. The alliance, made in an attempt to reunite the two kingdoms, led to Judah’s involvement in a conflict with Syria. In verses 4-11, Ahab’s false prophets assured him of victory. However, Micaiah, the prophet of God, warned that Israel would be overcome and scattered, and that Ahab would be killed (verses 12-27). Micaiah’s divinely inspired prophecy came to pass, and Israel’s resulting defeat and the death of Ahab are recorded in verses 28-34.

The word *affinity* in verse 1 means “to give a daughter away in marriage,” and the statement that Jehoshaphat “joined affinity” with Ahab refers to the marriage he permitted between his son Jehoram and the daughter of Ahab, Athaliah (see 2 Kings 8:18). Linking kingdoms through marriage was common strategy in the ancient world, but it was a poor move for Jehoshaphat and Judah.

According to 1 Kings 20:34, Ben-hadad, the king of Syria, had promised to return certain cities to Israel in exchange for leniency after being defeated in battle, and among those cities was Ramoth-gilead. Apparently, the city had not been returned, and since it was in a strategically important location, Ahab

determined to drive out the Syrians who occupied the city and take it by force.

Before making a commitment to join in this attack, King Jehoshaphat rightly asked for the counsel of God to be sought (verse 4). Ahab's four hundred prophets unanimously said what their king wanted to hear. (Verse 22 indicates this was because God put "a lying spirit" in their mouths.) In verse 6, Jehoshaphat requested that they also hear from "a prophet of the LORD," so Micaiah was brought from prison (see 1 Kings 22:26-27). Ahab frankly acknowledged, "I hate him; for he never prophesied good unto me, but always evil." Ahab's hatred of the messenger was because he hated the message, so his real conflict was with God.

Ahab's prophets and Micaiah came before the two kings where they sat "at the entering in of the gate of Samaria." (It was an ancient custom in the region to hold court and make decisions at the gates of the city.) One of Ahab's prophets, Zedekiah, employed an object lesson using horns of iron to illustrate the thrust of the two powerful armies, asserting that they would overcome the Syrians. All of Ahab's prophets joined in predicting that this would be the outcome. Micaiah's response, recorded in verse 14, was one of sarcasm and contempt; he mockingly agreed with the false words of the others. When Ahab rebuked him for what was obviously said ironically, Micaiah gave a straightforward prophecy that Israel would be scattered and would be like "sheep that have no shepherd" — a prediction that Ahab would perish (verse 16). For telling the truth, Micaiah was struck and imprisoned again (verses 23, 26).

Ahab disguised himself before going into battle because he did not want to be identified as a king and therefore become a major target. Jehoshaphat immediately was surrounded by soldiers who thought he was Ahab. However, he cried to the Lord and was miraculously spared when the soldiers turned back from pursuing him (verses 28-32). Ahab was struck by a random arrow and died "about the time of the sun going down" in a fulfillment of Micaiah's prophesy (verses 33-34).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- III. The history of the kings of Judah
 - D. The reign of Jehoshaphat
 - 2. The fateful alliance with Ahab
 - a. The alliance with Ahab (18:1-3)
 - b. The conflicting counsel (18:4-27)
 - (1) The prophets of Ahab (18:4-11)
 - (2) The prophet Micaiah (18:12-27)
 - c. The defeat in battle (18:28-34)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did Ahab's prophets predict? (verse 11)

2. How do you think Ahab should have responded to Micaiah's words?

3. What are some ways our determination might hinder God's will?

CONCLUSION

Are you feeling determined about something today? It's wise to make sure that your purposes are according to God's will.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“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. 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.” (2 Chronicles 19:2-3)

Unwise decisions can bring God’s rebuke. Today’s text indicates that Jehoshaphat experienced that, and I recall a time when I did as well.

Several years ago when I was in college, I became very good friends with a young man who attended school with me. We started as acquaintances who occasionally did projects together. We both were doing well academically, so it was natural to work together. He was intelligent, and we had deep conversations. He was an atheist and openly told me he hated Christians—“but not you,” he added.

We slowly became closer as the year went on. We started sharing meals and making phone calls outside of school. Once he invited me to his house, telling me that he had never invited anyone there before because he was very private. He told me that he found me fascinating. As a single young woman, it was nice to have the attention and admiration of an intelligent and likeable young man.

At the end of my junior year, the two of us worked together on a junior project. It was a great success, and our professors gave us rave reviews, saying they had never seen a better junior project, and it was even better than most senior projects. We were flying high as we headed into summer break.

I didn’t see that young man for three months during the summer. I hadn’t realized how close I had become to him until he left town. At first, I missed him dreadfully, but as time went on and I drew closer to God, I realized what a danger he presented for me as a Christian. Gradually, I saw how careless I had been. By the time we returned to school for our senior year, God had shown me very clearly that I needed to separate myself from him or I would fall spiritually. I couldn’t do it halfway either, I had to completely stop being with him. Thankfully, God helped me put an end to our relationship in a respectful way.

When King Jehoshaphat joined with Ahab, it was not according to God’s will because Ahab was ungodly. While God spared Jehoshaphat’s life in the

ensuing battle, in today’s focus verses the prophet Jehu rebuked him for making such an alliance. Jehoshaphat could have fallen along with the ungodly Ahab, but God spared him in His mercy because Jehoshaphat had pleased God by destroying the implements of idol worship in the land.

God showed me the same kind of grace when He revealed to me the danger of getting too close to a worldly man who could have impacted me spiritually. There is a lesson here for all of us: we need to use great care in choosing our close friends and associates, and make sure their spiritual values align with those God has put in our hearts so our relationship with Him is never compromised.

BACKGROUND

This chapter continues the account of King Jehoshaphat of Judah that began in chapter 17. The previous chapter recorded how God prevented the slaying of Jehoshaphat in battle when the army of Syria surrounded him. In this chapter, Jehoshaphat returned safely to his house in Jerusalem, where he was rebuked by Jehu the prophet for his alliance with Ahab (verses 1-3). The remainder of the chapter, verses 4-11, describes the further reforms that Jehoshaphat instituted in Judah.

Jehoshaphat should never have formed an alliance with Ahab and the Kingdom of Israel. The fact that he survived despite his unwise decision is significant because it contrasts his preservation with ungodly Ahab’s fate. Though the connection with Ahab would have further repercussions in Judah’s history, God extended mercy to Jehoshaphat because he had cried out to God for help during the battle (2 Chronicles 18:31) and because, according to verse 3 of today’s text, “there are good things found in thee.” Two specific actions are noted that brought God’s approval. First, Jehoshaphat took the groves out of the land (the wooden symbols of the female goddess Asherah, the consort of Baal). Secondly, he prepared his heart to seek God.

The prophet who delivered God’s rebuke in verses 2-3 was Jehu the son of Hanani; he is not to be confused with Jehu who was the eleventh king of Israel (2 Chronicles 22). This prophet Jehu also announced a message of doom against Baasha, King of Israel (1 Kings 16:7).

Verses 4-11 relate that Jehoshaphat undertook further reforms in Judah by appointing judges throughout “all the fenced cities of Judah.” In doing so, he was following the example of Moses, who chose godly

men to assist him in administering the civil affairs of the nation (see Exodus 18:21-22). Jehoshaphat commanded these appointees to “judge not for man, but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment” (verse 6), indicating these men were accountable to God for how they judged others. The caution against having “respect of persons” in verse 7 referred to showing partiality, and “taking of gifts” was a reference to bribery. According to verse 8, Jehoshaphat also appointed priests and Levites to assist in the administration of the laws.

The solemn charges Jehoshaphat gave these judges is not recorded in the parallel accounts in 1 or 2 Kings. It seems probable that the author of Chronicles chose to emphasize this good example of Jehoshaphat as a means of encouraging the leaders of the rebuilding community in Judah.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- III. The history of the kings of Judah
 - D. The reign of Jehoshaphat
 - 2. The fateful alliance with Ahab
 - d. The restoration of Jehoshaphat (19:1-11)
 - (1) The rebuke by Jehu (19:1-3)
 - (2) The further reforms of Jehoshaphat (19:4-11)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verse 3, what were the two things that the prophet commended Jehoshaphat for?

2. What were some of the positive benefits to Judah’s society from the reforms in verses 5-11?

3. How can we apply verse 9 to our own decisions and judgments?

CONCLUSION

Let us purpose in our hearts to be careful of the entanglements of this life that could draw us away from God.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“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.”
(2 Chronicles 20:17)

The battle account we find in today’s text provides us with helpful instruction on trusting God when we face severe trials. One day King Jehoshaphat’s intelligence sources came with the horrifying news that an enemy coalition was coming against Judah and was only about thirty-five miles south of Jerusalem. Jehoshaphat and his entire kingdom were in grave danger. The king responded in the right way: he called a national prayer meeting and encouraged the people to trust God in the face of this overwhelming crisis. They did so, and God intervened. Judah literally won the war by prayer alone, without swinging a single sword!

Thousands of years later, God intervened for another nation that turned to God in prayer during a time of crisis. In May of 1940, World War II was raging across Europe. British, Belgian, and French forces were falling back across France and a thrust by Nazi Germany through the Ardennes successfully cut the Allied army in half. By May 19, Britain was looking for ways to get its forces back across the English Channel. By May 24, the Germans were poised to capture Dunkirk, the last port the British could feasibly use for evacuation. Almost 400,000 troops were trapped on the beaches there with a real threat of annihilation.

King George VI of England called for a National Day of Prayer to plead for divine intervention. In his address to the nation he said, “Let us with one heart and soul, humbly but confidently, commit our cause to God and ask His aid, that we may valiantly defend the right as it is given to us to see it.” In response, thousands of people flocked into churches to pray. The special service held in London’s Westminster Abbey filled to overflowing, and hundreds more kept vigil outside. “Nothing like this has ever happened before” was how one newspaper described the scene.

Then something occurred that historians, many decades later, still cannot explain. On the very day King George VI called the nation to pray, Hitler halted the German offensive only ten miles from Dunkirk. For nearly three days, as England knelt and petitioned God for deliverance, German tanks remained stationary. This gave the British forces time to form a defensive

perimeter and move many of their troops to the English Channel.

Then another miracle occurred. Dunkirk was engulfed by inclement weather, making any effective response from the Nazis difficult. Meanwhile, word spread across England of the need for boats to cross the channel to Dunkirk to help evacuate the stranded soldiers. Men in rowboats, tugboats, fishing trawlers, and motorboats responded. Some of these small, unarmed crafts had never before been taken out of sight of land, and many lacked navigational equipment.

The English Channel is typically rough and choppy—not a good situation for inexperienced seamen—but once again something amazing happened. As the first small boats arrived on the shores of Dunkirk and soldiers began climbing into them, the water was calm, and yet there was still a thick, protective cloud cover. Back and forth the little boats went. A few at a time would load up a couple dozen men, head across the foggy channel, and then return for more. In the end, 338,226 British and Allied troops made it safely across the English Channel in a three-day period. The “Miracle of Dunkirk,” as it came to be known, remains the largest amphibious evacuation ever undertaken in wartime.¹

While we may never personally face an enemy army arrayed against us in a physical battle, we will face spiritual battles. The enemy of our souls will attempt to overthrow us. However, we have a divine Helper who will never fail us if we place our trust in Him. How do we do that? We must recognize that our own strength is insufficient, and that the battle is not ours, but the Lord’s. We will need to make sure we are obeying God in every area to the best of our knowledge and are seeking His interests rather than self-oriented desires. Also, like Jehoshaphat and King George VI, we must ask for divine help. When we take these steps, we will find that we can rely on God’s power to win the battle for us!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 20 of 2 Chronicles relates the invasion of Judah by the combined forces of the Moabites, Ammonites, and other allies (verses 1-4), Jehoshaphat’s prayer and God’s response through the prophet Jahaziel (verses 5-19), and the deliverance and defeat of Judah’s enemies (verses 20-30). The chapter concludes in verses 31-37 with summary remarks about the reign of Jehoshaphat.

When Jehoshaphat received word of the coming invasion, three responses are noted in verse 3: he

feared, he set himself to seek the Lord, and he called the nation to express their humility and total dependence upon God through a public fast. Based on verses 4-5, it appears that the people assembled in the house of the Lord to pray for deliverance; this was in accordance with Solomon's prayer in 2 Chronicles 6:34-35.

Jehoshaphat stood before the assembly to lead the people in a prayer that is recorded in verses 6-12. In it, Jehoshaphat reminded God that He had not permitted Israel to invade these nations when they came from Egypt to the Promised Land (see Deuteronomy 2:8-9 and 2:19). The implication was that since they had obeyed His divine prohibition, He should not allow these enemy nations to destroy Judah now. Jehoshaphat openly admitted that he did not have the solution. Their only recourse was to trust that God's power would protect Judah when nothing else could.

Following Jehoshaphat's prayer, the people seemingly stood silently before the Lord, waiting upon Him for direction or encouragement. Then God responded through the prophet Jahaziel. The divine command was to not be afraid or dismayed, because the battle belonged to God, and He would fight on behalf of Judah. They were to go out on the coming day to a specified location "by the cliff of Ziz" (verse 16)—an ascent which led inland to the northwest of En-gedi. God knew the plans of the attacking armies and He relayed this information to the king and people of Judah. In response, the people worshipped the Lord, who promised to save His people from this threat.

The next day, the people "rose early in the morning" to follow God's command (verse 20). Verse 21 indicates that Jehoshaphat appointed singers to lead the army. It was clear that he expected a battle because he brought the army, but it was also clear that he expected a supernatural intervention because he instructed the singers and worshippers to go first.

The exact meaning of the phrase "the LORD set ambushments" in verse 22 is unclear. Possibly God used supernatural agents, or He may have motivated the inhabitants of the land to rise up against the invaders. Whatever the case, the result was panic among Judah's enemies, causing them to fight among themselves and destroy one another. Based on verse 24, it seems that the army of Judah, led by the singing worshippers, never actually engaged the enemy forces. By the time they arrived at "the watchtower in the wilderness," the enemy soldiers were already dead and no one had escaped. All Judah had to do was to collect the spoil, which was so great that the task took three days.

Verses 26-30 describe the thanksgiving of the people, and their return to Jerusalem "with joy." News of this great victory came to neighboring countries, and the "fear of God" came upon them. As a result, Judah enjoyed peace for the remainder of Jehoshaphat's reign.

The final verses of chapter 20 provide a summary of Jehoshaphat's reign and an account of his unwise maritime alliance with Ahaziah King of Israel, which resulted in God's divine judgment upon the fleet. A parallel account is found in 1 Kings 22:41-50.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The history of the kings of Judah

D. The reign of Jehoshaphat

3. The Ammonite invasion of Judah (20:1-30)

- a. The invasion (20:1-4)
- b. The prayer of Jehoshaphat for deliverance (20:5-13)
- c. The prophecy of Jahaziel (20:14-17)
- d. The praise for the Lord's answer (20:18-19)
- e. The defeat of the Ammonites (20:20-30)
 - (1) The defeat (20:20-23)
 - (2) The spoils (20:24-30)

4. The summary of his reign (20:31-34)

5. The fateful alliance with Ahaziah (20:35-37)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Verse 3 records that when Jehoshaphat heard of the approaching army, he set himself to seek the Lord. What other step did he take?

2. What do you think was indicated by the response of Jehoshaphat and the people to Jahaziel's words? (verses 18-19)

3. What elements of Jehoshaphat's prayer in verses 5-12 might give us guidance regarding how we can structure our own prayers?

CONCLUSION

When Judah's king and the people of the nation prayed and committed their perilous situation to God, He intervened on their behalf and a great victory was won. When we face spiritual battles, we can take the same steps and anticipate the same response from Him.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Jehoram was thirty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. 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.”
(2 Chronicles 21:5-6)

It matters who you marry! Before my husband and I were married, he was excited to learn that a number of my extended family members were church office workers, ministers, and pastors, and one of my great uncles had even been Superintendent General of the Apostolic Faith organization. He liked to tease me that I was “church royalty” being related to so many “important people.” All joking aside, I was also happy to know that many in his family were also faithful Christian workers. Of course, what mattered most to both of us was that the other was also a born again Christian, and endeavoring to be active in the service of the Lord.

The spiritual state of a person’s spouse often has a tremendous influence on that individual’s own spiritual life. A godly husband or wife can be a huge encouragement, while someone who is less than enthusiastic about the Gospel can influence the other to grow lukewarm or even walk away from the faith entirely. For that reason, it’s important to be extremely careful when making the life-altering decision of marriage. The same can also be said of other close friendships and even business relationships.

Our focus verse says King Jehoram did evil “for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife.” As king, Jehoram could have followed in the footsteps of his godly father and grandfather, but he chose instead to follow in the way of his father-in-law who was one of the most wicked kings Israel ever had. While Ahab, Jezebel, and Athaliah were no doubt not the only influences on Jehoram, it was certainly decisive that he became involved with such a family. What we read could have been so different if he had made other choices.

We want to be prayerful about all close relationships in our lives. May we always choose godly companions and examples above any others!

BACKGROUND

This chapter records the wicked reign of King Jehoram, who succeeded his father Jehoshaphat on the

throne of Judah; a parallel account is found in 2 Kings 8:16-24. Verses 1-7 record the death of Jehoshaphat and the wicked deeds the new ruler committed when he became king. The revolt of the subjugated people of Edom and Libnah is described in verses 8-10, followed by a warning of coming judgment in verses 11-15, and an account of the invasion of the Philistines and Arabians in verses 16-17. The chapter concludes with a record of Jehoram’s death (verses 18-20).

The reference in verse 3 that Jehoshaphat gave his sons “fenced cities in Judah” may indicate that he followed the policy of Rehoboam (see 2 Chronicles 11:21-23) of establishing his sons throughout the kingdom and away from the capital so they would not be a united threat to Jehoram, the son who would succeed him.

Jehoram became king at the age of thirty-two, although he served as co-regent with his father for a few years. According to verse 5, he reigned for eight years. He was married to Athaliah, the daughter of Israel’s wicked King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. Like Athaliah, Jehoram was an idolater. One of his initial acts after ascending the throne was to slay all his brothers and some of the princes of the land, presumably in an attempt to eliminate any potential political rivals. Verse 7 indicates that God withheld judgment because of His promise to David that his descendants would continue upon the throne; the implication is that Jehoram’s wickedness was great enough to justify such judgment.

Verses 8-10 record the revolt of Edom and Libnah, who were under the control of Judah at that time. The Edomites were descendants of Esau and longtime enemies of Israel. Libnah was a former Caananite city that had been captured by Joshua and was allotted to the descendants of Aaron (see 1 Chronicles 6:57). Seemingly the leaders of these areas sensed weakness in Judah and saw an opportunity to free themselves.

Verse 11 notes two specific things Jehoram did to undo his father’s reform: he rebuilt the high places in Judah and compelled the people of Judah to “commit fornication” (a reference to going after idols). Verses 12-15 record that a “writing” came to him from “Elijah the prophet.” If the record in 2 Kings was written in chronological order, then Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind during the reign of Jehoshaphat; in that case, the message may have been written earlier and delivered to Jehoram after his father’s death. However, it is possible that the chapters of 2 Kings

Verses 18-20 describe the plague that fell upon Jehoram's family and his gruesome death, which precisely fulfilled the prophecy of Elijah in verses 14-15. The fact that "no burning" was made for him indicated that there was no kindling of fragrant spices made in his honor, as was typically done for kings of that era.

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1. Jehoshaphat's death and Jehoram's ascension (21:1-3)
2. Jehoram's wicked reign (21:4-7)
3. Jehoram's foreign difficulties (21:8-17)
 - a. The revolts of Edom and Libnah (21:8-10)
 - b. The invasion by the Arabs and Philistines (21:11-17)
 - (1) The reason for the invasion (21:11)
 - (2) The prophecy of Elijah (21:12-15)
 - (3) The invasion and destruction (21:16-17)
4. Jehoram's illness and death (21:18-20)

[illegible][illegible]



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“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.”
(2 Chronicles 22:10)**

Athaliah’s reprehensible actions, documented in today’s focus verse, are the opposite of the natural instincts of a mother and grandmother to protect, nurture, and love her own. In stark contrast, Thomas Edison’s mother was an example of one who *was* determined to protect, nurture, and love her child. She was her son’s fierce champion and advocate.

Thomas Edison, who lived from 1847 to 1931, is well known as an inventor. He is credited with developing the phonograph, light bulbs, generator systems, a motion picture camera, and many other innovations. Throughout his lifetime, he obtained 1,093 patents for his inventions. Yet when Edison was in school, he did not do well, partially because from a young age he had trouble hearing.

In an interview on November 29, 1907, Edison said, “One day I overheard the teacher tell the inspector that I was ‘addled’ and it would not be worthwhile keeping me in school any longer. I was so hurt by this last straw that I burst out crying and went home and told my mother about it. Then I found out what a good thing a good mother is. She came out as my strong defender. Mother love was aroused, mother pride wounded to the quick. She brought me back to the school and angrily told the teacher that he didn’t know what he was talking about, that I had more brains than he himself, and a lot more talk like that. In fact, she was the most enthusiastic champion a boy ever had, and I determined right then that I would be worthy of her and show her that her confidence was not misplaced.”¹

Eventually Mrs. Edison began teaching Thomas at home. In later years, he credited his success to her efforts and belief in him. He said, “My mother was the making of me. She was so true, so sure of me, and I felt I had someone to live for, someone I must not disappoint.”²

What a contrast Mrs. Edison’s supportive and loving actions were to those of Athaliah in today’s text! Athaliah was her son’s “counsellor to do wickedly” (verse 3), and when he was killed, she grasped control of the kingdom and “destroyed all the seed royal”—her own grandchildren. The difference between these two mothers reminds us that our

actions and choices, whether or not we are parents, will directly influence for good or bad the generation that follows us.

If you have been blessed with children, God has given you an incredible opportunity—and a tremendous responsibility. Being a champion and support for our children will unquestionably benefit them. However, the best benefit we can possibly give the next generation is to encourage them to seek God and His will for their lives. Instilling a strong faith in younger people begins by having a strong faith ourselves. We must model obedience to God, uphold godly values, and be faithful in teaching our children the ways of the Lord with tenderness, affection, and patience. As we verbally and visibly demonstrate the teachings of God’s Word in our families and homes, we can trust Him to help us have a lasting and positive impact on those who come after us.

BACKGROUND

The youngest son of Jehoram, Ahaziah, became king of Judah at his father’s death. This was because, as recorded in the previous chapter, all his older brothers had been slain by Philistine and Arabian invaders. Ahaziah reigned in Judah for only one year, and this chapter is a record of events of that year. Verses 1-9 describe the nature of his reign and his death, and verses 10-12 describe how his mother, Athaliah, took control of the kingdom and reigned in Judah for six years.

Ahaziah was referred to as Jehoahaz in 2 Chronicles 21:17. His age is given as forty-two in verse 2 of this chapter. However, most scholars believe this to be a scribal error given the close similarity between the character for “twenty” and the character for “forty” in the original script, and the parallel account in 2 Kings 8:26 which gives his age as twenty-two. His mother was Athaliah, the daughter of Israel’s wicked King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. While verse 2 refers to Athaliah as the “daughter” of Omri, she was actually his granddaughter.

Verses 3-4 indicate that Ahaziah sought counsel from ungodly individuals. Verse 3 says his mother was his counselor “to do wickedly,” and the “house of Ahab” who had advised his father had done so “to his destruction” (verse 4).

According to verse 5, Ahaziah’s close association with the wicked house of Ahab brought about an unwise alliance with Israel against Hazael, King of Syria. The reference to “Azariah” in verse 6 should read “Ahaziah” (see 2 Kings 9:16). This verse reveals

that Ahaziah’s connection with his mother’s family was so strong that he paid a visit at Jezreel to the king of Israel, Jehoram, who was “sick”—recuperating from the wounds he received in the battle against Syria.

“Joram” in verse 7 is an alternate spelling for “Jehoram.” Verses 7-9 indicate that Ahaziah’s association with Israel and its wicked kings led to his death. God ordained that he would die in the same judgment that came upon the king of Israel as prophesied through Jehu. The account in 2 Kings 9 records his ignominious end in greater detail. Ahaziah fled to the region of Samaria. When he was found there, he was brought to Jehu, who fatally wounded him near Ibleam. From there, he was taken by chariot to Megiddo, where he died. Then his body was carried by his servants to Jerusalem for burial (see 2 Kings 9:27-28).

Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, used the occasion of her son’s death to assume power. She immediately destroyed all the royal family in an attempt to eliminate any who might resist her takeover. The only survivor was Ahaziah’s youngest son, Joash, who was hidden by Ahaziah’s sister, Jehoshabeath, in the Temple. The young prince and rightful heir to Judah’s throne remained there for six years.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- III. The history of the kings of Judah
 - F. The reign of Ahaziah (Jehoahaz) (22:1-9)
 - 1. The character of his reign (22:1-6)
 - 2. The destruction of Ahaziah (22:7-9)
 - G. The usurpation of Athaliah (22:10-12)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Who were Ahaziah’s counselors? (verses 3-4)

2. Why do you think Jehoshabeath had the courage to hide the child Joash?

3. What are some ways we can encourage our children and grandchildren to honor God and His Word?

CONCLUSION

Our actions have generational influence; let’s be sure with God’s help that our influence is positive.

NOTES

1. T. P. (Thomas Power) O’Connor, “The Wizard of Electricity,” *T. P.’s Weekly*, 10 no.264, November 29, 1907, London. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo.31924069714339&seq=699> (accessed January 12, 2024).
2. Martin V. Melosi, *Thomas A. Edison and the Modernization of America*, (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman/Little, Brown Higher Education, 1990) p. 8.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“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 Chronicles 23:1)**

Christian author A. W. Tozer once stated, “Next to the Holy Scriptures, the greatest aid to the life of faith may be Christian biography. It is indeed notable that a large part of the Bible itself is given over to the life and labors of prophets, patriarchs, and kings—who they were, what they did and said, how they prayed and toiled and suffered and triumphed at last!”¹

I am not sure if my parents ever read Tozer’s statement, but they certainly would have agreed with him. While I was still young, they instilled in me a love for biographies of great Christians—people whose hearts were on fire for the Lord. They introduced me to the accounts of genuine heroes: missionaries, preachers, and Christians from different parts of the world, from the past and present. I read about men, women, and children with resilient spirits, mountain-moving faith, incredible courage, and selfless, sacrificial love. And those accounts impacted and inspired me.

As I read the stories of these people of God, I became aware of how often one hero of the faith was influenced by the life of another. Josh McDowell dedicated his life to serving God after reading of Jim Elliot’s sacrificial love for the Auca tribe of Ecuador. Elizabeth Elliott was inspired by both Amy Carmichael, who rescued children from idolatrous practices in India, and Lilius Trotter, who gave up a promising career in the world of art to minister in Algeria. Dorie Van Stone decided to become a missionary after hearing Darlene Diebler speak about her experiences while serving the Lord in Papua, New Guinea. Hudson Taylor was impacted by a sermon by Dwight L. Moody. Amy Carmichael was encouraged by George Mueller’s story of trusting God to provide buildings, staff to oversee them, furniture, food, and clothing for the thousands of orphans he cared for in England.

Not all the heroes I read about over the years were well-known. Many had names that would not be recognized by most people. But their faithfulness influenced others, many times changing the courses of lives.

In today’s text, there is mention of a priest named Jehoiada who would fit in that category. Although not as well-known as some Biblical heroes, this man’s courage and commitment to God impacted the life of a young prince and helped preserve the line of David. His wife had rescued the king’s son, Joash, from the murderous intentions of the queen mother Athaliah, and together they hid the young boy in the Temple for six years. It would have been safest for Jehoiada to simply go about his duties, since any action against Athaliah, who had assumed the throne, could have meant death. However, our focus verse indicates that Jehoiada “strengthened himself”—he summoned courage—and made a covenant with the captains and the guards to dethrone Athaliah and install the young Joash as Judah’s rightful king. Jehoiada did what was right in confronting evil, and throughout the remainder of his life, he continued to be a great influence for good in the kingdom of Judah.

There are times when we, too, must gather courage to do what is spiritually right. Whether the situation we face is difficult, daunting, or possibly even dangerous, let us follow the example of Jehoiada and other defenders of the faith who bravely took a stand for God. In Tozer’s words, let’s purpose to be among those who “prayed and toiled and suffered and triumphed at last!” Our story may never be recorded in a biography. We may never do fearless deeds that change the course of history. But who knows? Our example of courage may have a long-lasting influence on those who observe or learn about our lives!

BACKGROUND

The previous chapter of 2 Chronicles recorded the queen mother Athaliah’s attempt to destroy all the royal line in Judah after the death of her son Ahaziah in order to remove any who might challenge her taking control. However, Ahaziah’s sister, Jehoshabeath, hid Ahaziah’s youngest son Joash in the Temple. Verses 1-11 of this chapter relate that in the seventh year of Athaliah’s reign, the priest Jehoiada instituted a plan to depose Athaliah and replace her with the boy king Joash. Queen Athaliah was executed (verses 12-15) and in verses 16-21, a covenant was made between the young king, the priests, and the people, declaring their purpose to honor, obey, and serve God.

Jehoiada was a godly man who was determined to restore the throne to David’s rightful descendants. He was a priest and the husband of Jehoshabeath, who hid the child Joash to protect him from Athaliah’s massacre.

Jehoiada's brave action in calling together the captains, chief fathers, and Levites to implement the takeover of the throne could have cost him his life. Jehoiada chose the Sabbath as the day to overthrow Athaliah because the guards changed shifts on that day; this enabled them to assemble two groups of guards at the Temple at the same time without attracting attention. According to verse 9, the men who gathered to protect the new king were equipped with weapons dating from the days of King David. It was appropriate for the soldiers who would place the heir of David's royal line back on the throne of Judah to use weapons that had once belonged to King David.

Jehoiada brought Joash out and crowned him in a public and official ceremony. The statement in verse 11 that Jehoiada "gave him the testimony"—the scrolls containing the Mosaic Law—was in accordance with God's command in Deuteronomy 17:18, which commanded that the king should have his own copy of the Scriptures.

The people clearly were in favor of this transition of power, because the noise of the rejoicing and acclamation of the new king attracted the attention of Athaliah, who came to the Temple. When she realized what was taking place, she cried, "Treason, Treason" (verse 13). However, Jehoiada gave instructions for her execution. This was not to occur on the Temple grounds because it was necessary to preserve the sanctity of the Temple complex. The command to "have her forth of the ranges" (verse 14) meant that she was to be escorted out between ranks of soldiers, so there would be no possibility of her escape or of any supporter coming to her rescue.

Jehoiada continued to be a powerful influence for good in the kingdom as the young king began to rule. Verse 16 records that he led the people in making a covenant of recommitment to God. The people then destroyed the temple of Baal in Jerusalem. In verses 18-20, Jehoiada reinstituted worship practices based on what God had revealed to Moses and David. After more than six years, the rightful king of Judah once again ruled over the people, and "all the people of the land rejoiced" (verse 21).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The history of the kings of Judah

H. The reign of Joash

1. The ascension of Joash (23:1-11)
2. The execution of Athaliah (23:12-15)
3. The revival under Jehoiada (23:16-21)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 3, why did Jehoiada say the king's son, young Joash, should reign?

2. Why is Athaliah's cry of "Treason, Treason" in verse 13 somewhat ironic?

3. What courageous men and women of God have been a significant encouragement to you?

CONCLUSION

Courage is indispensable for both spreading and preserving the truth of Christ. May God help each of us to follow the example of Jehoiada and be willing to say and do the right thing regardless of the personal cost.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And at the king’s commandment they made a chest, and set it without at the gate of the house of the LORD. 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. And all the princes and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end.” (2 Chronicles 24:8-10)

In the early days of this organization, God made it clear to our founder, Florence Crawford, that He would provide what was needed for the financial support of the work of the Lord. Experience had taught her that faith, when combined with obedience to the will of God, always brings results. Shortly after her move to Portland, she stepped out in faith with only ten cents in hand and published the first *Apostolic Faith* paper issued from this city.

In accordance with her belief that God would provide for the work as it expanded, Sister Crawford let it be known from the outset that no collections would be taken during church services. When she was asked, “Who is going to be responsible for the upkeep of this place if no collections are taken?” she firmly responded, “I will be responsible.” She knew she could trust God to provide, and God’s people to give freely. She had a small box put near the entry of the church where the tithe and freewill offerings could be placed. From that day to this, collections have never been taken in Apostolic Faith Church services. The money freely given through tithes and offerings has met every need.

Today’s text records how a financial need was met in a similar manner during the days of King Joash of Judah. Early in his reign, King Joash set his heart upon restoring the Temple. It is likely that he had been taught by his uncle, the priest Jehoiada, to revere the house of God, and he clearly was troubled that it had fallen into disrepair during the evil reign of his grandmother, Athaliah.

At the direction of King Joash, the priests gave the people the opportunity to contribute. A collection box with a hole in the top was built to receive the money, and it was placed outside the gate of the house of the Lord. And the people *did* give—they gave willingly and abundantly! Our focus verse records, “And all the princes and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end.” The chest was soon filled, and the collected money

was carried to the king. And this did not happen just once. Verse 11 states, “Thus they did day by day, and gathered money in abundance.” Then the funds were distributed to the workmen repairing the Temple, and when the work was completed, there was even money left over to make vessels for the house of the Lord.

Giving is clearly a part of God’s plan for His followers, and that applies to us. Our tithes and offerings should be given with pure motives, an attitude of worship to God, and a desire to see the work of the Lord prosper. We should recognize that God does not need our money. After all, according to Psalm 50:10, He owns the cattle on a thousand hills! However, He allows us to have a part in the growth of His kingdom by offering back to Him what He has given us. There is a great blessing to us when we give freely and regularly to the work of the Lord.

The people of Joash’s day rejoiced when they gave. Blessings still accrue to those who follow God’s Word in giving generously and wholeheartedly to Him.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 24 of 2 Chronicles provides a summary of the forty-year reign of King Joash. (In the parallel account in 2 Kings 12, the variant spelling Jehoash is used.) Verses 1-14 of this chapter describe the repair of the Temple and the spiritual reformation that took place in Judah early in Joash’s rule. However, after the death of the godly priest Jehoiada, Joash was influenced by the princes of Judah to turn to idolatry (verses 15-19). When God pronounced judgment through Jehoiada’s son Zechariah, the leaders and the people conspired to murder the prophet (verses 20-22). As a result of this wicked deed, God sent judgment on Judah through a Syrian invasion, and Joash was assassinated by his servants (verses 23-27).

After leading the effort to establish Joash upon the throne of Judah when he was just seven years of age, Jehoiada continued to be a powerful influence for good in the kingdom of Judah for the remainder of his life. He was the uncle of Joash through his marriage to Jehoshabeath, and the fact that he arranged marriages for the young king (see verse 3) implies that he served as Joash’s legal guardian.

Early in Joash’s reign, and likely because of the influence of Jehoiada, the king “was minded to repair the house of the LORD” (verse 4). Joash commanded the Levites in Judah’s cities to collect money annually and bring it back for the project in Jerusalem. He instructed that this task be accomplished speedily, but the Levites failed to follow that instruction. According

to 2 Kings 12:6, the restoration project did not begin until the twenty-third year of Joash's reign.

The reference to the "sons of Athaliah" in verse 7 indicates that the Temple's disrepair was not the result of normal wear and usage; seemingly Athaliah and her sons had instigated a deliberate campaign against the Temple and the worship of the true God.

Verses 8-10 describe how the collection for the Temple repair was accomplished. A chest was placed at the gate of the house of the Lord where people could place their donations. The reference to the collection taken by Moses (verses 6 and 9) was an allusion to the offerings made to build the Tabernacle in Exodus 35. Further details regarding the chest of Joash's day are given in 2 Kings 12:9-15.

Mention is made in verses 15-16 of the death of Jehoiada at 130 years of age. He was awarded the honor of burial in the royal tombs "because he had done good in Israel, both toward God, and toward his [God's] house."

The statement in verse 17 that the princes of Judah "made obeisance to the king" implies that these leaders of Israel came in a fawning and flattering manner. Due to their influence, Joash and the people "left the house of the LORD God of their fathers" and turned to idolatry. Though God sent His prophets to warn that the nation was headed for destruction, "they would not give ear" (verse 19). It is possible that the prophet Joel was one of these prophets.

The statement in verse 20 that Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, "stood above the people" probably indicates that he was the priest who pronounced the benediction over the assembly of Israel. However, his warning was also rejected, and Zechariah was ultimately stoned at the command of the king. Ironically, the stoning took place in the "court of the house of the LORD"—the very place where Joash, Jehoiada, and the people had pledged by covenant to live according to the Law of God (see 2 Chronicles 23:11,16).

The judgment that fell upon Judah for these evil actions is described in verses 23-27. A small army of Syrians overcame the much greater army of Judah. The princes who had been an ungodly influence upon Joash were destroyed and their possessions were plundered, and a wounded Joash was killed by his own servants. Although Joash was buried in Jerusalem, he was not awarded a place in the royal cemetery.

The chapter concludes in verse 27 with the statement that Joash's son Amaziah succeeded him on the throne of Judah.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The history of the kings of Judah

H. The reign of Joash

4. The reign of Joash (24:1-27)

- a. The early character of his reign (24:1-3)

- b. The Temple repair under Joash (24:4-14)
- c. The apostasy during Joash's reign (24:15-24)
 - (1) The idolatry sanctioned by Joash (24:15-22)
 - (2) The Syrian invasion (24:23-24)
- d. The murder of Joash (24:25-27)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. How long did Joash reign in Judah? (verse 1)

2. What significance do you see in the statement in verse 2 that Joash did what was right in God's sight "all the days of Jehoiada the priest"?

3. Jehoiada's godly instruction obviously impacted King Joash. Who in your close circle of family and friends might be impacted by your life? What are some ways you can be a godly influence on them?

CONCLUSION

God's plan for financing His work on this earth is clearly spelled out in Scripture: it is to be done through tithes and freewill offerings. When we participate in that plan, we are blessed.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“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.” (2 Chronicles 25:7)

Warnings often fail to change people’s behavior. Either the warning goes unnoticed, or the warning is heard but ignored.

The latter was the case in the sinking of the British-owned steamship *Lusitania* by a German U-boat during World War I. The loss of this luxury liner should not have been unforeseen or surprising. For weeks before the ship was to sail from New York to Liverpool, notices had been published in newspapers cautioning people who were planning trans-Atlantic travel that ships belonging to Great Britain or her allies could be destroyed. That warning even appeared in *The New York Times* on the day of the *Lusitania*’s departure!

The British government had also warned the captain of *Lusitania* to avoid areas where German U-boats were active. He was told that if he entered such an area, he should zigzag through it by changing course at irregular intervals to foil any efforts by U-boats to plot the ship’s course for torpedoing. The captain received additional warnings when he did enter a danger zone, but for some reason, he ignored them. In fact, instead of employing the recommended evasive strategy, he slowed the ship down and remained close to shore! This made the *Lusitania* a perfect target. On May 7, 1915, a German U-boat torpedoed the ship and within twenty minutes it sank, claiming the lives of 1,195 people.

Today’s text references three warnings to King Amaziah of Judah. One was heeded, though grudgingly, and two were ignored. The result was disaster.

First, an unnamed prophet warned Amaziah not to use mercenary soldiers from Israel to fight for him against the Edomites. While Amaziah did follow that advice, he openly weighed obedience against the potential financial impact. The eventual victory over Edom was marred by the mercenaries’ reprisals in which three thousand from the cities of Judah were slain.

Then, a prophet rebuked Amaziah for worshipping the gods of the conquered Edomites. The divine “anger” expressed by the prophet was a warning—an attempt to turn Amaziah from his folly. The prophet told Amaziah, “God hath determined to destroy thee,

because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened unto my counsel” (verse 16).

Later, King Joash of Israel used a parable to warn Amaziah not to attack his nation, comparing Judah to a thistle and Israel to a strong cedar. Amaziah should have listened to Joash but he did not, and his nation suffered a terrible defeat in the ensuing battle.

Today, several thousand years after the days of Amaziah, we deal with warnings every day. Caution lights, traffic control signs, and advisories warn us of potential traffic or weather-related hazards. Medical professionals and fitness experts caution us about dangers to our health and well-being. Politicians and media analysts warn of impending economic and international crises. It is easy to become jaded by the warnings coming from all sides, and simply tune them out.

Of a far more serious nature than any earthly warning are the warnings in the Word of God—and those are warnings we must never disregard. The greatest danger facing society today is not a lack of Biblical warnings, but rather, a refusal to heed them! Let us purpose to be alert and responsive recipients, because ignoring God’s guidance and commands will result in eternal consequences.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 25 is a record of the twenty-nine-year reign of Amaziah, who ascended to the throne of Judah at the age of twenty-five following the death of his father, Joash. The nature of Amaziah’s reign is described in verses 1-4, which indicates that he began his reign doing what was right in the sight of the Lord, but not completely. Verses 5-12 tell of Amaziah’s victory over the nation of Edom, but after the battle, the king turned to idolatry (verses 13-16). He then initiated a military confrontation with King Joash of Israel that resulted in an ignominious defeat for Judah (verses 17-24). Because Amaziah had turned away from the Lord, verses 25-28 record that a conspiracy by his own people brought about his death. Most of the incidents in this chapter are also recorded in 2 Kings 14:1-20.

Verse 2 indicates that Amaziah did not serve God with a “perfect heart.” The Hebrew word translated *perfect* means “to be whole or complete,” so even at the start of his reign, Amaziah’s heart was not fully set on doing the will of God. Some of his policies were in opposition to God’s requirements, such as his allowing sacrifices and incense offerings to continue on the high places (see 2 Kings 14:1-4). Verses 3-4 of this chapter also indicate that although he slew the servants who

murdered his father, he spared their children, in accordance with the command in Deuteronomy 24:16.

According to verses 5-6, Amaziah organized a standing army of 300,000 men who would eventually fight against Edom. However, he also hired mercenary troops from the northern tribes of Israel. Using mercenaries in battle was a common practice in the ancient world, but an unnamed prophet cautioned Amaziah not to do so because the Lord was not with Israel. Furthermore, this prophet warned the king that if he did so, “God shall make thee fall before the enemy” (verses 7-8).

Though Amaziah heeded the prophet’s warning, he did ask about the one hundred talents he had paid to Israel. In essence he was asking, “How much will it cost me to be obedient?” The prophet answered, “The LORD is able to give thee much more than this” (verse 9). Amaziah wisely obeyed, and the result was a military victory at “the valley of salt” (an area south of the Dead Sea) though the dismissed mercenaries plundered the cities of Judah on their return home, killed thirty thousand people, and took much spoil (verse 13).

Verses 14-16 describe Amaziah’s descent into idolatry, stating that he brought the gods of the Edomites back to Judah and began worshipping them. When God sent a prophet to reprimand him, the king arrogantly silenced the man of God. However, the prophet pronounced judgment against Amaziah: God would destroy him because he rejected His counsel.

Amaziah wanted a showdown with Israel, possibly in retaliation for the mercenaries’ plundering of Judah, and the conflict between the two nations is described in verses 17-24. The phrase in verse 17, “Come, let us see one another in the face,” was a challenge to face one another in battle. King Joash of Israel responded with an allegorical reference to a thistle (representing Judah) and a cedar (representing Israel). In essence, he advised Amaziah to glory in his previous victory over Edom but then to stay at home. Amaziah ignored his words and, as the prophet had foretold, Judah was defeated in the resulting battle. Amaziah became a prisoner of the king of Israel for a time, and Jerusalem suffered great losses.

Verse 25 indicates that Amaziah lived for fifteen years after the death of King Joash of Israel, whose death probably prompted Amaziah’s release from imprisonment. However, Judah’s embarrassing military loss had undermined any support for Amaziah among the leaders of Judah. He fled to Lachish to escape those of his own nation who conspired against him, but his efforts were in vain; he was assassinated at Lachish. His body was brought to Jerusalem, where he was buried “with his fathers.”

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- III. The history of the kings of Judah
 - I. The reign of Amaziah (25:1-28)

1. The character of his reign (25:1-4)
2. The campaign against Edom (25:5-12)
 - a. The dismissal of the mercenaries (25:5-10)
 - b. The defeat of the Edomites (25:11-12)
3. The cause for the conflict with Israel (25:13)
4. The idolatry of Amaziah (25:14-17)
5. The campaign against Israel and the defeat of Judah (25:18-24)
6. The murder of Amaziah (25:25-28)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Based on verse 2, how would you describe Amaziah’s regard for the commands of the Lord? What of his actions in this chapter support your description?

2. What foolish thing did Amaziah do after conquering the Edomites? (verse 14)

3. While many warnings in God’s Word are directed to unbelievers, there are warnings for the followers of Christ as well. What are some Biblical cautions that you are striving to heed in your Christian walk?

CONCLUSION

We may ignore earthly warnings and still escape harm, but we will not escape God’s judgment if we ignore His warnings.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“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.”
(2 Chronicles 26:16)**

Pride in the heart can bring devastating consequences. Alexander Hamilton, whose face currently appears on the front of the United States ten-dollar bill, is an example.

Hamilton, one of America’s founding fathers, made many notable contributions to his nation. Numbered among the heroes of the Revolutionary War, he became George Washington’s chief of staff by the age of twenty-two. He was a zealous champion of a strong federal government and played a significant role in ratifying the U.S. Constitution. He served as the first secretary of the U.S. Treasury, and was instrumental in designing the nation’s banking, finance, and taxation system. He also championed the end of international slave trading.

However, despite Hamilton’s abilities and his undoubted legal, political, and financial acumen, he had a flaw that sabotaged his career and ultimately cost him his life: the sin of pride. When a political rival, Aaron Burr, made it known that Hamilton had insulted him at a private dinner, Hamilton arrogantly refused to back down. Burr challenged him to a duel to settle the matter, and Hamilton’s pride kept him from declining, perhaps fearing that attempting to resolve the conflict or refusing to duel would cause him to be labeled a coward.

On July 11, 1804, the two men faced off in Weehawken, New Jersey. Hamilton’s shot missed. Some historians suggest that he never intended to hit Burr but meant to “throw away” his shot, which was a common practice in a duel of honor. He may have assumed Burr would do the same. Burr’s bullet, however, mortally wounded Hamilton, who died the next day of his injuries. Hamilton was only forty-nine. What a tragic waste of the life of one who could have continued in service to his nation!

As recorded in today’s text, King Uzziah of Judah was also a man of great influence and ability whose many achievements had caused his fame to spread far and wide. However, he too suffered from pride. Our focus verse records that “his heart was lifted up,” and that led to transgression. With a censer in hand, Uzziah went into the Temple to burn incense—an aspect of

religious service that was strictly forbidden by Mosaic Law for anyone other than the priests. This act of prideful defiance was so serious that eighty valiant priests in the Temple endeavored to stop him. Uzziah responded with fury, and at that moment, God’s judgment fell—leprosy broke out on his forehead. As a result, he was isolated from society, and some years later, he died a leper.

Pride can often make a person careless, egotistical, and bold, and seemingly that was the case with Uzziah. However, pride shows up in a variety of ways. For some, it is overconfidence in personal achievements or abilities. It may manifest itself in arrogance or the need to always be right. It sometimes is evidenced by a desire to receive recognition, by selfish ambition, or by intense competitiveness. Whatever form it takes, pride is a deadly sin. The Bible says God hates it!

How can we avoid the snare of pride that brought ruin to Uzziah and Alexander Hamilton? We must ask God to help us see ourselves as He sees us. As we humble ourselves before Him and focus on what we can do to be a blessing to others, we understand more and more clearly that without God we are nothing—that all the glory for anything we are, have, or accomplish belongs to Him. As we stay close to God and maintain humility day in and day out, we can be confident that He will help us avoid the deadly sin of pride.

BACKGROUND

These chapters summarize the respective reigns of Uzziah and Jotham over Judah.

Uzziah’s rule began when he was sixteen years of age, while his father Amaziah was in captivity in Israel. His fifty-two year reign was the second longest in Judah’s history. (Manasseh ruled for fifty-five years.) Uzziah is considered by Bible scholars to be one of the great reformers of Judah. He is also remembered for his connection to Isaiah the prophet, who was called to his ministry in the year that Uzziah died (see Isaiah 6:1). Uzziah is referred to as Azariah in 1 Chronicles 3:12 and in 2 Kings 15:1.

The character of Uzziah’s reign is described in verses 1-5 of chapter 26, and his military prowess in verses 6-15. Uzziah had a positive beginning and accomplished a great deal of good for Judah, but pride was his downfall near the end of his rule. Chapter 26 concludes with a description of Uzziah’s sin in attempting to usurp the role of the priest, the divine judgment of leprosy that came upon him, and a record of his death and burial (verses 16-23).

The prophet Zechariah, mentioned in verse 5 of chapter 26, is not the Zechariah who ministered in the days of Ezra and authored the Book of Zechariah. The Zechariah in this text is only mentioned in this account, but he clearly had a godly influence on the young king.

Uzziah's military successes, which were a result of his reliance on God, led to the expansion of his kingdom westward into Philistine territory. In verse 10, the "towers in the desert" built at his direction may have been for the purpose of defending the nation or for protecting his livestock from raiding tribes. The "wells" in this verse referred to cisterns designed to collect and store rainwater. "Carmel" refers to a region in Judah south of Hebron, not the mountain in Israel where the fire of the Lord came down in answer to Elijah's prayer.

While Uzziah's army, described in verses 11-15, was not as large as other forces mentioned in Scripture, it was well equipped and included military armaments that were advanced for their time. "Habergeons" in verse 14 could be translated "coats of mail." The "engines" referenced in verse 15 could also be translated "inventions." Some commentators and historians believe these were similar to catapults; others suggest they were shielded or protected areas on city walls that enabled archers and military men to operate in comparative safety.

The pride of Uzziah, alluded to in verse 16 by the phrase "his heart was lifted up," led to his destruction. Seemingly, he was not content with the authority God had given him and wanted to add priestly functions to his royal power. Though warned by Azariah and eighty valiant priests, Uzziah took upon himself a function that belonged to the priesthood (see Exodus 30:7-8) and burned incense in the Temple. As a result, God smote him with leprosy—a disease that lasted for the remainder of his life. Because Uzziah had to be isolated from society due to his leprosy, during his final ten to eleven years as king, he co-reigned with his son, Jotham, who actually led the kingdom affairs. Uzziah's death and burial are noted in the final verse of chapter 26.

Chapter 27 concerns the reign of Jotham, who became co-regent with his father at the age of twenty-five, and ruled for a total of sixteen years. Based on verse 6, he is considered to have been a good king. Jotham continued the building projects started by his father (verses 3-4). The word "castles" in verse 4 could be understood as "fortresses." Jotham's military success against the Ammonites is noted in verses 5-6, and his death and burial in verses 7-9. His reign is also summarized in 2 Kings 15:32-38.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The history of the kings of Judah

- J. The reign of Uzziah (26:1-23)
 1. The character of Uzziah's reign (26:1-5)
 2. The military prowess of Uzziah (26:6-15)

3. The sin and leprosy of Uzziah (26:16-21)
4. The death of Uzziah (26:22-23)
- K. The reign of Jotham (27:1-9)
 1. The character of his reign (27:1-2)
 2. The building projects during his reign (27:3-4)
 3. The military success during his reign (27:5-6)
 4. The death of Jotham (27:7-9)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Who helped Uzziah in his military conflicts with the Philistines, Arabians, and Mehunims? (26:7)

2. What difference do you see between the satisfaction that comes as a result of a job well done, and the type of pride that God hates?

3. What are some ways we can guard against pride in our lives?

CONCLUSION

Although King Uzziah had pleased God in the early years of his reign, pride gained a foothold in his life. When he tried to perform the priests' duties in defiance of God's instructions, he was stricken with leprosy. The lesson for us is that even successful people must stay humble and obedient to God, or suffer the consequences.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“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.” (2 Chronicles 28:11)

What is courage? The dictionary defines this quality as “the mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.” When we picture a courageous individual, we might suppose that person is fearless. However, real courage is not the *absence* of fear, but the ability to face a challenge *despite* fear.

While there are many types of courage, perhaps the first that comes to mind is physical courage—bravery in the face of possible bodily harm or death. World War II Medal of Honor recipient Desmond Doss of Lynchburg, Virginia, displayed that type of courage.

Doss was raised with a firm belief in the Bible and the Ten Commandments. He held particularly strong views against killing, but when the United States entered the war, Doss wanted to do his part for his country. With the classification “conscientious objector,” he served in the armed forces as a medic. His focus was saving lives, not taking them, so Doss sometimes described himself as a “conscientious cooperator.”

When Doss’ non-combatant status became known during boot camp, he was a target of ridicule from some of the other soldiers. He was labeled a coward, verbally harassed, and had boots and other items thrown at him when he prayed at night. Still, Doss held on to his faith. And the day came when Doss’ fellow soldiers realized the character and courage of their Bible-believing medic.

Doss was serving in Okinawa, Japan, when his unit was ordered to take a 400-foot-high cliff called the Maeda Escarpment. The enemy forces strenuously defended the ridge, mowing down man after man. At last, the fighting intensified to the point that the unit was ordered to retreat. Doss refused to do so while there were men on the bluff who were too wounded to retreat under their own power, and he would not leave them behind. Alone and under fire, Doss lowered one injured man at a time to safety, continually putting himself in mortal danger to aid his fallen comrades. He saved between fifty and one hundred men this way and later was presented with the Medal of Honor for his outstanding bravery and unflinching determination in the face of danger.¹

In our text today, a prophet named Oded also exhibited great courage. He demonstrated moral courage, doing what was right despite potential shame, opposition, or retaliation from others. Oded went to meet the returning armies of Israel, not to commend them for their triumph over Judah, but to rebuke them. He told the military leaders that the victory they were so proud of had not been won because God favored them, but because God was angry with Judah and had used Israel as His instrument of judgment.

Oded went on to courageously charge the leaders with an abuse of power for slaughtering and enslaving their foes. In our focus verse, he pled with them to release the captives to avoid God’s wrath from falling upon them. Remarkably, the leaders of Israel responded to Oded’s message and recognized their wrongdoing. They cared for the captives they had taken in battle and sent them back to Judah.

Are you facing situations in your life today where you could face consequences for standing for what is right? In a world where fear of ridicule or repercussions often seems to immobilize people, don’t be afraid to uphold the truth. People talk a great deal about courage today without really understanding what it means. Those who are applauded by the world for some “courageous” departure from what the Word of God teaches are not courageous at all.

Taking a stand for God could well require stepping out of our comfort zones. We may need to uphold our values and beliefs in the face of ridicule or hostility. Doing so may even bring personal danger. However, we must remember that as Christians, we belong to a kingdom that is not of this world. We are not charged with conforming to or agreeing with the world. We are charged to overcome it!

Courage comes in many forms, but it is a characteristic we are all capable of embodying. Remember, one of the most repeated admonitions in Scripture is “Be not afraid”! Choosing to stand courageously in every aspect of our lives will not always be easy but it will bring God’s approval and blessing.

BACKGROUND

The subject of chapter 28 is the reign of Ahaz, who began ruling over Judah at the age of twenty and wore the royal crown for sixteen years. Numerous Bible scholars consider Ahaz the worst king of Judah. Although many of the nation’s previous kings had failed to follow God in every detail, the first verse of this chapter states conclusively that Ahaz “did not that which was right in the sight of the LORD.” Verses 1-4

describe his idolatry, and verses 5-21 tell of God's judgment. Further details of his wickedness are given in verses 22-25, and the chapter concludes with a record of his death (verses 26-27).

Ahaz not only rejected the godly heritage of his ancestor David, but he also embraced the ungodly ways of the kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. One of the great crimes of the northern tribes had been their worship of Molech, which led to their overthrow by the Assyrians (see 2 Kings 17:17-18). Ahaz followed Israel's example. A series of abominations to God are listed in verses 2-4: he made molten images to Baal, sacrificed his own children to Molech in the valley of Hinnom, and took part in immoral worship practices in the high places.

God had pronounced a death sentence against all who worshipped Molech (see Leviticus 20:1-5), so because of the terrible wickedness that was pervasive in Judah, God sent judgment through the combined forces of Israel and Syria. According to verse 6, a great slaughter took place, and 120,000 men of Judah were killed in one day. In addition, the conquering armies took 200,000 women and children hostage and gathered "much spoil" (verse 8).

Verses 9-15 describe the intervention of the prophet Oded, who reproved the military leaders of Israel as they were returning. He told them judgment had come upon Judah because God was angry with them, but that judgment would fall upon Israel as well if they took captives of their brethren. Four leaders of the people, who evidently had not been a part of the conquering army, supported Oded's pronouncement. Remarkably, the military men "that came from the war" (verse 12) responded favorably, and the four men fed and clothed the captives from Judah and escorted them back to their own land.

The forces of Israel and Syria had overthrown many of the cities of Judah, and Edomites and Philistines were making raids into the nation, so King Ahaz requested help from the king of Assyria (verses 16-19; see also 2 Kings 16:7). However, though Ahaz attempted to pay for Assyria's help with gold from the Temple (verse 21), his plea was rejected.

Verse 22 indicates that rather than repenting after experiencing God's judgment, Ahaz "did trespass yet more against the LORD." He even sacrificed to the gods of Syria because he assumed that since they had defeated Judah, they were more powerful. According to verse 24, in the process of introducing this new, God-defying worship, he destroyed the implements of worship that were in the Temple. The statement in this verse that he "shut up the doors" of the Temple means that he abandoned the true God and worshipped instead at idolatrous altars "in every corner of Jerusalem."

The wickedness of Ahaz was so great that when he died, he was not given a royal burial among the other

kings of Judah, though he was buried in Jerusalem.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The history of the kings of Judah

- L. The reign of Ahaz (28:1-27)
 - 1. The character of his reign (28:1-4)
 - 2. The judgment on Ahaz (28:5-21)
 - a. From Syria and Israel (28:5-15)
 - (1) Israel's subjugation of Judah (28:5-8)
 - (2) Israel's return of the Judean captives (28:9-15)
 - b. From Assyria (28:16-21)
 - 3. The further wickedness of Ahaz (28:22-25)
 - 4. The death of Ahaz (28:26-27)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In verses 2-4, what wicked actions of Ahaz are listed?

2. Why do you think Ahaz failed in attempting to appease the king of Assyria? (verses 21-22)

3. If you are facing circumstances in your life that could require courage, what can you learn from the prophet Oded that might help you?

CONCLUSION

People of faith and conscience must be willing to stand up for what is right. The Lord will honor those whose actions reflect the tenants of His Word.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them together into the east street, 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.” (2 Chronicles 29:4-5)

Some years ago, four members of our family decided to go together and purchase a house to fix up and resell. The asking price of the property was right. The house was nearby, making it convenient for us to put in a few hours there after a regular workday. It was in a good neighborhood and was structurally sound. The cost of putting it in sellable condition was within our budget, and we had the skills to do the needed renovation. In short, the house checked all the boxes for a good investment property to rehab and then put back on the market.

There was only one downside to taking on this project. Inside, the house was a terrible, dirty, disgusting mess! It looked like it had been ransacked by vandals—vandals who wrote on the walls, broke up the furniture, stuffed refuse down the heating vents, and left rotting food on the floor. Disintegrating carpet, scummy appliances, and peeling wallpaper added to the picture of extreme neglect and misuse. And the smell was awful; there was no question that animals had inhabited the place as well. Obviously, the first step in the restoration project was to order a dumpster, hold our noses, and begin shoveling out debris!

In our text today, we read about a similar cleaning process that took place over 2,500 years ago—the cleansing of the Temple in Jerusalem under the direction of Hezekiah, king of Judah. The doors of the Temple had been fastened shut during the reign of Ahaz, Hezekiah’s ungodly father. At the beginning of Hezekiah’s reign, the new king found the Temple in a shocking state of disrepair. How grievous it must have been for him to realize that this sacred place—the place where God had met with His people—had been so defiled! Restoring it was one of the first steps he took to turn his nation back to God.

The work of repairing and cleansing the Temple had to be done by its appointed personnel, so Hezekiah summoned the priests and Levites to meet with him east of the Temple area. Our focus verses record that the king instructed them to “carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place.” Not only were they to clean out the dirt and debris that had accumulated in the Temple

since the suspension of worship, but they were to remove all evidence of the idolatry that had defiled it and cleanse all the implements of worship.

The priests and Levites did as they had been instructed. They spent eight days repairing the doors and working in the courtyards of the Temple, and then they went into the inner part of the house of the Lord, and “brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the LORD into the court of the house of the LORD” (verse 16). It must have been horrifying for those who loved God to see what had been found in His house, but it was all brought out into the open—like a gigantic public confession. Nothing was hidden. And then, the refuse was carried out to the Kidron Valley area southwest of the Temple, to be disposed of near the garbage dump of the city in the Valley of Hinnom.

There is a lesson here for us. God will not coexist with uncleanness; we find that principle from the beginning of God’s Word to the end. God is holy, and He requires purity and holiness in His sacred dwelling place. This does not apply only to physical structures. Since we are the temples of God on this earth (see 2 Corinthians 6:16), He is not indifferent to our spiritual condition. As saved and sanctified individuals, we must not allow anything that defiles into His temple.

What kind of condition is your temple in today? Are things in order so God can be worshipped properly—is there holiness within? True cleansing of our hearts and lives does not take place on a superficial level—on the outside where man sees—but in the deepest part of our innermost being. When that inner man is properly tended to, the result will be great blessing.

After Hezekiah set the house of God in order, he commanded the Levites to sing praises unto the Lord. They bowed their heads, worshipped, and offered burnt offerings in abundance. Then we read, “Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people: for the thing was done suddenly” (verse 36). We too will find great joy when our temples are properly prepared for God’s Spirit to dwell within.

BACKGROUND

Chapters 29 through 32 of 2 Chronicles are a record of the twenty-nine-year reign of King Hezekiah, the fifteenth king of Judah. Hezekiah is considered by many Bible scholars to be the greatest of the reformer kings of the nation, since Scripture includes more about him than any of the other kings of Judah. Chapter 29 focuses on the religious reforms Hezekiah made at the beginning of his reign. It begins with a description

of the king's character (verses 1-2), and goes on to describe in verses 3-19 his restoration and cleansing of the Temple, and in verses 20-36, the reinstatement of Temple worship.

Hezekiah came to the throne of Judah at the very end of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. In the first month of his reign, he began his efforts to turn the people back to God (see verse 3). His first step was to reopen and repair the doors of the house of the Lord, which had been shut by his father Ahaz (see 2 Chronicles 28:24). Then he called together the priests and Levites and charged them to cleanse the Temple. While the command for them to "carry forth the filthiness" (verse 5) meant they were to remove the debris that had accumulated in the house of God, it also alluded to the ceremonial cleansing of the implements of worship that had been defiled (see verses 15-17). The time frame noted in verse 17 reveals the extent of the disarray in the Temple; it took sixteen days just to carry out the rubbish that had accumulated there and sanctify the house of God. In verses 18-19, the priests and Levites reported to Hezekiah that the task had been done.

Following the cleansing of the house of God, Hezekiah immediately convened the civil leaders and led them in bringing offerings to the Lord. His zeal for God's glory is evidenced by the statement in verse 20 that "the king rose early." Verses 23-24 indicate that the sin offering was made first; this was required because fellowship and worship of God could not occur until a sacrifice was made for sin. Once that was done, the burnt offering (verse 27) was made. Verses 28-30 indicate that there was great rejoicing during this time of praise and worship.

Hezekiah then encouraged the people themselves to "bring sacrifices and thank offerings" (verse 31), and the response was overwhelming. They came with so many sacrifices that the priests could not process all of them, so other Levites who had sanctified themselves were called upon to assist in the task. The Temple—a place for personal sacrifice and worship—had been restored, and the result was rejoicing.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The history of the kings of Judah

M. The reign of Hezekiah

1. The character of his reign (29:1-2)
2. The reformation during his reign
 - a. The purification of the Temple (29:3-19)
 - b. The restoration of Temple worship (29:20-36)
 - (1) The Levites cleansed (29:20-30)
 - (2) The people cleansed (29:31-36)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. How does verse 2 describe the nature of Hezekiah's reign?

2. In verse 11, why do you think Hezekiah admonished the priests and Levites to not be negligent in their appointed tasks?

3. Hezekiah took steps to prepare the people of Judah for revival. What steps can we take today to prepare our hearts for revival?

CONCLUSION

As saved and sanctified individuals, we want to maintain purity of heart so that we can worship God properly and receive His blessing.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“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.”
(2 Chronicles 30:12)**

During a drive through the Redwood Forest in northern California, my wife and I stopped for a closer look at the massive trees. Craning to peer toward the treetops, I quickly realized that you cannot look at that angle for very long without hurting your neck! Still, I could hardly bring myself to stop looking. What I knew of redwood trees was based mainly on my East Coast upbringing, where we had no trees of that species. I’d never seen redwood trees before, except in an encyclopedia.

It probably was from an encyclopedia or in a grade school science class that I learned redwood trees grow in groves, and that this growth habit is for a reason. Although redwoods can become over three hundred feet tall, their root system is usually only about six to twelve feet in depth. Instead of growing down, their roots spread outward, sometimes stretching as much as one hundred feet from the tree. Because the trees are in groves, their roots intertwine with other nearby trees, and that combined root system is what holds them up in storms.

As with the mighty redwood trees, there is strength in standing together as the family of God. In today’s text, the people of Judah were united in their purpose to follow King Hezekiah’s directions and fulfill God’s commandment to keep the Passover. The result of their unity of purpose was God’s blessing.

The mighty redwoods stand century after century, breaking the force of the wind through a team effort, just by holding ranks. Today, as members of the body of Christ, we can picture ourselves standing side by side with others of like faith. If each of us does our parts, the result is strength and stability. We support each other, and God’s Word indicates that is His plan for His Church.

The most obvious way to “stand together” in the faith is to make a concerted effort to engage in worship simultaneously. Yes, we can and should approach God as individuals, but there is an added dimension to worship that comes only when we look to God in a united manner. Faithfully fulfilling our church-related responsibilities is also necessary when it comes to standing together in the Lord—we depend upon one another! And we can support our brothers and sisters

when they face challenges by praying for them, sharing an encouraging word, or offering a listening ear.

May God give each of us a purpose to cherish and preserve unity with our fellow believers. As our spiritual roots “intertwine” with theirs, we are all benefitted. As we support and bolster each other by being united in our faith, our God who never changes will be there to help us all keep standing firm for Him, even when storms come.

BACKGROUND

The account of the reign of King Hezekiah, which began in chapter 29, continues in this chapter. It focuses on the king’s reinstatement of the Passover observance, the annual feast that memorialized God’s deliverance of Israel in the days of the Exodus (see Exodus 12). Verses 1-12 describe the invitation to the Passover and the preparations made for it. Verses 13-27 describe the convocation itself and the joy of the people as they celebrated this sacred event.

Verse 1 indicates that the invitation to the Passover was extended to both Israel and Judah. Israel’s capital, Samaria, had fallen to the Assyrians and the king had been deported, but the kingdom as a whole seemingly had not yet been completely dispersed into exile. Hezekiah evidently felt this was a good opportunity to unite the nation in religious revival.

While the Passover was typically held during the first month of the year, allowance was made in Jewish Law for it to be observed one month later in certain circumstances (see Numbers 9:10-11). In this case, it was delayed because the priests “had not sanctified themselves sufficiently” (verse 3) and time was needed for the notification to go out and the people to assemble in Jerusalem.

According to verse 5, the invitation was extended “from Beer-sheba even to Dan,” the traditional boundaries of Israel. This verse also indicates that the people “had not done it [held the Passover] of a long time in such sort as it was written.” Verse 26 of this chapter indicates that “since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem.” Most Bible scholars point out that these verses refer to far more than the passage of time. Passover had undoubtedly been observed by some Jews since Solomon’s day. The idea being conveyed is that since that time, Passover had not been observed in such magnitude, by so many, in such unity, and with such widespread reverence to the original intent.

In the invitation to assemble in Jerusalem for the Passover, Hezekiah admonished the people of the

northern tribes not to be stubborn like their forefathers, but to yield themselves to God. He asserted that if they would do so, “your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land” (verse 9). Verses 10-12 record that some of the people in the Northern Kingdom of Israel responded to Hezekiah’s message with scorn and mockery, but others humbled themselves and journeyed to Jerusalem to join with the people of Judah who had “one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes, by the word of the LORD.”

Verses 13-20 describe the preparations and observance of the Passover. There were many in the assembly who were not cleansed, primarily those from the northern tribes who had come hastily to Jerusalem. Since their nation of Israel had rejected God and proper forms of worship for many years, these individuals likely were ignorant about how to properly prepare for the Passover. However, their coming to Jerusalem was evidence that they desired to seek the God of their fathers, so Hezekiah prayed for them, asking God to pardon them. Verse 20 indicates that God responded to the king’s prayer on their behalf, and healed (forgave) the people.

The gathering at Jerusalem was a time of great joy and rejoicing. According to verse 22, it was also a time of teaching, which the participants from the northern tribes especially needed. The fact that the whole assembly agreed to extend the celebration an additional seven days (verse 23) indicated a remarkable response to their experience of worship, teaching, and fellowship. It is noteworthy that the spirit of joy and revival was so evident that even the “strangers” of the land were impacted (see verse 25).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- III. The history of the kings of Judah
 - M. The reign of Hezekiah
 - 2. The reformation during his reign
 - c. The observance of the Passover (30:1-27)
 - (1) The preparations for the Passover (30:1-12)
 - (2) The celebration of the Passover (30:13-22)
 - (3) The concluding festive days (30:23-27)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Who came to the Passover that Hezekiah instituted? (verses 11-13)

2. Why do you think the people rejoiced at this Passover celebration?

3. What are some ways other believers have helped you stand for the faith?

CONCLUSION

May our purpose today be to hold ranks and be united with other believers in our desire to please God and to keep our trust in Him.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**“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.”
(2 Chronicles 31:5)**

God’s people give generously to the work of the Lord when they become aware of needs. In our text today, King Hezekiah realized that the priests and Levites who served in the Temple at Jerusalem had not been adequately supported during the evil reign of King Ahaz, his predecessor on the throne of Judah. To address this challenge, he restored the practice of tithing that God had given to Moses and encouraged the people to offer gifts from their own possessions. Our focus verse records that they did so, and “brought in abundance the firstfruits of corn, wine, and oil, and honey, and of all the increase of the field.”

The doctrine of tithing is an instruction from God himself to provide for the maintenance and growth of His work on earth. Tithing and freewill offerings were practiced by the patriarchs of old, perpetuated in the Law of Moses, emphasized by the prophets, sanctioned and taught by Jesus, and practiced by the Early Church. In the Apostolic Faith organization, we follow this Biblical method of financing the work of the Lord.

For example, in the spring of 2022, more than 2,500 years after the generous giving of the people in Hezekiah’s day, a letter was sent from our headquarters church in Portland to United States pastors thanking them for sending headquarters a tithe of the tithes given in their local churches. The letter described how the tithes and offerings received the previous year had funded some of the needs existing among our international churches that operate in poverty yet are expanding their efforts to spread the Gospel. It also mentioned some of the pending needs at that time.

The reaction to that letter was both overwhelming and heart-warming. Further offerings immediately began pouring in, not just from the United States but from all around the world as the information was circulated. Within just a few months, donations were received that helped finance the construction or improvement of Apostolic Faith Church buildings in India, the Philippines, Haiti, Jamaica, Romania, Angola, Burundi, Malawi, and Mozambique. In addition, a new printing department was established in Zambia, funds were sent to help Ukrainian refugees,

and monitors were purchased so our congregations in South America could hold online meetings with people from various areas.

Has your heart been touched by news that one of our churches needs a new roof? Were you moved by reports of our rapidly expanding work in a nation where land is needed for a church building? Did you read with interest on our website about families who received much needed help after heavy rains caused flooding near one of our churches? God may be laying it on your heart to have a part.

While giving is clearly a part of God’s plan for His followers, tithes and offerings always should be given willingly, with pure motives and an attitude of worship to God and service to the Body of Christ. When this is done, God blesses both the giver and those who receive the gifts. We cannot outgive God!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 31 continues the record of the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah. After ordering the purification of the Temple and reestablishment of Temple worship (chapter 29), and restoring the Passover (chapter 30), Hezekiah undertook the further reforms described in this chapter. Verse 1 relates that as part of the nation’s return to God, the people themselves spontaneously tore down the high places throughout the land. Hezekiah followed up by organizing the priests and Levites for their priestly duties (verses 2-3), and reinstituting the tithe as a means of providing for the Temple workers’ physical needs so they could devote themselves to their ministry (verses 4-21).

The statement in verse 1 that the people threw down the high places and altars out of “all Judah and Benjamin, in Ephraim also and Manasseh” shows the extent of the reform; it included not only the Kingdom of Judah but also substantial portions of the northern tribes’ territory. There is no indication that King Hoshea of Israel supported this endeavor, but clearly, Hezekiah’s earlier emphasis on removing all traces of idol worship had an effect on the people.

Hezekiah’s appointment of the priests and Levites as noted in verse 2 was a reestablishment of the plan put in place by David (see 1 Chronicles 23 and 24). This verse indicates that some of the duties of the priests and Levites were offering the sacrifices, ministering (serving) in various Temple duties, and giving of thanks and praise to God in worship.

Verse 3 states that Hezekiah gave “the king’s portion of his substance . . .” He was so committed to the restoration of the priestly service shut down by King

Ahaz that he did not exempt himself from supporting their work with a gift from his personal possessions. The “portion of the priests and the Levites” (verse 4) was the first fruits and tithe the tribes were to pay as a means of sustaining those responsible for the duties of the Temple (see Exodus 23:19 and Numbers 18:21,24).

“The tithe of holy things” in verse 6 likely refers to gifts presented to the priests by the Levites from what they themselves had received. When Hezekiah commanded the people to begin to pay the tithe again, they responded so wholeheartedly and generously that it took four months to receive the offerings brought to the house of the Lord. King Hezekiah wisely set about to properly manage these generous gifts of God’s people, putting faithful men in charge of receiving and properly distributing these tithes and offerings to Temple workers and their dependents (verses 12-19).

Verses 20-21 summarize Hezekiah’s reformation in Judah. His godliness was exemplary because his concern was not primarily for political power or prestige, but for what was good, right, and true before the Lord. Additionally, whatever he did for God, he did “with all his heart” (verse 21) and for that reason, he prospered.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- III. The history of the kings of Judah
 - M. The reign of Hezekiah
 - 2. The reformation during his reign
 - d. The further reforms of the king (31:1-21)
 - (1) The destruction of idolatry (31:1)
 - (2) The restoration of Temple ritual (31:2-21)
 - (a) The establishment of priestly courses (31:2-3)
 - (b) The provisions for the priests and Levites (31:4-21)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 2, what did Hezekiah instruct the priests and Levites to do in the Temple?

2. Why do you think the people responded so generously to Hezekiah’s reinstatement of the practice of tithing and giving of offerings?

3. What are some specific ways the description of Hezekiah’s efforts in verse 21 motivates us in our service for God?

CONCLUSION

When we follow God’s instructions regarding tithes and offerings, His Word promises that we will be blessed.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“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: 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.”

(2 Chronicles 32:7–8)

Walking through the doors of the huge gymnasium, my team stared silently at the high ceilings, row upon row of bleachers, vast hardwood floors, and the single net set up on the court. As the volleyball coach of a small Christian high school in southern California, I had taken the team to games against several other small schools in the area. This was intimidatingly different. We would be facing the team of a public high school with an enrollment twenty times that of our school! Their facilities dwarfed our small gym. And when the opposing team began to filter in, it was obvious by their attitudes and actions that they had little respect for our team.

To encourage my awestruck players, I took inspiration from a scene in a motion picture that I had seen sometime before and sent the team captain and another player onto the court with a tape measure. I instructed them to measure the height of the net and the size of the court. They reported back that the dimensions were exactly the same as those in our little gymnasium back home. I asked my assembled team how many players our opponents could place on the court at one time and the answer was, “Six, just like us.” Finally, I advised them to forget the size of the school, the enormity of the gym, and the attitude of our opponents. I reminded them that we had prepared and if we did our best, we would have nothing to be ashamed of when the tournament concluded, no matter which team prevailed.

In our text today, Judah faced overwhelming odds against King Sennacherib and the Assyrian army. They did what they could to prepare. Hezekiah ordered his men to stop up the springs and wells around Jerusalem and channel the water underground into the city. They built up the broken walls of the city and raised up another wall outside it. They prepared weapons and appointed captains to organize the people for impending conflict. Then King Hezekiah reminded Judah of their not-so-secret weapon. While Sennacherib had a large army, God was with the

people of Judah, helping them and fighting their battles. They could confidently lean upon Him.

My volleyball team played well against the larger team, winning several individual games before finally losing the match. We earned the respect of the other team and left with our heads high, even though we were ultimately defeated by our opponent. In the case of King Hezekiah and Judah, though, they were not defeated. The angel of the Lord slew over 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Sennacherib and his remaining army returned to Assyria, giving Judah a great victory.

Are you facing a challenge today in which the odds look unsurmountable? Don’t fear! If you have aligned yourself with God, your day-to-day battles can be won when you depend on Him to bring you through.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 32 concludes the record of the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah. In previous chapters, the king had ordered the purification of the Temple and reestablished Temple worship (chapter 29), restored the Passover (chapter 30), and instituted the further reforms described in chapter 31. In this final chapter about Hezekiah’s life and reign, he faced an invasion by Assyria (verses 1-23) and was stricken with illness and recovered (verses 24-26). The concluding verses of the chapter summarize his wealth (verses 27-31) and describe his death and burial (verses 32-33). The events in this chapter are covered more extensively in 2 Kings 18:13–20:21.

Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, invaded Judah’s fortified border cities with the purpose of compelling the people to pay tribute, thereby enforcing the previous agreement made by King Ahaz of Judah that Hezekiah had broken (see 2 Kings 18:7). Verses 2-8 describe the diligent efforts Hezekiah made to fortify Jerusalem against the expected assault of Sennacherib. One action he took was to divert the spring outside the city that provided Jerusalem with water, channeling the water through an 1800-foot-long underground tunnel. That tunnel still exists in Jerusalem and includes an inscription stating that it was constructed by two groups of workers (one inside the city and one at the Gihon Spring) tunneling toward each other until they met in the middle.

According to verse 8, while taking measures to protect the city, Hezekiah also encouraged his men to rely upon the Lord to help them fight their battles. He understood that the defense of Israel did not rely solely on walls and towers and shields and water

supplies, but also on the courage of the soldiers, and most importantly, on the power and help of God.

Sennacherib's military campaign brought him to the city of Lachish, which was about thirty miles southwest of Jerusalem. While most of his army was laying a siege at Lachish, Sennacherib sent men to Jerusalem to engage in psychological warfare. His propaganda campaign of verbal and written threats against Hezekiah and the people of Judah is described in verses 9-19.

Proof of this Biblical account has been found by archaeologists, who discovered a pit near Lachish with the remains of about 1,500 casualties of Sennacherib's attack. An Assyrian carving depicting the siege is displayed in the British Museum, and a wall relief taken from the excavation of Sennacherib's royal palace in Nineveh is also preserved there. It portrays the Assyrian king on a movable throne in his military camp outside Lachish. Prisoners of war are marching by him, and the spoils from the city are piled on ox-wagons.

Verse 20 of this chapter reveals that the prophet Isaiah joined King Hezekiah in praying for the nation's protection. Isaiah's encouragement to Hezekiah and the divine revelation concerning how the city would be spared are recorded in Isaiah 37:21-35. The fulfillment of his prophecy is described in verses 21-22 of today's text. The Assyrian army was turned back before they shot a single arrow into Jerusalem. God destroyed the mighty army in one night, when 185,000 men died at the hand of the angel of the Lord (see 2 Kings 19:35).

According to verse 24, during this same period, Hezekiah became critically ill. A more complete record of his illness, his prayer for healing, the supernatural sign that his life would be extended by fifteen years, and his miraculous recovery are found in 2 Kings 20:1-11 and Isaiah 38. Sadly, after Hezekiah was healed, verses 25-26 indicate that he became proud, although he eventually humbled himself before God and God's retribution was averted.

Verses 27-31 summarize the wealth of Hezekiah and some of his notable achievements. His failure in showing Judah's treasures to the Babylonians is also recorded (see 2 Kings 20:12-19). Verse 33 indicates that Hezekiah received great honor and a royal burial at his death.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- III. The history of the kings of Judah
 - M. The reign of Hezekiah
 - 3. The Assyrian invasion of Judah (32:1-22)
 - a. The invasion of Sennacherib (32:1)
 - b. The encouragement of Judah by Hezekiah (32:2-8)

- c. The envoy from Sennacherib (32:9-19)
 - (1) The threats upon the people (32:9-15)
 - (2) The insults toward Jehovah (32:16-19)
- d. The angelic destruction of the Assyrians (32:20-22)
- 4. The sickness and recovery of Hezekiah (32:23-26)
- 5. The wealth of Hezekiah (32:27-31)
- 6. The death of Hezekiah (32:32-33)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 3, who did Hezekiah consult prior to Sennacherib's assault?

2. Though Judah was outnumbered, why did the balance of power shift?

3. In overwhelming circumstances, how can we lean on God's promises and be strong and courageous?

CONCLUSION

No matter how large the spiritual enemies we face are, they will always be smaller than God. We can be strong and courageous, confident in God's promise that "there be more with us" than with our opponents.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, 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.” (2 Chronicles 33:12-13)

If we were to compile a list of evil individuals who have ruled over nations of this world, surely Manasseh, King of Judah, would be near the top. Manasseh restored all the idolatrous forms of worship that his godly father, Hezekiah, had abolished. He erected altars to Baal and turned to witchcraft and wizards. He worshipped the sun, moon, and stars, and even sacrificed his own son to the Ammonite god, Molech. And he killed all who protested his evil actions.

When Manasseh faced adversity, though, he was driven to his knees. Our focus verses record that in a time of affliction, he “humbled himself greatly before God.” And despite his record of terrible wickedness, God had mercy on him and restored him to the throne. In response, Manasseh went on to institute spiritual reform in Judah.

Many centuries later, a backslider named Art Benedict also experienced the amazing mercy of God in a time of great affliction. It was in the burn ward of a hospital that Art turned back to the God he had rejected for years. He testified, “As I left for work that fateful morning, I told my family I would be home early, but that was not to be. Just a few hours later, a gasoline explosion took place in the boiler room where I was working. The only way of escape was up a steep stairway and through a manhole. However, the manhole acted like a flue for the fire. Caught on that stairway, I was burning from head to foot. I was a backslider—I had turned away from God—and oh the terror that a few moments face to face with eternity can bring!

“In desperation, I cried out, ‘Oh God, help me!’ My screams alerted my co-workers, and I was pulled to safety, but I was severely burned on my face, neck, and forearms. Rushed to the hospital, for days I hovered between life and death. With my head swathed in bandages and my eyes swollen shut, I was fed through tubes. The suffering was intense.

“Another man occupied the room with me. He, too, had been terribly burned, but he was able to walk around. During the night hours, he would come over to my bedside and hold a cigarette to my swollen lips,

and I would take a drag or two. My wife, who was also a backslider, was troubled by the sight of me smoking after being rescued from the very brink of death. She objected to me doing so, pointing out that perhaps God had permitted the accident to bring me to my senses. She said that if I were to ignore Him, I might never get out of that hospital alive.

“Her words made me think. On the fifth day of my awful suffering and semi-delirium, a minister from the Apostolic Faith Church came to my bedside. Although I couldn’t see him, his presence gave me hope. After that I began to pray secretly. However, there was a restitution I thought I could not face. At night, when the hospital was quiet, I would weep and say, ‘I can never do it!’ But God continued to deal with me and eventually, I yielded and committed to making that restitution.

“The next time the man of God came to see me, I whispered through parched lips that God had spoken peace to my soul. That peace was mine during the crucial time when an awful infection raged through my system. One night just past midnight, I awoke, and the room seemed to be full of angels. My heart was so full of joy that I wondered how long I could stifle the praises! A picture of God’s mercy burst vividly before me—the Hell I had escaped and the peace I had gained. The Spirit of God rolled through my being, and God sanctified me. Afterward, I slept like a child. My burned arm, which had caused the doctor so much concern, was clean. He said, ‘It is marvelous!’

“Four weeks to the day after the fire, the doctor sent me home. The next Sunday, for the first time in over nine years, I stepped into the Apostolic Faith Church. As the service took place, I drank in the testimonies, the songs, and the sermon. When the altar call was given, I went forward, and the Spirit of God surged through me again. My tongue poured forth praises to God in an unknown language. To think that God would again baptize me with the Holy Ghost! I could not keep quiet. During that altar service, the Lord also saved my wife. God is still on the throne, and surely my testimony is that His mercy endureth forever.”

What an amazing God we serve! If God forgave Manasseh of Judah and, centuries later, Art Benedict of Portland, Oregon, we can be certain He will do the same for any sinner who turns to Him with an honest and repentant heart. As we pray for those who are currently going their own way in sin, let’s remind ourselves that until death, no one is beyond God’s great mercy in this life!

BACKGROUND

In Chapter 33 of 2 Chronicles, a record is given of the fifty-five-year reign of Manasseh and the two-year reign of his son, Amon. Manasseh was a desperately wicked king who worshipped pagan gods and even sacrificed his own children to them (verses 1-9). However, verses 10-13 relate that when Manasseh faced the bitter consequences of his sins, he humbly repented, was restored to his kingdom, and went on to institute spiritual reforms in the nation (verses 14-17). Manasseh's death is recorded in verses 18-20. His son and successor, Amon, followed the evil ways of his father, and was killed by his servants after just two years on the throne (verses 21-25). A parallel account regarding these two kings is found in 2 Kings 21, although Manasseh's humbling and repentance is not covered in that passage.

A number of the specific sins of Manasseh are mentioned in this chapter.

- He followed the abominable practices of the heathens (verse 2).
- He rebuilt the high places destroyed by Hezekiah, and followed the example of Ahab in erecting altars to Baalim and worshipping "all the host of heaven" (verse 3).
- He built altars to pagan deities in the Temple and its courts (verses 4-5).
- He offered his own sons as burnt sacrifices in the Valley of Hinnom (verse 6).
- He practiced soothsaying (fortune telling), used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums (verse 6).
- He defamed God by setting an idolatrous image in the house of God (verse 7).

Verse 9 indicates that Manasseh's apostasy and evil actions influenced the people of Judah to turn away from the godly reforms of his father, Hezekiah, and ultimately marked them for destruction because they did deeds "worse than the heathen."

Verse 10 says that "the LORD spake to Manasseh, and to his people..." Prophets such as Isaiah, Micah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel warned the people of the coming desolation of Judah and Jerusalem, "... but they would not hearken." The account in 2 Kings 21:16 relates that "Manasseh shed innocent blood very much," and no doubt some of the prophets were among those victims. Early Jewish and Christian traditions hold that Manasseh ordered the martyrdom of Isaiah.

The word "wherefore" in verse 11 indicates that God sent the Assyrian army as His instrument of divine judgment upon unrepentant Manasseh and Judah, and the king was carried away captive to Babylon. In his distress, Manasseh "besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly" (verse 12), crying out to God for deliverance. In response, God extended mercy and the king was restored to his

nation and the throne. The fact that his repentance was genuine is illustrated in verses 14-16 by the actions he took following his restoration: he fortified the city of Jerusalem, removed the idols from the house of God, took down the altars he had built to false gods, sacrificed to God, and commanded the people to serve the Lord God of Israel. Manasseh's death, burial, and successor is noted in verse 20.

Amon, who followed his father as the king of Judah, was twenty-two years of age when he ascended the throne. His rule is described only briefly and is characterized as being "evil in the sight of the LORD." After two years, he was assassinated in his own house at the hands of his servants, who were then killed by the people of the land. The chapter concludes with the statement that the people appointed Amon's son, Josiah, as his successor.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- III. The history of the kings of Judah
 - N. The reign of Manasseh (33:1-20)
 - 1. The wickedness of his reign (33:1-9)
 - 2. The captivity and restoration of Manasseh (33:10-13)
 - 3. The later reforms by Manasseh (33:14-17)
 - 4. The death of Manasseh (33:18-20)
 - O. The reign of Amon (33:21-25)
 - 1. The wickedness of his reign (33:21-23)
 - 2. The conspiracy against Amon (33:24-25)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 9, who was influenced by Manasseh's evil actions?

2. What does the fact that God responded to Manasseh's entreaty tell us about His nature?

3. God often uses adversity to draw people to Himself. What methods did God use to get your attention?

CONCLUSION

God will never turn away a truly repentant heart that comes to Him seeking forgiveness.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem one and thirty years. 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.” (2 Chronicles 34:1-2)

Most people who are saved as children had some godly influence in their lives, and Hazel Wilson was an example of this. Born to God-fearing parents in 1926, she was the youngest of nine children. Early on, God spared her life twice. Her mother contracted smallpox while pregnant with Hazel, and the baby was born a month early. When Hazel was ten days old, she got smallpox and was not expected to live. The doctor said, “Just tell me when she dies, and I will sign the death certificate.” But God stood between Hazel and the graveyard. Her brothers and sisters prayed, a prayer request was sent to the church, and God undertook and healed her. Then when Hazel was four years old, she was very ill with scarlet fever, and again the Lord raised her up.

Hazel’s family came to camp meetings in Portland, Oregon, from her infancy. There were tents on the campground, and Hazel remembered lying quietly in bed with her sisters while her mother was praying in the tabernacle. She said, “That is where the Lord spoke to my heart and showed me that I needed to be saved.” God reminded her that He had spared her and helped her realize she owed Him her life.

Hazel was also influenced by her older Christian siblings. She said, “My brother Roy and my sisters Mary and Ella were just getting into the Gospel work and taking music lessons. I can still see Mary sitting in the rocker in the living room, reading her Bible. And I can remember when they prayed—hearing Mary in her room and knowing Roy was in his room praying. That had such a tremendous influence on my decision to serve the Lord. I have often thanked God for them.

“I am so thankful that God saved me when I was young—twelve years old. He gave me a real vision of the Gospel, and He has kept me all these years.” Hazel served God in many capacities, including as a pastor’s wife, playing the organ, and working in the church office. She was ninety-three years old when God took her to Heaven.

What a blessing it is to serve God faithfully year after year! In today’s text, we read that Josiah did so.

Our focus verses say, “And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, . . . and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left.”

Whatever our age, we can look at these examples and make the choice to serve God, purposing to be faithful. That decision will benefit us, and perhaps others around us will be influenced to commit their lives to the Lord as well.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 34 begins a record of King Josiah, who reigned over Judah for thirty-one years—a time of peace, prosperity, and reform in the nation. After describing the nature of Josiah’s rule (verses 1-2), an account is given of his efforts to purge Judah of false religions (verses 3-7) and his repair of the house of the Lord (verses 8-13). Verses 14-21 relate that during the cleansing of the Temple, the Book of the Law was discovered and read to Josiah, causing him to seek counsel from Huldah, a prophetess (verses 22-28). In response to her words, Josiah convened the elders, priests, and people of Jerusalem for a reading of the Law, and led the people in making a covenant to serve the God of their fathers (verses 29-33).

Josiah’s father and grandfather, Amon and Manasseh, were exceptionally wicked. Josiah was more like his great-grandfather, Hezekiah, in his desire to follow God and his purpose to institute spiritual reform in his nation. Since Josiah was only eight years of age when he ascended to the throne of Judah after the assassination of his father, he likely was under the guardianship of God-fearing priests or elders for a time. Verse 3 of today’s text indicates that in the eighth year of his reign, he began to “seek after the God of David his father.” Four years later, he began his attempts to bring spiritual reform in his nation. Verses 3-5 and the parallel passages in 2 Kings 23:4-5 reveal how extensive idolatry was in Judah at this time.

In the eighteenth year of Josiah’s reign, after his energetic campaign to purge the land of idolatry, he began attempts to restore the neglected Temple. No significant restoration had occurred in God’s house since the repairs done under Joash (see 2 Chronicles 24), and much deterioration had occurred during the evil reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh.

During the process of cleansing the Temple, Hilkiah the priest discovered the Book of the Law. According to Deuteronomy 31:24-27, a copy of the Law was to be kept beside the Ark of the Covenant, but it seemingly had been misplaced during the

apostate administrations of previous kings. When the Book of the Law was read to Josiah, he immediately realized that great changes had to be made in the land. Verse 19 indicates that “he rent his clothes”— he was so appalled by the spiritual failures the book revealed that he expressed his horror and astonishment in the strongest possible way.

Josiah’s concern for the fate of his nation is evident in verse 21, where he said, “Great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD.” He sent Hilkiah and others to inquire of the Lord through the prophetess Huldah. Little is known about this woman other than this mention and one in the similar account in 2 Kings 22:14. However, she delivered a two-part, divinely inspired message indicating that because of Judah’s sin, God would bring judgment according to the curses written in the Book of the Law (verses 23-25), but that judgment would not come in Josiah’s time because he had repented at the reading of God’s Word (verses 26-28).

Despite knowing that God’s judgment would not fall during his day, Josiah sought the return of Judah back to God. He stood before the people and publicly declared his commitment to obey the Law of God “with all his heart, and with all his soul” (verse 31). Then he urged the people to commit to a covenant with the Lord based on the Book of the Law. The statement that he caused all that were present to “stand to it” (verse 32) likely meant that he caused the assembled people to stand when he read the words of the covenant to signify their acceptance of its terms.

The efforts of King Josiah had a great effect upon the people of Judah; verse 33 indicates that they stayed faithful to God during his reign.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- III. The history of the kings of Judah
 - P. The reign of Josiah
 - 1. The character of his reign (34:1-2)
 - 2. The reformation during his reign
 - a. The destruction of Baalism (34:3-7)
 - b. The repair of the Temple (34:8-13)
 - c. The recovery of the Law (34:14-21)
 - d. The message of Huldah (34:22-28)
 - e. The king’s covenant before Jehovah (34:29-33)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Why did God promise that judgment would not come to Judah while Josiah lived? (See verses 27-28)

2. What was admirable about Josiah’s reaction to the words written in the book that was found?

3. Who helped influence you to become a Christian?

CONCLUSION

All of us can consider whether we are influencing others toward God. A daily Christlike example can have a big impact on those around us.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And he set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of the LORD.” (2 Chronicles 35:2)

In the original Hebrew, the word translated *encouraged* in today’s focus verse means “strengthened, helped, repaired, or fortified.” Have you ever been encouraged by the words of another individual? Perhaps a friend or acquaintance said exactly what you needed to hear at a time when you were going through a hard place.

That happened to me shortly after I became a Christian. One day, completely unexpectedly, the thought came into my mind, *Is there really a God?* That shocked me! I was not saved during my teenage years and during that time, I had tried to convince myself that there wasn’t a God. I figured if I could just believe He did not exist, then what I heard at church would not matter. I could go my own way and not worry about someday standing condemned before God. But after God had answered my prayer of repentance and saved me, when a thought like that suddenly came to mind, it bothered me.

I suspect my family sensed that I was going through a struggle. One night my aunt and uncle were visiting, and my uncle decided to drive back to their house to get something. He asked if I wanted to go along for the ride and I agreed, thinking he probably wanted to encourage me. I was right, even though I had never told anyone that I was wondering what to do with troubling thoughts, especially one that seemed so strange for a Christian. As we were driving toward his house, my uncle said, “You know, even as Christians, sometimes unexpected thoughts will come into our minds. Perhaps even thoughts like, *Is there a God?*” I just sat there, astonished. Then I thought, *OK, I’m going to make it. This is not unusual—other people have gone through the same thing.* What an encouragement his words were to me! Decades later, I still look back and recall how they helped settle my confusion.

In our text today, the climax of King Josiah’s reformation in Judah was his plan to celebrate the Passover at the house of God in Jerusalem. Josiah wanted this observance to align to the requirements of the Law of Moses, and to be administered by the priests and Levites in the manner established by David and Solomon. Since he realized that such a celebration would require extensive planning and effort,

he encouraged the priests and other Levites—he strengthened or fortified them—to make the necessary preparations.

God wants His people to be encouraged all along the way in serving Him. He wants each of His followers to be uplifted and renewed in purpose. Like Josiah, we can have a role in making that happen. By our words and examples, we can inspire those we associate with to feel enthusiastic, appreciated, and energized in their service for God.

When people leave your presence, are they spiritually encouraged? Are they renewed in their purpose to serve God faithfully, giving Him the best of their time and efforts? Our prayer should be, “Lord, help me to uplift others in the Gospel. Help me to be an example of how to be encouraged in the Lord.”

We want to be excited about what God has done and look forward to the things He is yet to do. We have every reason to be encouraged and everything to look forward to, because the promises of God will carry us through this life and into eternity. Let’s do our best to inspire others to feel the same way!

BACKGROUND

The account of the reign of King Josiah ends in this chapter with a focus on the celebration of the Passover (verses 1-19) and a summary of the death of Josiah (verses 20-27).

The last Passover of any magnitude had taken place in the days of Hezekiah (see 2 Chronicles 30:1-3) and clearly, King Josiah understood it would take an enormous amount of preparation to properly conduct this Passover after so many years had elapsed. Verse 2 indicates that Josiah “set the priests in their charges [duties], and encouraged them to the service of the house of the LORD.” The priests needed to be both “set” (appointed) and “encouraged” to accomplish the needed work.

The statement in verse 3 that the Ark of the Covenant “shall not be a burden upon your shoulders” indicates that this symbol of God’s presence was not in its proper place in the Temple and needed to be returned. No explanation is given for its absence; it may have been taken away by righteous priests for its protection during the reign of one of Judah’s wicked kings, or it may have been temporarily taken elsewhere for safekeeping while work was being done on the Temple.

The details given in verses 4-6 regarding preparations for the Passover reveal that Josiah wanted to ensure everything was done according to the

directions given by David and “according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses.”

Verse 7 states that King Josiah gave the people thirty thousand lambs and young goats and three thousand cattle for the Passover sacrifices. The fact that the king was willing to bear this expense personally reveals how determined he was to have a proper Passover celebration. Verses 8-9 indicate his good example inspired the princes of the land to give generously as well. The statement in verse 10, “So the service was prepared,” means that everything had been done as God required.

Verses 11-19 describe the preparation of the animal sacrifices and the celebration of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was a seven-day celebration that began the day following Passover. Both events commemorated the nation’s dramatic exodus from Egypt and reminded the people of God’s mighty deliverance.

The battle with Pharaoh Necho of Egypt described in verses 20-27 of this chapter took place in 609 B.C. Three years earlier, forces of the growing Babylonian Empire had overthrown the Assyrian capital of Nineveh, and Necho had allied himself with the remaining Assyrians in an effort to forestall Babylon’s further expansion. Necho’s armies marched through Judah on their way to Charchemish, where they intended to join the Assyrians. Verse 21 indicates that at God’s direction, Necho sent a message to Josiah, urging him not to interfere. (Necho was a pagan king, not a prophet, but in this instance, God used him as a mouthpiece.) However, Josiah failed to heed that counsel. He went into battle thinking he could avoid being a target and escape death by disguising himself, but he was shot by archers and died.

The concluding verses of this chapter indicate that there was great mourning for Josiah in all of Judah. Among the mourners was the prophet Jeremiah (verse 25). Verses 26-27 provide a concluding summary of the reign of good King Josiah.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- III. The history of the kings of Judah
 - P. The reign of Josiah
 - 2. The reformation during his reign
 - f. The celebration of the Passover (35:1-19)
 - (1) The gathering of the animals (35:1-9)
 - (2) The preparation of the animals (35:10-15)
 - (3) The celebration of the feasts (35:16-19)
 - 3. The death of Josiah (35:20-27)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 1, when was the Passover celebration held?

2. Why do you think Josiah commanded the Levites in verses 4 and 6 to “prepare yourselves,” and to “sanctify yourselves, and prepare your brethren”?

3. What are some steps we can take to prepare ourselves to offer spiritual encouragement to others?

CONCLUSION

With God’s help, we can be encouraged in the Lord, and encourage others as well.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“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: 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.” (2 Chronicles 36:15-16)

When warnings go unheeded, catastrophic consequences may result. That was the case in 1889, when a record-breaking storm hit the Johnstown-South Fork area of Pennsylvania. In twenty-four hours, nearly ten inches of rain fell. Local streams became raging torrents that poured tons of water into Lake Conemaugh, a reservoir created by the South Fork Dam.

Early on the morning of May 31, the president of the private club that owned the dam was alarmed to see the water had risen so high that the dam was in imminent danger of collapse. He and others tried to relieve the pressure by increasing the height of the dam, and then by attempting to dig spillways, but their efforts proved futile. At last, they telegraphed a warning to cities in the valley below that the dam could fail at any moment. They begged people to take to the hills.

Tragically, that warning was not heeded. For years, the dam had been poorly maintained, causing frequent speculation among the people living below it that it might not hold in a flood. However, there had been many warnings in the past when the water level was high, and each time the dam had held, so the supposed “danger” of its collapse became a joke around town.

That joke became a grim reality on May 31, 1889. A historical website describes: “At approximately 3:00 p.m. the South Fork Dam gave way. In less than forty-five minutes, twenty million tons of water poured into the valley below. Roaring down the narrow path of the Little Conemaugh River, a seventy-foot wall of water filled with huge chunks of dam, boulders, and whole trees, smashed into the small town of Mineral Point and swept away all traces of its existence. Next in line was Woodvale, a town of about one thousand, that the torrent smashed with equal ferocity. Scouring its way towards Johnstown, the flood picked up several hundred boxcars, a dozen locomotives, more than one hundred houses, and a growing number of corpses.

“The residents of Johnstown heard the speeding wall of death, a roar like thunder. Next, they saw the dark cloud and mist and spray that preceded it

and were assaulted by a wind that blew down small buildings. Next came the great wall of water, . . . that smashed into the city, crushing houses like eggshells and snapping trees like toothpicks. It was all over in ten minutes.”¹ Ultimately, the flood killed 2,209 people, making it the worst disaster in United States history at that time.

The people of Judah had adamantly refused to submit to God and obey His commandments. In today’s focus verses, we read that they mocked the messengers who warned of God’s impending judgment and “despised” their words. Consequently, God fulfilled His word and sent judgment. Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed, and the people carried into captivity.

We want to learn from the judgment that befell the people of Judah and make certain we heed the instructions and warnings given in God’s Word. Sometimes obedience may be “inconvenient” or even painful. However, the price we ultimately pay for neglect is catastrophic! How much better to obey now. In eternity, we will be ever so glad that we did!

BACKGROUND

The final chapter of 2 Chronicles is a greatly abbreviated version of 2 Kings 23:31 through 25:30. It summarizes in verses 1-13 the reigns of the final four kings of Judah: Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim (also known as Eliakim), Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah (also known as Mattaniah). Verses 14-16 concern the corruption of the priesthood. The last, chaotic years of Judah as an independent nation are covered in verses 17-21, which describe the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the people at the hands of the Babylonians. The final two verses of chapter 36 concern the decree of Cyrus regarding the rebuilding of the Temple.

After the death of King Josiah in battle, the reforms he had instituted were soon set aside and the people reverted to the wicked ways they had followed during the reign of Manasseh. They made Josiah’s fourth son, Jehoahaz, the king, but he only reigned for three months before Pharaoh Necho of Egypt forcibly removed him from the throne. According to verse 4 and 2 Kings 23:34, Jehoahaz (also known as Shallum) was imprisoned in Egypt, where he died just as the prophet Jeremiah foretold in Jeremiah 22:11-12.

Necho changed the name of Eliakim, Josiah’s older son, to Jehoiakim, and put him on the throne. Jehoiakim reigned for eleven years, and according to verse 5, “He did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God.” His eleven-year rule was marked by injustices, oppression, greed, and murder.

Babylon was fast becoming the new world power, and after overthrowing Syria in 612 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar waged war against Necho and defeated him at Carchemish in 605 B.C.

While Jehoiakim was king, Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah, taking away hostages from the nobility and royal families, including Daniel and the three Hebrew children. Jeremiah had prophesied this seventy-year captivity (see Jeremiah 25:11-12). While Babylon invaded Judah twice more in following years, this specific attack is documented by the Babylonian Chronicles, a collection of tablets discovered in the nineteenth century that are currently stored in the British Museum.

According to 2 Kings 24:1 Jehoiakim initially submitted to Nebuchadnezzar but then rebelled against him. In response to Jehoiakim's rebellion, Nebuchadnezzar again came up against Jerusalem. Verse 6 of today's text records that the king was captured and "bound in fetters."

Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim, became the next ruler of Judah. The statement in verse 9 that he was "eight years old when he began to reign" likely should read "eighteen years old," according to the record in 2 Kings 24:8. Eighteen is the most probable, due to his having wives (see 2 Kings 24:15). He too "did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD," and ultimately surrendered to the Babylonian assault in just three months and ten days. At that time, the Temple was looted and thousands more of the people of Judah, including the prophet Ezekiel, craftsmen and artisans, and royal personnel were deported to Babylon, with King Jehoiachin among them. This exile occurred in 597 B.C.

Verse 10 records that after Jehoiachin surrendered, Nebuchadnezzar placed his uncle, another of King Josiah's sons, on the throne of Judah. According to 2 Kings 24:17, his name had been Mattaniah, but was changed to Zedekiah. This final king of Judah reigned for eleven years, and continued the evil practices of his predecessors. According to verses 14-16, the priests and the people joined in the wickedness and rejected the strong warnings of Jeremiah and other messengers of God.

Verses 17-21 describe the resulting death and destruction that came upon Jerusalem; the account in 2 Kings 25:1-12 provides a more detailed record. It indicates that the city of Jerusalem was besieged for eighteen months and then destroyed in 586 B.C. The Temple vessels were taken to Babylon, and the Temple itself was burned. Nebuchadnezzar had King Zedekiah's sons killed in his presence and then put out his eyes. Then Zedekiah was carried to Babylon along with the remnant of the Jewish population, except for the poorest of the people who remained in the land.

The final two verses of this chapter are essentially repeated in Ezra 1:1-4. Most Bible scholars agree that these verses were probably added later, in order to indicate that the history of Israel found in 1 and 2 Chronicles was continued in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- III. The history of the kings of Judah
 - Q. The reign of Jehoahaz (36:1-3)
 - R. The reign of Jehoiakim (Eliakim) (36:4-8)
 - S. The reign of Jehoiachin (36:9-10)
 - T. The reign of Zedekiah (36:11-16)
- IV. The captivity of Judah (36:17-23)
 - A. The destruction of Jerusalem (36:17-21)
 - 1. The annihilation of the inhabitants (36:17)
 - 2. The destruction of the Temple (36:18-19)
 - 3. The captivity of the refugees (36:20-21)
 - B. The decree of Cyrus (36:22-23)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 18, what happened to the treasures in the Temple when Jerusalem was overthrown?

2. What were some of the evidences of the Jews' lack of submission to God?

3. How can we maintain an attitude of receptivity to God's warnings?

CONCLUSION

God judged the Jewish people because they failed to heed His messengers who warned of the consequences of continuing in disobedience. Let us purpose in our hearts to pay close attention to the instruction given in God's Word so we avoid the judgment of God.

1. Nathan Daniel Shappee, "A History of Johnstown and the Great Flood of 1889: a study of Disaster and Rehabilitation," (Pittsburgh, PA: Nathan Daniel Shappee 1940), 241-283.



Overview for Ezra

Purpose: While the author's purpose in writing the Book of Ezra is not explicitly stated, it clearly was to record the resettlement of the Hebrew people in their homeland after their exile in Babylon, in fulfillment of God's promise to restore His people to their land.

Author: According to Jewish tradition, the books of both Ezra and Nehemiah were written by Ezra, the priest, scholar, and scribe who led the second group of Jewish exiles who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon.

Time Period Covered: Chapters 1-6 occurred from 538-516 B.C. After an interval of about sixty years, Ezra 7-10 likely took place around 458 B.C.

Date Written: Uncertain, but likely around 450 B.C.

History: Because of Israel's unfaithfulness to God, the nation had been judged. The Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. In 586 B.C., the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Southern Kingdom of Judah and exiled most of its people. After Nebuchadnezzar died, Babylon was overthrown by Persia in 539 B.C.

During the time of Ezra, the Persian Empire under Cyrus the Great encompassed nearly the entire Near East. Cyrus reorganized his realm into administrative provinces and adopted a lenient policy toward conquered nations, allowing the people to return to their homelands and maintain their local identities. This policy may have been intended to win the loyalty of the conquered peoples, and thus provide a protective buffer zone around the borders of his kingdom.

God used Cyrus and his ruling policy to fulfill His promise to restore the Jewish people to their own land. After living for seventy years in Babylon, nearly fifty thousand exiles made the journey back under the leadership of Zerubbabel, whom Cyrus appointed as governor of Judah.

Setting: The events in Ezra took place primarily in Jerusalem and the surrounding area. The returning exiles were able to populate only a tiny portion of their former homeland.

The prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi were contemporaries of Ezra, and also played key roles in encouraging the people and leaders of Judah to return to their homeland and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem.

Unique Features: The Book of Ezra continues the historical narrative of the Chronicles; the final two verses of 2 Chronicles are repeated in the first two verses of Ezra.

Jeremiah had foretold that exile of the Jewish people would end after seventy years (see Jeremiah 29:10). Isaiah prophesied in chapter 45 of his writings that a ruler named Cyrus would capture Babylon and end the Jewish captivity. The fulfillments of both these prophecies are recorded in the Book of Ezra and verified by archaeological findings that reference the return of the Judean exiles and the freedom of worship they were given by Cyrus. The language and content of the Cyrus Cylinder, an ancient clay cylinder discovered in the ruins of Babylon in 1879, is very close to the decree recorded in Ezra 1:2-4.

In ancient manuscripts, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah appear as one document. Several sources seemingly were used in compiling the books. These include personal accounts of Ezra and Nehemiah; quotations from letters and official documents, such as royal decrees presented in their original form; Temple annals; and lists of names likely derived from public records. Ezra's background as a priest and scribe would have allowed him access to such documents.

Another unique feature of this book is the fact that although most of it was written in Hebrew, portions were written in Aramaic, the language of the Persian Empire (see Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26).

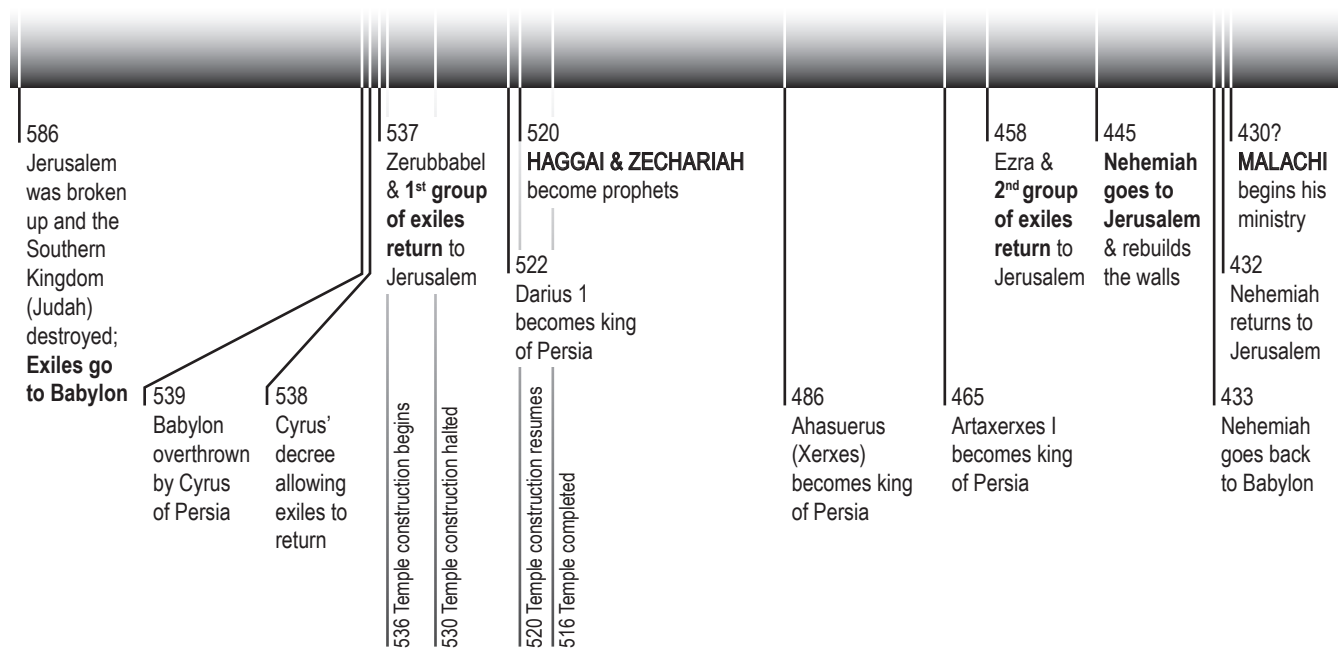
Key People: Ezra, Cyrus, Jeshua (Joshua), Zerubbabel, Haggai, Zechariah, Darius, Artaxerxes I

Summary: The Book of Ezra can be divided into two parts that are separated chronologically by nearly sixty years. The first section, chapters 1-6, relates how King Cyrus of Persia authorized the first return of the exiles under the leadership of Zerubbabel, who was appointed by Cyrus to serve as governor of Judah. The book documents the people's resettling in their homeland, their work of rebuilding the Temple, the opposition to their efforts, and the eventual completion of the Temple.

The events in chapters 7-10 likely took place over a period of about one year. This section describes the return of a second group of exiles, these under the leadership of Ezra the scribe, about sixty years after the completion of the rebuilt Temple. While Zerubbabel had led the people in physically rebuilding God's house, Ezra led the people in reforms to rebuild the law of God in their hearts and resumed the worship ceremonies. After learning that some had intermarried with their idolatrous neighbors, Ezra wept and prayed for his nation, leading the people to repentance and national revival.

Timeline

Some dates are approximate, as reference materials differ.



Outline

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A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.

- I. The reconstruction under Zerubbabel (1:1 — 6:22)
 - A. The return under Zerubbabel (1:1 — 2:70)
 - B. The rebuilding under Zerubbabel (3:1 — 6:22)
- II. The reformation under Ezra (7:1 — 10:44)
 - A. The return under Ezra (7:1 — 8:36)
 - B. The reform under Ezra (9:1 — 10:44)



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods; even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.” (Ezra 1:7-8)

“This is unbelievable...check it out! Can it be true?” I often hear comments like this when I visit my grandchildren. Nearly always, the exclamation relates to some amazing feat or supposed fact that the grandchild viewed online. Even as adults, when we hear improbable stories or extravagant advertising offers, we hesitate to take them at face value. We wonder (and often, rightly so), *Can that possibly be true?*

Reading the opening events in the Book of Ezra, I wonder if the Jewish people reacted in a similar way when they heard of King Cyrus’ decree. It was amazing enough that Persia’s ruler was allowing them to return to Judah to rebuild their Temple, even though they knew the prophesied seventy years of their captivity must be drawing to a close. But how astonished they must have been when they heard the information in our focus verses: Cyrus was returning the sacred vessels taken from the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar’s forces when they ravaged Jerusalem! They must have wondered, *Could it be true that those precious, consecrated emblems of worship had been preserved all these years?* If that was the case, was it possible that Cyrus really had given them to Sheshbazzar to be carried back to their homeland? No doubt the Jewish people asked among themselves, *Can this possibly be true?*

We too might wonder if God’s promises are true, especially when we are confronting what seems like an insurmountable problem or have waited a long time for an answer to prayer. Today’s text proves the reliability of God’s Word. It records an event prophesied by Isaiah around 150 years before the time of Ezra. That prophecy, recorded in Isaiah 44:28, even mentions Cyrus by name long before he was born!

The fulfillment of God’s promise to the exiled people of Judah is detailed several times in His Word. Ezra 1:1-3 repeats 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 almost word for word, and the entire Book of Haggai also gives a record. Additionally, the writings of secular Jewish historian Josephus tell of the events described by Ezra.

When we are perplexed or doubt arises, the Book of Ezra can bolster our faith in God and remind us that

He is in control of the events in our lives. Though we may not see an immediate solution or the answer to our prayers yet, God will *always* fulfill His promises!

BACKGROUND

The Book of Ezra describes the re-establishment of the people of Judah in their homeland after a seventy-year exile in Babylon. It opens with a brief explanation of how the return came about. Early in his reign over Babylon, King Cyrus of Persia reversed the Babylonian policy of keeping the people of conquered nations in captivity. Verses 1-4 describe the decree he made allowing the Jewish exiles to return to Judah and rebuild their Temple in Jerusalem, and verses 5-11 describe preparations for that journey.

The dating of Cyrus’ proclamation as the “first year of Cyrus king of Persia” in verse 1 was a reference to the first year the Persian monarch reigned over Babylon (about 539 B.C.) rather than the first year he ruled over Persia (550 B.C.).

The Cyrus Cylinder, an ancient clay artifact inscribed with an account of Cyrus’ conquest of Babylon, was discovered in 1879 in present day Iraq. Its words imply that Cyrus’ lenient attitude toward conquered nations was part of his political strategy. This strategy may have been based on a recognition that enslaving conquered people increased the potential for rebellion. A policy of allowing these people to return to their own homelands may have been designed to win their fidelity, thus establishing a protective buffer zone around the borders of his kingdom.

While political prudence may have been the basis for Cyrus’ decree, verse 1 establishes that it was “the word of the LORD” that stirred the spirit of Cyrus to allow the Jews to return to their native land. The Jewish historian Josephus and other scholars suggest that the words of the prophet Isaiah foretelling a Gentile ruler named Cyrus who would rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple (see Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1-6) were brought to the attention of the Persian king. Whether or not that was the case, it was God who prompted Cyrus to liberate the people of Judah.

Cyrus’ statement in verse 3, “the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,)” could seem to imply that the Persian king was a Jehovah worshipper. However, the Cyrus Cylinder shows that Cyrus was a polytheist who was equally willing to worship the gods of Babylon.

Since the territories of both the former Northern and Southern Kingdoms were part of Cyrus’ empire, his proclamation of liberation went to all twelve tribes. Verse 5 seems to suggest that only Judah and

Benjamin responded to the permission to return, but 1 Chronicles 9:3 states that some also came from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. Ezra’s account likely only mentions Judah and Benjamin because most of the returnees were from those two tribes. Josephus stated that one reason so many of the exiles remained in Babylon was that they did not want to leave their possessions behind.

In verse 4, Cyrus instructed those who chose to remain in Babylon to provide offerings to support the rebuilding of the house of God in Jerusalem. Accordingly, the Jews who did not join the returning exiles “strengthened their hands” by offerings of gold, goods, animals, and precious things. Verse 7 notes that Cyrus himself returned the Temple vessels that the Babylonians had removed from the house of God in Jerusalem, some of which had been used in their own idolatrous celebrations (see Daniel 5:2-4). In verses 8-11, the Persian treasurer Mithredath officially counted out the vessels and gave them to Sheshbazzar (Zerubbabel), a leader of the tribe of Judah.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- I. The reconstruction under Zerubbabel
 - A. The return under Zerubbabel
 - 1. The decree of Cyrus (1:1-4)
 - 2. The preparation for the journey (1:5-11)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verses 1-2, what occurred to allow the Jewish people to be released from Babylonian exile?

2. In verse 4, why do you think King Cyrus instructed those who would remain in Babylon to supply offerings to those returning to Judah?

3. The decree by King Cyrus was prophesied well in advance of his own birth. How does this fulfillment of prophecy encourage us today?

CONCLUSION

Cyrus’ release of the Jewish people from captivity and his return of the sacred Temple vessels remind us that God will always keep His promises.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place.” (Ezra 2:68)

Back in the early 1950s, advertising executives approached a young evangelist, offering him a Sunday afternoon time slot for a religious broadcast that would air nationwide for thirteen weeks. While the young preacher was convinced that religious broadcasting could be an effective tool for reaching souls, the price tag of \$92,000 was totally out of reach.

However, the ad executives kept up the pressure, and finally, the young preacher told them that the final decision was the Lord's. He said that if \$25,000 of the total amount came into his hands by midnight that night, he would take it that God was leading him to begin a radio ministry. He knew a sum that large would take a miracle, because the largest single donation he had ever received up to that time was for \$500.

The evangelist was scheduled to preach in Portland, Oregon, that night, and during the evening service, he told the audience that he had been approached regarding a nationwide radio broadcast but had refused because of the cost. At the close of the service, those present—like the Jerusalem fathers in our focus verse—“offered freely.” Donations and pledges were handed to one of his helpers, who stuffed them all into an old shoe box. When the money was counted, it totaled \$23,500! Those present were amazed, saying it was a miracle, but the young evangelist had asked the Lord for \$25,000, and he would settle for no less as a confirmation that God wanted him to begin a radio ministry.

Upon arriving back at his hotel that evening, he picked up his mail from the hotel desk. There were three letters for him, and each contained a check: one for \$1000 and two for \$250 each, bringing the total received that night to exactly \$25,000! That was the starting point for Billy Graham's *Hour of Decision* radio broadcast which ultimately was syndicated across 581 stations in the United States, as well as over 400 other stations around the world.

Reverend Graham received offerings when he had a need, and he gave to other ministries when they had a need. In his later years, he occasionally visited the island of Saint Martin in the Caribbean for vacation, and on one of those trips, he came across the Apostolic Faith Church in Sandy Ground. Not

wanting to disrupt the services by attending in person, he would sit outside our church there and listen to the music, testimonies, and preaching.

When one of our ministers and his wife visited the Sandy Ground church as representatives of the Portland headquarters, they met with the pastor, who gave them a tour of the building. Upstairs, the pastor pointed out the church's roof, which was constructed by Reverend Graham's team after the original was blown off during Hurricane Luis in 1995. He also noted that after Reverend Graham's passing, his son Franklin directed their team to help again in 2017 after Hurricane Irma destroyed much of the church. Seemingly the Grahams felt a burden for this church because Reverend Graham had enjoyed sitting outside and listening to the services there. People had supported his ministry financially over the years, and no doubt he and his descendants wanted to pass on that blessing.

And so, the Gospel work continues. When God's people give freely, He blesses freely and the work goes forward. May God help each of us to learn from the “chief of the fathers” who contributed in Ezra's day, and those in years since who have given of their resources, and do our parts to advance God's message on this earth.

BACKGROUND

This chapter continues the explanation of the return of the exiles to Judah that began in Ezra chapter 1. Babylon, the once mighty empire that had taken the people of Judah into captivity, had been overthrown. Persia was the new world power, and under the Persian King Cyrus' foreign policy, captured people were allowed to return to their homelands. The seventy years of captivity prophesied by Jeremiah had ended, and God provided the opportunity for Zerubbabel to lead the first group of captives back to Judah. (There were two subsequent groups of returnees: in 458 B.C., two thousand men and their families led by Ezra went back to Judah, and in 445 B.C., a small group returned under the leadership of Nehemiah.)

Zerubbabel was joined by nearly fifty thousand individuals in this first homeward trek. The key leaders who accompanied Zerubbabel are identified in verses 1-2 of chapter 2, and some of those who came with them are categorized by families and places of residence (verses 3-35). The priests and Levites are recorded (verses 36-54), followed by the descendants of Solomon's servants (verses 55-58), and other

returnees (verses 59-63). The total number is given in verses 64-67, and the chapter concludes with a description of the offerings made by the Jewish leaders upon their arrival in Jerusalem in verses 68-70.

This record of names is repeated in Nehemiah 7:6-73. Both lists were likely taken from a register of those families and categories made at the time of the return and preserved in official records. Bible scholars note that any Jew whose ancestors were noted in this registry would have considered the document of inestimable value because it named and thus honored the first rebuilders of their country after it had been laid waste by the Babylonians.

The phrase “children of the province” in verse 1 reflects the fact that Judah—once a distinguished kingdom—was now merely a province that was subject to and dependent upon another governing power. The statement that the returnees went “every one to his city” means that each went to the city that had been theirs in the former settlement by Joshua.

Jeshua, the high priest referenced in verse 2, was the son of Jozadak, the former high priest (see Ezra 3:2 and Haggai 1:1). He is referred to as Joshua in Zechariah 3:1-9 and 6:11. The Nehemiah mentioned in verse 2 is not the Nehemiah who rebuilt Jerusalem’s wall some decades later, nor is the Mordecai listed the Mordecai who appears in the Book of Esther. Tirshatha, mentioned in verse 63, was the title given the governor of Judea under the Persians.

No description is given of the exiles’ journey back to Jerusalem. However, the trip likely took Zerubbabel and the caravan he led around four months, as the distance between Babylon and Jerusalem was nearly nine hundred miles. An army could have traveled much faster, but Zerubbabel’s entourage probably included children and elderly people.

Verses 64-67 give totals of those who returned with Zerubbabel. The sum of individuals in named categories is 29,818, and the total number of returnees was 42,360. So seemingly there were over 12,000 exiles who did not know what family or city they were from, but knew they were Israelites. Whatever their lineage, by returning to the land of Israel from Babylon, the returnees indicated their trust in God’s promise to restore them as a people.

Verses 68-70 record that upon arrival, the leaders of the group gave of their resources “after their ability”—as much as they were able—to be used for the reconstruction of the Temple.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
Used by permission per WORDsearch

- I. The reconstruction under Zerubbabel
 - A. The return under Zerubbabel
 3. The list of those who returned (2:1-67)
 - a. The leaders (2:1-2)
 - b. The people (2:3-35)
 - c. The priests (2:36-39)

- d. The Levites (2:40-54)
 - e. The descendants of Solomon’s servants (2:55-58)
 - f. Other returnees (2:59-63)
 - g. The total number (2:64-67)
 4. The gifts of those who returned (2:68-70)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 1, who was the king of Babylon at the time the Israelites were “carried away” and led into captivity in Babylon?

2. Some of the children of the priests were considered polluted and “put from the priesthood” (verses 61-62). Why do you think this policy was implemented?

3. The accuracy of the family names, genealogy, and details of the exact number of people on this pilgrimage are evidence that God knows us individually. In what ways has God shown that He is concerned with the details of your life?

CONCLUSION

Like the leaders of Israel who “gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work,” we want to support God’s work generously and wholeheartedly.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God.” (Ezra 3:1-2)

British author and theologian C. S. Lewis once said, “Put first things first and second things are thrown in. Put second things first and you lose both first and second things.” Several decades later, the phrase “first things first” was popularized as the title of a best-selling book. Stephen Covey, the author, made that phrase the core principle of his time-management philosophy and explained that putting first things first meant organizing and implementing around your most important priorities. He stated, “It is living and being driven by the principles you value most, not by the agendas and forces surrounding you.”¹ In other words, it means doing what is *most* important before busying ourselves with other things!

The people of Judah certainly did that in today’s text. Our focus verses indicate that the former exiles gathered “as one man” in Jerusalem and, as one of their first official acts, set up the altar of God—even before they erected the Temple itself! Rebuilding the altar was their first priority because daily burnt offerings were required by the Law of Moses. God had expressly commanded that sacrifices should be offered daily in the place that He appointed, so the people built the new altar upon the foundations of the old one.

An online bookseller’s description of Covey’s book *First Things First* states that the author encouraged his readers to “make the changes and sacrifices needed to obtain happiness and retain a feeling of security.” The people of Jerusalem had made changes and sacrifices—they had left the developed culture of Babylon and undertaken an arduous, 900-mile-long journey to rebuild their native land and reinstitute the forms of worship God had ordained for them. No doubt they understood that to obtain happiness and retain a feeling of security, they would need to carefully follow God’s instructions. After all, their disobedience in the past had brought about seventy years of exile in Babylon! Their unified efforts to quickly

reestablish true worship indicated that they had a purpose to live as God had commanded.

There is a lesson for us in their example. While the phrase “first things first” may roll easily off the tongue, implementing it in daily life is more challenging. There are many rightfully important aspects of life that need our attention and devotion. When we add to these the demands, duties, and details of life, it is easy to become so preoccupied that we drift away from keeping God as our top priority. We must continually guard against being distracted by other matters and failing to ensure that our relationship with God is our focus.

To accomplish this, changes and sacrifices may be required of us, just as they were of the people of Judah. When we put God first, we live with a purpose to obey His commands and the Holy Spirit’s direction. Setting aside daily time to spend in His presence is vitally important. As we begin each day asking God for guidance and the power to live in a manner pleasing to Him, He will help us keep our connection to Him the supreme priority of our lives. The result will be the happiness and feeling of security that comes to those who put God first!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 3 begins a description of the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem and the restoration of worship for the Jewish people. This description continues through Ezra 6:15. In this portion of the account, the returned exiles rebuilt the altar of sacrifice on its ancient foundation, observed the Feast of Tabernacles, and laid the foundation for the Temple.

Although no year is specified in verse 1, “the seventh month” referred to the seventh month of the exiles’ first year in Jerusalem because verse 8, which gives a date for the laying of the Temple foundation, includes the phrase “of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem.” The seventh month was important on the spiritual calendar of Israel, because in that month the people traditionally celebrated the Day of Atonement, the Day of Trumpets, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The fact that the “people gathered themselves together as one man” was a sign of spiritual commitment and unity among the returned exiles. In a time of limited resources and with much work to be done as they resettled the land, they took time to observe the command to gather in Jerusalem for these feasts.

Alexander Maclaren, a well-known Bible expositor of the late 1800s, commented, “There was barely

interval enough for the returning exiles to take possession of their ancestral fields before they were called to leave them unguarded and returned to the desolate city. Surely their glad and unanimous obedience to the summons, or, as it may even have been, their spontaneous assemblage unsummoned, is no small token of their ardour of devotion... It would take a good deal to draw a band of new settlers in our days to leave their lots and to set to putting up a church before they had built themselves houses.”²

During their seventy years in Babylon, the Jews had not been able to offer any sacrifices, as this could only be done in Jerusalem (see Deuteronomy 12:5-6). Verse 2 records that one of the first official acts of the returned exiles was to rebuild the altar for burnt offerings and other sacrifices, even before the foundation of the Temple was laid. While verse 3 suggests that the immediate construction of the altar was due to fear of the surrounding neighbors, Jeshua and Zerubbabel and the other leaders understood the people’s need to perform acts of dedication to God. They were aware that the neglect of the altar of God in the past had caused the people to become contaminated by the idolatrous practices of the nations around them. To prevent a repetition of that failure, the leaders immediately set up the true altar according to the instruction given in Exodus 20:25.

Verse 4 indicates that the people kept the Feast of Tabernacles, a seven-day festival that was a reminder of God’s guidance and protection during their wandering in the wilderness. (Leviticus 23:33-36 gives a description of this Feast.) In this first observance since their return, the people also brought freewill offerings to the Lord.

Once the Feast was completed, verse 7 indicates that the people gathered the materials required to begin the building of the Temple and hired the needed workers. Cedar trees of Lebanon were legendary for their excellent timber. Procuring them was an indication that the leaders of the exiles not only wanted to use the best possible materials in construction, but also the same types of materials that were used in the previous Temple (see 1 Kings 5:6). The “grant that they had of Cyrus” was not only financial support from the royal treasury but was also legal permission to build the Temple.

Verses 8-13 describe the laying of the foundation of the Temple, which took place in the second month of the second year after their arrival in Jerusalem. Significantly, the site was called “the house of God at Jerusalem” even before the Temple was built. Setting the foundation in place was a memorable occasion. The priests were dressed in their ceremonial apparel, and musicians were present to praise God with

instruments and song. Spontaneously expressing their joy that an important step was being made, the people “shouted with a great shout” (verse 11). However, there were some present who had seen the former Temple and remembered its splendor. The contrast between the former glories and the present humble surroundings brought tears, and the weeping of the aged ones mingled with the sounds of rejoicing.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
Used by permission per WORDsearch

- I. The reconstruction under Zerubbabel
 - B. The rebuilding under Zerubbabel
 1. The rebuilding of the Temple
 - a. The work started (3:1-13)
 - (1) The erection of the altar (3:1-3)
 - (2) The observance of the feasts (3:4-7)
 - (3) The laying of the Temple foundation (3:8-13)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Verse 1 states that when the seventh month was come, the people gathered themselves together as one man in Jerusalem. According to verses 2-4, what did they do there at that time?

2. The Israelites procured masons, carpenters, and materials needed for construction from Zidon, Tyre, and Lebanon to the sea of Joppa (see verse 7). What might have been their purpose in doing that?

3. What steps can we take to ensure our spiritual foundation is solid and we are building our lives as God would have us?

CONCLUSION

When we purpose to serve God wholeheartedly and make Him first in our lives, our souls will prosper, and God’s blessing will be upon us.

1. Franklin Covey, “Habit 3: Put First Things First,” FranklinCovey, February 26, 2024, <https://www.franklincovey-benelux.com/en/resources/habit-3-put-first-things-first/>
2. Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. III (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1944), 284.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, and hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.” (Ezra 4:4-5)

One of the best ways for me to shift my perspective while facing a spiritual obstacle is to take a trip to the beach. The endless waves, tossed by the wind, demonstrate God’s limitless power, and remind me that He is greater than any opposition I might face. Often, kites are soaring above me, and their rapid flight across the sky are a reminder that with God’s help, we too can soar above the troubles that can weigh us down.

In order to achieve flight, a kite’s airlift depends on establishing and maintaining a balance between four forces: lift, weight, drag, and thrust. *Lift* is the upward force created by the wind moving over and under the kite. *Weight* is the downward force of gravitational pull on the kite. *Thrust* is the forward force that propels the kite in the direction the wind is blowing. *Drag* is the force opposing forward motion; it is caused by the difference in air pressure between the front and back of the kite, and the friction caused by the wind moving over the surface of the kite.

American historian Lewis Mumford said, “A certain amount of opposition is a great help to a man. Kites rise against, not with, the wind.”¹ Likewise, we need to find the balance between the tumults in our lives that threaten to pull us down, and the uplift our spirits experience when we recall God’s blessings and His power to overcome the forces that oppose us.

In today’s lesson, Zerubbabel and the returned exiles encountered a trial of opposition. While attempting to accomplish their God-given task of rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem, they faced antagonism from local citizens that threatened the project. There were deceitful offers of help, efforts to weaken and trouble the builders, and false accusations. Eventually, the adversaries brought their allegations to the attention of King Artaxerxes of Persia who commanded that all work on the house of God should cease. When the Israelites encountered this opposition, instead of resisting and allowing God to lift them over the obstacle, they gave up and lost out on God’s blessing.

They did not need to fail because they were assailed by contrary forces, and neither do we. Like

the people of Jerusalem in Ezra and Zerubbabel’s day, we will encounter opposition. Some will be a “weight” and some will be a “drag.” For example, relationships may become confrontational. Trials and disappointments may weigh on us. People may challenge our faith or attempt to pull us down spiritually. But when this happens, take heart! Remember that God will help us continue moving forward if we will turn to Him for help in maintaining our spiritual equilibrium. He can enable us to soar above any difficulty! We can buoy up our spirits and keep going by looking to the Lord for strength and power to overcome.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 4 of Ezra describes the opposition encountered by the returned exiles as they attempted to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. Neighboring “people of the land” offered to assist in the rebuilding project, but the Jewish leaders refused to allow the participation of outsiders. In retaliation for this rejection, the antagonists attempted to undermine the rebuilding efforts. As a result, the work ceased for a period of time.

Verses 1-6 recount the hostility of Judah’s neighbors. “The adversaries of Judah and Benjamin” mentioned in verse 1 were the Samaritans, a mixed race descended from Assyrians who had intermarried with the Jews left behind after the fall of Israel to Assyria in 722 B.C. The Samaritans were traditional enemies of the Jews. They claimed to worship the true God, but their faith was a combination of rituals from the Law of Moses mixed with various superstitions and idolatrous practices. Any partnership with them would have been spiritually dangerous for the returned exiles.

When these neighboring peoples became aware that the returning Jews were serious about reestablishing a permanent presence in Judea, they came to the Jews asking to have a part in the rebuilding, possibly to keep informed of the proceedings or disrupt the efforts. However, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the other leaders of Israel rejected this offer, saying that King Cyrus had authorized them alone to do the rebuilding. The evil intent of the Samaritans’ offer can be surmised based on their response to the Jewish leaders’ refusal. Verse 4 says that the Samaritans “weakened the hands” of the Jewish builders and “troubled them in building.” If they could not attack the work through a subversive collaboration, they would attempt to do so by discouraging the workers, troubling the builders, and lobbying against the Jews in the court of King Cyrus.

The statement in verse 5 that these obstructive efforts continued “all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia” is a broad overview of Samaritan resistance to the work of rebuilding the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. Their antagonism included letters sent to Persian king Ahasuerus (verse 6) and to the next king, Artaxerxes (verses 7-16). These letters seem to be in relation to a later building project rather than the Temple because Ahasuerus did not become king until about thirty years after the Temple was complete, and Artaxerxes almost twenty years after that. However, the letters are examples of the type of opposition brought by the Samaritans. Ezra wrote his account perhaps more than sixty years after the Temple was completed, and not every detail is in chronological order. His primary audience would have had no trouble understanding the timeframe based on the rulers who were named.

One of the accusations in the second letter was that “this city is a rebellious city, hurtful to kings and provinces” (verse 15). The Samaritans suggested that if the Jews were allowed to rebuild their city, the king of Persia would lose dominion over the area. While it was true that Jerusalem had resisted its former conquerors, the builders of Jerusalem had no intention of rebelling against Persia. Yet, after confirming the allegations of the past, King Artaxerxes commanded that rebuilding in the city be halted, and his command was carried out by force (verse 23).

The passage starting at Ezra 4:8 and continuing through Ezra 6:18 is written in Aramaic (instead of Hebrew), and Ezra 7:12-26 is also in Aramaic. Bible scholars suggest that the Aramaic portions were probably dictated in Persian to a scribe, who translated them into Aramaic and wrote them in Aramaic script.

Verse 24 indicates that the opposition from the Samaritan adversaries accomplished its purpose: work on the Temple stopped and did not resume until the second year of the reign of Darius—a period of approximately ten years.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
Used by permission per WORDsearch

- I. The reconstruction under Zerubbabel
 - B. The rebuilding under Zerubbabel
 - 1. The rebuilding of the Temple
 - b. The work stopped (4:1-24)
 - (1) The Samaritan interference (4:1-5)
 - (2) The letter to Ahasuerus (4:6-16)
 - (3) The reply from Ahasuerus (4:17-22)
 - (4) The work stopped (4:23-24)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In what language was the letter sent to King Artaxerxes written? (verse 7)

2. The letter sent to King Artaxerxes falsely implied the city's tributes to the king's treasury would be at risk (verses 12-13). Why do you think the letter included citywide concerns rather than just the building of the Temple?

3. When we are faced with false accusations, opposition, or bad news, how should we respond? What measures could we take to ensure we are not defeated in accomplishing God's plan for our lives?

CONCLUSION

We can be courageous and stand strong in the face of opposition, knowing the Lord will bring us through when we seek His help.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall? Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building? But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius: and then they returned answer by letter concerning this matter.” (Ezra 5:3-5)

Great undertakings often meet with challenges. That certainly was the case when the Erie Canal, the first major infrastructure project in America, was proposed in 1816.

Many scoffed at the idea of a 363-mile waterway connecting the Hudson River to the Great Lakes. They dismissed the proposal as folly, citing lack of funds, insufficient expertise, and unforgiving terrain. European engineers refused to assist with what they viewed as a foolhardy scheme. Even the American President, Thomas Jefferson, considered the plan “little short of madness.”

However, New York governor DeWitt Clinton was convinced that a canal could be built that would greatly facilitate commercial traffic in the nation. He persisted in advancing the project, which many derisively referred to as “DeWitt’s Ditch” or “Clinton’s Folly.” An amateur crew consisting of self-taught local engineers, a few inexperienced surveyors, and at least one local math teacher, did the initial planning. Ground was broken on July 4, 1817, and the eight-year-long project began.

Challenges were significant. Much of New York State was a morass of forest, swamps, and underbrush at the time. Earth-moving machinery did not exist, so early crews of area farmers and laborers had nothing more than axes, pickaxes, and shovels to fell countless trees and uproot giant stumps. Oxen and horses were used to plow the land. In some areas, laborers had to tunnel through huge rock formations, cracking the stone with gunpowder—a volatile and potentially deadly undertaking. Workers were plagued by malaria, mysterious illnesses, and construction accidents. Still, despite all obstacles and opposition, the Erie Canal was completed on October 25, 1825.

Our text today records another undertaking that met with persistent challenges and resistance—and

this one was of far greater importance than a commercial waterway. The reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem had been halted for about ten years due to the opposition of local officials. However, in today’s text, at the encouragement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, construction resumed. And this time, the efforts were carried on with zeal and determination. A report was sent from the regional governor to the king concerning the project. In spite of that, our focus verses record that by the providence of God, the Jews continued building, although there was uncertainty regarding how the king would respond.

We can learn an important spiritual lesson from this text: the necessity of continuing to press forward toward our spiritual goal despite challenges. Resistance may come. Society may attempt to intimidate us or ridicule our beliefs. However, we must not allow criticism or the accusations of hostile people to paralyze us. God permits all the circumstances of life, and if He allows opposition to come our way, He is well able to give us grace and determination to withstand it. We must purpose to keep on keeping on with God’s help!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 5 continues the account of the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. Construction began again because of the influence of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, after having been suspended for a period of about ten years due to the interference of the Samaritans described in chapter 4. Though the neighboring people again objected, God enabled the men to continue to build while the matter was brought before the king (verses 3-5). In his account to King Darius, Tatnai described the work the men of Jerusalem were doing, gave the names of the builders, and explained the Jews’ defense of their actions (verses 6-16). In the final verse of chapter 5, Tatnai requested that the king make a search of the royal archives to ascertain if King Cyrus really had authorized the rebuilding of the Temple (verse 17).

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah, mentioned in verses 1-2, were no doubt among the exiles who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon after the decree of Cyrus; their prophecies are recorded in the books that bear their names. Haggai 1:2 seems to imply that the exiles had ceased rebuilding the Temple because they had evidently concluded that the time for rebuilding the Lord’s house had not yet come. The fact that the two men of God urged and inspired the exiles to renewed action is implied in verse 2 of chapter 5 by

the statement that the leaders began to build, “and with them were the prophets of God helping them.”

Tatnai, who came to confront the leaders of Israel, was the appointed governor of the region west of the Euphrates that included Judah; Shethar-boznai was probably his secretary or scribe. These men and those with them inquired who had authorized the building of the Temple and the walls, and then listed the names of the builders (possibly in an attempt to intimidate the exiles). These governing officials then sent a report to the king and awaited his orders concerning the project. However, because “the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews” (verse 5), the rebuilding continued during this period of waiting.

Tatnai wrote a full report to King Darius, who was ruler of Persia by this time. Verses 6-17 record the content of the report. A copy of the letter is included in Ezra’s record (verses 6-17). The builders in Jerusalem were moving forward with industry and zeal, and Tatnai’s description of the project was comprehensive. Verses 9-10 repeat the questions that were asked of the leaders of the exiles in verses 3-4, and verse 11 gives the answers that were not recorded earlier. Tatnai’s letter concluded with a request for the king to research the matter and determine if the rebuilding of the Temple and Jerusalem had been royally sanctioned by an earlier ruler.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
Used by permission per WORDsearch

- I. The reconstruction under Zerubbabel
 - B. The rebuilding under Zerubbabel
 - 1. The rebuilding of the Temple
 - c. The work resumed and completed
 - (1) The work resumed (5:1-5)
 - (2) The letter of Tatnai to Darius (5:6-17)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verses 1-2, what did the prophets Haggai and Zechariah do to move the rebuilding project forward?

2. Why do you think Tatnai and his companions asked for the names of the people who were helping with the reconstruction?

3. What spiritual qualities and characteristics will help us withstand opposition to our walk with God?

CONCLUSION

The account of the rebuilding of God’s Temple in Jerusalem reminds us of the importance of staying committed and faithful to God’s work, and resistant to all spiritual opposition.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy, and offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.” (Ezra 6:16-17)

The dedication of a house of worship to God is a special and sacred occasion. The goal is to honor the Lord and welcome His presence as people come together to give praise and thanksgiving to Him.

In 2022, a new headquarters church and office building were dedicated by the Apostolic Faith believers in Malawi. The church sanctuary was full with over 120 people present, including three local kings, one queen (who had helped acquire the property), a local town official, and neighbors. Additionally, there were representatives from the church world headquarters in Portland, Oregon, the regional headquarters in Zimbabwe, and from other nearby countries.

Anticipation was high as the service began, and God answered prayers that were prayed before and during this occasion. Visitors were acknowledged, the choir sang in beautiful harmony, Scriptures were read, a solo was sung, and the dedicatory message preached. As the dedication prayer was being given, the Holy Spirit came down in a special way. The lady who sang the solo had been seeking for the baptism of the Holy Ghost for a long time. During the prayer, she received that experience, and a wonderful prayer service followed.

Other church services were held later that day, and two young ladies were saved after the evening meeting. The next day, one of them testified, “Hallelujah! I want to thank God for the joy I feel in my heart. For years now, I have been praying for salvation, but I thought God wasn’t listening to me. I got angry at Him, wondering, *Why doesn’t He answer my prayer?* Then last night, I came to this altar. I prayed with all my heart. I had faith that He would save me. Then it happened! I was saved!”

God had seen the faithful labor of those who constructed the church. He had heard the prayers that were prayed as the work progressed. And at the dedication service, He came to work in the hearts there. The result was joy!

Similarly, God saw the labor of the Jews in Ezra’s time. They had experienced setbacks and persecution, yet by God’s intervention and the encouragement of His prophets, they had persevered. Their Temple was completed, and when the dedication day came, there was joy.

While we may not be building a physical church today, when we give our lives to God and purpose to do His will, He has promised to bless us. It brings joy to dedicate ourselves, as well as buildings, to be used for the glory of God!

BACKGROUND

Today’s text relates that after searching the kingdom records in response to Tatnai’s request made in Ezra 5:17, King Darius confirmed that the decree of Cyrus authorizing the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem did indeed exist. Tatnai, the governor of the province west of the Euphrates River, relayed this information to the leaders of the exiles, and with the continued support of Haggai and Zechariah, the Temple construction was completed. The exiles held a joyful dedication of the new house of God, made offerings of worship and gratitude, and organized the priests and Levites into groups for service in the house of God. The chapter concludes with a description of the Passover observance that followed the dedication.

Verses 1-12 record the finding of the decree made by Cyrus, and Darius’ further instruction. Verse 2 indicates that the requested imperial records concerning Cyrus’ original decree were found in Achmetha, a beautiful city that had been the capital of the Median empire. In 550 B.C., when Cyrus captured that city, he made it his summer residence. Historians note that Achmetha was encircled by seven concentric walls. Since the city was positioned on a hill, each of the inner walls rose above the outer ones, and each wall was a different color. Today, Achmetha is usually identified with the city of Hamedan in west-central Iran.

Verses 3-5 are a review of the decree that was issued by King Cyrus. King Darius issued instructions that his decree must be carried out. The building dimensions had to conform to what Cyrus had written and he added that construction expenses were to be “given out of the king’s house”—financed by the royal treasury. In addition, the gold and silver vessels taken by Nebuchadnezzar from the Temple two generations earlier were to be returned to their place in the house of God. Commentators note that it was

a remarkable example of God’s providence that these spoils of war were still intact.

Beginning in verse 6, Darius addressed Tatnai personally, giving instructions for the rebuilding that was ongoing in Jerusalem. He prohibited any interference with the Jews or hindering of their work. In addition, Tatnai was instructed to provide the Jews with whatever they needed, to be funded by local taxes collected from the province itself. Verse 10 explains at least part of the motivation of King Darius for his kindness toward the Jewish exiles—he wanted the prayers of the Jewish people for “the king and his sons.” At the close of his decree, Darius threatened severe punishments for those who violated his commands.

Verses 13-15 record the completion of the Temple in Jerusalem. The statement that it “was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius” indicates that it took four years to complete after the rebuilding resumed.

The dedication of the Temple is described in verses 16-18. The dedication was kept “with joy” because it marked the close of a long period of danger, persecution, and trouble. Like the vast assembly that had gathered for the dedication of the former Temple nearly five hundred years earlier, the exiles came before God in worship and gratitude. While their offerings could not compare in number with the offerings made at the earlier dedication, a spirit of joyous celebration characterized both events.

Verses 19-22 tell of the Passover celebration. Since the priests and Levites had been organized into their divisions and courses for service and purified according to the Law of Moses (verses 18 and 20), it was possible for the returned exiles to keep the Passover. While the year is not mentioned, it likely took place the month after the feast of dedication. The final verse of the chapter acknowledges that it was God who “turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God.” The Persian monarch is referred to as the “king of Assyria” because he ruled over all the provinces that made up the former Assyrian empire, which constituted the greater part of the Persian empire at that time.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- I. The reconstruction under Zerubbabel
 - B. The rebuilding under Zerubbabel
 1. The rebuilding of the Temple
 - c. The work resumed and completed
 - (3) The recovery of Cyrus’ decree (6:1-5)
 - (4) The decree of Darius (6:6-12)
 - (5) The work finished (6:13-15)

2. The dedication of the Temple (6:16-22)
 - a. The ceremonies of dedication (6:16-18)
 - b. The observance of Passover (6:19-22)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 7, what instructions did King Darius give once he learned of the decree by Cyrus?

2. How do you think the Jews felt when they learned of the response from Darius?

3. What are some ways we can dedicate our lives to God?

CONCLUSION

Like others before us, we can experience joy when we dedicate ourselves to God and also when we come into His house to worship and praise Him.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.” Ezra 7:10

A veteran pastor who has now gone on to his Heavenly reward mentioned to me once how he had been approached by a number of people over the years who told him, “I really enjoyed your sermon.” He went on to share that while he genuinely appreciated the encouragement of the people of God, his hope was that they would simply follow what he had preached and do what God’s Word instructed. His point was that we should all be “doers,” not just “hearers”!

Today’s text reveals that Ezra was a doer of God’s Word. He clearly took his charge and calling as a priestly scribe seriously. He had been raised in less-than-optimal circumstances in Babylonian captivity, far away from Jerusalem. Yet verse 6 of our text describes him as a “ready” scribe, a word that means “apt” or “skillful.” It appears he excelled not only at the generational responsibility of the hand copying of Torah scrolls, but also studied diligently to learn the Law and apply it to his life in practical ways. We know he gained the confidence of the Persian king Artaxerxes, who authorized his journey back to Judah. And no doubt he had the trust of those who assembled to accompany him on the four-month journey.

God’s purposes for Ezra were realized because Ezra fulfilled two basic requirements. Our focus verse indicates that Ezra’s heart was set not only to “seek the law of the LORD,” but he had purposed in his heart “to do it”—to obey God’s laws. He also committed to teaching others the principles and virtues that God had commanded, just as he had sought, studied, and lived them himself.

The veteran pastor who spoke to me of “doing” knew that it is not personal achievement but our willingness to know and practice God’s Word that is important. If we, like Ezra, will “seek the law of the LORD” with all of our hearts and then by God’s grace begin to do it, our commitment will have a direct effect on how God uses our lives. Ezra probably never dreamed that future generations over the centuries would benefit by his example, nor can we foresee how our diligent seeking and obeying will impact others. However, we can be quite sure that by the grace of God, it will!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 6 of Ezra concluded with the dedication of the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem. Beginning with chapter 7 and continuing through chapter 10, an account is given of the return led by Ezra many years later. This chapter explains Ezra’s lineage, gives a brief mention of how the return came about, and describes the duration of the exiles’ journey. In addition, the decree of the Persian king Artaxerxes that authorized the return is recorded. The final two verses of the chapter relate Ezra’s comments on the king’s decree and his acknowledgement that “the hand of the LORD my God was upon me,” thus enabling him to accomplish this task.

Bible scholars agree that a period of at least fifty-eight years transpired between chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra. While Scripture contains no record of events in Judah during this time, the happenings recorded in the Book of Esther occurred between the Temple dedication in Jerusalem and the return of Ezra with his band.

Verses 1-6 of this chapter provide information regarding Ezra’s background. He was a distinguished scribe and also a priest, as he was a descendant both of Aaron and of Seraiah, the last High Priest before the captivity. Although Ezra was born and reared in exile, he was a competent scribe who was not merely skilled as a copyist—the normal function of a scribe—but was also thoroughly versed in the history and meaning of the Law of Moses. The favor granted to Ezra indicates that he had the esteem of the current king of Persia, Artaxerxes, and may have had a special position in the king’s court. However, it was because Ezra had God’s favor that he received all he requested from the Persian ruler.

Verses 7-10 give timing and details of the journey to Jerusalem that Ezra’s group of exiles made in “the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king” (verse 7). Since two Persian kings bore that name, historians differ regarding which king was ruling at the time of Ezra’s return. The distance between Babylon and Jerusalem is about five hundred miles geographically, but the route these travelers took would have been about nine hundred miles in length, going northwest along the Euphrates River and then south to Jerusalem.

Verses 11-26 are a record of the letter and decree in which Artaxerxes commissioned Ezra to make the journey to Jerusalem where he was “to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem” for the king and his seven counselors—he was to survey conditions in

Judah and Jerusalem based on “the law of thy God.” It is possible that Ezra had received word of irregularities or neglect of the Law among the Jews at Jerusalem and had requested authority from the king to go and investigate the matter.

In addition to granting authority for the journey, the decree authorized Ezra to deliver gifts of gold and silver from Artaxerxes to the exiles, as well as freewill offerings from the people and priests. The king stated that the gifts were to purchase animals for sacrifices at the rebuilt Temple, along with grain and drink offerings.

Verse 19 references vessels used in worship at the Temple. Since the original vessels taken by Nebuchadnezzar had been returned by the decree of Cyrus (see Ezra 6:5), these were likely new items that had been purchased or commissioned for the rebuilt Temple.

The phrase “why should there be wrath” in verse 23 implies that the king feared the wrath of the Jews’ God if he did not show favor to the Jewish exiles. It is possible that he thought that the troubles and rebellions that had recently taken place in his empire were tokens of divine anger directed against him, so he was seeking to avoid any further judgments of this kind.

Verses 27-28 are not part of the king’s decree but are Ezra’s reflections on how God had made the return to Judah possible. Ezra was fully aware that it was God “who hath put such a thing as this in the king’s heart.” Ezra recognized his own dependence upon God for the work he had been commissioned to do and was strengthened in his purpose by “the hand of the LORD my God.”

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- II. The reformation under Ezra
 - A. The return under Ezra
 - 1. The summary of Ezra’s ministry (7:1-10)
 - 2. The decree of Artaxerxes permitting the return (7:11-26)
 - 3. The thanksgiving of Ezra (7:27-28)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Who inspired the heart of King Artaxerxes to “beautify the house of the LORD” in Jerusalem? (verse 27)

2. Why do you think Ezra assembled and led the returning group of exiles?

3. What are some ways we can make God’s Word a priority in our lives?

CONCLUSION

Ezra led a team who restored true worship in Jerusalem after a lengthy exile. What might God do through you and other like-minded believers who prepare their hearts to seek to know God’s Law and to do it?

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And I said unto them, Ye are holy unto the LORD; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the LORD God of your fathers. Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD.” (Ezra 8:28-29)

The storage of precious metals is challenging, and transporting them from one location to another can be even more onerous. Security and accountability are key factors. In the United States, much of the country’s gold reserves are stored at the Fort Knox Bullion Depository in Kentucky. No coins or cash are produced there, but bulk gold valued by weight is kept under strictest security. The building is constructed of granite, concrete, and steel and has two electric fences and a concrete barrier around it. No visitors are allowed inside, and only a few people know the exact layout of the structure. The door to the vault weighs more than twenty tons, and no single person knows all the steps necessary to access it.

National coinage began in the United States in 1793, but a secure, permanent place for the nation’s bullion was not established until the depository at Fort Knox opened. Gold was first taken there in 1937 by the United States mail service via train. It was shipped to Fort Knox from two places—the Philadelphia Mint and the New York Assay Office. Historical photos show a police escort for the trucks as the gold was taken from the Assay Office to the train.

Today, movement of money and valuables between businesses and banks is called cash-in-transit. This is often handled by security companies whose employees go to great lengths to ensure that what they transport is delivered safely to the appointed location. Armored vehicles are generally used. One or two crew members are responsible for the valuables, and the driver never leaves the vehicle until it is back at its garage. We can be certain there is an accounting at the beginning and again at the end of each trip for every vehicle and crew.

Today’s text tells how twelve priests were selected and charged with carrying from Babylon the silver, gold, and vessels that had been donated for the Temple in Jerusalem. Accepting such a responsibility took faith because the danger was real. Throughout their journey, there would be a constant threat of robbers and bandits, especially because they were transporting valuables.

And these men knew they would be accountable for the delivery of the treasures once their group arrived. So, the whole company sought God for His protection, and because of their dependence on God (expressed through prayer and fasting), God protected them.

Likely none of us will be charged with the keeping of gold bullion. However, each of us will be accountable to God for how we have used the time and talents He has entrusted to us. Those gifts are a treasure as well! No doubt the men in our text took their responsibility seriously, and we also want to be diligent regarding the responsibilities God gives us.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 8 continues the account that began in chapter 7 of the return to Jerusalem that was led by Ezra. Information concerning the exiles who accompanied Ezra is provided, and preparations made prior to the journey, both spiritually and materially, are detailed. The final portion of the chapter describes what was done immediately following the travelers’ arrival back in their ancestral homeland.

The list of names given in verses 1-14 is not a complete list of Ezra’s companions, nor even of chief elders among them. Unlike the list of exiles who came with Zerubbabel in the first major return (see Ezra 2:2-61), this record begins with priests of the Aaronic line. It shows which ancient houses of Israel were represented in Ezra’s company and designates the male members of the group by the names of their notable ancestors. The total number of men who traveled with Ezra came to about 1500. Thirty-eight Levites and 220 Nethinims (Temple workers) joined their number just prior to the journey. In addition, wives and children probably were part of the group, so the total number of people in the caravan may have been as many as 5,000 to 6,000.

According to verse 15, the group of travelers assembled at “the river that runneth to Ahava.” This probably was a canal or small stream that flowed into the Euphrates not far from Babylon. During the three days the group camped there, Ezra discovered that no Levites had joined those making the journey. No reason is given in Scripture as to why, but it seems probable that the Levites simply were comfortable in Babylon and thought it would be better to remain there rather than to venture into uncertain conditions in Judah.

Verses 16-20 indicate that Ezra knew Levites would be needed for service in the Temple in Jerusalem, so he appointed a group of nine “chief men” and two “men of understanding” (probably teachers) to confer with Iddo, seemingly a leader of a community

of Nethinims who lived at Casiphia, somewhere near Ahava. There, these chief men were to ask Iddo to recruit the needed Levites. By the “good hand of our God upon us,” 258 Levites and Nethinims agreed to join the travelers.

While encamped at the river, Ezra proclaimed a fast and led the assembled group in prayer to God (verses 21-23). In ancient Jewish culture, feasting days typically celebrated victory, while fasting days indicated deep distress or failure of a military or moral nature. In this case, however, the fast was held because Ezra and his caravan wanted to begin their journey with an assurance of divine favor. Verse 22 reveals a practical motive for seeking God’s care and protection as they traveled. Since the journey had been authorized by King Artaxerxes, it would have been appropriate for Ezra to ask for a military presence to accompany them. However, Ezra had expressed to the king his confidence in the power of the God of Israel, and he did not want to imply by his actions that his words were not true. If he had requested an armed escort to protect the caravan, the implication would have been that their God was unable to care for those who follow Him. Verse 23 states that God listened to the petition of the people. The eventual success of the journey shows that God not only heard, but He granted their request.

Verses 24-30 describe the treasures offered to the returnees by the king, his lords, and the people of the land for the Temple in Jerusalem. A careful inventory was taken of all the gifts, and a select group of twelve priests was given responsibility for safe delivery of the treasures. Ezra knew it was important to be able to prove at Jerusalem that nothing had been lost or stolen along the way.

The group’s departure from Babylon and arrival at Jerusalem are recorded in verses 31-36. They left in the first month of the Jewish calendar, which would have been March or April on our calendar. Ezra 7:9 indicates that their arrival in Jerusalem occurred in the fifth month, so the nearly 900-mile journey took them four months. Upon arrival, they encamped in Jerusalem for three days before taking their gifts to the Temple. Then the returned exiles offered burnt offerings in the court of the Temple as an expression of thanksgiving to God.

The closing verse of the chapter states that the returnees delivered King Artaxerxes’ orders to the governors of the region. As a result, these officials had no choice but to aid the Jews in whatever way they could.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- II. The reformation under Ezra
 - A. The return under Ezra
 - 4. The list of those who returned (8:1-14)
 - 5. The preparations for the return (8:15-30)
 - a. The gathering at Ahava (8:15-20)
 - b. The fasting at Ahava (8:21-23)
 - c. The appointment of guardians (8:24-30)
 - 6. The arrival in Jerusalem (8:31-36)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Why did Ezra and his companions fast and pray before they began their trip? (verse 21)

2. What emotions do you suppose these travelers experienced when they arrived in Jerusalem?

3. What are some ways we can show responsibility regarding what God has given us?

CONCLUSION

An accounting day is coming, and we want to be found faithful in the handling of what has been entrusted to us.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this; should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? wouldst not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?” (Ezra 9:13-14)

It is a sad and frightening matter to turn away from God and reject the commandments He has given. A man in our Portland congregation testifies of how he went back on his commitment to the Lord, and yet, God reached out to him in mercy.

“As a child growing up, I had a loving and caring mother, but God did not have a proper place in our home. Meanwhile, my grandmother was faithful to take every opportunity to teach me about the Lord. She prayed for me and also gave me some Christian literature. When I was in my late teens, my job included working at night and often by myself. I would read what she had given me, and the Lord began to deal with my heart. One night, as I was reading that literature and considering what it said, I just looked up and with a very simple prayer asked the Lord to make me right with Him. God’s Spirit came down in a powerful way, and I knew I was forgiven of my sins.

“After that, I began attending church services. When I would pray at the altars afterward, many times the Lord met me. I went along for years like that. By then I had married the woman I loved, and we had three little boys. Yet as time went on, I slowly began to take my life back, just a little at a time, until I compromised to the point where I didn’t feel like I was doing the Lord any favors by calling myself a Christian. Then I made the decision to turn and go away from the good life the Lord had given me. I could have turned to the Lord at that time for help, and He would have straightened it all out, but instead, I went away for over ten years.

“I don’t think there was one day that passed that I didn’t think about the Lord and truly wish that I was saved. But the further I went, the more impossible getting back to God seemed to become. The sins built up and wove their way around me.

“Eventually, I began attending the Sunday morning services sometimes, and started reading the Bible

a little and secretly praying. God was dealing with me in His wonderful way. One day I came home from work, and some events transpired that the Lord used to bring me to a crossroads. God let me know that if I would turn to Him, He would help me. Still I waited. For a moment I thought, If I turn away now—I had gone so far—where will I be if He ever calls me again? I decided to go to church. At the end of the service, I poured my heart out to God. I said, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner,’ and told Him I was sorry for ever turning away. The Lord came down and put peace in my heart. God restored the relationship that I had broken when I walked away from Him. I didn’t deserve it, but I thank God for His mercy and His love.”

In today’s text, Ezra was distraught when he learned that some of the Jews had committed the very same sins that had brought judgment upon their forefathers. He was fearful that their disobedience would bring God’s wrath upon them also, and he prayed for mercy.

In these days also God is calling those who have turned away from Him. If you are praying for someone who is away from God, take heart! He is looking for anyone who will ask Him for mercy.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 9 marks a change of tone and theme in the Book of Ezra, as the narrative transitions from a historical record of the exiles’ return to a focus on the reforms undertaken by Ezra following his arrival in Judah. The Jewish historian Josephus places the events of chapter 9 about five months after the presentation of the Temple treasures and the sacrificial offerings recorded in chapter 8. In this chapter, Ezra received heartbreaking news regarding the spiritual condition of the post-exilic community. The beginning of the chapter describes his shock and anguish upon learning that the Jewish people had intermarried with the pagan population of the region against the commandment of the Lord. The remainder of the chapter records Ezra’s prayer and confession on behalf of his people.

In verses 1-2, some of the Jewish leaders at Jerusalem came to Ezra and reported an existing situation that was contrary to the Law of Moses, likely because they were aware of Ezra’s commitment to the Law and his desire to teach it to the people. God had strictly prohibited marriage between the people of Israel and foreigners (see Exodus 34:11-16 and Deuteronomy 7:1-4). Marrying people who did not

worship the true God was already leading to spiritual pollution through the infiltration of pagan practices into Jewish worship—the people were “doing according to their abominations” (verse 1).

To add to Ezra’s distress over this news, among the chief trespassers in this matter were some of the officials and leaders of Israel—men who should have set a good example but did not. In verses 3-4, Ezra recounted that he was so aghast at this affront to God and His holiness that he tore his garments and plucked out his hair and beard, expressions of extreme mourning. He could not comprehend how the people, and especially the Levites, could so gravely disobey and offend God, who had blessed them so abundantly. Verse 4 indicates that there were those in the community who did respect God and were also horrified at the sins of their people, and these people joined with Ezra in mourning.

Verses 5-15 describe Ezra’s prayer of contrition. At the evening sacrifice, Ezra arose from a time of deep heaviness and mourning, fell on his knees, and spread out his hands before God. Ashamed and humiliated by what the people had done, he acknowledged their sin and guilt. Even though he personally had not participated in the terrible affront to God, he felt a sense of shared identity and responsibility with the transgressors.

In his prayer, Ezra used several figures of speech to convey his feelings. “Confusion of face” in verse 7 means “utter disgrace.” Ezra reflected on the goodness of God in bringing His people back from exile and allowing them to live in the Promised Land again. In the statement that God had given them “a nail in his holy place” the word *nail* refers to a tent pin, and indicated that God had blessed them with a foothold or place of security in the land. In verse 9, “to give us a wall in Judah” is not a reference to literal walls, as the walls around Jerusalem were not built until Nehemiah’s time. Here, the expression is metaphorical; the picture of a fenced enclosure or fortified town was intended to portray the concept of protection.

In verses 13-14, Ezra stated that God had punished the people less than they deserved; if they had received the justice their sins earned, they would have been consumed by His anger. In the concluding verse of this chapter, Ezra did not offer an excuse or reason for the people’s wrongdoing. Israel had sinned and they were guilty, so his appeal was for God’s mercy.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- II. The reformation under Ezra
 - B. The reform under Ezra
 - 1. The unfaithfulness of the remnant (9:1-15)
 - a. The grief of Ezra (9:1-4)
 - b. The confession of Ezra (9:5-15)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What had the Jews done that caused Ezra such anguish? (verse 2)

2. What attitudes did Ezra show when he fell on his knees and spread his hands out to God?

3. How has God shown you mercy?

CONCLUSION

We can thank God for His mercy and trust that as He tarries, He is watching for those who will turn to Him and seek His pardon and grace.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing.” (Ezra 10:2)

The people of Judah had trespassed against God regarding His commands for marriage, and in today’s text, they acknowledged their sin. Despite the challenges their wrongdoing had created, they purposed to rectify the matter. And as a result, our focus verse declares there was “hope in Israel concerning this thing.”

A number of years ago, a woman in our congregation, faced a similar situation. Like the people of Judah, she was in a marriage that was not Biblical, and she felt convicted about that because she knew what God had commanded. She had been raised in a godly home, but in her teenage years, the worldly lifestyle looked glamorous and appealing, and she made up her mind that she wanted to wait a while before giving her life to the Lord. What an unwise decision that was! Those years filled with sinful choices brought consequences.

She testified, “War was going on in the Middle East, and I knew the Bible said one of the signs of the end times would be ‘wars and rumors of wars.’ There was tremendous fear in my heart that the Lord would come, and I wouldn’t be ready to meet Him. One part of me wanted to surrender to God right then, but by that time I was married in adultery. My first husband was still living, and I knew I couldn’t be in a wrong marriage and be ready for Heaven.”

She went on to relate that many times she told God that she did not know how she could get along without her husband. Each time the Lord would speak to her heart and assure her that He would take care of her if she would serve Him. One day, as she was driving alone in her car, the Lord spoke so clearly to her and let her know that He could come even while she was praying. She related, “I was so afraid! I knew it was God’s Voice and I felt like it was my last chance. While I was still driving, I determined to surrender my life to the Lord no matter what the consequences. Thoughts about what my husband might say or do paled in comparison to the thought of standing before God to give an account of my life.

“My husband was still at work when I knelt beside my bed and poured out my heart to God, confessing

my sins and asking His forgiveness. I told Him I didn’t care what happened to me if only He would save me. In a moment of time, He answered that prayer and forgave me. I *knew* I was saved! God’s peace filled my heart, and I felt such relief that the battle was won. Deep in my heart was such joy!

“I really didn’t know what to do next, but I knew that God had changed my life and given me an assurance that He would help me explain to my husband what had happened. I remember marking some places in my Bible that explain what adultery is, and the Lord was there as I shared those Scriptures with my husband and told him that God had saved me.”

In a wonderful and peaceful way, God worked out that situation and they ended their relationship without animus. And in the years since then, God has been with this woman. She has truly proved that “there is hope . . . concerning this thing” when one does what God commands. She testified, “God has been so good to me. As I grow older, I am reminded of God’s love when I think about how He has repaired my life and replaced sin’s damage with blessings and beauty. I can say with assurance that there is no problem too difficult for our awesome, loving Heavenly Father, and my desire is to continue to serve Him for the rest of my life.”

Our world today is still plagued by the effects of sin. However, as this woman found, there is a remedy! God is faithful to forgive. When people come before God in sincere repentance, humbly acknowledging their sins, they experience God’s transforming power. He will change them completely and give them hope!

BACKGROUND

After Ezra’s heartbroken prayer in chapter 9 on behalf of the exiles who had disobeyed God’s commands by intermarrying with the people of the land, this chapter describes the people’s repentant confession and their renewed covenant to obey God’s Law. An assembly was called in Jerusalem, the guilty individuals agreed to make a complete break with the sin that was destroying them, and the plan was carried out. The conclusion of the Book of Ezra is the list of those who were guilty in this matter but repented and separated themselves from their heathen wives and the children born to those wives.

Verse 1 reveals that the people were convicted and felt their need to confess and repent, perhaps as a result of observing Ezra’s anguish over the matter. They joined Ezra in weeping over the sin in their midst. A man named Shechaniah, the son of one of the

leaders, seemingly grasped that their evident brokenness was indicative of the work of God's Spirit among them. Thus, it was a reason for hope. In verses 2-4, he advised action: a renewal of Israel's covenant with God, necessitating that the guilty ones separate themselves from their pagan wives and the offspring born to them. This decisive step would prove their repentance was sincere.

In verses 5-8, Ezra called upon the people to swear an oath to "do according to this word." Then, in his deep mourning, he observed a complete fast, abstaining from both food and water. A proclamation was circulated throughout Judah instructing all the exiles to gather within three days at Jerusalem. The penalty for failure to do so was severe. According to verse 8, "all his substance should be forfeited," meaning that anyone who failed to come would lose the legal right to possess property in the land of Judah. In addition, that one would be "separated from the congregation"—he would not be allowed to worship in the Temple.

The people obeyed and assembled within three days (verse 9). This gathering took place in the ninth month of the Jewish calendar, during the season of heavy rains. As they gathered outside of the Temple, they had no shelter from the elements. Verses 10-12 relate Ezra's instructions, which repeated the counsel of Shechaniah: they were to confess to God their sin and separate from their foreign wives and the children born to them. The people agreed to do so.

Verses 13-17 relate that because the problem was so widespread in Judah, the people requested that a framework be established for the undertaking to be accomplished. At appointed times, those who were guilty in this matter would come to Jerusalem for hearings before the officials, accompanied by local elders and judges who likely would stand as witnesses. According to verse 15, only four named individuals were needed to administer this decision.

The plan was carried forward as decided, and the hearings took three months. The leaders then gave their report of the individuals who had followed through and separated from their foreign wives. That list of names is given in verses 18-44 and concludes both the chapter and the Book of Ezra.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- II. The reformation under Ezra
 - B. The reform under Ezra
 2. The repentance of the remnant (10:1-15)
 - a. The confession of the people (10:1-2)
 - b. The covenant of the people (10:3-8)
 - c. The separation from the foreign wives (10:9-15)

3. The register of those who married foreign women (10:16-44)
 - a. The research (10:16-17)
 - b. The list (10:18-44)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What was the people's attitude when faced with the fact that they had sinned?

2. What might be some evidences we would expect to see when a person is truly repentant?

3. What should people do if they have sin in their lives?

CONCLUSION

The first step to a solution is recognizing the problem. When people recognize there is sin in their lives, they are in a position to do something about it! Just as Israel repented and turned away from their sin, so must every person today. In true repentance, God's forgiveness and hope will be found.

NOTES



Overview for Nehemiah

Purpose: Nehemiah recorded the return of the third group of exiled Jews, their successful efforts to rebuild the city walls around Jerusalem, and the reforms enacted while he served as governor of Jerusalem.

Author: Though the book begins, “The words of Nehemiah,” the style and theme are consistent with the Book of Ezra. Most Bible scholars attribute authorship to the priest Ezra, suggesting he compiled and supplemented Nehemiah’s narrative. Ezra led the returned captives in Jerusalem to make a new commitment to God’s Law, and assisted Nehemiah in interpreting God’s Law for His people.

Key Figure: Nehemiah, whose name means “God comforts,” was the trusted cupbearer of the Persian King Artaxerxes and later, the appointed governor of Jerusalem. While he was evidently a member of an important Judahite family, he was not a member of the priesthood nor of the Davidic line. The text reveals him to be a devoutly religious man who was loyal to the traditions of his people and deeply interested in the situation at Jerusalem.

Time Period Covered: From 445 to approximately 432 B.C.

Date Written: Sometime after 432 B.C.

History: After King Cyrus of Persia granted permission for the Hebrew people to return to Judah following their seventy-year captivity in Babylon, Zerubbabel led the first return in 537 B.C. In 458 B.C., Ezra led the second return. In 445 B.C., Nehemiah learned of the deplorable condition of the walls and gates of Jerusalem and the troubling circumstances of the people. He mourned for many days, fasting and praying to God, and then asked King Artaxerxes for permission to go to Jerusalem to restore the city. His request was granted. He was appointed governor of the province and led the third group of exiles back to Judah to lead the reconstruction efforts. Upon arrival, Nehemiah surveyed the walls at night and then organized the labor force and began work.

Nehemiah and the builders of the wall faced ridicule, threats, and harassment, particularly from Sanballat (a Samaritan), Tobiah (an Ammonite official), and Geshem (an Arab). Despite their efforts to halt the reconstruction, Jerusalem’s wall was finished in fifty-two days.

Nehemiah’s activities did not cease with the completion and dedication of the wall. He remained as governor of Jerusalem for twelve years. After a brief visit to Babylon in 433 B.C., he returned again to Jerusalem. During his tenure as governor, Nehemiah instituted many social, political, and religious reforms. He led the people in a renewal of their covenant with God and their support for the Levites, and expelled the heathen wives who had intermarried with the people of Judah.

Setting: Around a thousand years after the time of Moses and some four hundred years prior to the birth of Jesus, the Jewish people were in a desperate state. Their nations had been destroyed: first, the Northern Kingdom of Israel and then the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The city of Jerusalem had been overthrown and the people deported to Babylon. After seventy years of captivity there, they had been given the opportunity to return to their homeland. In the days of Ezra, they had rebuilt the Temple and laid a spiritual foundation for Israel once again.

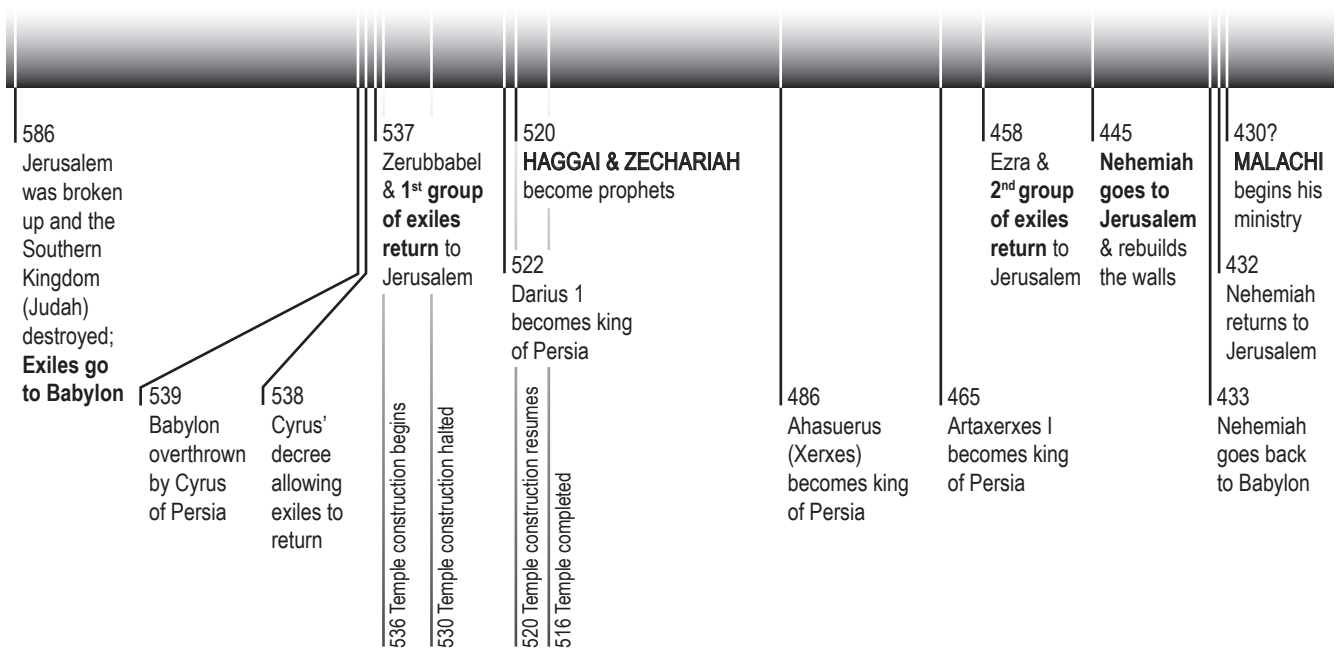
Nehemiah came to Jerusalem about thirteen years after Ezra. Although the exiles had been back in their homeland for nearly one hundred years when Nehemiah arrived, the walls of the city were still broken down and the gates burned. The people themselves were disorganized and defenseless. Prior to their exile to Babylon, Judah had a king, an army, and an identity, but all those were gone. The remnant in Jerusalem was in dire need of leadership, civic organization, and religious renewal.

Unique Features: Originally combined with the Book of Ezra, the Book of Nehemiah is the last of the Old Testament historical accounts and is written in a first-person narrative style like a diary or memoir.

Summary: The text can be divided into four main sections. Nehemiah’s initial actions and prayers when he heard the tragic news from Jerusalem are covered in chapters 1 through 2:11. His inspection and rebuilding of the wall is covered in Nehemiah 2:12 through chapter 6. The third section, chapters 7 through 10, describes the civic and religious reforms Nehemiah instituted. The final chapters of the book, 11 and 12, relate other actions he took to establish the people in Jerusalem, dedicate the rebuilt walls of the city, and make further religious reforms.

Timeline

Some dates are approximate, as reference materials differ.



Outline

*Hannah's Bible Outlines used by permission per WORDsearch.
A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.*

- I. The arrival in Jerusalem of Nehemiah (1:1 — 2:11)
 - A. The tragic news from Jerusalem (1:1-3)
 - B. The confession and prayer of Nehemiah (1:4-11)
 - C. The request and permission to go to Jerusalem (2:1-8)
 - D. The arrival in Jerusalem (2:9-11)
- II. The restoration of the wall by Nehemiah (2:12 — 7:73)
 - A. The inspection of the wall (2:12-20)
 - B. The rebuilding of the wall (3:1-32)
 - C. The opposition to the work (4:1 — 6:14)
 - D. The completion of the wall (6:15 — 7:73)
- III. The revival of the people under Nehemiah (8:1 — 10:39)
 - A. The public reading of the Law (8:1-18)
 - B. The public confession of the people (9:1-38)
 - C. The public renewal of the covenant (10:1-39)
- IV. The remaining actions of Nehemiah (11:1 — 13:31)
 - A. The establishment of the people in Jerusalem (11:1 — 12:26)
 - B. The dedication of the wall of Jerusalem (12:27-47)
 - C. The final reforms in Jerusalem (13:1-31)



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.” (Nehemiah 1:3-4)

Great things happen when people pray, and in 1949, the Smith sisters proved that. Peggy, the older of the two women, was eighty-four and blind. Christine, age eighty-two, was severely crippled with arthritis, so the two of them rarely left their cottage on Lewis and Harris, the largest island of the Outer Hebrides archipelago in Scotland. Although the sisters were unable to attend church services, they still could pray. And they did! Regularly they brought before the Lord the names of people in each cottage along their village streets. They were especially grieved that the young people in their area no longer attended church services. In time, they became convinced that only a supernatural revival could reverse the decline of spirituality they observed.

Peggy and Christine urged their pastor, Reverend James MacKay, to call the leaders of the church together for special prayer meetings. MacKay respected the sisters’ spiritual discernment, and the call to prayer was made. A group of church leaders began meeting three nights a week in a village barn to intercede for revival, and Peggy and Christine rose from their beds to pray fervently in their cottage during the same hours. An announcement was placed in two newspapers asking people to pray that the villages on the island would be “visited with a spirit of repentance.” And God began moving in hearts.

During one of those times of prayer, God showed Peggy and Christine that a Scottish preacher they had never met was to visit their town and that he would be used to bring about revival. When they conveyed this to their pastor, MacKay contacted Scottish evangelist Duncan Campbell and asked him to come and preach. Campbell was in the middle of an evangelistic campaign on the island of Skye, and conversions were taking place, so he declined the invitation. However, when MacKay told that to Peggy, she responded, “God has said something else, and he will be here within a fortnight.” A few days later, the convention on Skye was cancelled and within ten days, Campbell arrived on the island of Lewis and Harris.

In the first service after Campbell’s arrival, it seemed nothing extraordinary happened. Afterward, the church emptied and only the evangelist and one young deacon remained. That young man told Campbell: “God is hovering over us, and He will break through any moment.” The two went back to prayer, and less than an hour later, a man entered the church and said, “Mr. Campbell, something wonderful is happening! Will you come outside and see?” When Campbell went to the church door, he discovered the entire congregation gathered outside. Others had joined them as well, drawn from their homes to the church by an irresistible power they couldn’t explain.

The crowd streamed back into the church and everyone immediately went to prayer. A witness later recalled that the presence of God brought a wave of conviction of sin, resulting in groans of distress and prayers of repentance from the unconverted. Strong men crumpled to their knees under the weight of sin, and cries for mercy were mingled with shouts of joy from others. The revival that broke out that night on the Isle of Lewis and Harris spread quickly to neighboring districts and lasted for about two years.¹

The revival in the Hebrides did not come about because Duncan Campbell was there, but because people prayed. In today’s text, Nehemiah was deeply grieved about the condition of Jerusalem, but he did not merely mourn about it. He prayed! In subsequent chapters, we will see how God worked in response to those prayers.

Do you have burdens on your heart today? Go to God about those needs, and do not cease to bring them before Him. Nehemiah as well as Peggy and Christine Smith proved that He will never fail to respond to the fervent prayers of His people, and so can you. God still answers prayer!

BACKGROUND

The Book of Nehemiah opens with a record of when and how Nehemiah, cupbearer to the Persian King Artaxerxes, received news about the desolate condition of Jerusalem and the unrepaired state of the city’s walls and gates. It continues with a description of his reaction to the news and his heartfelt prayers for the people of Israel.

While Nehemiah was not of priestly lineage nor a descendant of David, he was from a prominent Judahite family in Babylon. His role as the king’s cupbearer was a prestigious one. Historians of Persian culture note that in addition to ensuring the safety and quality of the king’s food and drink, the cupbearer’s duties would

have been similar to those of a prime minister and master of ceremonies. The person holding such a position would have been a trusted royal favorite, and likely very wealthy.

The heading in chapter 1—the first sentence of the book—indicates that the following report was from Nehemiah’s own contemporaneous records. In that same verse, Nehemiah identified his location as Shushan, which was the capital city of the Persians.

Hanani, mentioned in verse 2 as one of the men who brought news of Jerusalem’s condition to Nehemiah, may have been Nehemiah’s brother (see also Nehemiah 7:2).

The description of Jerusalem’s walls and gates in verse 3 includes the words “broken down” and “burned with fire.” City walls in that era had both a physical and psychological function: they were essential for protection from enemy raids or attacks and were also symbolic of strength and peace. The destruction of a city’s wall meant both vulnerability and shame for the residents. Those residing in an unwalled city lived with constant stress and tension because they never knew when they might be attacked.

The news about conditions in Jerusalem affected Nehemiah deeply. His response is recorded in verse 4: he sat down and wept, mourned certain days, fasted, and prayed. His actions indicate that he was a godly man who had an ever-deepening sense of responsibility toward his suffering countrymen, though they were eight hundred miles away from him and likely were people he had never met.

Nehemiah’s prayer, recorded in verses 5-11, began with words of praise of God’s nature. In the phrase “great and terrible God” in verse 5, the word “terrible” has the sense of awe-inspiring rather than dreadful. Nehemiah went on to confess the sins of his people without any attempt to excuse them, and included himself in the acknowledgement of culpability. In verses 8-9 he reminded God of His promise of restoration if the people would repent. Verse 11 makes it apparent that Nehemiah prayed with a heart that was ready to take personal action, asking God to give him favor with the king of Persia concerning the matter.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
Used by permission per WORDsearch

- I. The arrival in Jerusalem of Nehemiah
 - A. The tragic news from Jerusalem (1:1-3)
 - B. The confession and prayer of Nehemiah (1:4-11)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. How did Hanani and the men of Judah describe the condition of Jerusalem to Nehemiah?

2. Why do you think Nehemiah responded as he did to the news?

3. What aspects of Nehemiah’s prayer provide a pattern for us to follow as we bring our petitions before God?

CONCLUSION

Situations that seem impossible can be turned around when God’s people bring their needs before Him!

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, and said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?” (Nehemiah 2:2-3)

Like Nehemiah in today’s focus verses, most of us will at some point experience situations in life that bring sorrow or fear. However, we must not allow those emotions to overwhelm us or cause us to stop doing what God has called us to do. Nehemiah had been praying about the troubling news that had come from Jerusalem, and God helped him to courageously present his request to King Artaxerxes despite his apprehension about doing so.

Paul Gerhardt, considered by many to be one of Germany’s greatest hymn writers, was another individual who found courage and strength in God during times of sadness and fear. In fact, historians suggest that many of Gerhardt’s songs sprang from painful experiences—these gave power, depth, and beauty to his hymns. One of those historians noted, “Living and serving God in troublous times, he drank deeply of the cup of bitterness. The light of his holy life shone all the brighter by reason of the surrounding darkness.”¹

Born in 1607, Gerhardt lost both of his parents before he turned fourteen. Nearly two thirds of his life was lived during the Thirty Years War that devastated Central Europe from 1618 to 1648, and as a result, he endured many personal and family hardships. Once, an army swept through his hometown, burning down four hundred buildings, including his family home and church. A plague followed the raid, killing three hundred of his townspeople, including his brother.

His life as a young adult continued to be full of turmoil. He trained to be a pastor at the University of Wittenberg where Martin Luther had taught a century before but was unable to find a fulltime position in the ministry. He finally took employment as a private tutor to a family in Wittenberg, and during that period, wrote hymns in his leisure time.

One of those hymns suggests a great spiritual lesson that Gerhardt had learned through the sad circumstances of his life. It begins with the beautiful words, “Give to the winds thy fears; hope, and be undismayed; God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears; God

shall lift up thy head. Through waves and clouds and storms He gently clears the way. Wait thou His time, so shall the night soon end in joyous day.”

When he was forty-four years old, Gerhardt became a pastor in the country parish of Mittenwalde, near Berlin. In 1655, he married Anna Maria Barthold, from the family he had tutored. However, hardships continued. The couple had seven children, but death invaded their household time after time—five of their children died in infancy.

In the summer of 1657, Gerhardt was called to pastor a church in Berlin. He preached persuasively and lovingly and was considered a model pastor. However, after only seven years, all clergymen were ordered to sign their support of a document that contradicted some Biblical doctrines, including the nature of the Lord’s Supper. When Gerhardt refused to do so, knowing that would compromise his conscience, he was removed from his position in the church and forbidden to minister privately to his congregation. Gerhardt and his family had to leave their home, and for about a year he lived in Berlin without a fixed position of service. Then his wife passed away, leaving him with just one surviving child, a six-year-old son.

In 1668, Gerhardt was offered a “church, people, home, and livelihood” in Lubben, Saxony, where he had liberty to preach the Gospel as his heart prompted him. Gerhardt accepted the offer and ministered in that location until his death in 1676.

Paul Gerhardt proved that God can enable His followers to have courage and hold fast to their faith in spite of challenging circumstances. In the years since he passed from this life, his hymns have lived on, bringing comfort and hope to rich and poor, and to young and old.

In today’s text, God gave Nehemiah courage in a time when his spirit was deeply troubled over conditions in Jerusalem. And in the years since Nehemiah’s day, the Biblical account of this man’s courage and his faithfulness in accomplishing the task God gave him have inspired countless believers.

Often God uses troubles to show us that He is our Source of strength and provision. When we understand this truth, as Nehemiah and Paul Gerhardt did, we find new hope. Today, are you facing sad circumstances or great challenges? If you will do as Gerhardt suggested in his great hymn of the faith, and “Wait thou His time” while looking to Him for help, you too will find that “so shall the night soon end in joyous day.” God will never fail the one who puts trust in Him!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 2 describes Nehemiah’s request to King Artaxerxes of Persia, the king’s authorization of his plan, and a short account of the journey to Jerusalem. Nehemiah’s nighttime inspection of the wall is recorded, and then his summoning of workers for the rebuilding project. The chapter concludes with a description of the opposition the workers encountered at the outset.

Verses 1-4 record the exchange between Nehemiah and the king. The date given in the first verse reveals that four months passed before the king asked about Nehemiah’s evident “sorrow of heart” (verse 2). The reason for this four-month delay is not explained, but some Bible historians suggest that a rotation of cupbearers served the king on a quarterly basis, so Nehemiah’s sadness would not have been noticed until it became his turn to serve.

All people in the king’s presence were required to be joyful—a fact that could explain Nehemiah’s fear when his downcast face caused the king to inquire about the reason for his sorrow. When the king asked what Nehemiah desired, Nehemiah looked to God and uttered a brief prayer. Then he asked the king for permission to travel to Jerusalem to build up the city where his ancestors were buried. The reference to an ancestral burial ground likely impacted the king, because in that era, graves were accorded great respect.

In verses 5-8, Nehemiah explained how long he would be gone, the authorization (letters) needed, the supplies required, and what work needed to be done, and the king agreed to support Nehemiah in his venture. The journey itself is briefly described in verses 9-11. The travelers immediately met opposition from three local governors: Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem (see verses 10 and 19). No reason is given for their animosity.

Verses 12-16 describe Nehemiah’s unannounced inspection of the wall after his arrival in Jerusalem. He carefully and quietly made his way around the broken-down walls and the burned gates at night, perhaps to avoid discussion about his arrival and to prevent the enemies’ awareness of his intentions. The word *viewed* in verses 13 and 15 can also be used as a medical term indicating the probing of a wound to see the extent of its damage.

The final verses of the chapter, 17-20, record Nehemiah’s assembling of the civic and religious leaders and his call for the people to begin rebuilding. His appeal was “laughed...to scorn” and “despised” by the same three opponents, who insinuated that Nehemiah was planning rebellion against the king of Persia. However, Nehemiah was not swayed by their tactics. He confidently responded that the God of Heaven

would help the builders, and those who opposed the project would have no rights nor credit for the great work God would help them accomplish.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
Used by permission per WORDsearch

- I. The arrival in Jerusalem of Nehemiah
 - C. The request and permission to go to Jerusalem (2:1-8)
 - D. The arrival in Jerusalem (2:9-11)
- II. The restoration of the wall by Nehemiah
 - A. The inspection of the wall (2:12-20)
 - 1. Nehemiah’s preliminary inspections (2:12-16)
 - 2. Nehemiah’s initial challenge (2:17-18)
 - 3. Sanballat and Tobiah’s hostility (2:19-20)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 6, what questions did the king ask Nehemiah regarding his proposed travel to Jerusalem?

2. Why do you think Sanballat and Tobiah were so upset when they heard that “there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel” (verse 10)?

3. What can we learn from the steps that Nehemiah took before presenting his plan for rebuilding to the people of Jerusalem?

CONCLUSION

If we have cultivated a strong relationship with God, we can take our sorrows and burdens to Him in prayer and be confident that He will work on our behalf in His own time and way.

1. Chris Frenner, ed., “Paul Gerhardt,” *Hymnology Archive*, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, accessed February 12, 2024, www.hymnologyarchive.com/paul-gerhardt



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And next unto them repaired Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz. And next unto them repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabeel. And next unto them repaired Zadok the son of Baana.” (Nehemiah 3:4)

Meremoth, Meshullam, and Zadok are probably nothing more than names to most of us. However, they had a role that is noted in Biblical history: they are among the thirty-eight individuals listed in this chapter who helped rebuild sections of the walls around Jerusalem. This long record of names teaches us an important lesson—that everyone can have a part in “building the wall.” Nehemiah had great faith in God, but the task of repairing the broken-down walls of Jerusalem would have been insurmountable if not for those who helped him. One of the powerful messages of the Book of Nehemiah is how much can be achieved when individuals are willing to submit themselves to the will of God. Nehemiah and his followers accomplished what seemed to be impossible because they were doing what God called them to do.

Another lengthy list of names can be found at the back of the Apostolic Faith history book. Perhaps the names Paul Patkotak, Peter van der Puije, or Theophilus Scott are not familiar to you either, but they built for God as well—nearly 2500 years after Meremoth, Meshullam, and Zadok cleared rubble, spread mortar, and carried stones near the walls of Jerusalem.

Paul Patkotak was a young, spiritually hungry Eskimo man who traveled in 1913 from northern Alaska to the city of Seattle, Washington. He wanted to find a church to attend, and a man on a street corner pointed him to the Apostolic Faith. As he sat in that first service, God moved in his heart. He testified, “I wanted the preacher to stop preaching so I could pray and call on God to have mercy and take the sin out of my heart!” At the close of the service, he went forward to the altar and was wonderfully saved. Through the decades that followed until the end of his life, Brother Paul zealously shared the Gospel with his family and acquaintances in northern Alaska. He was “building the wall”—doing his part to advance the Kingdom of God.

Across the world in Gold Coast (now Ghana), Peter van der Puije received Gospel tracts from this church in the 1940s. He sought and received his spiritual experiences and began establishing small churches in his area. In 1948, he attended our camp meeting in Portland, Oregon, and presented the needs of the

African people—trusting and believing that God would send someone to help believers in his country. His plea inspired George Hughes, a minister at the Portland headquarters, to consecrate to go to Africa. Just a few months later, Brother George left for Ghana, and the work on that continent began to expand. Peter van der Puije and George Hughes were builders on the wall!

In 1928, Theophilus Scott and his wife constructed a little thatch-roofed church with walls of sticks and mud on the island of St. Vincent in the Caribbean. People came from around the neighborhood and began responding to the Gospel message. The Scotts’ efforts met with opposition, but when they showed Gospel literature from the Apostolic Faith to prove their affiliation with this organization, they were granted permission to continue public ministry. Today, we have twelve churches on that island, in part because Theophilus Scott and his wife were willing to be builders on the wall.

God is still looking for builders. The work is not yet done! We cannot personally build everywhere we see a broken portion of the wall, but sometimes our awareness of a need is God calling us to action. What walls do you see that need attention? Are you available and willing? Wherever God calls you to serve, do so with all your might. Add your efforts to those of Meremoth, Meshullam, Zadok, Paul Patkotak, Peter van der Puije, George Hughes, the Scotts, and many, many more. Do your part in wall building for the Kingdom of God!

BACKGROUND

Nehemiah carefully organized a plan of action for rebuilding the wall circumferencing Jerusalem, and chapter 3 provides a detailed list of those who participated and the locations where they worked on the wall. Based on maps showing the probable location of the wall and gates in Nehemiah’s day, it appears that verses 1-5 detail the north wall assignments; verses 6-12 the west wall; verses 13-14 the south wall; and verses 15-32 the east wall. Because many roads converged on Jerusalem, the city wall had many gates, and each area of reconstruction was designated by referring to the named gates in that portion. Gates were the entry and exit points of the city, and the places where enemy attacks would most likely occur, so work began at each gate and went out from there.

The walls on each side of the gates were taller and thicker than the rest of the wall. This allowed soldiers to stand on each side of these critical entry/exit points as guards. The gates—massive wooden doors that were often reinforced with brass or iron—were more than

passageways. During times of peace, gateways served as places for personal business and civic affairs. The city council met there and shopkeepers set up their goods near them. Thus, rebuilding the wall and gates of the city was both a military and commercial necessity. Ten gates are mentioned in this chapter. Today, there are eight gates in the walls surrounding the Old City of Jerusalem; most of them date from about A.D. 1537 when Suleiman the Magnificent rebuilt the walls.

Eliashib the High Priest and “his brethren the priests” are the first workers named in the list of builders given in chapter 3. These religious leaders led by example, not seeking exemption from the physical labor required to rebuild the wall. Their assignment was the area around the Sheep Gate. This was the gate where animals were brought into the city for sacrifice at the Temple, so it was significant that they were assigned this portion.

The Fish Gate (verse 3) was the place of entry for fish being transported into the city from the seacoast. Merchants from Tyre, the Sea of Galilee, and other seaports used this gate.

Seemingly, nearly all of the people of Jerusalem engaged in the rebuilding project. The “nobles” (wealthy leaders) of the Tekoites (verse 5) were the only named inhabitants of Jerusalem who did not participate.

Rephaiah the son of Hur is referred to in verse 9 as “the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem,” indicating that the city was divided into two administrative districts. According to verse 12, Shallum was in charge of the other half. Verse 12 also refers to Shallum’s daughters, so even women took part in the rebuilding project.

Verse 28 records that some of the laborers were assigned locations near their own houses. This was practical for several reasons. The workers would be motivated to build quickly and carefully. Working near their own homes would ensure that no time was wasted on traveling to a distant portion of the wall. In addition, the builders would be able to quickly defend their own homes and families in the event of an attack.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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II. The restoration of the wall by Nehemiah

B. The rebuilding of the wall (3:1-32)

The repairs about the:

1. Sheep Gate (3:1-2)
2. Fish Gate (3:3-5)
3. Old City Gate (3:6-12)
4. Valley Gate (3:13)
5. Refuse Gate (3:14)
6. Fountain Gate (3:15-25)
7. Water Gate (3:26-27)
8. Horse Gate (3:28)
9. East Gate (3:29-30)
10. Miphkad Gate (3:31-32)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Who was the first person named who pitched in and helped with the work of rebuilding?

2. Verse 5 states that the nobles of the Tekoites “put not their necks to the work of the LORD.” Why do you think this fact is mentioned?

3. God has a place on the Gospel wall for each of us to work. How should we go about finding our place on the wall?

CONCLUSION

As in Nehemiah’s day, work on the Gospel “wall” of our day must be a team effort. Are you zealously and faithfully doing your part?





DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared.” (Nehemiah 4:21)

Today’s text recounts some of the resistance that Nehemiah and his fellow workers faced. The opposition of their neighboring enemies was strong.

On July 4, 1993, during the camp meeting in Portland, Oregon, veteran pastor Dick Taylor used today’s focus verse as the text of his sermon. He read the verse, “So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared.” Then he said, “They got up on that wall they were building, and when the sun started to lighten the sky in the morning, the enemy could look up there and see the silhouette of those warriors standing with their spears in their hands.

“And the warriors were there all day. The Bible says they held the spears ‘from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared.’ It sounds as if they didn’t lay their weapons down. Rather, they held them up, sending the message, ‘Take a look! We’re ready to fight the battle. If you want to test us, just come on up here!’ The next day, the warriors were still there. And the day after that. And the day after that.”

Brother Dick repeated for emphasis, “Every morning, the enemy could see the silhouette of those men in their places, standing for what they knew was right. Through the heat of the day and then as the sky started to darken in the evening, they could look up and see the men with their spears. They were still standing in their places. Those warriors paid the price of protecting the city.”

Brother Dick went on to exhort his listeners, “There is a price for every one of us to pay. Somebody else doesn’t fight all the battles. Somebody else doesn’t pray all the prayers. We *all* need to get there and get the job done!

“Yes, there’s a price to pay. There are consecrations to make. The old Gospel chariot is going to move along, but it’s going to move along because you pushed and pulled, because you helped it get out of the mudholes along the way. It takes those who will be faithful, those who are determined not to let anything discourage them.”

That admonition is still good for us today. As Brother Dick challenged his listeners, we can learn from the example of Nehemiah and the Jewish workers on the wall. We can purpose to be faithful in our

service to God, whatever our roles might be, so that others can see the light of Jesus shining through us. May God help us to rise to the challenge as the people of Nehemiah’s time did!

BACKGROUND

In chapter 4 Nehemiah described the opposition directed against the rebuilders of Jerusalem’s wall. Hostility toward the workers and their efforts was exhibited in three ways: through ridicule, anger, and attempts to discourage them.

The opposition by the Jews’ enemies is recorded in verses 1-6. Sanballat, mentioned in verse 1 and in preceding chapters, was a leading opponent. His designation as “the Horonite” indicates that his town of origin was probably Beth Horon, located about twelve miles from Jerusalem. An ancient document from that period refers to Sanballat as “governor of Samaria.” When he learned that work on the wall had begun, he was furious, and sarcastically mocked the Jews in an attempt to intimidate them. Verse 2 indicates that he even brought the army of Samaria to join him in a barrage of criticism and ridicule. While reasons for Sanballat’s opposition are not given, some Bible scholars suggest that Samaria’s economic supremacy in the region would be threatened by a restored Jerusalem. Others propose that Sanballat may have wanted to become governor of Judea as well as Samaria, and Nehemiah’s appointment to that role destroyed his hope.

Verse 3 records that an Ammonite officer named Tobiah joined Sanballat in the ridiculing, criticizing the quality of the work the Jews were doing. Nehemiah knew that taunts could demoralize the workers, so he prayed that God would reverse the situation and allow Judah’s enemies to be taunted instead of them (verses 4-5). And the work on the wall continued despite opposition. The statement in verse 6 that the wall was joined “unto the half thereof” meant that the people had completed half the height of the finished wall. The verse also gives the reason for this progress: the fact that “the people had a mind to work.”

Verses 7-9 record that when the wall was almost continuously joined around the city, Sanballat and Tobiah joined with allies from neighboring countries and planned a coordinated effort against the Jews. Since the project had the official support of Artaxerxes, it is likely their intent was merely to display military force near the wall of the city without physically attacking it. Nehemiah prudently prepared for further opposition. Again, he prayed about the matter, and

then set an additional watch that stayed on duty day and night.

Verses 10-14 record that the workers who were simultaneously working, praying, and watching became discouraged. Inhabitants of the land “which dwelt by them”—evidently people from communities on the outskirts of Jerusalem—suggested that the builders return home. In response, Nehemiah placed guards on the “lower places behind the wall” (locations where the wall was not rebuilt to its final height) and armed fighting forces on the higher places where they could advantageously resist the enemies. He also addressed the people of Jerusalem, encouraging them to put their trust in the Lord, and reminding them that they were fighting for their own families and homes. When the Jews’ opponents realized that Nehemiah was aware of their plans and that “God had brought their counsel [plans] to nought” they gave up their attempts (verse 15).

Verses 16-23 describe Nehemiah’s plan to provide an ongoing defense of the city while the rebuilding continued. The workers kept swords at their sides as they labored with trowels in their hands to get the work done. They employed a system of communication utilizing trumpets that could sound an alarm at a moment’s notice. The builders dedicated themselves zealously to their sections of the wall, working hard from sunrise to past dark, even spending the night on the wall to protect the city against attack.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- II. The restoration of the wall by Nehemiah
 - C. The opposition to the work
 - 1. The opposition through ridicule (4:1-6)
 - a. The ridicule by Sanballat and Tobiah (4:1-3)
 - b. The prayer of Nehemiah (4:4-6)
 - 2. The opposition through anger (4:7-9)
 - a. The hatred of Sanballat and Tobiah (4:7-8)
 - b. The prayer and watch of Nehemiah (4:9)
 - 3. The opposition through discouragement (4:10-23)
 - a. The spirit of defeatism (4:10-12)
 - b. The remedy for defeatism (4:13-23)
 - (1) The encouragement to faith (4:13-14)
 - (2) The work of the people (4:15-23)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 9, what did the Jews do when their enemies came against them?

2. What does “a mind to work” in verse 6 imply?

3. In verse 14, Nehemiah challenged the people to “remember the LORD.” How will remembering what God has done be an encouragement to us?

CONCLUSION

God is looking for those who will faithfully labor in their places and stay watchful against the assaults of the enemy.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them. Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise.” (Nehemiah 5:11-12)

Throughout Scripture, we see that God requires wrongs committed against others must be made right. Eugene Marshall, a convert in the early days of the Apostolic Faith work, testified about how God impressed upon him the necessity of confessing an unrighteous action and repaying what he had wrongfully taken.

A tobacco farmer in the State of Virginia, Eugene had been an alcoholic and a gambler when God saved his soul. His life was changed, but after a time, God showed him that something stood in the way of his spiritual progress: a five-dollar gold piece. He testified, “Some years after God saved me, a minister came to Virginia preaching restitution. After the sermon, he asked me about my lack of spiritual progress. He said, ‘When you get down to pray, what are you looking at?’ I said, ‘A five-dollar gold piece—and it gets bigger all the time.’ He asked for the story behind the gold piece, and I told him it happened when I drove my employer to church one morning. As she stepped out of the carriage, a five-dollar gold piece dropped from her purse and hit the sand. She didn’t see it, so I just put my number ten [shoe] on it to hide it. After hearing this, the minister told me I would have to make restitution for it.

“Later that evening, I climbed into my buggy with my wife and child and started for home. As the old mule’s hooves hit the road, they seemed to say, ‘Make res-ti-tu-tion! Make res-ti-tu-tion!’ For five miles that mule preached restitution to me. When we reached home, I was glad to put the mule in the stable and go to bed. However, my conscience kept bothering me. As I tossed and turned, the bedsprings seemed to be saying, ‘Res-ti-tu-tion! Res-ti-tu-tion!’ Finally, I told the Lord if He would let me live until morning, I would make the restitution, and then I was able to turn over and go to sleep.

“The next morning, I told my wife, ‘Don’t cook any breakfast for me. I’m going.’ I got behind the

mule and traveled five miles. I rapped at the woman’s door, and when she answered, I told her, ‘Here is a five-dollar bill. I want to make restitution.’ She listened to my story and gave me her blessing. I thought that was the end of making restitutions, but God resurrected my memory of other past actions. It cost me two hundred dollars before all my restitutions were made. Now I am paid up; God has given me the victory!”

The primary definition of the word *restitution* is “the act of restoring to its rightful owner anything wrongfully obtained; the act of giving an equivalent for loss or damage.” Simply put, restitution is making right the wrongs committed against businesses and institutions, violations of the laws of the land, and any act that hurt another person.

In our text today, Nehemiah was outraged when he heard that the nobles and rulers of Jerusalem had charged some of the poor people of Judah exorbitant interest rates after a famine had left many families destitute. In some cases, the usury rate was so high that land was forfeited, and children were even sold into slavery to pay off the debts of their parents. This was expressly contrary to the law of God, which forbade charging interest of fellow Jews (see Deuteronomy 23:19-20). When Nehemiah confronted these rulers, our focus verses indicate that they acknowledged their guilt and agreed to rectify the situation and restore what they had taken.

Throughout history, God has always required His followers to treat one another fairly and to maintain a conscience void of offense toward God and man. Those who follow God’s commands by righting wrongs will enjoy a clear conscience and the peace of mind that comes with obedience!

BACKGROUND

Chapter 5 records that in addition to withstanding external opposition to the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem, Nehemiah had to deal with internal contentions among the people. The complaints of the poorer residents of the city are noted, and also Nehemiah’s response.

Verses 1-5 describe the challenge the poorer members of the community were facing: a food shortage or “dearth” that was likely caused by crop failure or famine. To obtain “corn”—food that the people needed to survive—and to pay the required “king’s tribute” (taxes), some had mortgaged their homes and property. At times, children were even being enslaved to pay off debts, and there was no money to redeem them.

Nehemiah responded by calling an assembly, described in verses 6-13. Wealthier Jews seemingly were taking advantage of the poorer members of the community in their time of distress; verse 7 indicates that some were charging “usury” (interest), which was a violation of God’s law (see Deuteronomy 23:20). Nehemiah rebuked the nobles and rulers for their unlawful and unkind actions toward their brethren. He reminded them that when Judah was conquered, Jews were sold as slaves to foreigners and many of them had been bought out of slavery by other Jews (verse 8). Also, the poorer Jews said their children had been sold into slavery to other Jews because they couldn’t pay their debts. The Jewish nobles responded by pledging to do as Nehemiah instructed and cease from such practices.

Nehemiah’s statement “I shook my lap” in verse 13 refers to a symbolic action that indicated disdain. Nehemiah’s action was a warning that those who did not abide by their commitment to do right in this matter would be shaken out and “emptied” of all they had.

The remainder of the chapter, verses 14-19, reveals Nehemiah’s godly example before the people. He did not avail himself of the wages and provisions that were his right as the governor. In addition, he gave what he received from the king—food that he could have sold for his own profit—and fed as many as 150 people regularly.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- II. The restoration of the wall by Nehemiah
 - C. The opposition to the work
 - 4. The opposition through internal strife (5:1-19)
 - a. The complaint of the people (5:1-5)
 - b. The condemnation of the nobles (5:6-13)
 - c. The conduct of Nehemiah (5:14-19)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 3, why had some of the people mortgaged their lands?

2. Verse 7 indicates that Nehemiah did not immediately confront the guilty rulers, but consulted with himself that he might act with discretion. Why is it advisable to take time for contemplation before confronting someone regarding a fault?

3. In what ways might making restitution have a positive impact on those who know about the matter?

CONCLUSION

God’s blessing will rest upon those who rectify wrongdoings in their past and restore anything they have obtained in an unrighteous manner.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee. And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.” (Nehemiah 6:10-11)

John Wesley, a noted theologian and evangelist, was a central person in the eighteenth-century revival in Great Britain, and a missionary to Native Americans in the United States. However, he was also a controversial figure in the religious world of his day.

For example, his work among factory workers and the poor was unconventional and brought opposition. While his focus on practical holiness led to a variety of social reforms, the “elite” were alarmed by the emotional response of the “underclass” to Wesley’s preaching. In addition, Wesley ignored many regulations of the Church of England and allowed lay ministers to preach and do pastoral work. As a result, even clergy joined in the attacks on Wesley and his followers, criticizing him in sermons and in print. Churches banned him from speaking from their pulpits, forcing him to preach in obscure venues and even outdoors.

At times, the antagonism escalated into physical attacks. Meetings were frequently disrupted by mobs—more than once they drove oxen into groups assembled in a field to hear Wesley preach.irate opponents chased Wesley and his companions with clubs and cleavers. He was pelted with rotten tomatoes and manure, smeared with dirt, grabbed by the hair, and chased into houses that the mob threatened to burn or tear down. He was beaten with fists and pummeled with rocks, but civil authorities rarely made any attempt to stop the violence.

Wesley was fearless in withstanding this opposition. He believed he was commissioned by God, and no persecution or obstacles could sway him from the divine urgency and authority of this commission. Still, he recognized the strength of the forces against him. He wrote to his friend, William Wilberforce, “Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing!”¹

Nehemiah, who lived many centuries before John Wesley, was another man who refused to give up in the face of continued opposition. In today’s text, Nehemiah’s chief antagonists, Sanballat and Tobiah, resorted to desperate measures after their previous efforts to stop the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s wall had failed. Their new approach was to attack Nehemiah personally through rumors, duplicity, and false reports. They tried to turn the people against Nehemiah, and threatened to tell the king of Persia that Nehemiah was instigating a revolt. They even hired a man named Shemaiah—possibly one of the priests—to try to persuade Nehemiah to hide out in the Temple to escape a supposed plot against his life. In each case, Nehemiah refused to give in to fear or intimidation. He kept at his task, steadfastly rejecting all attempts to divert him from the work.

Nehemiah’s opponents were convinced the job couldn’t be done. They asserted that the task of rebuilding the wall was far too big for “these feeble Jews” and the problems were too great (see Nehemiah 4:1-3). However, the people of Jerusalem proved them wrong; verse 15 of today’s text records that “the wall was finished . . . in fifty and two days.”

The lesson for us? We must not allow the difficulty of the challenge or the hostility of the opposition to keep us from applying ourselves to our God-appointed tasks. Like Nehemiah, let’s pray, “O God, strengthen my hands” (verse 9), knowing that with God’s help, we can accomplish whatever He has called us to do!

BACKGROUND

In chapter 6, Nehemiah continued his description of the ongoing opposition to the repairing of the wall around Jerusalem, and despite both external and internal efforts to hinder the process, the wall was completed. This was a blow to Judah’s enemies. However, treacherous forces were still at work, this time some Jews and nobles who were allied with Tobiah (mentioned in verse 1 and in earlier chapters as one of the chief antagonists of the builders).

Verse 1 of today’s text states that the wall around Jerusalem was almost complete, though the doors of the gates had not yet been put in place. Historians note that this final step would have included covering the wood with metal to prevent the doors from being burned by invaders.

Having failed in their previous attempts to halt the project, verses 2-4 describe another plot by Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian. These men tried to persuade Nehemiah to join them for a personal

conference in “the plain of Ono,” a location about twenty miles from Jerusalem. Their exact purpose is not explained, but Nehemiah was aware that their intent was “to do me mischief.” Bible scholars suggest this may have been a plot to assassinate Nehemiah. Whether or not he suspected this, four times he rejected their proposals.

Verses 5-9 record Sanballat’s threat to report to the king of Persia a slanderous rumor that Nehemiah intended to rebel and set himself up as king of Judah. However, Nehemiah was not intimidated by this ploy, and once again appealed to God for strength.

In the next plot against Nehemiah, described in verses 10-14, Sanballat hired a man named Shemaiah (possibly a prophet or priest) to convince Nehemiah that his life was in danger and persuade him to take refuge in the Temple. Once again, Nehemiah refused to be lured into the trap. Verse 13 indicates he knew the Law prohibited him from entering a place reserved for those of the priesthood.

The chapter concludes in verses 15-19 with a description of the completion of the wall. The rebuilding process had taken just fifty-two days—a very short time for a task of such magnitude. The heathen nations around Jerusalem were “cast down in their own eyes”—they were disheartened because it was undeniable that God had given Judah divine support in this endeavor. However, verses 17-19 record that opposition did not cease. Some high officials in the community had connections with Tobiah and they would praise him to Nehemiah, and then report back to Tobiah how Nehemiah reacted. In response, Tobiah wrote threatening letters to Nehemiah in an attempt to discourage him.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- II. The restoration of the wall by Nehemiah
 - C. The opposition to the work
 - 5. The opposition through distractive dialogue (6:1-9)
 - 6. The opposition through fear (6:10-14)
 - D. The completion of the wall
 - 1. The wall finished (6:15-19)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. How close to completion was the wall rebuilding project in verse 1 of our text?

2. Why do you think Sanballat left visible his letter to Nehemiah that accused Nehemiah of plotting revolt? (verses 5-7)

3. What actions and characteristics of Nehemiah in this text would be valuable for us to emulate?

CONCLUSION

One of the powerful lessons of the Book of Nehemiah is what individuals can accomplish when they align themselves with the will and plan of God, and apply themselves to their God-ordained tasks without fear of opposition.

NOTES

1. John Wesley to William Wilberforce, February 24, 1791, Drew University, Methodist Library, Archives; Methodist Archives and Research Centre; Manchester, England, 1977/609.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Now it came to pass, when the wall was built, and I had set up the doors, and the porters and the singers and the Levites were appointed, that I gave my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem: for he was a faithful man, and feared God above many.”
(Nehemiah 7:1-2)

Most of today’s text is a registry found by Nehemiah listing those who had come with Zerubbabel to Jerusalem some years before, following their captivity in Babylon. While all the individuals noted were known to God and important in His sight, the phrase in our focus verses, “He was a faithful man, and feared God above many,” described Hananiah, the co-leader of Jerusalem. That phrase stands out because faithfulness and a healthy fear of God are vital qualities for all of us.

Through the years since the time of Hananiah, countless godly men and women have exemplified these qualities. One who comes to mind is Clarence Frost, a pioneer evangelist and pastor in the Apostolic Faith work. From the time of Brother Frost’s conversion in 1911 at the age of twenty-two, he had a tremendous burden to spread the Gospel. He also had a cheerful disregard for any inconvenience or discomfort associated with evangelistic outreach, and that characteristic, combined with faithfulness and zeal, made him an outstanding soul-winner.

Brother Frost’s early life certainly gave no hint of the direction it would later take. Few would have dreamed that the troubled young man he described in his testimony would become a zealous preacher of righteousness! But God worked a miracle in the winter of 1911, when Brother Frost rented a building in Ashland, Oregon, and opened a bowling alley. A group of Christian people in the area had hoped to obtain that building and use it for a mission. Without ever meeting him, they began praying for the “bowling alley man.” One night God led him into one of their Gospel services, dealt with his heart, and saved his soul. What rejoicing broke out when the people praying with him learned he was the man who owned the bowling alley! He soon helped them transform the building into a mission hall.

As a new Christian, Brother Frost sought and received his deeper spiritual experiences and in time, God called him into the ministry. In 1919, he was appointed pastor of the Medford Apostolic Faith branch

church, and as he viewed the small rural towns scattered throughout southern Oregon, he saw them as a vast spiritual harvest field. He asked the Portland headquarters church to send Gospel workers to help with outreach efforts, but none were available. Instead, he was told to go and find new workers . . . and he did just that! His love for the souls of men took him on strenuous trips in every direction. Across mountain grades, through mud, snow, ice, and slush in wintertime, and over rocky and dusty roads in the summertime, he went from one locality to another preaching the Gospel.

Like Hananiah in our focus verses, Brother Frost “feared God above many” and his consistent prayer life was evidence of that. He made it a habit to rise early to pray wherever he was. There were even times when he prayed all night because someone needed immediate help from God. It is no wonder that he was able to stir the hearts of his listeners when he stood before them to preach the Word of God!

As the years went by, Brother Frost’s faithfulness did not waver. He went into communities where he had lived, and many people who remembered his youthful days there as a sinner came to the meetings and were saved. He held a series of meetings in Dorris, California, where people had known him as a drunken logger, and more than sixty people were converted. Wherever he found a building that could be used for a temporary church, meetings were held, and souls were converted.

Under Brother Frost’s oversight, the group of believers in Medford grew from a handful of people worshiping in a tiny Gospel hall, to a large congregation worshiping in a beautiful church. Today, scores of people in Apostolic Faith congregations up and down the West Coast represent families that came into the Gospel through the faithful efforts of Brother Frost.

In our text today, Nehemiah appointed Hananiah as one of the co-rulers of Jerusalem. He had served faithfully as “the ruler of the palace”—the head of those responsible for the security of Jerusalem. We do not need to be a palace ruler or a preacher to be counted among those who are faithful and fear God. Many of us may not appear to be especially gifted. We may not be able to sing, teach, or travel to far away places to share the Gospel. However, we can still be used of God if we are faithful and maintain a healthy fear of God.

Hananiah passed on to his reward thousands of years ago. On May 15, 1969, Brother Frost went Home to meet his Lord and Savior who had made such a far-reaching change in his life. But if this pioneer of the Gospel were to stand among us today, no doubt his

message would echo the words he said to the Medford congregation back in 1952: “Don’t you believe that there are some more yet for us to go out and find? We know people’s hearts are different today, but are we going to lie down just because of that? I say, Let’s go out and find them. Let’s go out and bring them in!”

BACKGROUND

After the completion of the wall surrounding Jerusalem, Nehemiah’s narrative shifts to a focus on the logistical and civic aspects of restoration of the city. In chapter 7, Nehemiah recorded his instructions for the guarding of the city (verses 1-4), the census taken of the people of Judah and its final totals (verses 5-69), and a list of the gifts given for the work (verses 70-73).

Verses 1-4 of chapter 7 relate to ensuring the safety of the city after the walls were completed and the doors of the gates hung. Their inclusion here suggests that the porters, singers, and Levites referred to in verse 1 were charged with the responsibility of watching over the wall and the operation of the gates, along with their Temple duties. Verse 2 records that Nehemiah appointed two men to positions of authority. First named is Hanani, his brother (or near relative) who had informed Nehemiah of the tragic conditions in Jerusalem (see Nehemiah 1:2). The other man was Hananiah, the “ruler of the palace” (leader of the fortress) who “feared God above many.” Instructions were issued concerning the opening and shutting of the gates, and the people were organized into shifts to serve as sentinels in locations around the wall near their own homes. Jerusalem was spread out across a significant area, but its population was small and there were many abandoned houses.

Verses 5-7 relate that Nehemiah was inspired by God to take a census of the people. During the census-taking process, a register was found (probably in the Temple) of the exiles who had returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel. Names from this register are virtually the same as on the list recorded in Ezra 2, with only minor variations. The registry begins with Zerubbabel (verse 7) and notes his key companions. Jeshua in this list is Joshua, the high priest; other names in this list also have slightly different spellings than in the Book of Ezra. The Nehemiah named in the list as a companion of Zerubbabel is not the Nehemiah who narrated this account.

Verses 6-25 are a list of families or clans, while verses 26-38 are a list of cities. Some historians suggest that the families listed were ones who settled in Jerusalem, and those who are listed by city settled in those locations. Temple workers (priests, Levites, and Temple servants) are listed in verses 39-56, and the families of Solomon’s servants in verses 57-60.

Verses 61-65 provide names of individuals who participated in the census but could not prove their ancestral lineage. Genealogies were of great

importance to the Jewish people. Those whose lineage was uncertain could not have citizenship, though they were permitted to return to Jerusalem. Included in this list were some among the priesthood. These men were instructed not to eat of the holy food until a priest could validate that they were qualified to participate. This was done by inquiring of God through use of the Urim and Thummim—differently colored rocks drawn from a pouch. The term “Tirshatha,” used in verse 65, was the Persian title for governor, and referred to Nehemiah.

The list ends in verses 66-73 with totals of those who returned, their animals, and donations made to the treasury for the work.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- II. The restoration of the wall by Nehemiah
 - D. The completion of the wall
 - 2. The city guarded (7:1-4)
 - 3. The returnees noted (7:5-73)
 - a. The introduction (7:5-6)
 - b. The leaders (7:7)
 - c. The people (7:8-38)
 - d. The priests (7:39-42)
 - e. The Levites (7:43-45)
 - f. The Temple servants (7:46-56)
 - g. The sons of Solomon’s servants (7:57-60)
 - h. The others of uncertain lineage (7:61-65)
 - i. The total number (7:66-69)
 - j. The gifts for the work (7:70-73)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 2, which two men did Nehemiah appoint after the wall was built and the doors were set up?

2. Why do you think Nehemiah arranged for those who watched on the wall of Jerusalem to stand guard “over against [near] his house”? (verse 3)

3. In what specific ways can you demonstrate faithfulness in your areas of Gospel service?

CONCLUSION

If we are faithful in our service to God and maintain a healthy fear of the Lord, we will be blessed and productive in our efforts for His kingdom.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.” (Nehemiah 8:8)

If you have traveled internationally, you may have faced situations where an inability to understand the language being spoken created problems. My brother recalls a late-night visit to a pharmacy in France where he eventually resorted to pantomime to communicate what he needed. Another time, he and the friends with him thought they understood directions to a transit station where their bus was scheduled to depart in a few minutes. Either they had not made themselves clear to the individual who pointed them in the “right” direction, or that person did not know the location either! Whatever the case, the four of them spent some frantic moments rapidly dragging suitcases up one street and down another before they finally found the station.

When understanding is a challenge, a person who makes the effort to interpret for you is very appreciated. A couple of years ago, my husband and I were traveling in Denmark. We found ourselves on a busy street corner where a taxi had dropped us off, looking in all directions for the building where we intended to go. A kind young woman peddling by on a bicycle observed our puzzled expressions, stopped, and inquired in slightly accented English if she could be of assistance. With her help, we navigated across the busy thoroughfare, under an overpass, around a bend—and there was the building! We were most grateful she understood our language . . . and that we could understand her directions!

Various forms of the verb *understand* appear throughout this chapter of Nehemiah, which describes the priest Ezra reading the book of the Law to a large congregation of people (see verses 2, 3, 7, 8, 12 and 13). The repetition of this word highlights how important it was for the listeners to comprehend the Law—not merely to hear the audible sounds, but to grasp the meaning of what they heard. Ezra did not just voice the words and let the people figure out what was meant. Verse 7 indicates that Levites engaged in giving the people the “sense” of the words.

We are not told how that was accomplished. It is possible that Ezra read in Hebrew and the Levites translated his words into Aramaic, the common language of the people. Alternatively, Ezra may have read the Law paragraph by paragraph and then had the Levites explain it, or the leaders may have divided the

large assembly into smaller groups for focused clarification and discussion. Whatever the case, Ezra and the Levites clearly knew it was vital for the meaning to be clear to those present.

Verse 3 of our text indicates that Ezra read the Law to the people from morning until midday, or for about six hours between daylight and noon. Throughout that whole time, “the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.” They paid close attention! And the proof that they understood was that they responded with emotion and action: they mourned and rejoiced, and then “all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them” (verse 12).

The effort expended by Ezra and the Levites is a reminder of the importance of trying to fully comprehend the truths delivered to us. That will take effort and focus! Truly grasping what we hear or read from the Word of God is life transforming, because to know His Word will help us know and experience His power. The more we absorb God’s truth—the more it affects our hearts and impacts our behavior—the more joy and comfort and guidance it will bring into our lives.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 8 marks a turning point in the Book of Nehemiah. While chapters 1–7 deal with the reconstruction of the wall around Jerusalem, chapters 8–13 focus on the restoration and spiritual revival of the people. The setting for chapter 8 is found in the final words of chapter 7: “And when the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities.” In this chapter, the people gathered to hear Ezra read the book of the Law of Moses. The response of those present is recorded, and a description is given of the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Verse 1 is the first mention of Ezra in the Book of Nehemiah. While Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries, Ezra was likely much older and had arrived in Jerusalem about thirteen years before Nehemiah. The two men shared governance of the city: Nehemiah as governor and political leader, and Ezra as priest and religious leader.

Verses 1-8 relate that the people gathered to hear the reading of the Law in an open square about five hundred yards from the Temple in front of the water gate—the gate which led from the Temple to the brook Kidron. Ezra stood on a “pulpit of wood” (an elevated platform set in place for the occasion, likely

so his voice could be heard) and read aloud “from the morning until midday.” Verse 5 names thirteen men who stood with him on the platform, though exactly how they assisted Ezra is not clear. When Ezra “opened the book” (unrolled the scroll), all the people stood. There is no indication in Scripture that this was the standard procedure when the Law was read, so it seemingly was a signal of great respect on this occasion. Ezra began by blessing (praising) God, and the people lifted their hands, bowed their heads, and worshiped with their faces to the ground, signifying their humility in His presence.

According to verses 9-12, the people openly wept when they heard the words of the Law, seemingly realizing how far they had strayed from obeying God. However, Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites encouraged them not to mourn but to be filled with joy because the day was holy. They were to celebrate by eating and drinking joyfully, and were also told to “send portions,” signifying that they should share food with those who were less fortunate.

After the reading of the Law, verses 13-18 relate that the “chief of the fathers,” the religious leaders, and Ezra studied God’s words further. In so doing, they were reminded that God had instructed them to “dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month.” This was a reference to the Feast of Tabernacles (also translated “booths”)—which commemorated how God had blessed and provided for Israel in the wilderness during the Exodus. Details regarding this feast can be found in Leviticus 23:33-43.

The Law commanded that all citizens of Judah were to observe this feast, and the people obeyed. Verse 16 relates that some built their booths on top of their houses, and others—likely those who were not residents of Jerusalem—built their branch-topped shelters in the streets and courts of the Temple. Verse 17 suggests that this feast had not been celebrated like this since the time of Joshua. The result of the people’s obedience was “very great gladness.” As God had commanded, the people observed the feast for seven days, and Ezra read again each day from the Law.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- III. The revival of the people under Nehemiah
 - A. The public reading of the Law (8:1-18)
 - 1. The Law expounded by Ezra (8:1-8)
 - 2. The response of the people (8:9-12)
 - 3. The observance of Tabernacles (8:13-18)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 6, how did the people respond when Ezra stood before them and blessed the Lord?

2. Why do you think the people wept and mourned when they heard the words of the Law?

3. The Feast of Tabernacles was instituted as a reminder to the people of their deliverance from bondage and the time spent in shelters in their wilderness journeying. What reminders of God’s deliverance and provision can you institute in your life?

CONCLUSION

When God’s Word is comprehended and heeded, blessings and joy follow.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God.” (Nehemiah 9:2-3)

One night several years ago, my sleep was disturbed by the loud roar of a helicopter near our house. Then, while I was still trying to get fully awake and sort out what was happening, the entire room was brightly illuminated. I jumped from bed and hurried to the bedroom window. To my amazement, our entire backyard and even the alley behind us were ablaze with light! A police helicopter was hovering above our home, and its searchlight was incredibly powerful.

At once I began to wonder, *Who are they looking for? What has that person done?* I knew my family and I were safe inside our home and that the police search had nothing to do with us. So, as the light continued to blaze down around our house for the next half hour, I began to consider God’s searchlight. The purpose of the light that lit up our yard was a negative one from the viewpoint of the person being sought. However, God’s purpose in sending His spiritual searchlight to illuminate our hearts is positive. His intention is to reveal any spiritual errors and help us rectify that situation.

That was what happened in our text today. In the previous chapter of Nehemiah, Ezra had read from the Law to the people, and it acted as a searchlight: it revealed just how far the people of Judah had departed from following God’s instructions. Today’s text relates that later in the same month, the people came together again to confess their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. Their purpose was evidenced by the fact that the people assembled “with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them” (verse 1)—all indicators of a spirit of mourning in that culture.

We can learn a lesson from the people of Judah, who responded rightly to God’s revelation by confessing and repenting. At times, God’s Word—perhaps in our personal devotions or in a sermon from the pulpit—illuminates a situation or attitude in our hearts which needs attention. When the searchlight of God’s Spirit points out a matter, we may not “wake up” immediately. But gradually the understanding comes

that we have said or done something that was not pleasing to God. How should we respond?

When God enlightens us about a matter, we may be tempted to hide from the revelation—to justify ourselves or make an excuse. We may even attempt to ignore it. However, the right course of action is to open ourselves up to God’s Spirit and willingly clear up any problem that He makes evident.

God’s searchlight also performs a vital function by revealing spiritual dangers. Our focus verses begin with the statement that the people of Jerusalem “separated themselves from all strangers.” For many years of Israel’s history, God had warned them to separate themselves from the ungodly nations about them, but they had ignored that warning. God knew that such entanglements would draw the Israelites away from pure worship, and that is exactly what had happened.

In our day as well, God’s searchlight can help us keep away those areas in life where the devil hides his snares. How can we avoid danger if we refuse to allow the searchlight to illuminate those areas? As Christians today, we want to welcome the light and then take the necessary actions to rectify anything it may reveal.

BACKGROUND

In chapter 9, two days after the conclusion of the joyful Feast of Tabernacles described in chapter 8, the people of Judah gathered once more. In an assembly of humble repentance, they confessed their sins with fasting, soul searching, and prayer—actions which signified a repentant spirit. Then the people were led by the Levites in a prayer that rehearsed portions of Israel’s history.

In verse 1-3, the people took three symbolic actions that indicated deep remorse, mourning, and submission. They fasted (abstained from food, demonstrating that they were so troubled by their sins that food was unappealing); they wore sackcloth (a type of cloth made of black goat’s hair that was thick, rough, and uncomfortable against the skin); and they placed dirt on their heads (equating themselves with the dust of the earth and indicating they were seeking God’s pity and forgiveness). The people also separated themselves from “strangers” (the pagan inhabitants of other nations they had mingled with and, in some cases, married). This showed their willingness to decisively disengage from the ungodly influences that had affected their worship practices. Verse 3 indicates that they listened to the book of the Law being read for one fourth part of the day, or about three hours.

Verses 4-5 state that certain of the Levites then led the people in prayer from an elevated position “upon the stairs,” probably the platform that Ezra had previously stood upon to read the Law to the people (see chapter 8). The words of the prayer are recorded in verses 6-38. As in other places in Scripture, the prayer included mention of historical events. This oral summary of God’s intervention in their past reminded the Israelites of their great heritage. Several notable events were included: God’s call of Abram and the covenant made with him (verses 7-8); the Israelites miraculous deliverance from bondage in Egypt (verses 9-12); how God instructed and provided for the people during their sojourn in the wilderness (verses 13-25); and the people’s disobedience and rebellion against God and His subsequent judgment (verses 26-31).

In verses 32-37, the people asked God for mercy and showed that they recognized that the problems they faced were deserved. They then renewed their covenant with God, with their leaders signing a written pledge to follow Him in obedience.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- III. The revival of the people under Nehemiah
 - B. The public confession of the people (9:1-38)
 - 1. The spiritual revival of the people (9:1-4)
 - 2. The prayer of the Levites (9:5-38)
 - a. The adoration of God’s person and work (9:5-15)
 - b. The confession of unfaithfulness (9:16-31)
 - c. The supplication for God’s help (9:32-38)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. The Levites summarized Israel’s history in this chapter. According to verses 16-17, how did their forefathers respond to God’s many blessings upon their nation?

2. What attributes of God’s nature are highlighted by His response to the waywardness of the Israelites?

3. In what ways can you encourage awareness and openness to God’s “searchlight” in your own life?

CONCLUSION

We will be blessed spiritually if we allow God’s Spirit to search our hearts, and willingly clear up any problem that He makes evident.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God’s law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes.” (Nehemiah 10:29)

As an indication of their commitment to adhere to God’s instructions, in today’s text the Jewish people signed a written covenant with Him. Their purpose was to truly follow through on doing right, although some of the process would be painful to them.

In the years since that time, others have committed to serve God. Lee, a man in our congregation, is an example of this. He testified that he knew he needed to ask God to come into his life and forgive him. When he was sixteen years old, at a Sunday morning service during camp meeting, he prayed and asked God to give him the same peace that he had heard others talk about.

Lee said, “Just as clearly as an audible conversation with someone would have been, the Lord’s words came to me: ‘Lee, would you be willing to give up football to have this peace?’ Football was important to me. I loved it, and people said I was good at it. In my second year of high school, I was six feet two inches tall, weighed 235 pounds, and could run the forty-yard dash in nearly record time. And God wanted to know if I would give up football. I prayed, ‘Yes, Lord, I’ll give up football. I’ll give up everything to have this peace.’ As soon as I made that consecration, such a joy and peace came into my heart.

“When we returned home, it was soon time for football practices, and phone calls started coming to ask why I wasn’t attending. When I told the coaches I’d given up football to serve the Lord, it became a very difficult time in our house.

“My father was a moral man and taught us many good lessons, but he was not godly. He enjoyed seeing the names of his boys on the sports page of the newspaper, and when he found out that I was no longer going to play football, he disowned me. For the next two years, he hardly spoke to me. He did not want anything to do with me because of the shame that he said I brought upon him.

“Meanwhile, the head football coach researched how many professional football players professed to

be Christians and came up with a list of ninety-six. He asked me, ‘If these people are Christians and they play football, why can’t you?’ God gave me the wisdom to say, ‘It may be fine for them, but this is what God asked me to do!’

“The school athletic director showed me six letters of intent from major colleges for football scholarships. He could not comprehend that I was willing to give that up ‘to be religious.’ I replied, ‘It’s not about being religious. It’s about having this peace in my heart that God gave.’ Additionally, I told him my dad had taught me to be a man of my word—if a promise was made, it needed to be kept. God helped me to hold fast to the promise I’d made to Him.”

In time, God restored Lee’s relationship with his father. Also, Lee said, “Nearly three decades after the fact, an old friend shared with me how much my decision to quit sports and serve the Lord had influenced him and some of our peers to be committed to God. While I never regretted the decision to obey God, it was so encouraging to know that it had a positive impact on others.”

God wants each of us to make a commitment to serve Him. The people of Nehemiah’s time chose to do so, and Lee did as well. Will we make that commitment also, and then follow through?

BACKGROUND

The final verse of the preceding chapter introduces chapter 10. After confessing their rebellion and disobedience to God, the people of Judah signed and sealed a written covenant and recommitted themselves to Him. This chapter notes who signed and then gives a summary of priests, Levites, and others who pledged to support this reform, and lists provisions and obligations of the agreement.

Verses 1-27 of this chapter record names of the signers of the covenant. Since Nehemiah was the governor of Judah, he was the first person to sign. The word “Tirshatha” following his name was the Persian title for a governor or high-ranking civil official. Three groups of people are mentioned in the list of signers: the priests (verses 2-8), the Levites (verses 9-13), and the leaders of the people (verses 14-27). It is noteworthy that while eighty-four people sealed the covenant, the rest of the people “having knowledge, and having understanding,” also pledged to the covenant made with God (verse 28). The phrase “entered into a curse” in verse 29 means that those who made the covenant did so with the knowledge that they would receive punishment if they broke their pledge.

The chapter continues by listing six provisions of the agreement.

- Verse 30: They would not allow their children to marry individuals from the pagan nations around them.
- Verse 31: They would not make purchases on the Sabbath or on a holy day; in other words, they would keep the Sabbath.
- Verse 31: They would not demand payment for debts on the seventh year; it would be observed as a Sabbath year.
- Verses 32-33: They would commit to paying an annual assessment for support of the Temple.
- Verse 34: They would participate in bringing wood to the Temple in order to ensure a perpetual flame would burn on the altar (see Leviticus 6:12-13).
- Verses 35-38: They would bring their first-fruits to the Temple and a tithe of the ground to the Levites, who in turn would take “the tithe of the tithes” to the Temple storehouse.

The final commitment made by the people is found in verse 39: they promised that “we will not forsake the house of our God.” This pledge meant not only that they would continue to participate in worship, but also that they would pledge to provide whatever was necessary for the Temple service.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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III. The revival of the people under Nehemiah

- C. The public renewal of the covenant (10:1-39)
 - 1. The signers of the covenant (10:1-27)
 - a. The governor (10:1)
 - b. The priests (10:2-8)
 - c. The Levites (10:9-13)
 - d. The leaders of the people (10:14-27)
 - 2. The obligations of the covenant (10:28-39)
 - a. Obedience to the Law (10:28-31)
 - b. Support of the Temple ritual (10:32-39)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 29, what did the people of Judah commit to do?

2. Why do you think God did not want the Jewish people to intermarry with the other people of the land? (verse 30)

3. What are some ways that our commitment to serve God might be tested?

CONCLUSION

God is looking for His followers to make a full commitment to Him. Are we determined to serve Him no matter what the price?

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.” (Nehemiah 12:43)

Recently in one of our Portland church services, the minister preached about joy, and told of an experience he had some years ago in a poor village on Gonave Island off the coast of Port au Prince, Haiti. That is an arid region, and for hundreds of years, the women of the village had walked many miles in the hot sun to get water for their homes. They would carry large containers to the water source, fill them up, put them on their heads, and walk back to their mud huts. And that trek wasn’t down a sidewalk or a nice path—the path went around and over rocks, some of them bigger than a car.

Sadly, most of the water in that area was horrible. Our minister related, “Some of the water sources looked like a low spot in a barnyard where water collected when it rained. Cows had drunk from it and kids had played in it, but it was water! Another water source was a pool in a cave. It was a pretty place with white sand around the edges of the water. However, the cave was full of bats—and the water was as green as a healthy lawn! It was full of bacteria and parasites, but the women filled their containers anyway. What else could they do? That was the only water available!”

Then one day our minister’s brother, a well driller, came to the village with a big truck and a well-drilling machine. He set up the machine and started drilling, and after a time, some water gushed out! A crowd gathered and they were excited, but their excitement was short-lived. The well driller welded a solid lid on top of the well and then drove off. The lid had been put in place to keep the children from throwing items in the well and damaging it. The villagers were understandably disheartened.

That was not the end of the story, though. One day, the drilling crew returned with different equipment and a load of pipe, and our minister was with them. The villagers gathered once more, watching . . . waiting . . . hoping. The men unloaded the pipe, cut the lid off the well, and ran the pipe down the hole. Then they placed a pump on top and bolted it down. The pump had what looked like bicycle pedals, but it was cranked by hand. One man started turning the pedals and the villagers heard rattling from inside the well. And then . . . out came water! Fresh water! Clean water!

Our minister said, “I will never forget the rejoicing in that village! The people literally screamed and shouted with joy. An old, white-haired man was sitting nearby under a tree, watching. Somebody filled a dirty water jug and took it over to him. With a huge smile on his face, he took that jug, drank some water—and then held the jug over his head and poured the rest all over himself!

“We showed the people how to use the well and then loaded up our equipment and prepared to drive off. At that moment, a young barefoot mother with a small child on her hip came running to us. We wondered what she wanted. Often people would approach us asking for money, but this young woman held out a little basket of eggs. That was probably at least a week’s worth of food for her little family, and it was her gift to us for providing water for her village.”

In our text today, we read of a momentous day of rejoicing in the city of Jerusalem—a day the people who witnessed that event likely remembered for the rest of their lives. The wall was complete! The people gathered “to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps” (Nehemiah 12:27). Like the young village mother with her basket of eggs, they offered sacrifices of thanksgiving. Even the wives and the children joined in the celebration—a rejoicing so great the “the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.”

Our lives will also include events that bring great joy—times we will never forget. In addition, we will have private times of devotion when we experience joy as we reflect on all God has done for us. Whatever the occasion, let us follow the example of the people of Jerusalem, and make sure our joy includes heartfelt praises to God, the Giver of every good gift.

BACKGROUND

Following three chapters concerning the spiritual revival of the people, chapters 11 and 12 tell how Nehemiah focused on the logistical and civic aspects of restoring Jerusalem. After King Cyrus of Persia granted permission for the exiles to return to Judah, the city had gradually repopulated, but only sparsely. Jerusalem still needed more people, and these chapters describe Nehemiah’s plan for repopulating it. The close of chapter 12 provides a historical account of the dedication of the wall surrounding the city.

Chapter 11 begins with the statement that “the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem.” This likely meant that most of the priests, Levites, and other officials had living quarters within the city walls. However,

Jerusalem was spread across a fairly large area. The wall had been rebuilt on the original foundation, but the city's population was small compared to what it had been before the exile, and there were many abandoned houses. The purpose of the census Nehemiah had previously ordered (see chapter 7) was to compile a list of the families of Judah. Based on that census, in these chapters Nehemiah implemented a plan to bring one tenth of the population of surrounding cities to live in Jerusalem. The selection was made through the casting of lots. In addition, verse 2 records that some people voluntarily agreed to move into the city.

The roster of people who lived in Jerusalem and nearby towns during Nehemiah's governorship begins in verse 3 and continues through the remainder of chapter 11. For the most part, the inhabitants of Jerusalem are listed by heads of families. This extensive list includes tribal leaders (of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin), military men, priests, Levites, gatekeepers, and civil and royal servants. Those who resided outside of the city (verses 25-36) are listed by villages.

Verses 1-26 of chapter 12 are a listing of the priests and Levites from the time of Zerubbabel to that of Nehemiah. Twenty-two families are mentioned.

The official dedication of the wall around Jerusalem, described in verses 27-47 of chapter 12, was joyous. Levites from around Judah were summoned to participate in the celebration. Musicians were present to join in this time of gladness. Verse 30 indicates that before the ceremony began, the priests purified themselves and the people; this would have been done through ceremonial washing and the offering of sacrifices of purification (see Numbers 8:6-11 and 19:1-10).

Verses 31-43 describe two processions at the dedication, one led by Ezra and one seemingly by Nehemiah himself. The two groups marched in opposite directions, giving their thanks to God. After encircling the city, they met near the Temple. These groups are described in verse 31 as marching "upon the wall." Since portions of the wall that have been excavated had a thickness of seven to eleven feet, there was plenty of room for them to literally walk along the top of the wall.¹ The groups then joined and gave thanks in the house of God (verse 38). The singing and the sounds of the instruments was so loud and joyful that it was heard "even afar off" (verse 43).

Verses 44-47 of chapter 12 describe the arrangements that were made for those who ministered in the Temple. Certain individuals were appointed to bring in the "treasures"—the offerings, firstfruits, and tithes—and to oversee the storage chambers that were filled with supplies for the sacrifices.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The remaining actions of Nehemiah

- A. The establishment of the people in Jerusalem (11:1 — 12:26)

1. The securing of inhabitants for Jerusalem (11:1-2)
2. The inhabitants of Jerusalem (11:3-24)
 - a. The heads of provinces (11:3-9)
 - b. The priests (11:10-14)
 - c. The Levites (11:15-18)
 - d. The gatekeepers (11:19-21)
 - e. The others (11:22-24)
3. The residences outside Jerusalem (11:25-36)
4. The priests and Levites at the time of Zerubbabel (12:1-9)
5. The high priest, priests and Levites in Nehemiah's day (12:10-26)
 - a. The high priest (12:10-11)
 - b. The priests (12:12-21)
 - c. The Levites (12:22-26)
- B. The dedication of the wall of Jerusalem (12:27-47)
 1. The preparation of the people (12:27-31)
 2. The procession of the choirs (12:32-42)
 3. The praise of the people (12:43)
 4. The provision for the Temple personnel (12:44-47)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 18 of chapter 11, how many Levites lived in Jerusalem?

2. Why do you think the priests and Levites purified themselves and the people before the dedication of the wall?

3. When Nehemiah asked one-tenth of the people from outlying areas around Jerusalem to move within the city wall, a few people "willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem." What can we learn from their example?

CONCLUSION

The joyful praises of the people who gathered to dedicate the wall around Jerusalem were heard "even afar off." Their worship was a testimony to others, and our joy and praises to God will impact others as well.

1. Eliat Mazar, "The Wall that Nehemiah Built," *Biblical Archaeology Society*, March/April 2009, <https://library.biblicalarchaeology.org/article/the-wall-that-nehemiah-built/>



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.” (Nehemiah 13:22)

Nehemiah was a man of prayer—the last part of our focus verse and his many other prayers recorded in this short book make that apparent. Before approaching the king, Nehemiah prayed. Before he began the project of rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem, he prayed. In perplexing situations, when facing opposition, and in times of danger, he prayed. As a result, his life demonstrated the impact one individual can have on a nation.

While Christians around the world know about Nehemiah, many will not recognize the name Jeremiah Lanphier. However, Lanphier was also a man of prayer whose efforts made a great impact on his nation, and eventually, the world.

Converted under the ministry of Charles Finney, Lanphier felt God calling him at the age of forty-eight to serve as an “urban missionary” in New York City. He had no seminary training, but when a church in the older section of downtown Manhattan needed someone to hand out Gospel pamphlets and Bibles, Lanphier quit his business and started knocking on doors. He visited local organizations, invited children to Sunday school, and encouraged hotels to refer guests to the church on Sunday. However, the response to his efforts was disappointing, and Lanphier found that time spent in prayer brought him the most peace and resolve.

Lanphier wrote in his journal, “One day the idea was suggested to my mind that an hour of prayer, from twelve to one o’clock, would be beneficial to businessmen, who usually in great numbers take that hour for rest and refreshment.” The thought took root, and gradually he developed a plan—he would begin a weekly prayer meeting open to anyone who was interested, from bankers to broom-pushers. He printed up handbills advertising the first meeting, to be held at noon on September 23, 1857, in a small, third floor hall on Fulton Street in New York.

On the appointed day, no one came during the first half hour, so Lanphier prayed alone. Then one man arrived, and another. By 1:00 p.m., there were six. Lanphier had hoped for more, but he reminded himself that Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

The following week, there were twenty present, and forty the week after that. Then, some of those who had been impacted by these times of prayer asked if they could meet daily, and the number of attendees grew.

When Lanphier began inviting people to those first prayer meetings, he had no idea what would happen just three weeks later. On October 13, 1857, after a major trust company declared bankruptcy, panic struck the New York Stock Exchange and hundreds of banks and individual investors were ruined. Shortly thereafter, railroads went bankrupt, factories closed, and unemployment increased. Amid the resulting social and financial turmoil, many people realized their need of God. The Fulton Street prayer meetings were thronged, and noon prayer meetings began in other churches, theaters, and halls throughout the city.

The telegraph and newspapers spread the word of the religious awakening in New York. Prayer requests began coming in from around the world and converts swelled church congregations across the land. Historians have suggested that up to a million people came to faith during the years 1857 to 1858. While Jeremiah Lanphier’s prayers and the Fulton Street prayer meetings were not the sole impetus behind the revival that swept across the United States, the prayers prayed during those weeks in 1857 clearly played a key role. In time, the revival kindled on Fulton Street spread to Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, Europe, South Africa, India, Australia, and the Pacific islands.¹

God hears and responds when people pray! Nehemiah was a man who put everything before the Lord in prayer, and he was rewarded for his diligence and perseverance. Jeremiah Lanphier recognized the value of prayer and dedicated himself to giving others an opportunity to pray. Their commitment to prayer can become a model for us. What will happen in response to our prayers? We will not all change the world, but we can be sure that there *will* be results!

BACKGROUND

Following Nehemiah’s first twelve-year period of governing in Judah, he traveled back to Persia in 433 B.C. Scripture does not record how long he stayed in Persia. When he returned to Judah for a second period of governorship, he found conditions in Jerusalem had changed significantly from the unified desire to follow God that had existed when he left.

The final chapter of the Book of Nehemiah describes reforms Nehemiah instituted during his second administration as governor. Verses 1-9 describe Nehemiah’s expulsion of Tobiah from his unlawful

residence in the Temple chambers. Three further reforms are noted in the remainder of the chapter: the restoration of support for the Levites; renewal of the Sabbath observance; and the denunciation of mixed marriages. The chapter concludes by briefly summarizing what Nehemiah accomplished during his second tenure as governor.

For the first reform, Nehemiah immediately dealt with a situation in the Temple that seemingly occurred soon after he had returned to Persia. The phrase “on that day” (verse 1) refers to when the wall was dedicated. At that time, when the Law was read (as seen in chapters 11 and 12), the people were reminded of God’s instruction in Deuteronomy 23:3-4 that the Ammonites and Moabites were to be excluded from Israel unless they converted to the worship of Israel’s God. At that time, the people obediently separated such individuals from their midst. However, verses 4-9 reveal that Eliashib the high priest had made an exception. He was “allied unto” Tobiah the Ammonite (probably through marriage), and he allowed Tobiah to have his own quarters in the Temple chambers—areas that were supposed to be reserved for the priests and Levites or storage of Temple treasures. When Nehemiah discovered this upon his return from Persia, he immediately cast Tobiah out of the Temple complex with all his belongings. He then had the rooms Tobiah had used ceremonially cleansed and restored to their proper use.

Verses 10-14 indicate that Nehemiah became aware that the Levites had not been properly supported, so they had gone back to their fields to make a living, thus neglecting their duties in the Temple. To rectify this, Nehemiah gathered the rulers and insisted that these abuses be corrected. He appointed four trustworthy men to oversee collection of the tithes and offerings, and to ensure that those who served in the Temple were provided for as commanded by the Law.

A further reform, noted in verses 15-22, concerned a general ignoring of a proper observance of the Sabbath. Many of the people of Judah were failing to obey God’s commands regarding the Sabbath rest, which took place from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday. Foreigners were selling near the city gates on the Sabbath and the people of Judah were buying, treating this holy day like any other. In response, Nehemiah commanded that the city gates be closed on the Sabbath. In addition, he placed watchmen at the gates to ensure that vendors did not enter. When “once or twice” a few of these individuals camped outside the gate (possibly hoping to secretly move their goods inside or to entice customers out to them), Nehemiah threatened to take stern action if they did so again.

Another situation that Nehemiah had to address is described in verses 23-29. While Nehemiah was away, the Israelites had resumed their practice of

intermarrying with people from the pagan nations around them. This was in direct disobedience to God’s command, for such unions presented a grave danger that the Jews would compromise their worship by adopting idolatrous religious customs. Nehemiah was indignant when he saw this was again occurring and that the children of such marriages could not even speak the language of the Jews. He reacted with vehemence and pointed to the failure of Solomon to remind the people of the results of “this great evil.” Intermarriage had even occurred within the family of Eliashib the high priest, so Nehemiah dealt with the situation swiftly and firmly.

The book closes with Nehemiah’s personal and brief summary of his reforms, and a short prayer in which he committed himself and his work to God.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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IV. The remaining actions of Nehemiah

- C. The final reforms in Jerusalem (13:1-31)
 - 1. The separation from foreigners (13:1-3)
 - 2. The cleansing of the Temple after Tobiah (13:4-9)
 - 3. The restoration of the Temple personnel (13:10-14)
 - 4. The restoration of Sabbath observance (13:15-22)
 - 5. The denunciation of mixed marriages (13:23-29)
 - 6. The summary conclusion (13:30-31)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 3, what did the people do when they had heard the Law?

2. Why do you think Nehemiah was so indignant regarding the errors of the people of Judah that are described in this chapter?

3. What lessons about effective leadership can we learn from Nehemiah’s actions in this chapter?

CONCLUSION

The prayers and efforts of Nehemiah and Jeremiah Lanphier are examples to us of how God can use one dedicated life to work out His purposes.



Overview for Haggai

Purpose: The prophet gave his messages to motivate the people of Judah to complete the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Author: The prophet Haggai

Date Written: 520 B.C.

To Whom Written: The newly returned exiles from Babylon, and the remnant living in Jerusalem.

Key People: Haggai, the first of the prophets to minister to the post-exilic community in Jerusalem; Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah and the man who led the first group of exiles back to Jerusalem; and Joshua, the first high priest after the restoration.

Setting: Five interrelated Old Testament books were written after the Jewish people returned from exile: Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The events recorded in the Book of Esther also took place during this period.

After spending seventy years in captivity in Babylon, the decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C. gave permission for the Jewish people to return to Jerusalem. Around fifty thousand had done so. They had begun rebuilding the Temple in 536 B.C., soon after their arrival, but when they faced opposition from hostile neighbors, the work halted.

In 520 B.C., at the direction of God, Haggai challenged the people to resume work on the Temple. He pointed out that during the approximately ten years since the rebuilding efforts had stopped, the people had built and beautified their own houses while neglecting the rebuilding of God's house. For that reason, the blessing of God had ceased to be upon them, and their lives were unsatisfying. Haggai instructed the people to consider their current economic and spiritual circumstances and to renew their efforts to complete the work of restoring the Temple.

The prophet Zechariah joined Haggai in exhorting the people of Judah just two months after

Haggai's first message (see Haggai 1:1 and Zechariah 1:1).

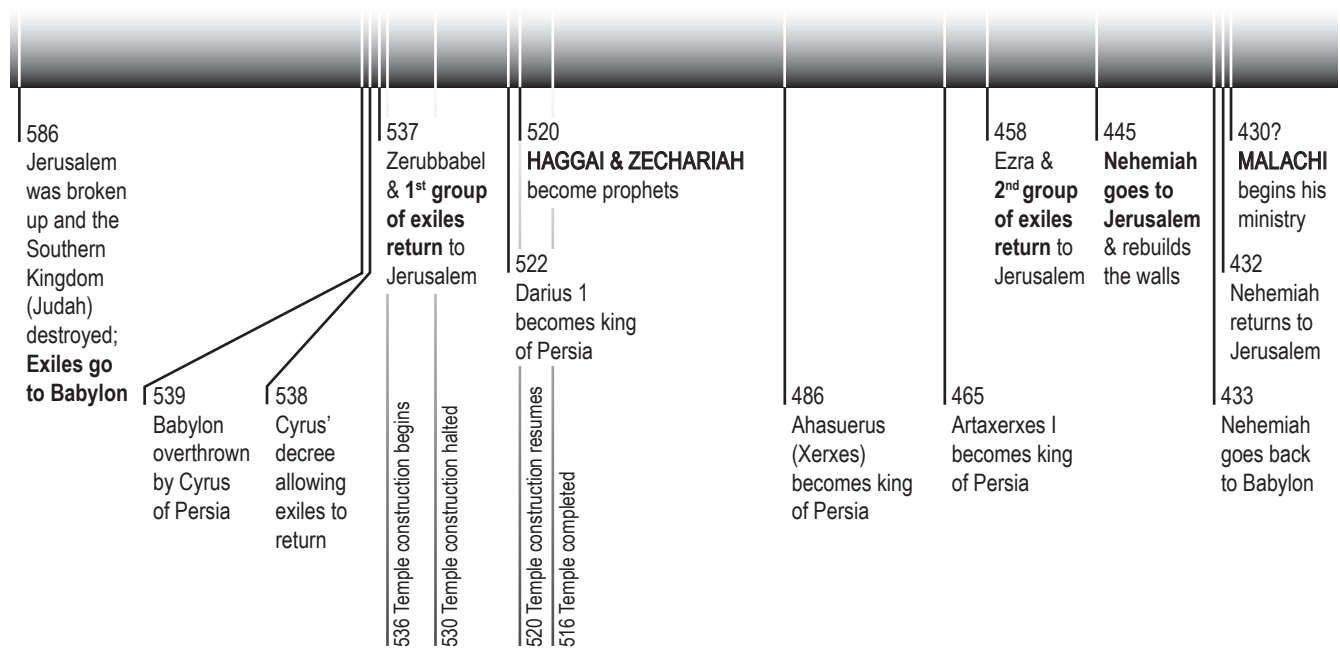
Unique Features and Style: The Book of Haggai is unique among Old Testament prophetic books for one key reason: the people of Judah listened! A mere twenty-three days after the "word of the LORD" came to Haggai, the people began again to build (see Haggai 1:14-15).

Next to Obadiah, Haggai is the shortest book in the Old Testament; it contains just two chapters and a total of thirty-eight verses. Haggai delivered his prophecy using simple prose, rather than the customary poetic form. The book's straightforward style is characterized by questions, recurring expressions, and commands. Variations of the instruction to "consider your ways" are issued five times in the two chapters.

Summary: Haggai's passionate and simple prophecy to the people of Judah was delivered in the form of four short messages, each of them precisely dated. The first message (Haggai 1:1-15) contained a rebuke for the people's failure to finish rebuilding the Temple and a call to renew their efforts and complete the task. The second message (Haggai 2:1-9) compared the present Temple with the earlier Temple of Solomon. Though the difference between the two was disheartening, the people were encouraged to be strong because of God's presence. The third message (Haggai 2:10-19) contained principles regarding holiness and God's commitment to bless and prosper Judah in the time to come. The final message (Haggai 2:20-23) was addressed to Zerubbabel alone. It promised the destruction of Judah's enemies and revealed that Zerubbabel had been chosen as the "signet"—a seal, stamp, or ring symbolizing the authority of the Messiah from David's line, who would one day come as the divine Deliverer and overthrow all earthly kingdoms.

Timeline

Some dates are approximate, as reference materials differ.



Outline

*Hannah's Bible Outlines used by permission per WORDsearch.
A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.*

- I. The first message—To rebuke (1:1-15)
 - A. Date: August 29, 520 B.C. (1:1)
 - B. The building ceased (1:2-4)
 - C. The blessing ceased (1:5-11)
 - D. The building continued (1:12-15)
- II. The second message—To encourage (2:1-9)
 - A. Date: October 17, 520 B.C. (2:1)
 - B. The people's discouragement (2:2-3)
 - C. The Lord's encouragement (2:4-9)
- III. The third message—To bless (2:10-19)
 - A. Date: December 18, 520 B.C. (2:10)
 - B. The illustration of contamination (2:11-13)
 - C. The application to the nation (2:14-17)
 - D. The abundance in the nation (2:18-19)
- IV. The fourth message—To promise (2:20-23)
 - A. Date: December 18, 520 B.C. (2:20)
 - B. The destruction of the nations (2:21-22)
 - C. The choice of Zerubbabel (2:23)



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.” (Haggai 1:5-7)

Through the prophet Haggai, God challenged the people of Judah to consider their ways—to stop and assess what was going on in their lives and recognize that a change must be made. Today, in His love for souls, God issues the same challenge, calling individuals to consider how they are living and recognize their need of Him. Darwin Lee was one who responded to that challenge.

Darwin had a difficult childhood. His mother died when he was just six years old, and his father was an atheist, so he was not taken to church and had no understanding about God’s salvation. After he married and began raising a family, his wife occasionally wanted to take the children to Sunday school. Darwin was against that. He said, “I figured the kids could make up their own minds about religion later on. I thought religious people were weaklings and that I was all right—after all, I was not a drinking man, and I worked hard and took care of my family. However, I had a vile temper and a foul mouth.”

God began dealing with Darwin’s heart when their sixteen-year-old daughter became a Christian and started attending the Apostolic Faith Church. He said, “As I watched her, it was obvious to us that something had happened in her life. Her behavior and the way she dressed were quite different. However, I dismissed it, thinking it was just a passing whim. Then one of our sons, Darrel, came home from college to check up on what was going on with his sister, thinking to rescue her from what he felt were misguided notions about religion. He went to church with her and shortly thereafter, had an encounter with God himself and was saved.”

He continued, “By that time, my life was miserable. I was nearly fifty years old. My wife and I had been married for over twenty-five years, but we were not communicating much at all. I felt hopeless, and I am sure that my son could sense my unhappiness. He kept asking me to attend church with him, even though I made excuses. Finally, I gave in and agreed to go.”

Darwin was surprised when the pastor did not ask for money, which is what he expected would happen. And because of his son’s persistence, he continued to attend church with him. He recounted, “What I heard started to make sense to me. Gradually, I absorbed more, and finally, I began going down to the altar and praying.” He was considering his ways!

Darwin’s breakthrough came when he went to the Apostolic Faith headquarters church in Portland for special meetings. On Saturday evening they showed the film “A Thief in the Night”—a dramatization about the coming of the Lord. It made an impression on Darwin, and that night he surrendered to God. He testified, “My first words when I knelt to pray were, ‘God, I need help!’ I got that help, and I have been getting it ever since. The Lord came down and saved me, and I knew something real had happened in my life. Things started improving at home. My wife had been saved earlier, and God restored the love and warmth in our marriage. Others of our children were saved over a period of several years. Today, my life is better than it ever has been.”

Today’s text was God’s message to the people of Jerusalem, but it applies to us as well. God wants us to stop and think about our own lives—to consider our ways, giving careful thought to how we are living. Have we committed our lives to God, as Darwin did? If so, are we still living in obedience to His Word? Are we trusting Him in good times and challenging times? Are we following God’s will for us even when doing so is not easy?

When the people of Judah failed to put God first, God’s blessing was withheld. Let’s make sure that we have surrendered to God and are living in a manner that will allow Him to bless us.

BACKGROUND

Only two chapters long, the Book of Haggai contains four brief but powerful messages delivered by the prophet Haggai to the people of Judah, who had previously returned to their homeland from exile in Babylon. Haggai began each of his messages by referencing “the word of the LORD” or a similar phrase.

The Israelites had been in exile in Babylon for nearly seventy years when King Cyrus’ edict in 538 B.C. allowed them to return to Judah. Upon arrival, they had been confronted with the devastation left by the armies of King Nebuchadnezzar. Their capital city of Jerusalem was in ruins and the glorious structure that once was Solomon’s Temple had been demolished.

The returnees had begun rebuilding the Temple soon after their arrival. However, opposition brought their work to a halt (see Ezra 4:4-5, 24), and for many years, the people had been consumed with secular pursuits and building their own homes. Because they had neglected God's house, God's blessing upon them and their efforts had been withdrawn.

Chapter 1, which is Haggai's first message to the exiles, begins with a rebuke for the people's failure to finish rebuilding the Temple. The prophet then issued a call for them to renew their efforts and complete the task. The prophecy was delivered to Zerubbabel (the governor) and Joshua (the high priest), who had been given the charge to rebuild the Temple and the city. Verse 1 indicates that the message was given in the sixth month of the second year of King Darius's reign, or 520 B.C.

Verse 2 indicates that the people excused their failure to build by implying they were waiting for a convenient time. In verses 4-7, Haggai admonished the people to consider their ways. They had spent time and energy on constructing their own homes and neglected the building of God's Temple. The word translated *ceiled* in verse 4 comes from the root word *saphan*, which means "to cover" or "to roof," and refers to houses that were paneled with fine woods, as was common for royal residences (see 1 Kings 7:7 and Jeremiah 22:14). However, building fine personal dwelling places was inexcusable when the Lord's house was still lying waste. As a result, God's blessing had been withheld, and the people were dissatisfied and discouraged because of the troubles that had come upon them.

In verse 8, Haggai instructed the people to obtain the materials needed and resume work on the Temple. He promised that God would be glorified and take pleasure in their efforts if they would be obedient. Verses 9-11 rehearse again the troubles they had brought on themselves by their disobedience. Grain, grapes, and olives, alluded to in verse 11, were Israel's principal crops, so their livelihood had been significantly impacted by the drought that was God's judgment.

Verses 12-15 indicate that the people complied with Haggai's instruction. Their obedience resulted in the message of reassurance, recorded in verse 13, that God would be with them as they followed Him in obedience. The dates given in verse 15 reveal that just twenty-three days after Haggai had received the message from God, work on the Temple resumed. Likely those twenty-three days were spent procuring the needed building supplies and preparing the building site for the resumed efforts.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
Used by permission per WORDsearch

- I. The first message—To rebuke (1:1-15)
 - A. Date: August 29, 520 B.C. (1:1)
 - B. The building ceased (1:2-4)
 - 1. Because of indifference (1:2)
 - 2. Because of indulgence (1:3-4)
 - C. The blessing ceased (1:5-11)
 - 1. Consider the leanness (1:5-7)
 - 2. Cure for leanness (1:8)
 - 3. Cause of leanness (1:9-11)
 - D. The building continued (1:12-15)
 - 1. Reaction of the people (1:12)
 - 2. Renewal of blessing (1:13)
 - 3. Return to work (1:14-15)
 - a. Return to work (1:14)
 - b. Date: September 20, 520 B.C. (1:15)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to verse 2, what did the people say to excuse their failure to build God's house?

2. Why do you think God told the people to "Consider your ways"? (verses 5 and 7)

3. What blessings has obedience to God brought into your life?

CONCLUSION

Obedience to God, even when it is not easy, proves the validity of our commitment to Him.

NOTES



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the LORD’s temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you.” (Haggai 2:18-19)

Some days are just plain challenging! Have you ever had so much to do that you wondered how you would ever get it all done? On days like that, establishing priorities and giving precedence to what is most important can be the solution.

The account of Charles Schwab and Ivy Lee is an example of the importance of correct prioritizing.¹ When Schwab was president of Bethlehem Steel, he hired Lee, a highly respected productivity consultant, to show him how to get more done with his time. He promised to pay Lee any fee within reason if he was successful. Lee’s suggestion was simple. He handed Schwab a piece of paper and told him to write down his most important tasks and number them in order of importance. Then he instructed Schwab to begin working on the first task as soon as he arrived at work each day, and to stay with it until it was completed. Next, he was to recheck his priorities and start on number two. If any task took longer than one day, he was to stick with it for as long as it remained the most important.

Lee told Schwab that if this method worked for him, he was to share it with his employees and then send him a check for whatever he felt it was worth. Sometime afterwards, Lee received a check for \$25,000, a very large sum in the early 1900s! Schwab’s company later became the largest independent steel producer in the world, and he attributed his success to Lee’s guidance regarding priorities.

In today’s text, Haggai delivered three messages from God to the exiles who had returned to Judah after having been in Babylon for seventy years. The people had begun rebuilding the Temple in 536 B.C., soon after their arrival in Jerusalem. However, their priorities had become misaligned. The Book of Ezra and the first chapter of Haggai record that after facing opposition from the inhabitants of the land, the people became more and more involved in building their own homes and eventually ceased the rebuilding of God’s house (see Ezra 4:4-5, 24; Haggai 1:2-4). As a result,

God had sent judgment. Drought had come upon the land, their harvests were meager, and the people were discontented and discouraged after facing repeated setbacks.

In 520 B.C. Haggai delivered his first message, calling on the people to resume rebuilding the Temple—that had to be their priority. And they obeyed! In today’s focus verses, which are part of a message given just one month after the first message, Haggai relayed God’s promise that from the day the foundation of God’s house was laid, His blessing once again had been upon the people.

The concept of putting God and His work first is still vital for us today. There are twenty-four hours in a day and 168 hours in a week—the same for each one of us. How we spend those hours is crucial. Our priorities must align with God’s priorities! When we choose to put God first, we determine that His will is more important than our own preferences. Obedience to Him is a necessity if we want His blessing.

BACKGROUND

God gave the prophet Haggai four separate messages to deliver to the people of Judah, and today’s text records the final three. Each of the messages begins with the specific date it was given, and all were delivered to the people within a period of four months. The prophet started each message by referencing “the word of the LORD” that was given to Haggai the prophet. The instruction to “consider” their ways is issued five times in the two chapters.

Haggai’s first message, described in the preceding chapter, had included a rebuke for the people’s failure to finish rebuilding the Temple and then a call for them to renew their efforts and complete the task. Although the people had obeyed and resumed building, they were still experiencing discouragement when Haggai gave his second message about one month later.

Haggai’s timely call to courage (verses 1-9) exhorted the people to continue the work despite the opposition of their adversaries and the challenges they faced. The older people of Judah had memories of the glory of the original Temple built by Solomon, and they could clearly see that the rebuilt Temple, when completed, would not compare to it. However, this was not to be a cause for despair. Rather than feeling disheartened by the contrast, Haggai encouraged Zerubbabel (the civic leader of the people), Joshua (the high priest), and all the people of the land to be strong in the Lord.

Verse 6 is the only portion of Haggai quoted in the New Testament (see Hebrews 12:26). Some Bible scholars suggest that verses 6-9 refer to revolts that took place during the early years of Darius' reign. Others view these verses in an end-time context, seeing God's declaration that He will "shake all nations" as a reference to His divine judgment when all national powers of the world will be overthrown. With that perspective, "the glory of this latter house" in verse 9 would refer to a future Messianic Temple that will be even greater than that of Solomon's Temple.

About two months after the second message, Haggai delivered his third exhortation from God (verses 10-19). In this message, the prophet instructed the people to ask the priests two questions to be answered from God's Law. The queries illustrated the differences between "clean" and "unclean" and established that while holiness could not be transferred, uncleanness could be (verses 12-13). The people needed to understand that their religious observances and offerings had been unacceptable to God because they were not obeying Him, and their uncleanness had polluted the offerings. As a result, God had sent judgment in the form of "blasting" (wind), mildew, and hail (verse 17). However, now that the people were obeying God and were rebuilding the Temple, they could expect His blessing even before they harvested their grain, grapes, figs, pomegranates, and olives.

The Book of Haggai concludes with the prophet's fourth prophecy, recorded in verses 20-23, which was delivered to Zerubbabel on the same day the preceding message was given to the people. In this continuation of God's promised blessing, Haggai spoke of a coming upheaval in which God would overthrow kingdoms and the strength of the chariots, horses, and riders, and would shake the heavens and the earth. Many Bible scholars consider this to be a reference to the Battle of Armageddon at the end of time.

Verse 23 states that Zerubbabel was to be God's own signet, indicating his leadership would bear the mark of divine authority. God was reaffirming and guaranteeing His promise of a Messiah through David's line, as Zerubbabel was a descendant of David (see Haggai 1:1 and 1 Chronicles 3:17) and in the ancestral lineage of Jesus Christ (see Matthew 1:12-13).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
Used by permission per WORDsearch

- II. The second message—To encourage (2:1-9)
 - A. Date: October 17, 520 B.C. (2:1)
 - B. The people's discouragement (2:2-3)
 - C. The Lord's encouragement (2:4-9)
 - 1. The present prospect (2:4-5)
 - 2. The future promise (2:6-9)
 - a. Shaking of the nations (2:6-7)
 - b. Filling of the Temple (2:8-9)

- III. The third message—To bless (2:10-19)
 - A. Date: December 18, 520 B.C. (2:10)
 - B. The illustration of contamination (2:11-13)
 - 1. Holiness not transferable (2:11-12)
 - 2. Unholiness is transferable (2:13)
 - C. The application to the nation (2:14-17)
 - D. The abundance in the nation (2:18-19)
- IV. The fourth message—To promise (2:20-23)
 - A. Date: December 18, 520 B.C. (2:20)
 - B. The destruction of the nations (2:21-22)
 - C. The choice of Zerubbabel (2:23)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did God say in verse 9 about the Temple?

2. In verses 13-14, what was Haggai trying to bring to the people's attention?

3. If Haggai's message were delivered to us today, what are some ways you could apply it in your life?

CONCLUSION

Though it is one of the shortest books in the Old Testament, the messages contained in Haggai are applicable for our day as well. We must be careful to obey God's instructions and keep Him first in our lives if we want His blessing.

NOTES



Overview for Zechariah

Purpose: The prophet encouraged the people of Judah to continue their rebuilding of the Temple, and reassured them that God would deliver and bless them in a future kingdom in which the Messiah would reign throughout the world.

Author: Zechariah, the son of Berechiah and grandson of Iddo the prophet

Date Written: Chapters 1-8 were written in 520–518 B.C., during the early years of the reign of Persia's King Darius I. Most Bible scholars agree that chapters 9-14 were written sometime after 480 B.C., based on the reference to Greece in Zechariah 9:13.

History: Zechariah delivered his messages to the post-exilic community in Judah which had resumed the task of rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. After their seventy-year captivity in Babylon, the people had been allowed to return to their native land, beginning in 538 B.C. when Babylon fell to the conquering Persians. The exiles had begun the Temple rebuilding soon after their arrival but had become discouraged when they faced opposition. After a lapse in the construction efforts for almost ten years, Zechariah joined the prophet Haggai in attempting to encourage the people to finish their work of rebuilding.

Key People: Zechariah, Zerubbabel (the political leader of Judah who led the first group of exiles back to Jerusalem), and Joshua (the high priest)

Summary: The fourteen chapters of Zechariah divide naturally into two major sections: chapters 1-8 and 9-14.

The first section begins with the prophet's call to repentance and focuses on his encouragement to the people to finish the work of rebuilding.

Zechariah's first messages, found in Zechariah 1:1-6:8, were based upon a series of eight symbolic night visions. These messages focused on the need of the people to repent, emphasized the reality of sin, and pointed to the Spirit of God as the power that

would banish it. These allegorical visions were followed in verses 9-15 of chapter 6 by a description of the dual crowning of the high priest Joshua, prefiguring the dual role of the Messiah who was to come as priest and king. In chapters 7-8, Zechariah answered an inquiry regarding a national fast instituted during the captivity. These chapters also allude to another important element of the Messianic hope by indicating that the One to come will reign in justice from the city of Jerusalem.

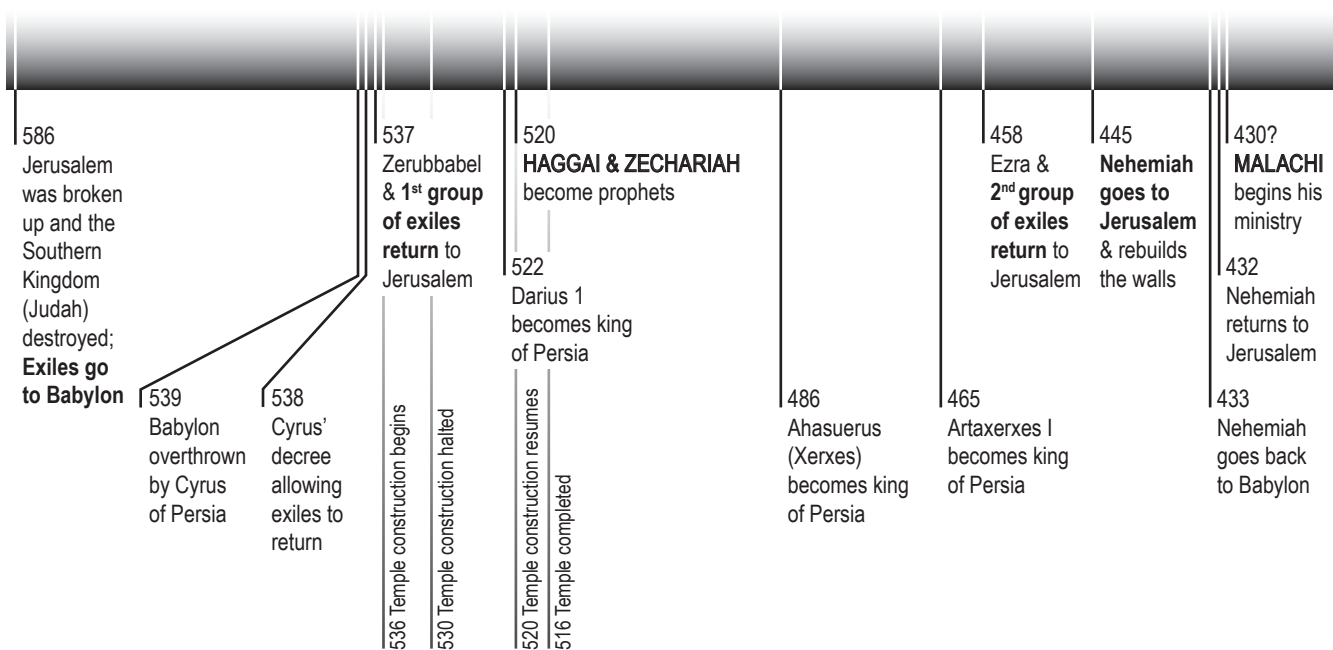
The second section of the book, chapters 9-14, consists of two "burdens," or announcements of a grievous or threatening nature. The first foretells judgment against heathen nations and presents God's promises regarding Israel's glorious future. It references the first and second advent of the Messiah and also foretells the people's rejection of their Messiah. The second burden, which begins in chapter 12, describes Jerusalem's deliverance from her enemies and the subsequent repentance of Israel. The message closes in chapter 14 with a description of the universal reign of Christ when all nations will come to worship Him, and He will rule throughout the world.

Style and Unique Features: The language and style of Zechariah's writings is simple and direct, except for the prophet's retelling of the eight apocalyptic visions. Two expressions occur frequently in the book. In chapters 1-8, the prophet used "thus saith the LORD" a number of times. Since that was the portion of the book written in his early prophetic ministry, it is thought that it may have served to validate his messages to the people. In chapters 9-14, he used "in that day" several times, indicating events that would happen in the end times.

The Book of Zechariah contains more Messianic prophecies than any other of the minor prophetic books, and the prophet repeatedly mentioned both the first and second comings of Christ. He dwells more comprehensively on the person and work of Christ and mentions the "angel of the LORD" more frequently than any of the other minor prophets.

Timeline

Some dates are approximate, as reference materials differ.



Outline

*Hannah's Bible Outlines used by permission per WORDsearch.
A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.*

- I. Introduction (1:1-6)
 - A. The superscription: time and author (1:1)
 - B. The call to repentance (1:2-6)
- II. The eight night visions (1:7—6:8)
 - A. The vision of the man among the Myrtle trees (1:7-17)
 - B. The vision of the four horns and four craftsmen (1:18-21)
 - C. The vision of the man with the measuring line (2:1-13)
 - D. The vision of the cleansing of Joshua (3:1-10)
 - E. The vision of the candlestick and olive tree (4:1-14)
 - F. The vision of the flying roll (5:1-4)
 - G. The vision of the woman in the ephah (5:5-11)
 - H. The vision of the four chariots (6:1-8)
- III. The crowning of Joshua (6:9-15)
 - A. The offering of the Exiles (6:9-11)
 - B. The presentation of Messiah, the Branch (6:12-13)
 - C. The provision for a permanent memorial (6:14)
 - D. Millennial blessings: Gentile help in building the Temple, confirmation of God's word, absolute obedience (6:15)
- IV. The question of the fasts (7:1 — 8:23)
 - A. The question (7:1-3)
 - B. The reply (7:4-8:23)
- V. The two burdens (9:1 — 14:21)
 - A. The first burden (9:1-11:17)
 - B. The second burden (12:1 — 14:21)



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Therefore thus saith the LORD; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the LORD of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem. Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.” (Zechariah 1:16-17)

A while back, several of my friends went on a tour of Israel. Like most Christian believers, I feel a connection to that nation, so I studied the photos they posted online with great interest. I paid special attention to the pictures they took in Jerusalem, as they reminded me of recent historic events in that city.

On December 6, 2017, the President of the United States formally recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and stated that the American embassy would be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The official opening of the Jerusalem embassy took place five months later on May 14, 2018, a date coinciding with the 70th anniversary of the Israeli Declaration of Independence.

The official U.S. Government statement that day noted: “Seventy years ago, the United States, under President Truman, recognized the State of Israel. Since then, the State of Israel has made its capital in Jerusalem—the capital the Jewish people established in ancient times. Today, Jerusalem is the seat of Israel’s government... It is therefore appropriate for the United States to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.”¹

The embassy relocation was both joyously applauded and vehemently condemned around the world. The controversy that swirled around this event is a reminder that the city of Jerusalem has a long and conflict-riddled past. However, it also has a glorious future! As Zechariah began his prophetic ministry, the Lord spoke words of comfort to His disheartened people, pledging to intervene on their behalf.

In our focus verses, a description is given of three future events. After the Lord stated that He had “returned” to Jerusalem in mercy, He promised that “my house shall be built in it,” indicating that the Temple rebuilding would be completed. He went on to say that the city itself would be rebuilt, symbolized by the measuring line “stretched forth upon Jerusalem.” (This was fulfilled about seventy years later through Nehemiah.) The promise in verse 17 points ahead to the Messianic kingdom still to come: “and the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.”

Today, amid all the agitation and competing opinions about Jerusalem and Israel, we can be assured that God’s words concerning His chosen people will come to pass. God has proved His power to maintain the Jewish people’s existence among the nations of the earth where they were scattered in divine judgment. He has brought many of them back to their homeland, to a nation miraculously “born” in a day. And someday, if we remain faithful to Him, we will witness His marvelous restoration of the Holy City, Jerusalem, which He has chosen to be the center of His Messianic Kingdom.

BACKGROUND

The Book of Zechariah opens with the prophet’s message calling the Jews to return to God. Then Zechariah described the first three visions in a series of eight, all delivered to the prophet in one night. These were not dreams but rather, vivid allegories that symbolized the divine truths he was to impart to the people. The first vision portrayed a man among the myrtle trees. The second was of four horns and four craftsmen. The third centered on a man with a measuring line.

Zechariah’s call to repentance in Zechariah 1:1-6 was given two months after the prophet Haggai had begun encouraging the rebuilding of the Temple, and a month after the work had restarted. Through Zechariah, God rehearsed what Israel and Judah’s forefathers had done that caused Him to send them into exile, and reminded the people of His faithfulness to them.

In verses 7-17, Zechariah described the first vision, which was of a man on horseback leading other horses and their riders. They were in a ravine in a grove of myrtle trees; in Scripture, myrtle often is used to signify repentance and renewal. An interpreting angel stood near Zechariah, providing explanations. The horsemen had been charged by the Lord to survey the earth. They gave their report to “the angel of the LORD.”

The angel of the Lord’s question in verse 12 revealed the purpose for the night visions. The comforting answer was understood by the interpreting angel and relayed to Zechariah in verses 14 and 15. Although God had used Assyria and Babylon as tools to “forward the affliction” (or judge) the idolatry of Israel and Judah, He was angry with these “heathen” (Gentile) nations for their oppression of His people. Verse 16 indicates that God had turned back to Israel with mercy. The scope of His commitment is seen in Zechariah’s prophecy of future events: God’s house would be rebuilt, Jerusalem would be rebuilt, the “cities” (representing the nation) would be rebuilt and prosperous, and in verse 17, “the LORD shall yet comfort Zion,

and shall yet choose Jerusalem,” looking ahead to the Messianic kingdom.

In the second vision, described in verses 18-21 of chapter 1, the prophet saw four “horns.” In that era, horns symbolized the threatening power of a nation, so this vision foretold that God would judge the nations that had victimized God’s people. The tense of the verb used in verse 19 could refer to both current and future cycles of oppression and retribution. The “carpenters” in verse 20 referred to all types of craftsmen who use different tools to force material into submission. These signified those by whom God would “fray” (terrify or overthrow) the nations that had scattered Israel.

The third vision, described in chapter 2, revealed God’s intent for Jerusalem in the end times through the symbolism of an angel with a measuring line and a city without walls. In verse 1, the Hebrew word *chebel*, translated as “measuring line,” refers to boundaries for an inheritance—indicating here the portion God will claim as His own (see verse 12). Seemingly, the city was measured to ensure that it will be large enough for the multitudes God will bring to it, in contrast to its small population in Zechariah’s era. The Jerusalem of the future will have no need of walls because God will be its protection (verses 4-5).

The third vision concludes with two appeals—the first to the exiles who had not returned from Babylon (verses 6-9), and the second to the future inhabitants of Zion (verses 10-13). “Ho, ho, come forth . . .” in verse 6 was an imperative statement directing those remaining in Babylon to flee because judgment would fall upon the oppressors. In verse 9, the shaking of the hand was a threatening or dismissive gesture indicating the removal of protection from them. The Lord of hosts declared that the “spoil” of the oppressing nations would ultimately come to those they had oppressed.

The future inhabitants of Zion, addressed in verses 10-13, will include those from many Gentile nations, during the Millennial Reign. Verse 12 is the only Scriptural reference to “the holy land.” The land will only be holy when God purifies it in preparation for Christ’s reign from Jerusalem. Verse 13 portrays the Lord emerging from His holy habitation to rule over human affairs.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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- I. Introduction (1:1-6)
 - A. The superscription: time and author (1:1)
 - B. The call to repentance (1:2-6)
 1. God’s anger (1:2)
 2. God’s invitation (1:3)
 3. God’s warning (1:4-6)
- II. The eight night visions
 - A. The vision of the man among the Myrtle trees (1:7-17)

1. The time (1:7)
2. The vision (1:8-12)
3. The comfort (1:13-17)
 - a. God’s love for Israel (1:13-14)
 - b. God’s anger against the nations (1:15)
 - c. God’s return to Israel (1:16-17)
 - (1) The restoration of the Temple and Jerusalem (1:16)
 - (2) The prosperity of the cities, the comfort of Zion and the selection of Jerusalem (1:17)
- B. The vision of the four horns and four craftsmen (1:18-21)
 1. The four horns (1:18-19)
 - a. The vision (1:18)
 - b. The interpretation (1:19)
 2. The four craftsmen (1:20-21)
 - a. The vision (1:20)
 - b. The interpretation (1:21)
- C. The vision of the man with the measuring line (2:1-13)
 1. The vision (2:1-3)
 2. The promises of the vision (2:4-13)
 - a. Jerusalem’s expansion (2:4)
 - b. Jerusalem’s protection (2:5)
 - c. Israel’s enemies judged (2:6-9)
 - d. Israel’s millennial blessings (2:10-13)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Zechariah 1:13, what kind of words did the Lord use in responding to the angel?

2. Zechariah’s first prophecy was given about two months after Haggai began to prophesy. Why do you think God commissioned two prophets to deliver similar messages so close together?

3. What steps can we take to stay encouraged in the Lord and committed to our opportunities of service for Him, even when we face challenges?

CONCLUSION

As we read Zechariah’s stirring message of hope to the discouraged remnant in Jerusalem, we are reminded that God always does what He has promised. Someday, Jerusalem will be restored in God’s future Kingdom!

1. President Donald Trump, “Recognizing Jerusalem as the Capital of the State of Israel and Relocating the United States Embassy to Israel to Jerusalem,” December 6, 2017, Jerusalem, Israel, Transcript: Federal Register, National Archives, <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2017-26832/p-4>.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.” (Zechariah 3:3-4)

The phrase “filthy garments” in today’s focus verses brings two images to my mind—one humorous and the other inspiring.

The humorous image is a quick photo I snapped years ago of our toddler son and daughter in garments that truly could be described as filthy. They had been playing outside in the yard, and somehow managed to turn on the hose. A flowerbed that had been freshly spaded looked like an inviting spot to mix dirt and water . . . and you can guess the rest! By the time I discovered what was causing such joyous shrieks of laughter, they were absolutely covered with mud.

The inspiring image that comes to mind is the face of my eighth grade Sunday school teacher, Sally Barrett. She often testified of a time as a young mother when she visualized herself clothed in “filthy rags.” Sally’s husband had just been saved, and she was deeply convicted by the change in him. Those who knew her back then would have considered her a “good” woman. She had joined the neighborhood church and accepted Christ, but as she watched her husband’s life after he was saved, she realized she did not have the peace that shone on his face.

She recalled, “In my stubborn way, I told him, ‘You go your way and I’ll go mine.’ However, God did not leave me in that condition. He began to show me what was in my heart—the bitterness, pride, self-righteousness. A few nights later, I was out in the rose garden pruning. As I cut away the drooping blossoms, I felt I was snipping things out of my life. I would tell the Lord, ‘I don’t want this in my life anymore. If You will make me a Christian like my husband, I won’t do this anymore.’”

“A week later, I went to church with my husband. The Lord let me see that all my self-righteousness was as filthy rags in His sight. I saw all the criticism, hatred, and sin that was there, and I wondered how God could love me. But He did! As I prayed that night, God put wonderful peace into my heart. He took away the condemnation and the love for things I thought I couldn’t get along without. My heart was filled with something

far sweeter than anything I had ever known.” From that day forward, Sally lived with gratitude in her heart for the amazing change God made in her life. A testimony to that is the fact that just a few years after I was in her class, she and her husband went to the mission field in South Korea, where they served for over twenty years.

In our focus verses, Joshua, as the high priest of Judah, represented the people of Israel. The filthy garments he was clothed in symbolized the sins they were mired in: their disobedience, their neglect of true worship, and their apathy toward the messages of God’s prophets. But the God who sees all is merciful and gracious. The angel of the Lord commanded that Joshua’s filthy garments be removed, and stated, “Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.”

Satan often disparages the amazing love and forgiveness of our Lord, and frequently tells sinners, “You have gone too far; God won’t hear your prayers” or “God will never forgive you. Look what you’ve done!” That is not true, and Zechariah’s vision proves it. God is more than willing to remove the “filthy garments” of sin and clothe repentant individuals with His righteousness.

My toddlers’ mud-stained clothes were undeniably filthy garments; the two of them were in desperate need of an immediate bath and a “change of raiment.” The filthiness of sin, though sometimes unseen, is every bit as real as physical dirt and cannot be removed by human efforts. Only God can take away the stain and contamination of unrighteousness in the heart. In today’s text, God was willing and ready to forgive and restore Israel, making this sinful people fit to appear in the presence of God and enjoy His blessings.

The same free, gracious forgiveness and removal of sin is available today for all who will confess their sins to God and look to Him for deliverance and cleansing.

BACKGROUND

Today’s text covers the fourth and fifth of eight visions that were given to Zechariah, all delivered to the prophet in one night. In chapter 3, the fourth vision concerned the cleansing of Joshua the high priest, as a picture of God dealing with the moral condition of the people of Judah. The fifth vision, described in chapter 4, was of a golden candlestick and two olive trees, representing Joshua the high priest, and Zerubbabel the civil head of the Jewish community.

The fourth vision of Zechariah is described in verses 1-5 of chapter 3. Joshua the high priest was standing before the “angel of the LORD.” The location

of the vision is not stated. However, the phrase “standing before” is given in a judicial sense, and may be an indicator that Joshua, as a representative of the people, was being accused and was standing for judgment. The adversary, Satan, was beside him to “resist” (attack or accuse) him. Because the Lord had chosen Jerusalem, He halted Satan’s accusations and stated that His chosen city was “a brand plucked out of the fire,” meaning that it had been miraculously snatched away or delivered before it was completely destroyed.

Joshua was clothed in filthy garments, indicating that both Judah and the priests had sinned. The angel of the Lord instructed that these garments be removed, denoting moral cleansing. In verse 5, Zechariah suggested that a “fair mitre” be placed on Joshua’s head. This was the headpiece worn by the high priest which had a golden plate on the front bearing the inscription “HOLINESS TO THE LORD” (see Exodus 28:36-38).

After Joshua received cleansing and reinstatement, in verses 6-7 the angel of the Lord commissioned Joshua, in essence defining the high priest’s duties. He promised that if Joshua would “walk in my ways” (follow the Lord in obedience), and “keep my charge” (perform his priestly duties in keeping with the instructions delivered to him), then he would be allowed to “judge my house.” He would also have unhindered access to God like “these that stand by” (the angelic beings in the presence of God).

In verses 8-10, the Lord of hosts made a Messianic promise. The high priest and his fellow priests were a sign of things to come—the forefathers of those who would see the promised Messiah, “my servant the BRANCH.” This phrase identified the coming Messiah as both priest and king (a descendant of David). Bible scholars have varying interpretations regarding the stone referred to in verse 9, but it likely was symbolic of the Messiah.

In his fifth vision, described in chapter 4 verses 1-6, Zechariah saw a seven-branched golden candlestick—a *menorah* in Hebrew—symbolic of the Divine Presence in the community, ever watchful over His people. On either side of the lampstand were olive trees. The prophet asked what these were.

An explanation and encouragement were offered in verses 6-10 to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah who had been given the responsibility of rebuilding the Temple. His task would not be accomplished by “might” (denoting effort by a human force such as an army), nor by “power” (indicating individual strength), but by God’s Spirit. While the task of rebuilding seemed to be a mountain, through the Spirit of God, all obstacles would be leveled like a plain. Ultimately, those who had “despised the day of small things”—who were disappointed in the Temple’s appearance when comparing it to Solomon’s Temple (see Haggai 2:3 and Ezra 3:12)—would rejoice when

they saw the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel as he put in place the capstone of the Temple.

In verses 11-14, Zechariah asked again about the meaning of the olive trees in his vision. While Bible scholars identify “the two anointed ones” in various ways, the context suggests they were Joshua and Zerubbabel, the divinely appointed religious and civil leaders of the post-exilic community. They stood in the Lord’s presence, and it was through them that the Spirit of God (often represented in Scripture by oil) would work.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- II. The eight night visions
 - D. The vision of the cleansing of Joshua (3:1-10)
 - 1. The defilement of Joshua (3:1-3)
 - 2. The cleansing of Joshua (3:4-7)
 - 3. The prophecy for Joshua (3:8-10)
 - a. The branch (3:8)
 - b. The stone (3:9)
 - c. The day (3:10)
 - E. The vision of the candlestick and olive tree (4:1-14)
 - 1. The vision (4:1-3)
 - 2. The inquiry about the vision (4:4-5)
 - 3. The purpose of the vision (4:6-10)
 - 4. The interpretation of the vision (4:11-14)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Zechariah 3:8, whom did the Lord of hosts say He would bring forth?

2. A divine being referred to as “the angel that talked with me” (see Zechariah 4:4) was present in many of Zechariah’s visions. Why do you think this angel appeared so frequently?

3. The word *resist* in the first verse of our text means “accuse.” What are some ways we can overcome the accusations of our spiritual adversary?

CONCLUSION

God’s willingness to remove the filthy garments of sin from Joshua (who represented all of the people of Israel) is a picture of His willingness to forgive and restore all who come to Him in genuine repentance.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a flying roll. And he said unto me, What seest thou? And I answered, I see a flying roll; the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits.” (Zechariah 5:1-2)

In advertising, where one of the key goals is to capture attention and make a lasting impression, aerial advertising banners are an eye-catching means of communicating information. Usually made from a lightweight material such as nylon, the banners are often brightly colored and bear a company's logo or message. The concept behind them is simple: they invite you to look up and pay attention!

Aerial advertising banners were first used shortly before World War II. Aviation pioneer and New Hampshire airport owner Arnold Sidney Butler is generally credited with being the innovator. He is renowned for attaching long, trailing banners to his fleet of Piper J-3 Cubs and having them flown across the sky. Once the war ended, aerial advertisements became increasingly common. Major businesses such as the Pepsi-Cola Corporation began to use aerial advertising for marketing their products. Today, aerial messages have been towed across thousands of popular beaches, busy highways, county and state fairs, music festivals, and football stadiums.¹

While historians name Mr. Butler as the originator of this form of creative messaging, he wasn't really the first. In today's text, we read that the prophet Zechariah saw a huge “roll” or scroll with writing on it flying through the air. The scroll must have been open, because Zechariah could see how large it was—it measured approximately fifteen by thirty feet! Aerial messages are generally towed by an airplane or drone, but the scroll Zechariah saw was guided by God. And its message did not promote a company, announce a sale, or highlight a logo. God's scroll contained news of a judgment that was soon to be poured out upon the people of Judah.

In the community of returned exiles, it appears that theft and lying—the two sins specifically condemned by the flying scroll—were common abuses of God's Law. God chose a vivid and unforgettable way for Zechariah to impress upon the people of Judah that sin does not pay, letting them know that both the thief and the liar would be “cut off.” And though we likely will not see an aerial banner calling us to look up and pay attention, the same message is

true today. While sin may not be punished immediately, a day of reckoning will come and all who have not repented of their sins will face God's judgment.

God's amazing grace and mercy are available to those who come to Him in repentance, but His justice demands condemnation and punishment for sin that is not repented of. Let us purpose today to learn a lesson from the flying scroll that Zechariah saw and follow God's instructions with very careful obedience.

BACKGROUND

Today's text records the final three visions revealed to the prophet Zechariah—messages that further disclosed God's intent for Israel's future. Chapter 5 describes Zechariah's sixth vision, which was of a flying roll (scroll), signifying God's future judgment against sinners. It also relates the seventh vision, which was of the woman in the ephah (clay pot) that was carried away; this illustrated God purging the very principle of sin from the land. The eighth and final vision is recorded in chapter 6 and was of four chariots carrying God's judgment to the nations. Following the visions, God gave Zechariah a message regarding the crowning of Joshua the high priest, who typified the “Branch”—the Messiah who will eventually reign over Israel as both Priest and King.

In vision six, described in verses 1-4 of chapter 5, the roll that Zechariah saw flying through the sky measured twenty cubits by ten cubits, or at least thirty feet by fifteen feet. The reference to “the curse” in verse 3 indicates that the scroll represented God's judgment against sinners, particularly those who violated God's Law by stealing and lying. Its immense size indicated that His indictment was large and detailed. The roll's dimensions were the same as the Holy Place in the Tabernacle in the wilderness, possibly portraying that the judgment meted out would match the people's failure to align to the Law of the sanctuary. This judgment would expose even the most private of sins, denoted by the roll's entrance and destruction of the “houses” of thieves and perjurers.

In the seventh vision, verses 5-11, Zechariah saw an “ephah”—a container used for dry measurement, which would have been somewhat larger than a bushel basket. The prophet was told that it “goeth forth,” meaning it would be taken out of the land of Israel. This container had a circular lead lid, and when it was lifted, Zechariah saw a woman inside who was the personification of wickedness. Two women with “wings like the wings of a stork” carried this symbol of sin from Israel to Shinar—a place mentioned eight

times in the Old Testament, always in reference to the geographical location of the land of Babylon, which symbolized world idolatry. The words “established” and “set” in verse 11 denote firmness and finality.

Chapter 6, verses 1-8, records Zechariah’s eighth and final vision: four war chariots pulled by horses of various colors. (The colors of the horses are of uncertain significance.) These chariots were instruments used by God to execute His judgment. They emerged from between two “mountains of brass,” generally thought to be Mount Zion and the Mount of Olives, and thus representing the source of divine judgment. Their primary mission was directed toward the “north country,” probably a reference to Babylon. When judgment was inflicted upon the nation that had destroyed the Temple and oppressed God’s people, God would be “quieted”—His wrath would be appeased.

After the visions, at God’s direction Zechariah crowned Joshua the high priest in a foreshadowing of the triumphant Messiah, High Priest, and King who will one day reign. In verses 10-11, Zechariah was instructed to accept the donations of three men who had recently arrived from Babylon and use these gifts to make silver and gold crowns to place on Joshua’s head. This action looked beyond Joshua to the coming Messiah, “whose name is The BRANCH” (verse 12). This familiar title for the Messiah was previously introduced in Zechariah 3:8. The promise that “he shall build the Temple of the LORD” indicated that the Messiah himself would build a future Temple and would also unite both the roles of High Priest and King.

Verse 14 states that the two joined crowns would be in the Temple as a “memorial” (or reminder) of the message that God gave through Zechariah. The phrase in verse 15 “they that are far off” likely refers to Gentiles. Their uniting with Israel in service to God in the Temple would testify to the validity of the prophet’s words.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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II. The eight night visions

- F. The vision of the flying roll (5:1-4)
 - 1. The vision (5:1-2)
 - 2. The interpretation (5:3-4)
- G. The vision of the woman in the ephah (5:5-11)
 - 1. The observation of the ephah (5:5-6)
 - 2. The presentation of the woman (5:7-8)
 - 3. The destination of the woman (5:9-11)
- H. The vision of the four chariots (6:1-8)
 - 1. The vision (6:1-3)
 - 2. The question (6:4)
 - 3. The interpretation (6:5-8)

III. The crowning of Joshua (6:9-15)

- A. The offering of the Exiles (6:9-11)
 - 1. The offerings (6:9-10)
 - 2. The instructions (6:11)
- B. The presentation of Messiah, the Branch (6:12-13)
 - 1. The Messiah, Joshua’s antitype, will build the Temple (6:12)
 - 2. The Messiah will bear glory and be priest and king (6:13)
- C. The provision for a permanent memorial (6:14)
- D. Millennial blessings: Gentile help in building the Temple, confirmation of God’s Word, absolute obedience (6:15)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. According to Zechariah 5:5-6, what did the prophet see after his vision of the flying scroll?

2. Why do you think God used such vivid and unique visions to communicate His messages to Zechariah?

3. Verses 9-15 of chapter 6 look ahead to the Messianic Kingdom and the One who will one day “sit and rule upon his throne” (verse 13). What feelings are stirred in your heart when you think about the Messianic Kingdom to come, and what can you do to ensure that you are prepared to have a part in it?

CONCLUSION

Zechariah’s final three visions demonstrate God’s authority over evil and His plan for the Israel of the future. They challenge us to be mindful of the judgment that will come upon those who reject God’s instructions, and the blessings that will accrue to those who follow Him in obedience.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts.” (Zechariah 8:6)

Amy Carmichael was born into a Christian family in Ireland in December of 1867, and at the age of fifteen, she gave her heart to God. In her late teens, she attended services at the Keswick Convention where the definite experiences of salvation and sanctification were emphasized, and there she learned of a deeper walk with the Lord. The words “Go ye” from Mark 16:15 were deeply impressed on her heart and on March 3, 1893, at the age of twenty-four, she became the first woman missionary sent out by the Keswick Convention.¹ After serving briefly in Japan and Ceylon, she went to India in 1895, where she spent the remainder of her life, never returning home for a furlough.

During Amy’s travels around the villages of southern India, she learned the horrifying truth that parents were selling their little girls to the priests and priestesses of the Hindu temples throughout the area. This was the beginning of Amy’s lifelong mission to rescue young girls from that fate. By 1901, Amy’s home in Dohnavur, India, was housing fifty children rescued from temple prostitution. To those little ones, she was known simply as “Amma,” or “Mother.”

Slowly, Amy became aware that young boys of southern India were also being sold and used in the same degraded manner. She explained the boys’ plight to her ministry contacts but was told it was impossible for anything to be done about the situation. Despite her pleas, they insisted that there simply were not resources to build a facility for boys, nor workers to staff it.

However, Amy was a woman of prayer, and she began to pray fervently about the matter. One day as she walked near a waterfall and pondered its beauty, a Voice spoke a promise to her heart: “Can I who do this, not do that?” That settled the matter for Amy. She knew God would bring it about.

In time, a baby boy was brought to her for care. Taking that as a sign, she had a field next to the girls’ compound surveyed and came up with the design for a boys’ orphanage there. She also asked God to send a specific confirmation that this was His will—a donation of one hundred British pounds—and told her staff that she had made that request of God. The very next day, a donation of one hundred pounds was received in the mail! Less than ten years later, nearly eighty boys

were being cared for at Dohnavur. Today, the Dohnavur Fellowship is still a refuge for at risk boys and girls.²

Those who insisted a home for the exploited boys of India was impossible remind me of the people of Judah who considered Zechariah’s prophecy of a transformed Jerusalem to be too fantastic to believe. The prophet had relayed God’s promises, but the Temple was only half-built at that time, and the walls encompassing their city were still broken down. It seems the people thought, *How could that ever happen?*

God saw the doubt in their hearts. In today’s focus verse, He said, in essence, “What seems unbelievable to you is no great thing for Me!” Though the discouraged remnant in Jerusalem found it hard to imagine that their land would one day enjoy great peace and that God himself would reign from their city, we know that will happen. One day, Jerusalem *will* be a safe and holy place, honored throughout the world, and the governing center of the Messianic Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Like Amy Carmichael, let’s settle in our hearts that when God makes a promise, we can count on it being fulfilled, no matter how impossible the situation might seem. God is trustworthy, and He keeps His word!

BACKGROUND

Two years after Zechariah’s night visions, the prophet received another message from the Lord. This one was in response to a question regarding ritual fasts on anniversaries pertaining to the Babylonian captivity. In these chapters, God gave Zechariah a two-part answer for the people. In chapter 7, God explained what He requires of His people and why He had decided to punish them with exile. Chapter 8 continues the response, offering a series of promises regarding the future restoration of Israel and encouragement for the people of Zechariah’s day.

Chapter 7:1-2 relates that a two-man delegation came to the priests and prophets in Jerusalem, wanting to know if they needed to continue their fasts now that the Temple was being rebuilt. Although they inquired specifically about a fast that mourned the burning of the Temple, Zechariah responded with a broader review of all their fasts. While in exile, the Jews had added several new fasts to the God-ordained fast on the Day of Atonement. These additional fasts lamented tragic events in the defeat of their nation: the beginning of the siege; the destruction of the Temple; the assassination of Gedeliah; and the final capture of Jerusalem.

God’s response, given in verses 4-7, was directed to “all the people of the land.” God rebuked the hypocritical and ritualistic nature of the fasts. Instead of

adding additional fasts that He had not required, the people should have obeyed the instructions previously given them by the prophets.

In verses 8-14, God rehearsed former teachings concerning justice, mercy, and compassion toward poor and helpless community members. Instead of obeying these, their forefathers had refused instruction and made their hearts as hard as “an adamant stone”—one that could not be marked upon. Therefore, God’s wrath had come upon them. They had brought upon themselves the calamity they bewailed in their fasts.

Nevertheless, in chapter 8 God offered hope through promises of restoration. The repetition of the phrase “thus saith the LORD” throughout the chapter emphasizes the surety of these promises. A partial fulfillment of some of these promises has occurred, but many of the blessings described for Israel will come in the end times. The fact that Jerusalem will become a safe, thriving place under the Messiah’s rule is illustrated by the depiction of extreme old age together with youth (verses 4-5); in troubled times, the elderly and the young are the first to perish.

In verse 6, the word “marvelous” denotes something difficult to believe. In essence, God asked the rhetorical question: If the promises of a safe, transformed, prosperous Jerusalem seem unbelievable, does that mean such promises are difficult for Me? He went on to promise deliverance for His people from the east and the west, denoting the whole earth. Jerusalem will be enlarged to hold them, and they will worship and serve God together in truth and righteousness.

The next portion of text, verses 9-13, opens and closes with the words “let your hands be strong.” This was a message of encouragement for those rebuilding the Temple. Though they had faced a lack of resources and opposition, there were better days ahead.

Verses 14-17 indicate that God’s promises were contingent upon the renewal of the covenant standards, exemplified by practicing truth, righteousness, and love towards each other. “In your gates” (verse 16) alludes to the justice system, as the gates were where legal determinations were made.

The delegation’s question was answered in the concluding verses of chapter 8, with the revelation that in the future, fasts would be replaced with joyful feasts (verses 18-19). The multitudes from heathen nations who will worship with Israel and fully enjoy the salvation appointed to God’s people (verses 20-23) point to a fulfillment in the Millennial Reign when the nations of the earth will gather in Jerusalem, the government seat of the Messiah’s Kingdom, to honor Him.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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IV. The question of the fasts (7:1 — 8:23)

A. The question (7:1-3)

1. Elisabeth Elliot, “A Chance to Die: The Life and Legacy of Amy Carmichael,” (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Revell, 2005).
2. Vance Christie, “Trusting God Who Is Able—Amy Carmichael,” vancechristie.com, June 27, 2014, <https://www.vancechristie.com/2014/06/27/trusting-god-able-amy-carmichael>.

B. The reply (7:4-8:23)

1. The rebuke of ritualism (7:4-7)
2. The reminder of past disobedience (7:8-14)
 - a. The command (7:8-10)
 - b. The past disobedience (7:11-12)
 - c. The past result (7:13-14)
3. The restoration of Israel (8:1-17)
 - a. The future restoration (8:1-8)
 - (1) The reason for restoration (8:1-2)
 - (2) The return of Messiah and the results of restoration (8:3-6)
 - (3) The promise of restoration (8:7-8)
 - b. The present encouragement (8:9-17)
 - (1) The subjects of encouragement (8:9)
 - (2) The reason for discouragement (8:10)
 - (3) The details of encouragement (8:11-15)
 - (4) The commands to the encouraged (8:16-17)
4. The restoration of millennial blessing (8:18-23)
 - a. Fasts replaced by feast (8:18-19)
 - b. Gentiles will seek God (8:20-22)
 - c. Jews will enjoy special privilege (8:23)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Zechariah 7:9-10, what did God tell Zechariah He expected of His people?

2. Why do you think God said in Zechariah 8:3 that in the future, Jerusalem will be called “a city of truth”?

3. Through Zechariah, God told the people to “fear not, but let your hands be strong” (Zechariah 8:13). In what ways has He encouraged you to “be strong”?

CONCLUSION

Even when situations seem impossible, God is well able to fulfill His promises.

Zechariah 7 Presented as a Chiasm

In a *chiasm* or *chiastic structure*, a sequence of ideas is presented and then repeated in reverse order. Each idea is connected to its “reflection” by a repeated word, often in a related form. The term *chiasm* comes from the Greek letter *chi*, which looks like our letter X.

- 1—A delegation came to Jerusalem, seeking answers from God (7:1-3)
- 2—Fasting was of man, for their mourning (7:4-7)
- 3—Exhortation—imagine no evil against your brother (7:8-14)
- 4—Promise—God will dwell in Jerusalem; God will bless the inhabitants of Jerusalem (8:1-5)
- Yehovah’s confirmation** (8:6)
- 4—Promise—God’s people will dwell in Jerusalem; God’s people will be blessed (8:7-13)
- 3—Exhortation—imagine no evil against your brother (8:14-17)
- 2—Fasting will turn to rejoicing, for God’s glory (8:18-19)
- 1—Gentiles will come to Jerusalem, seeking God (8:20-23)

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DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them again to place them; for I have mercy upon them: and they shall be as though I had not cast them off: for I am the LORD their God, and will hear them.” (Zechariah 10:6)

In today’s text, we read of a future time when God will gather the Jewish people from around the world into Israel in great numbers. God himself will dwell there with His redeemed ones, and the young and old will mingle together on the streets of Jerusalem.

As I read about this gathering of God’s people that will occur in the end times, it made me think of camp meeting—an annual event that perhaps is a little foretaste of that great future assembly. I don’t remember my first camp meeting. I was just a week old when my parents carried me onto the Portland campground on the opening Sunday of camp that year. However, I do remember an event that took place there exactly three years later—my third birthday was celebrated in tent (now cabin) number 785!

I have another vivid camp meeting memory: going to the airport to meet Brother Timothy Oshokoya, leader of the Apostolic Faith work in Nigeria, when he arrived to attend the convention in Portland. International travel was rare back then, and our family was excited to welcome him. I was caught up in the anticipation too, even though I was still very young. I remember peering between the adults gathered at the airport and asking, “Where’s Brother Timothy? Where’s Brother Timothy?” Finally, someone picked me up and I was face to face with him. I will never forget his wonderful, wide smile! Looking back, I am sure he was as thrilled to be joining the people of God at camp meeting as we were thrilled to have him come.

Camp meeting is still my favorite event of the year, and fellowshiping with first-time visitors and long-time friends remains one of its special joys. Fellowship occurs as we sit side by side in a service, pray together around the altars, visit as we relax on the benches scattered around the grounds, share meals in the Fellowship Lodge, or enjoy snacks in the kitchenettes. And best of all, God himself meets with us!

Just as we look forward to camp meeting, we can look forward to when God establishes His Millennial Kingdom on this earth. That feeling of anticipation should encourage our hearts! We may be facing opposition and challenges today, as the people of Judah did

during Zechariah’s day. However, someday every battle, every disappointment, and every trial will be in the past. The Jewish people will be restored to their land, united in worship of their Deliverer, and their Messiah will be our King as well. What joy and fellowship will be ours in that day when we all worship Him together!

BACKGROUND

Today’s text begins the second part of this Book. This section contains two groupings of prophecies (chapters 9-11 and 12-14). Both are designated as “burdens”—messages of God’s judgment or a prophecy of a calamitous nature. Bible scholars agree that these were written much later than those in the first section.

Chapter 9 highlights how God will bring Israel to a place of final holiness. Although Jerusalem and the Temple had been rebuilt when these chapters were written, the city was surrounded by hostile neighbors. In verses 1-8, God indicated that the nations of Syria (represented by Hadrach, Damascus, and Hamath) and Phoenicia (identified by the cities of Tyrus and Zidon) would come under the judgment of God. The destruction of Tyrus and Zidon would be an example to Philistia (represented by the cities of Ashkelon, Ekron, Gaza, and Ashdod) and cause great fear there. Verse 7 indicates that God would end the Philistine practice of consuming blood with idolatrous sacrifices and would remove the abominations (things offered to idols). A remnant of the Philistines, however, would turn to God, and those few would be accepted “as a Jebusite” (ancient inhabitants of Jerusalem who were integrated into the population as equal citizens).

Verse 8 promised God’s protection of Judah while the prophesied destruction occurred all around them. This portion of the oracle was partially fulfilled at the time of Alexander the Great’s conquest of the eastern Mediterranean coastal lands in 333 B.C. While he did pass by Jerusalem more than once, he never came against the city. The fact that Jerusalem has been defeated and destroyed since that time indicates that the statement that “no oppressor shall pass through them [Israel] any more” will not be fulfilled until the nation’s ultimate deliverance in the end times.

Next, Zechariah looked ahead to the two comings of the Messiah. Verse 9 foretells a notable event that occurred about five hundred years later: Christ’s Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1-11). The “lowly” nature of the Messiah’s coming at that time is contrasted with the power and glory of His coming in the end times when He will usher in an era of peace. In that day, war and its implements will be

eliminated throughout Israel (“Ephraim” representing the Northern Kingdom and “Jerusalem” representing Judah) and “from sea even to sea”—the whole earth.

Verses 11-17 foretell deliverance for Israel.

Because God had made a covenant with His people, identified as “prisoners of hope,” He promised to free them from the “pit” (exile) and commanded them to return to their place of safety in Jerusalem. In graphic language, Zechariah told of a time when God would use His people as weapons against Greece (representing all Hellenists in the Mediterranean area). Most scholars agree these prophecies were partially fulfilled by the Maccabees—a priestly family of Jews who organized a successful rebellion against Antiochus IV and reconsecrated the defiled Temple of Jerusalem in 167-160 B.C. Verses 16-17 foreshadow Christ’s future victory over evil, the preciousness of God’s people, and the beauty of the restored land of Israel.

Chapter 10 begins with an additional allusion to the prosperity and blessings described at the end of chapter 9. Verses 2-3 are a warning against turning away from God. Israel had trusted the guidance of idols and diviners and had been led by them into destruction. God was angry at Israel’s “shepherds” (leaders) and He punished the “goats”—the chief civic and political leaders who had led the people in defecting from God.

Verse 4 indicates that out of the people of Judah, God would provide a Conqueror. Various figures of speech are used to describe the Messiah: “corner” (the chief or head), “nail” (a fixed and secure leader), and “battle bow” (portraying reliability for defense). Bible scholars agree that the phrase “out of him every oppressor together” is challenging. The word “oppressor” may refer to the authority over civil affairs.

Verses 5-7 continue the thought of Israel’s future victory over her enemies. God will transform His people into mighty warriors who will be invincible “because the LORD is with them.” God himself will strengthen those from Judah and Israel, and treat them as though they had never been unfaithful to Him. They will fill the land and become a strong and happy people.

Verses 8-10 concern the Messiah’s regathering of His people. The word “hiss” refers to a method of summoning, such as a whistle used by a shepherd to call his flock. “I will sow them” indicates that God will multiply the influence of Israel. Egypt and Assyria (verses 10-11) represent the oppression from which Israel will be delivered. Gilead and Lebanon denote the territory on both sides of the Jordan River which was part of Israel’s original inheritance. The Messiah will regather so many people that Israel’s land will no longer be sufficient, so Israel’s boundaries will be expanded.

Verses 11-12 affirm that God will end the bondage and oppression that Egypt and Assyria symbolically represent. Just as God’s people had been led by Moses through the “sea of affliction” in the past, God will again deliver them, and they will walk in liberty.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- V. The two burdens
 - A. The first burden
 - 1. The destruction of the nations (9:1-8)
 - a. The prophecy against Hadrach, Damascus, Hamath, Tyre and Sidon (9:1-4)
 - b. The prophecy against the cities of Philistia (9:5-7)
 - (1) Their destruction (9:5-6)
 - (2) Their remnant (9:7)
 - c. The protection of Israel (9:8)
 - 2. The advent of the Messiah (9:9—10:12)
 - a. His first advent: His coming and character (9:9)
 - b. His second advent (9:10—10:12)
 - (1) The establishment of peace (9:10)
 - (2) The prediction of deliverance (9:11-16)
 - (3) The bestowal of kingdom blessing (9:17—10:1)
 - (4) The warning against apostates (10:2-4)
 - (5) The victory of Israel over its enemies (10:5-7)
 - (6) The restoration of Israel to the land (10:8-12)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. The first verses of chapter 9 contain prophecies against those who oppressed Jerusalem. What did Tyrus (Tyre) do as a defense, and what was the end result of her efforts? (Zechariah 9:3-4)

2. The prophecy of Christ’s Triumphal Entry in Zechariah 9:9 was precisely fulfilled. What assurance does this give us regarding other prophecies?

3. Zechariah 10:6 describes God’s mercy toward the Jewish people, the “house of Joseph.” In what ways has God shown mercy to you?

CONCLUSION

The Jewish people have been scattered throughout the world for many centuries, but one day God will reunite the remnant of His people in the land of Israel. What a great day that will be!



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And the LORD said unto me, Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd. For, lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, which shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that that is broken, nor feed that that standeth still: but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their claws in pieces.” (Zechariah 11:15-16)

Shepherding is one of the oldest professions in the world, but it is not for the weak of heart or body. Today, flocks can consist of one thousand sheep, and the shepherd is responsible for their welfare and safety. Assisting with the birthing of lambs, moving heavy bales of hay, and relocating fences are strenuous tasks. Often these duties are performed in extreme weather—subzero temperatures, rain, deep snow with drifts, heat, and humidity. Flocks need to be moved regularly to fresh pastures, and life-and-death decisions for the animals must be made, sometimes very early in the morning. It is humble, exhausting, and dirty work!

Considering the grueling nature of the job, why would anyone choose to be a shepherd? Those who have a passion for it say there is the joy of watching the birth of a lamb and then seeing it walk within a few minutes. They find satisfaction in working at an occupation that is centuries old, even if the monetary reimbursement is not large. As good shepherds, they pay attention to the flock and are devoted to keeping the sheep safe and healthy.

In this text, God used Zechariah to point out that the Jewish people would ultimately reject the Good Shepherd—the Messiah. Although He would offer the best of care and nurturing, they would refuse Him and consequently receive God’s judgment. Instead of following the Good Shepherd, they would choose to follow foolish shepherds—those who would not care for them but rather would destroy them.

Today, the Good Shepherd has a flock—those who have asked Jesus to forgive them and chosen to follow Him. And the Good Shepherd is faithfully caring for His flock, who have the benefits of His love, help, and protection. How much better that is than being buffeted by the enemy of our souls and his forces of evil! The choice is up to each one of us. Let us determine to serve the Lord and be a part of His flock.

BACKGROUND

Chapter 11 concludes the “burden” which began in chapter 9. While chapter 10 foretold the first advent of

the Messiah, this chapter concerns Israel’s rejection of Him and emphasizes the resulting judgment. It begins with a poem of lament over the coming destruction of Jerusalem, and then presents an allegory of the rejected shepherd and the tragic consequences. The chapter ends with the people following an end-time “foolish,” or worthless, shepherd.

Bible scholars interpret verses 1-3 in a variety of ways. Some believe that verses 1-2 are a Hebraic figure of speech denoting the Temple (representing all Judah), since that building’s massive cedar beams were sourced from Lebanon and the secondary woods of “fir” and “oaks” came from Bashan. Others note that the word “doors” in verse 1 refers to an opening or gate, and feel this verse indicates that the destructive forces will come upon Judah through the mountain passes between Lebanon and Israel. Either way, these introductory verses clearly portray great devastation being mourned by “shepherds,” or leaders.

In verses 4-14, God commissioned Zechariah to enact a prophecy of judgment for the people. In it, the prophet’s portrayal of a good shepherd pointed ahead to the Messiah at His first coming. The “flock of the slaughter” refers to the people of Israel who, because of their rejection of Christ, would be killed by the Romans. The “possessors” in verse 5 may refer to Israel’s religious leaders and rulers who would lead the people into destruction. Alternatively, it may be a reference to the Romans who would oppress the people and, as vindication of their actions, would point to the Jews’ religious leaders who were focused on their own ends rather than the good of the nation. Verse 6 indicates that when God’s compassion would be removed, neighbor would oppress neighbor, and the ruler would “smite” the people of the land.

In verse 7, Zechariah enacted the role of a shepherd of Israel, foreshadowing the Good Shepherd, the Messiah. The “poor of the flock” refers to the small portion of the people who would submit to the Good Shepherd’s leading—the people who responded to Jesus when He came the first time. Zechariah took up two staves, which he gave allegorical names. The first he called “Beauty” (which could also be translated “favor,” symbolizing the divine grace promised to God’s people) and the second, “Bands” (which refers to a binding union, signifying the unity that should exist between Israel and Judah).

Verses 8-11 indicate that because the flock found the Shepherd repugnant, He took away the unique protection they had enjoyed. The identity of the three defeated shepherds in verse 8 is obscure. Since they

were “cut off,” they may represent the prophets, priests, and kings of Israel. History records that after the Roman conquest of Judea, the offices of prophet, priest, and king were eliminated in Israel, and to this day they have never been restored. Verse 9 indicates that because the flock turned against the Shepherd, He left them to their fate. The reference to individuals eating “the flesh of another” did actually happen in the Jewish community during the Roman siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

In verse 10, the breaking of the first staff, “Beauty,” does not denote an annulment of the Abrahamic covenant, but rather indicates that since the people of the Covenant had operated outside of its terms, they would suffer the consequences. When the heathens would be allowed to crush them, the “poor”—the few who would accept Jesus as the Messiah—would know that it was God’s doing (verse 11).

In verses 12-14, Zechariah continued his enactment of a good shepherd. He requested compensation for the care he had bestowed, leaving it to the people to determine his value. Their response was insulting: the thirty pieces of silver they offered as compensation was the minimum required price for a bondservant, or the required payment for injury or death of a slave (see Exodus 21:32). It indicated contempt for the shepherd’s pastoral favor and gracious care. This foreshadowed the Jews’ rejection of the Greatest Shepherd, Christ the Messiah, who would come, be despised and rejected, and sold for the price of an injured slave.

The reference in verse 13 to thirty pieces of silver being a “goodly price” is sarcasm. The Lord himself commanded the silver to be cast “unto the potter.” Zechariah obeyed, casting it to the potter “in the house of the LORD.” This prophecy was fulfilled when Judas betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver and, being convicted for his actions, “cast down the pieces of silver in the temple” and the chief priests then used the silver to purchase a potter’s field (see Matthew 27:5, 7). As a result of this shameful payment for service, Zechariah broke his second staff, “Bands,” prophetically symbolizing the annulling of the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. This was at least partially fulfilled in the years leading up to the Jews’ revolt against the Romans; the Jewish historian Josephus recorded intense political and religious infighting among the Jews during that time.

In verses 15-17, God instructed Zechariah to enact the role of a worthless shepherd that Israel would choose to follow. While some commentators view this as a reference to the Antichrist of the end times, many Bible scholars feel it more likely refers to the Roman oppressors of A.D. 70 who treated the Jewish people mercilessly after their rejection of their Messiah. This worthless shepherd would be the opposite of the rejected Good Shepherd. He would not care for the needs of the flock, but rather would devour them.

When the flock was attacked, he would abandon them. However, he would ultimately be punished. The statement that “the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye” implied that he was so severely incapacitated that he could neither pull nor aim a bow—in other words, he was worthless as a soldier because he was unable to fight.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- V. The two burdens
 - A. The first burden
 - 3. The rejection of Messiah (11:1-17)
 - a. The result of the rejection (11:1-6)
 - (1) The desolation of the land (11:1-3)
 - (2) The destruction of the people (11:4-6)
 - b. The fact of the rejection (11:7-14)
 - c. The reception of another shepherd (11:15-17)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What did Zechariah call the two staves (verse 7) and what happened to them (verses 10, 14)?

2. Spiritually, why would a foolish or evil shepherd be a danger?

3. What are some of the benefits that you have experienced from following the Good Shepherd?

CONCLUSION

All those who choose to follow the best of shepherds—the Good Shepherd—will be glad they did! Are you part of His flock today?



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.” (Zechariah 13:1)

English poet and hymn writer William Cowper was born in Hertfordshire, England, in 1731. His mother died shortly after his sixth birthday, and he was sent to a boarding school, where he was severely bullied. He began suffering from depression and panic attacks, and as a young man, was admitted to a mental institution.

One day at the institution, Cowper noticed a Bible on a bench. Picking it up, he read the account of Lazarus being raised from the dead. He recounted later that this passage showed him the mercy of the Savior. Turning next to Romans 3:25, he read that God sent Christ Jesus to be a propitiation for sin through faith in Jesus' Blood. Right there, Cowper lifted his heart to God in prayer and was saved. He wrote, “The full beams of the sun of righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement He had made, my pardon sealed in His blood, and all the fullness and completeness of His justification.”¹

After leaving the institution, Cowper moved in with a retired clergyman and his family. About the same time, he developed a close friendship with John Newton, the former captain of slave ships who had been transformed by Jesus. Newton recognized that Cowper was a gifted poet and encouraged him to try his hand at writing hymns, which the younger man did. In fact, he composed almost seventy hymns in a fairly short period of time! Newton was so impressed that he asked Cowper for a contribution to a hymnal he was compiling. When it was published in 1779, it contained sixty-seven of Cowper's compositions. Among them was the beautiful hymn “There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood,” that is still sung in church services today. Its words, “There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins. And sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains,” are based on today's focus verse, Zechariah 13:1.

Two key doctrines of the Gospel—justification and sanctification—are referenced in that verse. Justification deals with the acts of committed sins, while sanctification deals with the nature of sin inherited from Adam. Charles Spurgeon said of Zechariah 13:1, “This provision is inexhaustible. There is a fountain opened; not a cistern nor a reservoir, but a fountain. A fountain continues still to bubble up and is as full after fifty years as at the first; and even so the provision

and the mercy of God for the forgiveness and the justification of our souls continually flows and overflows.”²

The visual picture of God's mercy and cleansing power flowing freely like a fountain to His people is found frequently in Scripture. In today's text we read of a time in Israel's future when spiritual renewal and restoration will take place through this never-ending supply. However, God's remedy “for sin and for uncleanness” is available today!

Personal attempts at reform, no matter how sincere, cannot take away sin. Making restitution for past wrongs or performing good deeds cannot cleanse the heart. Only that “fountain filled with Blood” avails. Thank God for the precious Blood of Jesus that can remove all sin and uncleanness!

BACKGROUND

The final section of Zechariah, chapters 12-14, looks ahead to the conflict and the final victories of Israel, relates how Israel will be refined through terrible suffering, and describes the role Jerusalem will play in Christ's Kingdom. The phrase “in that day” occurs sixteen times in these last three chapters, clearly referencing the “day of the LORD” that will be ushered in at the Revelation of Christ. Chapter 12 describes the coming assault by armies of the world against Israel, God's mighty deliverance, and Israel's repentance. Chapter 13 focuses on the smiting of the Shepherd and the final reconciliation between God and His chosen people.

Verses 1-4 of chapter 12 reveal that Jerusalem will be “a cup of trembling” to the nations around her. “Cup” portrays a basin around which the adversarial forces will gather, anticipating an opportunity to “drink” from the city's resources. However, it will cause reeling and stumbling among those who drink. “Burdensome stone” in verse 3 alludes to a problem that cannot be solved; God will cause such confusion among the attacking armies that instead of injuring Jerusalem, they will rush to their own destruction. God's actions toward the “horse” and “rider” in verse 4 symbolize the confounding of these military forces.

According to verses 5-9, the people of Israel, under siege and in desperate need, will recognize God as their only hope for deliverance. In response, He will make the leaders of Judah (representative of the people as a whole) like a burning conflagration among the nation's enemies, enabling them to overpower their enemies quickly. This will be an indisputably divine deliverance, so all glory will go to God alone. In God's defense of Israel, He will make the weakest among the people as effective a warrior as David was.

Verses 10-14 describe Israel's repentance, their recognition of Christ as their Messiah, and God's complete fulfillment of his Messianic-Davidic promises. In response to Israel's turning to God for physical deliverance, God will pour upon the people a "spirit of grace and of supplications." As Jerusalem is supernaturally defended, they will turn to Him and bitterly repent of His crucifixion. "Hadad Rimmon" in verse 11 is the site of King Josiah's death, which was recognized as a place of national mourning in Zechariah's day (see 2 Chronicles 35:24-25).

The families of David and Levi mentioned in verses 12-13, as well as the families of Nathan (the son of David from whom Zerubbabel was descended) and Shimei (the grandson of Levi from whom Joshua was descended) are representatives of all the people. The house of David represents the royal family; the family of Nathan represents the prophets; the family of Levi, the priesthood; and the family of Shimei, the scribes and teachers of Israel.

In verses 1-6 of chapter 13, the mourning and repentance described in chapter 12 is followed by the opening of a fountain for the expiation of sin and the complete removal of moral impurity from Israel. While Christ's death on the Cross was the opening of the "fountain" for sin and uncleanness of all mankind, the national cleansing of Israel will not occur until that day, which is also referred to in Zechariah 12:11.

"In that day," the zeal for complete reform and pure religion will be so great that even family members of false prophets will condemn them. According to verses 4-6, those who once prophesied or worshipped falsely will be ashamed of their past. The phrase "I was wounded in the house of my friends" has traditionally been interpreted as a reference to the wounds made in the hands of Christ. However, most Bible scholars now concur that the wounds refer to incisions false prophets made on themselves in their frenzy of worship. They then lied to disguise their former role, claiming that the marks were merely the result of an altercation at a friend's house.

Verses 7-9 describe the smiting of the Shepherd and a time of great tribulation for His flock. Jesus quoted from verse 7 just before His arrest (see Matthew 26:31), and that quote indicates this is a prophecy of Christ's disciples being scattered at His crucifixion. Many Bible scholars also feel that the scattering of the flock was at least partially fulfilled after the Jewish revolts of A.D. 70 and 135, when the Jews were scattered from Jerusalem and Judah.

The events described in verses 8-9 will occur during the Great Tribulation, when two-thirds of Israel's population will die. A purified and refined

remnant—"the third part" mentioned in verse 9—will align themselves with the Lord. They will survive the "fire" of the Tribulation and have a part in His Millennial Kingdom.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- V. The two burdens
 - B. The second burden
 - 1. The deliverance and conversion of Israel (12:1—13:9)
 - a. The conflict and deliverance (12:1-9)
 - (1) The siege of Jerusalem (12:1-3)
 - (2) The deliverance of Jerusalem (12:4-9)
 - b. The conversion of Israel (12:10—13:9)
 - (1) The outpouring of the Spirit and the repentance of Israel (12:10-14)
 - (2) The cleansing of Israel (13:1-6)
 - (a) From idols (13:1-2)
 - (b) From false prophets (13:3-6)
 - (3) The restoration of the remnant (13:7-9)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. Based on Zechariah 12:2-3, in what two ways did Zechariah characterize the city of Jerusalem in his prophecy?

2. In Zechariah 12:10, God said he would pour out upon the people of Jerusalem "the spirit of grace and of supplications." Why do you think the people will mourn as a result of this bestowal?

3. What aspects of the promise in today's focus verse have you experienced in your own life?

CONCLUSION

What a blessing it is to know that the fountain that can cleanse us from "sin and uncleanness" is still open today.

1. Stephen Nichols, "William Cowper," 5 Minutes in Church History, Ligonier, June 27, 2018, <https://www.ligonier.org/podcasts/5-minutes-in-church-history-with-stephen-nichols/william-cowper>.

2. Charles Spurgeon, "The Open Fountain," Spurgeon's Verse Expositions of the Bible: Zechariah 13, StudyLight.org, January 22, 1871, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/spe/zechariah-13.html>.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be.” (Zechariah 14:8)

Water is vital to life. From the smallest cells on earth to the complex human body, from tiny organisms to enormous mammals, nothing can live without water. No new water is being created; what exists repeats a cycle of evaporation, condensation into clouds, and then rain or snow falling to the earth again. The oceans, which are salty, contain 97.25 percent of the world’s water. Another 2.05 percent is in glaciers and ice caps. That leaves a very small percentage available for plants, animals, and humans.

Even with just that small percentage, the introduction of water to dry parts of the earth can have a huge impact. For example, the people of Israel have illustrated that water can transform a desert. A Polish-Israeli engineer named Simcha Blass is credited with designing and perfecting irrigation by a drip system which provides specific amounts of water and fertilizer to plants. Interestingly, the idea for this system emerged from an accidental discovery in the desert of southern Israel. One day Blass noticed that a particular tree in a certain location was thriving, while the foliage near it was not. Inspection revealed that a pipe near the tree had sprung a leak and was dripping a small amount of water onto the tree’s root system. Blass then began doing tests with a variety of materials and water pressures, attempting to find a way to cause moisture to drip in regular intervals onto trees and plants. In 1965, he and his son formed a drip irrigation company called Netafirm, and technologies from that firm are now used to help produce crops in other countries of the world.¹

If water is so vital to survival and can make such a difference in the productivity of an area, consider what it will be like when the Lord causes “living waters” to go out from Jerusalem as described in the focus verse. This prophecy relates to the Millennial Reign of the Messiah; the earth will flourish when Jesus rules. The curse upon vegetation will be done away with and His living water will heal the land. We look forward to that time!

In our present day, we can hold onto the promise Jesus made in John 7:38-39 of living water flowing out of our souls, a reference to the Holy Spirit. What

reviving and spiritual life the Holy Spirit brings! God has sent Him to be a Comforter, a Guide, to remind us of God’s Word, to give us wisdom when we don’t know how to respond to situations, to help us hold to the truth. Thank God for His Spirit! We can lean on Him as we anticipate the blessedness of the living water going out of Jerusalem during the Millennium.

BACKGROUND

This chapter completes the oracle that began in chapter 12 concerning events in the end times, and also completes the prophecies of the Book of Zechariah. The chapter opens with a description of a future war in which all nations will join to fight against Jerusalem. Verses 1-7 and 12-15 provide information about the war and the supernatural intervention of the Messiah at His Second Coming. Verses 8-11 and 16-21 focus on the establishment of the Messiah’s Kingdom and the role that Jerusalem will have during the Millennial Reign.

The details given in verses 1-5 prove conclusively that these events will occur in the end times. The nations gathered against Jerusalem will overthrow the city and plunder it, leading half of its inhabitants into captivity. While the Romans’ destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was accomplished by a multinational army and wrought terrible destruction, there was no Messianic deliverance at that time. This text describes the literal appearance of the Messiah at His Second Coming. Verse 4 states that He will descend “upon the mount of Olives” and will fight for Israel when it seems that all hope is gone, bringing about a supernatural deliverance. The Mount of Olives will split in two, creating a new valley running east to west. Through this valley, the Lord will provide a safe path for the rescue of the remnant in the city.

Verses 6-8 describe other great changes that will take place in nature. The natural light of the daytime sky will abate, and the nighttime sky will become light. This day will be like no other, a new one known only to God. Living waters will flow forth from Jerusalem, the center of God’s earthly kingdom, pouring over the land towards the east to the Dead Sea and towards the west into the Mediterranean Sea; another description of this fountain is found in Ezekiel 47. The phrase “in summer and in winter shall it be” implies that this source of water will be unaffected by the seasons.

Verses 9-11 foretell that the Messiah will establish His kingdom “over all the earth.” The land between the cities of Geba (in the north) to Rimmon (in the

south) will become a leveled plain. Jerusalem, at the center of the Messianic Kingdom, will be geographically elevated, and its inhabitants will dwell in safety.

While Israel will be forgiven and restored, according to verses 12-15, the armies of the nations that came against it will be annihilated along with their implements of war and even their animals, signifying a totality of defeat. This destruction will come about partly by infighting and partly by Judah's actions against them (see Zechariah 12:2-9). Triumphant Israel will ultimately own all the enemies' wealth.

Verses 16-19 indicate that the Gentile nations that survive the war will come annually to Jerusalem to worship the Messiah during His Millennial Reign. The Feast of Tabernacles, originally established to thank God for His provision, protection, and presence during the Israelites' sojourn in the wilderness, will be celebrated from year to year in Jerusalem. Also known as the "feast of ingathering" (see Exodus 23:16; 34:22), this annual occasion was noteworthy for its joyous, festive nature. Those in the Millennial Kingdom will joyfully celebrate the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel and His final gathering of His people.

According to verse 17, failure to come to Jerusalem for worship will result in withheld rain. This verse, along with verses 18-19, seemingly indicates that not every individual alive during the Millennial Reign will worship God. Although punishment for those who rebel will be administered equally to all, Egypt is used in these verses to represent any who remain defiant against God and hold antagonism toward Israel.

The final two verses of chapter 14 indicate that in the Messiah's rule, the distinction between the sacred and unclean will cease. Under the Law, certain days, places, and implements were set apart and consecrated to God as holy, but in that day, holiness will pervade every aspect of life. This is demonstrated by the fact that the decorative bells on the horses' bridles will be inscribed with the same words that were on the high priest's turban, and there will be no distinction between ordinary vessels for household use and the implements used in Temple worship. The word "Canaanite" in verse 21 is representative of any unholy or ungodly person, so there will be no unclean person serving in "the house of the LORD of hosts."

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah's Bible Outlines
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- V. The two burdens
 - B. The second burden
 - 2. The advent of the Messiah (14:1-21)
 - a. The future siege of Jerusalem (14:1-2)
 - b. The advent of the Messiah (14:3-8)
 - (1) The return (14:3-4)
 - (2) The changes (14:5-8)
 - c. The establishment of the kingdom (14:9-11)
 - d. The punishment of Israel's enemies (14:12-15)
 - e. The devotion of the nations (14:16-19)
 - f. The holiness of Jerusalem (14:20-21)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What will happen to the Mount of Olives when Jesus returns as King?

2. What possible benefits might there be when Jerusalem is "safely inhabited"? (verse 11)

3. How can considering the future worship of God during the Millennium help us worship the Lord now?

CONCLUSION

We do not have to wait until the Millennial Reign of Christ to have the living water that Jesus promised would flow out of us.



Overview for Malachi

Purpose: The purpose of Malachi's prophecy was to rebuke the people of Israel for neglect of the Temple, their false and profane worship, and their willful disobedience of God's commandments. The prophet also called the people back to authentic worship and offered hope through the promise of future blessings for God's people.

Author: The title of the book comes from a word meaning "messenger." This may have been the prophet's personal name, or it could have simply pointed to his role as a messenger of the Lord. No other identifying information is given about him. However, all other prophetic books in the Old Testament bear the name of the author, so Malachi is generally assumed to be the name of the prophet who wrote the book.

To Whom Written: Malachi delivered his message of judgment to a Judean audience familiar with worshipping at the Temple in Jerusalem.

Time Period Covered: Internal evidence indicates that the Temple had been rebuilt by Malachi's day and had been in use for some time. Thus, Malachi must have prophesied after Haggai, Ezra, and Zechariah, since the Temple was still incomplete when those books were written.

Date Written: The book is not precisely dated, but the date of writing is generally accepted to be between 460 and 400 B.C.

Setting: The people of Judah had been back in their land for decades following their seventy-year exile in Babylon. Though the Temple in Jerusalem had been rebuilt, the initial zeal of the returning Israelites had given way to apathy regarding the things of God and the worship He had commanded. By Malachi's time, rampant corruption existed in the priesthood and the people were experiencing spiritual depression and widespread disillusionment because the expected Messianic age had not arrived. They were focused on their difficult temporal circumstances and refused to acknowledge it was their own sinful actions that

had brought about their present situation. Through Malachi, God pointed out that disobedience had broken their relationship with Him. He summoned the people to repentance and pointed ahead to the great day of the Lord when God's people would enjoy future blessing.

Key People: Malachi, the priests

Style: Malachi's messages were bold and severe in tone. He incorporated vivid figures of speech and transitioned quickly from one point to another as he condemned the people's sins and called them to repentance. However, his messages also offer distinct evidences of the love of God, as well as His might and power.

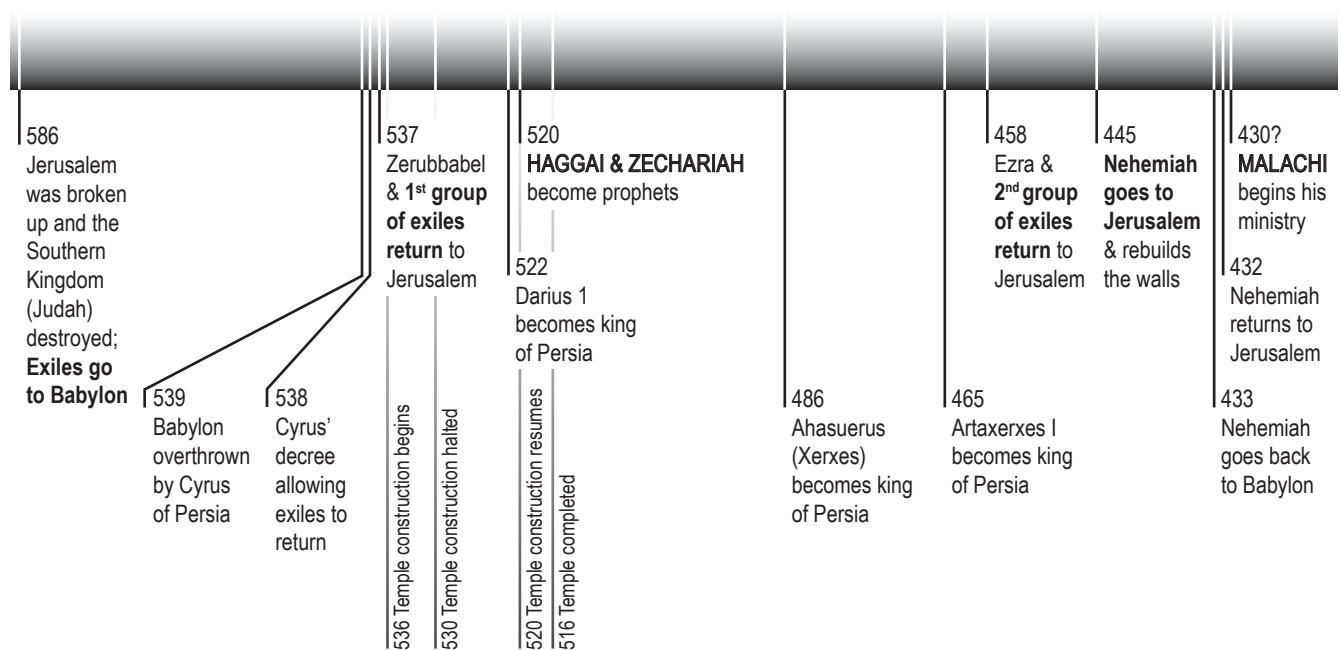
Unlike any other book of the Bible, many of Malachi's messages were delivered in the form of a public debate. The prophet used a series of questions and answers to defend the honor and justice of God. When the people disputed God's declarations or denied His charges against them, the prophet responded with incontestable evidence of their guilt. This makes the tone of the Book of Malachi one of the most confrontational in all of Scripture.

Summary: Malachi's prophecy is described in the first verses as being a "burden," meaning it was one of rebuke and condemnation. After an opening statement declaring God's love for the people of Israel, the prophet delivered God's charges against the priesthood (Malachi 1:6–2:9) and then against the people (Malachi 2:10–3:18). The closing chapter points ahead to the final triumph of the righteous in the end times. In his final words, the prophet exhorted the people to remember the Law of Moses and look forward to the coming of "Elijah," a prophet who would prepare the people's hearts for the coming Messiah. Jesus identified this prophet as John the Baptist in Matthew 11:14.

The Book of Malachi is the last prophecy of the Old Testament. A period of four hundred years would pass before the advent of Christ and the ushering in of the New Covenant.

Timeline

Some dates are approximate, as reference materials differ.



Outline

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A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.

- I. Introduction (1:1)
- II. Israel's questions to God (1:2 — 4:3)
 - A. How has God loved us? (1:2-5)
 - B. How have we (priests) despised God's name? (1:6 — 2:9)
 - C. How do we (the people) profane the covenant? (2:10-16)
 - D. How have we wearied God? (2:17 — 3:6)
 - E. How shall we return to God? (3:7-12)
 - F. How have we spoken against God? (3:13 — 4:3)
- III. God's exhortation to Israel (4:4-6)
 - A. Remember the Law of Moses (4:4)
 - B. Expect the coming of Elijah (4:5-6)



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! And ye have snuffed at it, saith the LORD of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the LORD.” (Malachi 1:13)

In my early childhood, my grandmother lived just down the lane from us and as her first grandchild, I spent a lot of time at her home. I built a tree house in one of her large Black Walnut trees, played in the hay in her barn, and helped feed the cows and chickens. Best of all, I got to enjoy her cooking! It became a bit of a family joke that I would call my parents to see what was being served for dinner at our house, and then request a longer stay at Grandma’s house so I could eat with her.

Occasionally, I wasn’t thrilled with some dish that Grandma put on the table. Grandma had a very direct response when I did not seem to want to eat what she served. She would say, “Are you going to turn your nose up at that?” It was obvious to her by my facial expression when I did not like the smell, texture, or taste of what she had served!

This is the exact sense of the word translated “snuffed” in today’s focus verse. The Lord was chiding His people for their flagrant disregard of Him and His instructions. They essentially said, “The table of the LORD is contemptible,” or, in my grandmother’s words, they “turned their noses up” at what God had prescribed. Although God had delivered the people of Judah from Babylonian exile some years before, they had become weary of God’s instructions, much as their ancestors had become weary of the manna God sent during their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land.

My turning up my nose at Grandma’s food (which only happened rarely) could be attributed to youthful immaturity. This attitude of snuffing by Israel was pervasive, and indicative of the people’s disregard for God’s commands. Not only were the people ignoring God’s instructions related to proper sacrifices, but the priests were failing to lead the people righteously. Our text today reveals that this indifferent attitude had infiltrated society to the extent that His plan for lifelong marriage was being rejected. And then the people wondered why God was not accepting their offerings when they came before Him to worship!

While my parents and grandmother found it somewhat humorous when I would choose where and what I would eat, God does not take it lightly when people

disobey His instructions. Rather than “snuffing” at God’s commands, may we respond with obedience, honoring God as our Heavenly Father.

BACKGROUND

Written sometime between 460 and 400 B.C., Malachi’s prophecies were directed to the priests and people of Judah and Jerusalem. While the Temple had been rebuilt many decades earlier, by Malachi’s day the people were not serving God faithfully. Nehemiah had returned to Babylon from Jerusalem in 433 B.C., reporting widespread problems which included failure to pay tithes, neglect of the Sabbath requirements, the breaking of marriage vows, the oppression of the disadvantaged, and the corruption of the priests. Malachi described these same conditions. The people were disillusioned and focused on their difficult temporal circumstances, but they refused to acknowledge it was their own sinful actions that had brought about the problems they faced. Doubt, skepticism, and a lack of gratitude toward God prevailed. Through Malachi, God pointed out that disobedience had broken the people’s relationship with Him. He summoned them to repentance and pointed ahead to the great day of the Lord when God’s people would enjoy future blessing.

Unlike any other book of the Bible, many of Malachi’s messages were delivered in the form of a public debate. The prophet used a series of questions and answers to defend the honor and justice of God. When the people disputed God’s declarations or denied His charges against them, the prophet responded with incontestable evidence of their guilt. This makes the tone of the Book of Malachi one of the most blunt in all of Scripture. The first questions by Israel are asked and responded to in today’s text.

The initial question and response are found in verses 2-5 of chapter 1. The people’s question was “Wherein hast thou loved us?” To respond, Malachi referred to Jacob and Esau. In these verses, “Esau” represents the nation of Edom (Esau’s descendants) and “Jacob” represents the nation of Israel (Jacob’s descendants). In verse 3, the Hebrew word translated *hated* has a range of meanings from “less favored” to “vehement opposition.” The use of it in context with verse 4 illustrates God’s irreparable judgment upon Edom (see the Book of Obadiah for more detail). He “laid his [Edom’s] mountains and his heritage waste” (verse 3), causing Malachi to refer to the Edomites as “the people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever” (verse 4). In contrast, God cared for and preserved the Israelites in a special way, rescuing

them from exile and restoring them to their own land. Verse 5 states, “your eyes shall see,” indicating that the evidence was right before them.

The next questions and responses are found in Malachi 1:6 through Malachi 2:9. The questions were, “Wherein have we despised thy name?” and “Wherein have we polluted thee?” (1:6-7). In response, Malachi pointed out that they had despised God by not giving Him the honor due a father or master. The priests had despised God’s name by offering impure sacrifices in worship, breaking the very covenant for which their ancestors (the tribe of Levi) had been called into the priesthood (2:4-8). The priests had not followed God’s directions, and in addition, they had administered the Law with partiality.

In chapter 2, verses 10-16, Malachi condemned the people because of their disobedience of God’s commands regarding marriage. Malachi asked, in essence, “If God is our Father and Creator, why do we violate His covenant?” Israel had been instructed not to intermarry with individuals from the nations around them because these people worshipped false gods. However, divorce had become common, and Jewish men were leaving their Jewish wives to marry women of the surrounding countries. In verse 13, God said the offerings and tearful worship of those who sinned in this way were pointless and would not be regarded by Him.

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

Hannah’s Bible Outlines
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- I. Introduction (1:1)
- II. Israel’s questions to God
 - A. How has God loved us? (1:2-5)
 1. God states His love, Israel doubts it, and God demonstrates it (1:2-5)
 - a. His choice of Jacob (1:2)
 - b. His preservation of Israel (1:3-5)
 - B. How have we (priests) despised God’s name? (1:6—2:9)
 1. God’s statement of being despised and Israel’s questioning reply (1:6)
 2. God’s defining answer (1:7—2:9)
 - a. Their improper sacrifice (1:7-10)
 - b. Their improper respect for God’s name (1:11-14)
 - (1) The Gentiles will honor God’s name (1:11)
 - (2) The priests do not honor God’s name (1:12-14)
 - c. Their improper obedience (2:1-9)
 - (1) The warning to the priests: their disobedience and condemnation (2:1-3)
 - (2) The example of Levi (2:4-7)
 - (a) The purpose of the covenant (2:4)
 - (b) The practice of Levi (2:5-7)

- [1] Fears God (2:5)
- [2] Truthful and upright (2:6)
- [3] Mediates (2:7)
- (3) The present priesthood (2:8-9)
 - (a) Their practice: they turn away from God, cause others to stumble and corrupt the covenant (2:8)
 - (b) The judgment (2:9)
- C. How do we (the people) profane the covenant? (2:10-16)
 1. The question from Israel (2:10)
 2. The reply to Israel (2:11-16)
 - a. The reasons for profaning the covenant (2:11-13)
 - (1) They marry foreign wives (2:11-12)
 - (a) The fact of unfaithfulness (2:11)
 - (b) The result of unfaithfulness (2:12)
 - (2) They offer unacceptable sacrifices (2:13)
 - b. The reason of foreign marriages repeated (2:14-16)
 - (1) The fact (2:14)
 - (2) The counsel (2:15-16)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. What abomination did the prophet identify in Malachi 2:11?

2. The people of Malachi’s day were condemned for offering imperfect sacrifices. What might constitute an imperfect offering to God in our day?

3. What are some ways in which we can properly honor God?

CONCLUSION

Malachi rebuked the priests and people of his day for dishonoring God by offering unworthy sacrifices and failing to follow God’s commandments. May we purpose to learn from their mistakes and be careful to honor God in proper worship and complete obedience.



DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” Malachi 3:10

When our children were young, we placed three jars for each of them on a shelf in the kitchen, with the goal of teaching them the importance of tithing and careful handling of their money. Whenever they received their allowances or earned money for doing extra tasks, we pointed them to the three jars. The first jar was marked with the word “GOD,” the second with the word “SAVING,” and the third with the word “SPENDING.” First and most important was to honor God by tithing, so we instructed them to place ten percent of whatever money they received into the “GOD” jar before doing anything else. Then, to teach the wisdom and discipline of retaining some of what is earned or received, a certain portion of their money was placed in the “SAVING” jar. To impress that concept on their minds, we reminded them that the Bible says that ants, though small, store extra in the summer to prepare for winter. Finally, the balance of the money was placed in the “SPENDING” jar. We advised them to use the money in that jar wisely, thinking carefully about each expenditure rather than buying impulsively. We wanted to instill in them that if they would honor God first through tithing, and then save for the future and live on less than they earned, they could avoid much of the heartache people have concerning money.

The principle of honoring God first by tithing is found throughout Scripture. Both Abraham and Jacob set an example for their descendants long before commands regarding tithing were given in the Law of Moses, so Malachi’s instruction to the people in today’s text was not new to them. However, even before the Jewish people were exiled to Babylon, Israel and Judah had wandered far from the principles of the covenant in many ways, including in this important matter. By Malachi’s day, the refusal to tithe had made it necessary for the Levites to work to earn their living (see Nehemiah 13:10-11). As a result, they had neglected their responsibilities regarding the care of the Temple and the teaching of proper worship. In today’s focus verse, Malachi challenged the people to return to honoring God with their tithes

and offerings. The result would be heavenly blessings beyond their imaginations.

The same principle is true today. When we honor God first with our tithes and reflect His generous nature with our offerings, we become the recipients of blessings far beyond anything we give. God challenged Israel to “prove me now.” Let us purpose to prove God as well through our faithfulness in tithing and generous support of His work.

BACKGROUND

Malachi’s prophecies were directed to the priests and people of Judah and Jerusalem, who refused to acknowledge that their own sinful actions had brought about the problems they were facing. Through Malachi, God pointed out that disobedience had broken the people’s relationship with Him. When the people disputed God’s declarations or denied His charges against them, the prophet responded with incontestable evidence of their guilt. Today’s text continues the series of questions asked by Israel and God’s responses given through Malachi.

Malachi 2:17, the first verse of today’s text, records Malachi’s assertion that the people had wearied God with their hollow talk and twisting of the truth by calling evil good. They then questioned, “Wherein have we wearied him [God]?” Their assumption was that because God had not responded to them, He tolerated their actions or at least would not punish them.

Chapter 3 contains God’s response. The point is made in verse 1 that a true messenger would be sent by God to prepare the way for His coming in judgment. Jesus quoted this passage and in Matthew 11:10 and Luke 7:27, identified this messenger as John the Baptist. Malachi foretold that the Messiah would be instrumental in the purging and purification of Israel, the restoration of pure worship, and judgment upon the wicked—the sorcerers, adulterers, false swearers, oppressors, inhospitable, and those who did not fear God (Malachi 3:5).

In verses 7-12, the next question posed by the people was, “Wherein [how] shall we return [to God]?” Malachi responded by urging them to stop robbing God. They replied, “Wherein have we robbed thee?” Malachi said, “In tithes and offerings.” He promised that if they would bring “all the tithes into the storehouse,” God’s abundant blessings would be poured out upon them.

The next question and God’s response are found in Malachi 3:13 through 4:3. After God stated that the

people's words had been "stout" (strongly) against Him, they questioned, "What have we spoken so much against thee?" This seemed to be a denial of Malachi's charge. Malachi responded by pointing to their arrogance in asserting that it was futile to worship God since the wicked seemed to be prospering.

Verses 16-18 of chapter 3 refer to a different group of speakers: the faithful ones who feared the Lord and "spoke often one to another." Despite the words of the arrogant doubters, the faithful received affirmation: a "book of remembrance" was written about them and those who "thought upon his name."

Chapter 4 includes the promise that the "Sun of righteousness" would one day arise with healing in His wings (verse 2), picturing the glory of the Messiah, who would come to dispel the darkness of sin. This is followed by Malachi's final admonition to "remember . . . the law of Moses," thus exhorting the people to live in accord with its demands. The book concludes in verses 5-6 with a look toward a future messenger, figuratively referred to as Elijah the prophet, who would turn hearts to the Lord. The New Testament fulfillment of this prophecy is found in the ministry of John the Baptist (see Mark 9:11-13 and Luke 1:17).

AMPLIFIED OUTLINE

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II. Israel's questions to God

- D. How have we wearied God? (2:17—3:6)
 1. Israel's accusation of God's injustice (2:17)
 2. God's reply of true justice (3:1-6)
 - a. The precursor of the judge and the advent of the judge (3:1)
 - b. The purging and purification of Israel (3:2-3)
 - c. The restoration of true worship (3:4)
 - d. The judgment of the unrighteous (3:5)
 - e. The preservation of the remnant (3:6)
- E. How shall we return to God? (3:7-12)
 1. The exhortation to return to God and the question about returning (3:7)
 2. The explanation of Israel's sin (3:8-9)
 3. The result of Israel's repentance (3:10-12)
 - a. Blessing (3:10)
 - b. Protection and provision (3:11)
 - c. Exaltation (3:12)
- F. How have we spoken against God? (3:13—4:3)
 1. The accusation of the Lord and the reply of Israel (3:13)
 2. The explanation of the accusation (3:14-15)

- a. It's vain to serve God (3:14)
- b. Evil doers are better off than the righteous (3:15)
3. The answer to the accusation (3:16—4:3)
 - a. The faithful will be rewarded (3:16-17)
 - b. The wicked will not prosper (3:18—4:1)
 - c. The righteous will triumph in the "Sun of Righteousness" (4:2-3)

III. God's exhortation to Israel (4:4-6)

- A. Remember the Law of Moses (4:4)
- B. Expect the coming of Elijah (4:5-6)
 1. The promise and time of his coming (4:5)
 2. The ministry of his coming (4:6)

A CLOSER LOOK

1. In Malachi 3:16, what is the special book that was written before the Lord?

2. What is the implication for Israel of the declaration in Malachi 3:6, "I am the LORD, I change not . . ."? What is the implication for us?

3. What can we do to ensure we are included when the Lord makes up His "jewels"? Malachi 3:17

CONCLUSION

The very best way to teach our children about honoring God with tithes is by our own example of faithfulness. Beyond that, allowing them to join in generosity above tithing is a great means of teaching them of God's generosity toward us.

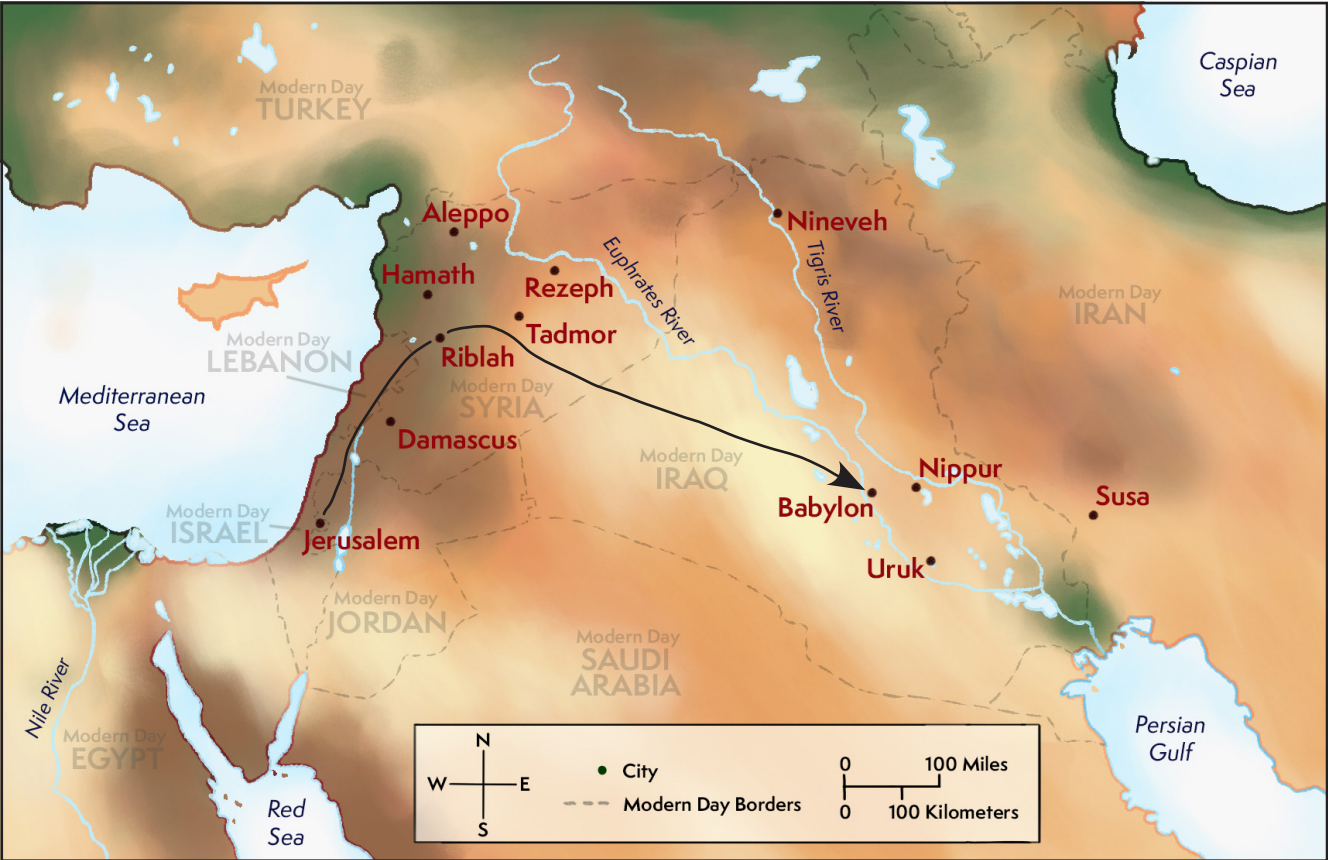
NOTES

Key Locations in 1 & 2 Chronicles

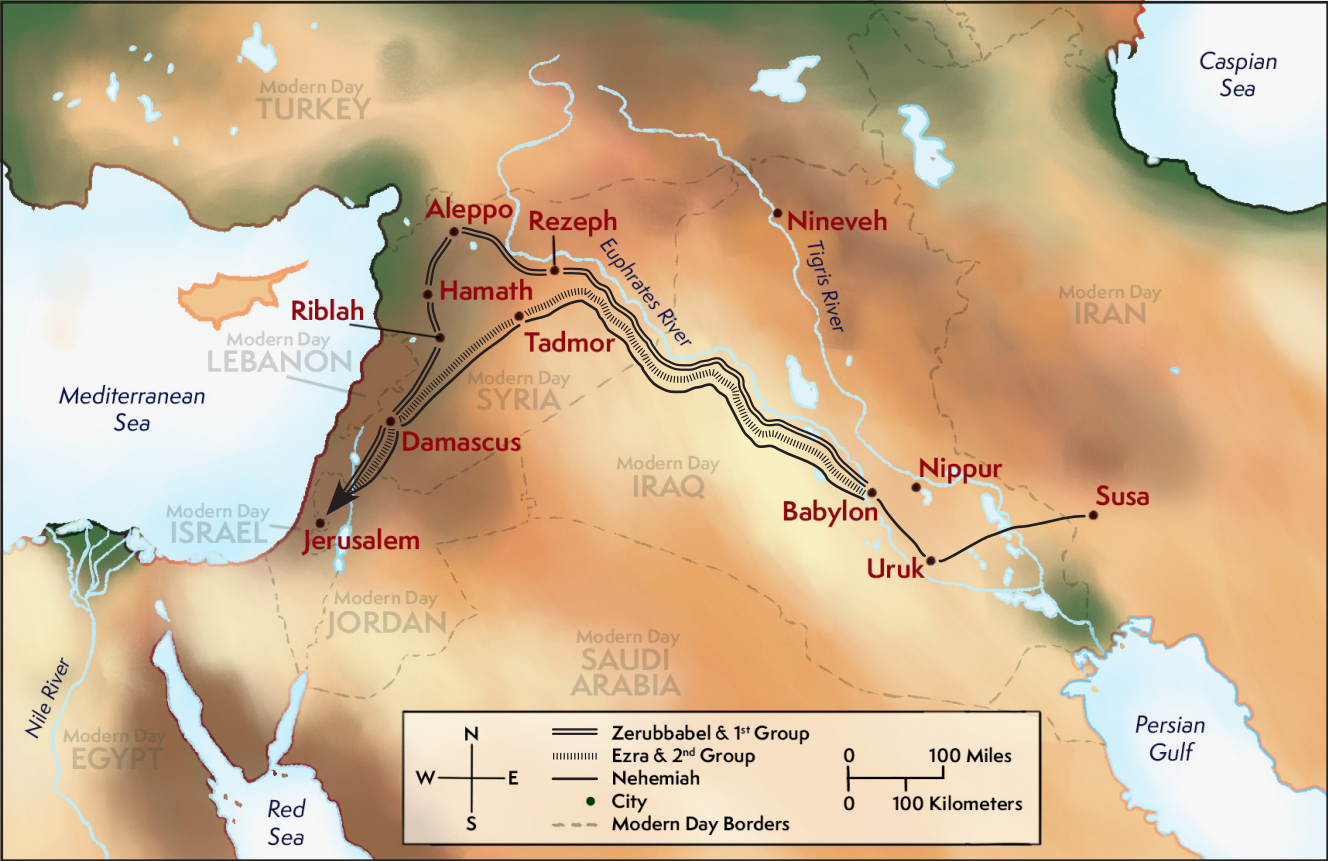


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The Exiles' Journey to Babylon



The Exiles' Journey Home



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