

The History, Book 9

II Chronicles

The Book of II Chronicles records the history of the Southern Kingdom, from the reign of Solomon to the return from Babylonian captivity, where the Book of Ezra takes up the story. It essentially recapitulates the history of I and II Kings, except that it focuses exclusively on the kings of Judah. Like I Chronicles, by concentrating exclusively on David's descendants, the human ancestry of Jesus, II Chronicles points us to David's Greater Son, the Messiah to come.

A. Author. As stated in the introduction to I Chronicles, although there is evidence that Isaiah may have compiled some of the earlier records (what is now I Chronicles) all evidence points to Ezra as the final compiler of all of the records that now constitute I and II Chronicles.

B. Place and Date. Like I Chronicles, II Chronicles was probably compiled in Jerusalem, about 450 BC.

C. Occasion. Like I Chronicles, this second Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah consolidated the history of the Israelite people. Through the agency of Cyrus, King of Persia, God's chosen people had returned to Jerusalem and the surrounding area at the time of its compilation. The destroyed Temple was being rebuilt on the same site, the badly damaged walls of Jerusalem and were being restored, and the nation was struggling to regain its identity and a knowledge of its true history and purpose. As was stated in the introduction to I Chronicles, without a knowledge of its true history, a nation cannot have a valid sense of its identity, or a valid vision for its future.

D. Theme. Like I Chronicles, the theme of II Chronicles is the heritage of God's chosen people, the blessings that follow obedience to His Word, and the destruction that invariably results from disobedience, especially the spiritual adultery of paganism ("a whoring after other gods"). This choice, and its consequences, were made clear in the Law, from Genesis 3 to Deuteronomy 30; it has never been a secret, or a subtle implication. The Israelites had had their noses rubbed in it since the Exodus. The Books of I & II Samuel, I and II Kings, and I and II Chronicles vividly illustrate this foundational truth.

E. Highlights. Because II Chronicles retells the story of I and II Kings, much of the material is the same. Highlights selected from II Chronicles, therefore, in order to avoid repetition, will be restricted to those events not recorded in I and II

Kings, and passages with additional information concerning those which are. Thus, highlights of II Chronicles include the following:

1. Solomon Is Off to a Good Start: (1:1-12)

Solomon leads the people in worship at the Tabernacle of Moses. Although the Ark of the Covenant is housed in its special tabernacle, which David had built for it at Jerusalem, the Tabernacle of Moses is at Gibeon, where it has been since the insane, utter destruction of Nob by Saul. Here Solomon worships, and offers a thousand burnt offerings¹. It is here, on that same night, that the Lord appears to Solomon in a dream and gives him the famous choice of what he most desires. Solomon makes the perfect choice: wisdom with which to rule the kingdom, and he is off to a great start.

2. Fire from Heaven--God is Pleased.(7:1-3)

Solomon has the Temple constructed, exactly according to the plans the Lord had given to David. When the Temple is finished, and furnished, the Ark of the Covenant is brought from the tabernacle David had built for it at Jerusalem, placed in the Holy of Holies, and the finished Temple is dedicated with great celebrating. Solomon closes the dedication with a long prayer, and the Lord is pleased; to express His pleasure, He sends fire from Heaven, which consumes the burnt offerings. The glory of the LORD fills the Temple and is such an overwhelming presence that the priests are unable to enter². At this point, if Solomon and the people were able to speak at all, they must have said something like, "Awesome!" They fall on their faces, and worship and praise the Lord, the entirely appropriate thing for them to do.

3. "If My People..." (7:12-14)

After the dedication of the Temple, the Lord appears to Solomon a second time, as He had at Gibeon, and promises wonderful things for the future of the nation. The promises, as before, are conditional, and will depend on the faithfulness of the nation to the Lord. The Lord, of course, knows that the people will **not** be faithful, so He graciously prescribes a remedy for the times when they disobey. This remedy, verse 14, has become one of the most familiar verses in the Bible. ***NOTE:** Solomon reigns for 40 years in peace and unprecedented prosperity; but in his latter years he marries many pagan women and becomes completely corrupted by their paganism. Upon his death he is replaced by his son, Rehoboam, whose foolishness leads to the dividing of the Kingdom, with Jeroboam King of the*

¹ By this time, the Tabernacle is about 2,000 years old, and has been moved many times. Some of the fabric and animal skins may have worn out, and been replaced, during that time, but we are not told of this; we are only told that it is the same one built by Moses in the Exodus (v3).

² And when they were able to enter, they could not stay on their feet to minister (I Kings 8:10-11).

Northern Kingdom, Israel, and Rehoboam King of Judah in the South. Rehoboam's son, Abijah, who succeeds him as second king of Judah, is no better than his father; but he lasts only 3 years and is succeeded by his son Asa, a righteous king. Sixty-one years after the kingdom was divided, righteous Asa's righteous son, Jehoshaphat, becomes King of Judah. He is a very good king, remembered both for his righteousness and his gullibility; his worst failing is his willingness to cooperate with ungodly kings around him. These events are described fully in I Kings, and will not be repeated here.

4. Jehoshaphat's Crusade for Righteousness. (17:1-18:1)

Jehoshaphat puts first things first. Realizing that faithfulness to the Lord is the only wise foundation for the kingdom, he first attacks the pagan high places and groves that his father, Asa, had allowed to remain³. Then he decrees a systematic proclamation and teaching of the Word of God. He sends out teaching teams of his princes, priests and Levites. They are sent to every part of the Southern Kingdom, to ensure order, and teach the Word. Jehoshaphat knows that political order cannot be divorced from spiritual order and righteousness. The result of Jehoshaphat's wisdom and righteousness is predictably good: he has peace because the surrounding pagans fear the people of God; he "waxed great exceedingly"; and "had riches and honor in abundance."

NOTE: In the rest of Chapter 18 there is retold the story of Jehoshaphat's unwise joint undertaking with wicked King Ahab of Israel, to fight against the Syrians. In the battle Ahab is mortally wounded, but Jehoshaphat returns safely to Jerusalem, sadder but, we hope, wiser for his bad experience.

5. Jehoshaphat Repents: Another Revival. (Chapter 19)

As Jehoshaphat returns from his ill-advised campaign against Syria, the prophet Jehu meets him and rebukes him for his alliance with wicked Ahab. Jehoshaphat apparently gets the message, for he personally leads a second revival throughout the land, with systematic teaching of the Word of God, and he reestablishes spiritual and political order. This kind of personal leadership by a king of Judah, to reestablish righteousness, will be approached in the reformation under Hezekiah, but will not be equaled until the reign of Josiah, 300 years later.

6. The Perfect Response to a Serious Threat. (20:1-13)

After Jehoshaphat's second revival, the kings of Moab and Ammon unite in a war against the Kingdom of Judah. Moab and Ammon are joined in their aggression by other, smaller, pagan principalities and, combined, they greatly outnumber

³ It appears that Jehoshaphat failed to destroy all of the high places of pagan worship (or allowed some to be rebuilt); see I Kings 22:43).

Judah. Things definitely look grim, and Jehoshaphat is shaken; however, he knows what to do. He might have leaned on the arm of flesh, and hastened to ask the wicked Northern Kingdom to help him; or, he might have scraped up the gold and silver in the treasury and bribed Syria to help him. But not Jehoshaphat; he proclaims a fast, gathers the people to the Temple, leads them in prayer to the Lord for help, and the people stand in agreement. He couldn't have made a better response.

7. The Perfect Answer to Earnest Prayer. (20:14-17)

As the king leads the people in crying out to the LORD for help, the Holy Spirit comes upon a Levite in the crowd named Jahaziel, and he prophesies. The LORD, through the prophet, tells the people not to fear, that the battle is the LORD's. He tells them to go down against the enemy in battle array, tells them exactly where the enemy is, but tells them that they will not have to fight; all they will have to do is to stand and watch the LORD defeat the enemy. They couldn't wish for a better answer to their prayers.

8. The Perfect Result from Trusting the Lord. (20:18-25)

In gratitude, Jehoshaphat falls on his face before the Lord, and the people follow his example; the Levites then unite in shouting praises to the LORD. The next morning Jehoshaphat leads the people, in battle array, into the forest of Tekoah. He reminds them to trust in the LORD, and he appoints singers, which go in advance of his army, singing "Praise the LORD, for His mercy endureth forever." He couldn't have done better, and they all watch as the LORD causes the enemy to kill one another. The invaders are all killed, not one escapes, and it takes Jehoshaphat's people three days to haul away the gold, jewels and other spoil. Their perfect response to the threat has produced the perfect result!

8. Peace and Prosperity. (20:26-37)

After three days of collecting the spoils, Jehoshaphat personally leads the people in rejoicing, the valley is named Barachah ("Blessing"), and he leads them back to Jerusalem, singing and praising God all the way. From that time on, the pagan nations around them are afraid to offend Judah, and the rest of Jehoshaphat's reign is one of peace and prosperity. His remaining years are marred only by his great fault--that of being gullible and willing to undertake joint ventures with the ungodly kings around him. It never works for him. Perhaps it is his trusting nature that also causes him not to destroy all the high places where some of his people persist in sinning, in spite of his excellent example⁴.

⁴ By combining what seem to be contradictory statements in I Kings 22:43, II Chronicles 17:6 and 20:33, we learn that Jehoshaphat destroyed some of the pagan high places, but not all of them.

9. Godly Jehoshaphat's Ungodly Son. (21:1-7)

Jehoshaphat, one of the **very best** kings of Judah, dies and is succeeded by Jehoram (Joram), his first-born son, one of the **very worst** kings of Judah. One of Jehoram's first acts is to have all six of his brothers murdered plus, for good measure, he apparently kills some of the princes of the Northern Kingdom ("divers also of the princes of Israel"), who were probably all his cousins. Instead of following his father's godly example, he follows Ahab's ungodly example. For his wife, he chooses the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, the very wicked Athaliah⁵. Like her mother, Jezebel, wicked Athaliah's name will become inseparable from her evil deeds.

10. An Evil Reign and Its Fruit. (21:8-11)

Jehoram lives eight years as king, during which, in weary repetition of the errors of apostate kings before him, he does everything wrong. The Edomites, who have been paying tribute to Jehoshaphat, see the difference in this new king, seize the opportunity, and rebel. Jehoram attempts to bring them back into submission, but fails. Then Libnah, one of his own fortified cities and one of the strongest, rebels against him. Things are quickly going sour for Jehoram, and the reason for his failures is stated plainly in the passage: "because he had forsaken the LORD God of his fathers." In spite of his reverses, however, he not only embraces pagan worship, but promotes and enforces it in Judah.

11. A Message from a Prophet and a Terrible Ending. (21:16-20)

The Lord, ever just, sends a message to Jehoram from the aged prophet Elijah. The message is in writing, perhaps because Elijah is too old to make the trip to Jerusalem or, perhaps, so that there can be no misunderstanding of it (and maybe for both reasons). Jehoram is told that, because of his own wickedness, and because he has led Judah into spiritual adultery, there will come a plague of sickness upon him and his people, from which he will die a terrible death. Then the Lord stirs up the Philistines who revolt, together with Arabians, and capture at least part of Jerusalem and carry off his wives and children to their deaths. His wife, wicked Athaliah, survives, as does their youngest son, Jehoahaz (Ahaziah/Azariah)⁶. At this point the plague of dysentery strikes Jehoram; he suffers with it terribly for two years without relief ("day by day") and dies a horrible death in perfect fulfillment of Elijah's prophecy. He is so hated by the people that he is not buried in the sepulcher of the kings, and there is no "burning

⁵ Young King Jehoram may have had ambitions to re-unite the two kingdoms under his own reign. Not only did he marry Ahab's daughter, but he had also taken the unusual step of murdering a number of the princes of Israel, the natural heirs to that throne, which was not his.

⁶ This son of Jehoram and Athaliah is also called Ahaziah (22:1) and Azariah (22:6).

for him, like the burning of his fathers⁷." Thus ends the dark period of eight years, during part of which it seems that there was also the confusion of having the kings of both Israel and Judah named Jehoram (Joram).

NOTE: this is the only mention of a written prophecy by Elijah. It is also the only record of his functioning in ministry to Judah; of course, by this time the wickedness of Jehoram and Athaliah have made sinful Judah seem indistinguishable from sinful Israel. The Lord seems to send his heavy hitters wherever they are most needed.

12. The Brief Reign of Ahaziah. (22:1-9)

Ahaziah, Jehoram's only surviving son becomes King of Judah; his mother is wicked Athaliah, Ahab's daughter. With her as his counselor, it is to no one's surprise that he rules wickedly. He associates closely with his Uncle Jehoram, King of Israel, and this leads to his death. While visiting with his wounded uncle in Jezreel, Jehu arrives to seize the Northern Kingdom. Jehoram is killed and Ahaziah is mortally wounded; he was in the wrong place at the wrong time, a victim of the bad company he kept. He had been king only one year.

NOTE: Verse 2 says that Ahaziah was 42 years old when he began to reign; and this presents a problem, for v 21:20 above it says that his father was only 40 years old at his death. The parallel passage (II Kings 8:26) says that Ahaziah was 22 years old when he began to reign. Some ancient Greek (Septuagint) and Syriac manuscripts have v 2 written exactly as it is here; the Hebrew reads "forty and two" Some commentators suggest that the figure 42 was Athaliah's age when he was born; other explanations have been suggested, but none is authoritative. It seems certain that Ahaziah was 22 when he began to reign and that his father was 20 when he was born; perhaps the 42 figure is the combination of the two ages (20, his father's age when he was born, plus 22, Ahaziah's age when he began to reign).

13. The Reign of Wicked Athaliah. (22:10-23:15)

Seeing her opportunity with the death of her son, King Ahaziah, wicked Athaliah murders her grandchildren ("the seed royal") and takes over as Queen of Judah. Unknown to her, Jehosheba (Jehoshabeath), wife of the High Priest, rescues the youngest son of Ahaziah, a baby, and hides him in the Temple. For the next six years, unknown to wicked Athaliah, there is, growing up in the Temple, a rightful heir to the throne of David, which she has so wickedly stolen for herself. When the boy is six, the high priest, Jehoiadah, quietly gathers all the priests and Levites

⁷ This interesting statement is not explained. It may refer to the burning of incense, during his preparation for burial and his burial; or it may refer to funereal fires, burned to honor the one who died. It cannot refer to cremation, for cremation was never practiced by the Israelites. He was buried with neither honors nor grieving.

to Jerusalem, and arms them. On the day planned, young Joash is brought to the seat of the king in the Temple and proclaimed King of Judah. Athaliah hears the people crying "God save the king," realizes that she has been overthrown and flees. As she runs away, she is overtaken and killed, ending her evil reign of six years. According to Josephus, she was taken to the Brook Kidron, where unclean things were disposed of, and executed there⁸.

She was the only woman to reign over either of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel.

14. Joash, the Good/Bad King.

a. Joash, the Good Years. (23:16-19; 24:1-14)

When young Joash assumes the throne of Judah, the Temple is a shambles and its sacred furnishings have been carried away to places of Baal worship. Jehoiada leads in the destruction of the temple of Baal, and young Joash decides to restore the Temple of the Lord. The Temple is repaired, Temple worship restored, and Joash is a righteous king as long as old Jehoiada lives.

b. Joash, the Bad Years. (24:15-22)

Jehoiada dies at age 130 and, because of his unusually exemplary service, not only as High Priest, but also in restoring a descendant of David to the throne of Judah, he is buried in the sepulcher of the kings. However, with Jehoiada gone, Joash, like Rehoboam before him (at the time of the division of the kingdom), allows himself to be misled by his young princes and, instead of his righteous up-bringing in the Temple, and his years of prospering under the LORD, he turns from the Lord and embraces paganism. Zechariah, Jehoiada's son and successor as High Priest, prophesies to the king and his friends that they should repent. The king is offended, he commands that Zechariah be stoned, and he is murdered in the sacred precincts of the Temple! As Zechariah is dying, he calls out, "The LORD look upon [what you are doing] and require it⁹." Wicked history is made, and Joash's doom is sealed.

15. The Ignominious End of Joash. (24:23-27)

Within the year, the LORD stirs up the Syrians to attack Judah. Even though the Syrian army is much smaller than Joash's army, the Syrians prevail. When the Syrians depart, Joash's own servants murder him, because of his outrageous killing of Zechariah and his brothers¹⁰. Joash is so despised that he is refused burial in

⁸ Josephus, Antiquities, 9.7.3.

⁹ This is probably the murder that Jesus referred to in Matthew 23:35.

¹⁰ Note that "sons" of Jehoiadah in v 25 is plural; this probably means that Zechariah's brothers were also prophets, and Joash assumed that he would receive the same unwanted truth, that Zechariah had spoken, from them if he allowed them to live. Thus, Joash's sin of having Zechariah, God's prophet murdered, was multiplied

the sepulcher of the kings; there is justice in this, and the high priest, whom he had murdered, lies there in his place, in honor¹¹. Amaziah, Joash's son, succeeds his father as king.

16. Amaziah, the Foolish Son of Joash. (25:1-10)

Like his father, Amaziah begins his reign as a good king. He gets off to a good start, but there is something fundamentally wrong with him. Verse 2 ominously states that “he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart.” He executes those servants who killed his father; and, following the Law of Moses, he does not have their children killed. So far, he is doing most things the right way.

He organizes his army for a war against Edom, and then, just to be safe, he hires 100,000 soldiers from the Northern Kingdom to help him. At this point an unnamed prophet comes to Amaziah and rebukes him for hiring the soldiers of Israel. He warns Amaziah that if he takes with him these mercenaries from Israel he will fall before the enemy; he reminds him that God can give him victory, but can also cause him to be defeated. Amaziah is convinced of his error, but he doesn't want to waste the money he has already paid the soldiers of Israel. The prophet tells him that God is able to give him much more than he will lose. Amaziah gets the message and sends the hired soldiers back to Israel, but they are very angry about being sent back.

17: A Great Victory and a Stupid Mistake. (25:11-28)

Amaziah leads his army into the battle with Edom and wins a great victory¹². Meanwhile, the angry army he had sent back to the Northern Kingdom attacks and pillages the cities of Judah as they return, killing 3,000 of Amaziah's people and taking great spoil.

Having been given a great victory by the LORD over Edom, Amaziah then does an unbelievably stupid thing. The fool carries home the idols of the Edomites, bows down to them, burns incense to them, and makes them his gods! The LORD is very angry with this foolish king, and He sends a prophet to ask Amaziah the obvious question: if those idols couldn't help the Edomites, whom Amaziah has just defeated, why worship them? Amaziah has no answer, so he threatens the prophet, and the prophet replies that Amaziah has brought about his own destruction.

¹¹ Although Joash (Jehoash) was Solomon's only living descendant, and the slender, essential, hereditary connection that preserved the messianic line, his name is omitted from the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:8, apparently because of his wickedness.

¹² In v 12 there is an amazing act of what appears to be unnecessary, extraordinary, cruelty to the defeated Edomites. It is not explained here, nor does it appear in the parallel passage in II Kings 14.

Then Amaziah foolishly offends the King of Israel, who soundly defeats him, destroys part of Jerusalem's wall, and the Temple is again ravaged. Eventually, Amaziah's subjects rise up against him and, like his father, he is killed by his own people.

18. Uzziah, the Farmer-Soldier-King. (Chapter 26)

Amaziah's 16-year-old son, Uzziah, succeeds him as King of Judah. Uzziah is very young when he begins to reign, but he has a godly counselor named Zechariah, apparently a prophet, who keeps him out of trouble¹³. Uzziah makes many improvements in Judah, in the production of food and livestock, and in military matters. He greatly strengthens Judah's defenses, conquers his enemies round about, including part of Arabia, and expands his fortified cities into Philistia; under his leadership Ammon becomes a subdued tributary, and Judah is raised to a level of prosperity unknown since Solomon's time.

But Uzziah's downfall is his pride, and all his successes lead him into a serious error. He decides to play priest, and goes presumptuously into the Temple to burn incense on the altar of incense. Azariah, the Chief Priest, withstands the king, backed up by 80 priests who are also "valiant men" (apparently a special caste of priests who are warriors, set to protect the Temple)¹⁴. It is a violation of the Law for the king even to enter the Holy Place, let alone act there as a priest in offering incense. Uzziah's response is angry determination to proceed with his presumption, and he is stricken on the spot with leprosy¹⁵! With this he finally gets the message, and he flees from the Temple; he lives out the last years of his life as a leper, living alone in a separated ("several") house unable even to attend services at the Temple. He has made of himself an outcast and it appears that from that time forth his son, Jotham, functions with regal authority in his place in day-to-day matters¹⁶. At Uzziah's death he has been king 42 years¹⁷.

NOTE: Isaiah, perhaps the greatest of God's prophets, began his ministry near the end of the reign of King Uzziah, although he is not mentioned in the narrative here, nor in the parallel passage in II Kings 15. See Isaiah 1:1 and 6:1.

19. Jotham Continues His Father's Accomplishments. (Chapter 27)

¹³ This is the only place in the Bible where this Zechariah appears.

¹⁴ As if the names of the Kings of Israel and Judah were not already confusing enough, here we have the High Priest named Azariah, which is also the secondary name of King Uzziah! In the parallel passage, II Kings 15, King Uzziah is called Azariah.

¹⁵ According to Josephus, the appearance of the leprosy was accompanied by a major earthquake; we might think of this as God's exclamation point! (Josephus, Antiquities, 9.10.4) See also Zechariah 14:5.

¹⁶ See II Kings 15:5.

¹⁷ The only king of the unified kingdom, or in the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, who reigned longer than Uzziah, was Manasseh, King of Judah, by far the most wicked of all.

Jotham succeeds his father, King Uzziah, and for 16 years he reigns righteously, further strengthening Judah and expanding her control. But he dies young (at age 41), and is followed by his almost unbelievably wicked son, Ahaz. At this point, things immediately go sour for Judah.

NOTE: The pattern throughout the period of the Kings is that when the king was righteous, doing "that which was right in the sight of the Lord," that the people followed his good example and lived righteously. And, when the king was wicked, the people lived wickedly. For reasons not explained, this was not true of the reign of King Jotham; perhaps he was just a passive leader, living righteously himself and making godly decisions, but making no effort to lead his people to live as he did. This supposition is strengthened by the fact that the parallel passage (II Kings 15:32-38) tells us that he did not destroy the pagan "high places" of worship.

20. Ahaz, the Unbelievably Bad King. (Chapter 28)

Ahaz, Jotham's 20-year-old son, becomes king of a strong and prosperous Judah. God has smiled on the kingdom for two generations because its kings have lived in obedience to Him. One would think that young Ahaz would understand this, and behave himself accordingly; but no, such is not the case. Instead, he deliberately rebels against the Lord and plunges into darkest paganism. He seems to have set his goal at being more wicked than any of his forebears. In fact, he becomes so wicked that he makes the Northern Kingdom seem righteous by comparison; he even sacrifices his own children to the fires of Moloch.

The Lord sends the Syrians against him; they slaughter and carry away multitudes of his people, but he doesn't catch on. Instead, he thinks the Syrians have stronger gods, so he makes them **his** gods and worships them. The Northern Kingdom invades, and carries away another multitude of his people; but a prophet in Israel named Oded rebukes the army of Israel for bringing the captives from Judah, tells them that they have offended the LORD God, the captives are treated kindly, and are taken back to Judah.

At the same time, the enemies of Ahaz round about, whom his father and grandfather had subdued, invade from all sides, retaking their lost territory and much more. He still doesn't get it. He loots the Temple, even cutting up the sacred furnishings, and nails shut the doors to the Temple! If we were to rank the kings of Judah from best to worst, Ahaz would be a strong contender for the worst king of all. He dies at age 36, having done unthinkable damage to the kingdom, and is refused burial in the sepulcher of the kings.

21. Enter Righteous Hezekiah. (29:1-19)

When it seems that Judah is about to perish and disappear permanently into the swirling darkness of evil self-destruction, Ahaz is succeeded by his righteous son, Hezekiah. For those of us who are weary of the depressing, unbroken, wickedness of his father, it is not a moment too soon! In his first act as king, Hezekiah re-opens the boarded-up Temple. He gathers all the priests and Levites in the east street, in front of the Temple, and charges them to sanctify themselves, and then to sanctify, cleanse, and restore the Temple. They first bring out all the idols and other pagan filth from the Temple, carry them down to the Brook Kidron, and destroy them there¹⁸. They then replace or repair all the sacred furnishings, and when the Temple is ready, they report this to Hezekiah.

22. Hezekiah Leads from the Front. (29:20-36)

Knowing that reformation and revival must begin at the top, Hezekiah gathers his subordinate leaders, both spiritual and political, at the Temple. Animals for sacrifices are provided, seven of each kind; with sacrifices the Temple is rededicated, priests and Levites are sanctified, and musicians are assigned. Hezekiah leads them all in humble worship, and the psalms of David are sung. Then Hezekiah commands that more animals be brought, but there is a problem: a shortage of consecrated priests. It appears that the corrupted priests are not as ready for revival as the Levites, and many have not yet responded to the call for repentance from paganism. There are not yet enough priests to kill so many animals, so Levites step in and function as priests. Hezekiah and the people rejoice, the leaders are back on track, and widespread revival is on the way.

23. Reinstating the Passover. (30:1-4)

This cleansing and rededication of the Temple occurs within the time of preparation for the Passover, and Hezekiah is reminded of this long-neglected celebration of the goodness of God. They are already too far into the 1st month of the year, Abib, to begin the Passover; but there is a provision in the Law whereby those who are ceremonially unclean in the first month of the year, may celebrate the Passover in the 2nd month¹⁹. Hezekiah must have reasoned that if that exception in the Law applies to one or more people, then it can apply to the whole, backslid, decidedly unclean, nation; he declares that the Passover shall be held in the second month and, with almost a month to get ready, he sets preparations in motion.

24. A Gracious Invitation to an Ungrateful Remnant. (30:5-12)

¹⁸ Spiritually unclean things (and, at times, people) were routinely destroyed and disposed of in the Brook Kidron. At least in a spiritual sense, it must have been the most polluted stream in the World!

¹⁹ Numbers 9:9-11.

Hezekiah, in his reformation zeal, seems to have assumed a leadership responsibility for the scattered remnants of the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom, now defunct and carried off to Assyrian captivity. He sends messengers throughout the former Kingdom of Israel, calling its scattered survivors to turn from their paganism and to come to Jerusalem for the Passover. His message seems to include prophecy, for he states that if they will return to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, those carried away to Assyria will eventually be returned to their land; but the reaction of the remnant in the north is not good. For the most part, they do not have ears to hear, and they scorn and mock the messengers. Some, however, are touched by the call to repentance, and they come to Jerusalem.

25. An Unorthodox Passover Pleases the Lord. (30:13-31:1)

The Passover, possibly the first one observed in 200 years (since the dividing of the kingdom), is unorthodox. There are still not enough sanctified priests, and a great many of the people who have come have not ceremonially prepared (cleansed) themselves. But their attitude is right, and there is a great tearing down of pagan idols and altars, which are cast into the Brook Kidron²⁰. Many who were ceremonially unclean eat the Passover anyway; and Hezekiah, who is now in full stride, leading both politically and spiritually, intercedes for the people, asking for this to be acceptable. The Lord, Who always looks upon the heart rather than the outward appearance, is pleased with them and their desire to do right, and He permits it. There is joyful feasting, praising and singing. Since most of the people are ignorant of the Scriptures, the Levites present teachings to them. The whole thing is so pleasing to the people that they do it all over again, keeping the feast another seven days, and there is ongoing, undiluted joy! It seems that when we allow ourselves to slip away from close communion and a right relationship with the Lord, we forget how good it is to be rightly related to Him; and then, when we return, there is great joy and we cannot get enough.

The entire celebration is unorthodox, but it is a delight to the people, and pleasing to the Lord. And, when the people return to their homes, they carry the reformation with them, destroying all pagan altars and idols in Judah and Benjamin.

NOTE: *As recorded in II Kings 20, and not to be repeated here, Hezekiah becomes fatally ill; he cries out to the Lord to heal him, he is healed and given 15 additional years to live. As a sign, the Lord causes the Sun to reverse 10 degrees. Hezekiah,*

²⁰ Still more pollution for the Brook Kidron! I cannot help feeling sorry for this poor little stream.

advised by the prophet Isaiah, lives out those years faithfully and dies. Waiting in the wings is his extremely evil son, Manasseh, and there are very dark days ahead.

The revival of Hezekiah, and its period of blessedness, lasts only until his death and the assumption of the throne by his wicked son, Manasseh. This 12-year-old hellion deliberately reverses his father's reforms, and leads the nation into darkest rebellion against God. He sets up altars to astrology ("all the host of heaven") in the two courts of the Temple. He even sets up a phallic idol in the Temple, apparently in the Holy of Holies! He restores a hideous statue of Moloch in the Valley of Hinnom, and even sacrifices his own children there. All who object to these abominations are put to death, and Josephus recorded that there were executions daily²¹. According to Jewish tradition, Manasseh has Isaiah sawn asunder (cut in half); truly, he "filled Jerusalem with innocent blood" as recorded in II Kings 24:4. Manasseh is so wicked that even the pagans find him revolting. Yet, in spite of Manasseh's mind-boggling wickedness, the LORD speaks to him about his sinfulness; but Manasseh will not hear. (33:1-10)

27. Manasseh's Amazing Reformation. (33:11-20)

Finally the Lord brings judgment upon Manasseh in the form of the Assyrians, who capture him and take him to Babylon as a prisoner. At long last, he cries out to the Lord for forgiveness. In perhaps the most spectacular example of the grace of God, in all of human history, he is not only forgiven, but is miraculously released from captivity and returned to his throne in Jerusalem! For the remaining years of his life, Manasseh is a reformer king, cleansing the Temple and the land, leading the people back to righteous worship of the Lord, and strengthening Jerusalem militarily. He dies peacefully, but is not buried in the sepulcher of the kings; rather, he is buried in the garden of his palace.

NOTE: One must wonder why the King of Assyria had Manasseh taken to Babylon; why not take him to the Assyrian Capitol, Nineveh? This was a problem passage for commentators such as Matthew Henry who lived before the days of archeological research; some thought v 11 to be a copyist error. Today, however, this is not a problem. Ancient inscriptions have been discovered which explain that the King of Assyria had rebuilt the city of Babylon, which he had destroyed in his previous conquests, and he was very proud of it. Soon, Nebuchadnezzar's nation of Babylon would arise and conquer Assyria; but in Manasseh's day the Assyrians were the super-power that controlled the entire region, including the city of Babylon.

28. Fourteen Dark Years in Judah. (33:21-34:2)

²¹ Josephus, Antiquities, 10.3.1.

Upon Manasseh's death, he is succeeded by his son, Amon. At age 22, Amon has learned well his father's wickedness; but he has learned nothing from his father's latter-day righteousness. He immediately leads the nation back into darkest paganism and, after only two years on the throne of Judah, he is murdered by his servants and replaced by his eight-year-old son, Josiah.

This little child will become arguably God's most righteous king; however, for 12 more years, while he grows up, the Temple continues to fall into decay, paganism continues to reign in the land, and the Scriptures are (literally) lost and forgotten. For 14 dismal years, darkness prevails and deepens in the kingdom.

29. Josiah Brings Judah's Last Reformation. (34:3-13)

Growing up, young Josiah learns of his predecessors on Judah's throne; he seems to be touched by the stories of David and the other godly kings, and is attracted to their example. At age 16 he develops a hunger in his heart to know "the God of David," but there is a problem: the Scriptures have been lost and forgotten²². By the time he is 20, he knows enough to begin a reformation in the kingdom; he has the groves and pagan altars destroyed, and burns the bones of the pagan priests upon their own altars, fulfilling the prophecy of the nameless young prophet who confronted King Jeroboam, 300 years earlier²³. For six years, he personally leads this cleansing of the land; and, like his great-grandfather Hezekiah, he extends the revival into the remnants of the former Northern Kingdom. In fact, he carries it even farther into the old Kingdom of Israel than did Hezekiah. He is now 26 and the land is cleansed of paganism, but the Temple is still a shambles; with money gathered from throughout the kingdom, Josiah has it repaired and restored.

NOTE: In the cleaning-out of the accumulated mess in the Temple, the Scriptures are discovered by the high priest ("I have found the book of the law"). He gives them to Shaphan the scribe, who refers to them as "a" book (not "the" book) and gives the scroll(s) to King Josiah²⁴.

The Scriptures are read to Josiah and, although, at first, he seems not to have known what he was hearing, he is mightily convicted. He realizes that Judah must comply with what he is hearing. He personally reads the law to the people in the Temple and calls them to join him in a covenant to live by the Law. He then decrees the keeping of the Passover. These events are described in detail in II Kings 22 and 23, and will not be repeated here.

²² It is interesting to note that, during this long and dismal period when Temple worship was abandoned and the Temple had become a neglected warehouse for rubble and trash, the scribes had continued carefully to record the lives and deeds of the kings. It was in the reading of these records that the Lord stirred the heart of Josiah to want to be like David, which led to the restoration of the Temple and re-discovery of the Scriptures.

²³I Kings 13:2.

²⁴ II Chronicles 34:18.

30. The Ark of the Covenant Returns to Its Place. (35:1-3)

In preparation for the renewal of the Passover, Josiah commands that the Ark of the Covenant be restored to its rightful place in the Holy of Holies. This statement in the passage raises a question: if the Ark is to be returned to the Holy of Holies, where has it been? The single verse, 35:3, is our only evidence as to where it has been, but it doesn't answer the question. Some speculate that it has been removed to make room for Manasseh's idol; but if that is the case, it seems that he would have returned it to its rightful place after he repented. The latter part of the long sentence in verse 3 refers to its being a burden carried on the shoulders of the Levites. The italicized words added by the King James translators, plus the rest of the sentence, cause it to read as if this were something they have been doing, but need do no more. It is therefore likely that, during Josiah's nation-wide revival, the Ark has been traveling around, from place to place, with the king and his team of teachers and preachers. This, it seems to me, is the most likely explanation.

31. God Speaks through Pharaoh Necho. (35:20-22)

King Josiah's righteous life ends in an ill-advised attempt to help an ally, Assyria. Assyria is in its last days as a major power, and Pharaoh Necho comes up from Egypt to regain territory previously lost to his old enemy. As already seen in II Kings, Josiah feels obliged to attack the Egyptians at Megiddo, and it costs him his life; but there is an interesting aspect to this last chapter in Josiah's life, and it is revealed only in this passage.

Here it is recorded that Pharaoh urges Josiah to stay out of the battle, saying that his war is only with the Assyrians; but it is Pharaoh's reasoning that is fascinating. He states that he is on a mission for God, and that Josiah should not interfere with the will of God. It is not unusual for the Lord to use an ungodly nation to execute judgment; but it is unusual for the pagan leader to know this and to speak prophetically for the Lord. For reasons not explained, Josiah not only ignores the warning, but he goes to the battle in disguise. Perhaps Josiah would have lived longer and accomplished more had he heeded Pharaoh's inspired advice ("from the mouth of God").

32. Josiah's Brave but Unwise Death. (35:23-27)

Josiah refuses to listen to reason, and joins battle with the Egyptians. Like Jehoshaphat, Josiah is where he has no business being, in an unwise attempt to help an ally. And as Ahab, in disguise, had been mortally wounded by a chance arrow of a Syrian, Josiah, in disguise, is mortally wounded by a chance Egyptian arrow. He dies and is buried with the kings in Jerusalem, and there is great lamentation, led by the prophet Jeremiah.

NOTE: *It would be difficult to think of one better qualified to lead the lamentations for good King Josiah than Jeremiah, the prince of lamentations, and author of the Book of Lamentations.*

33. Twilight for the Kingdom of Judah. (36:1-10)

The final 22 years of the kingdom of Judah are dismal ones. After the death of Josiah, it is all downhill.

Jehoahaz, son of Josiah succeeds his father as king, but lasts only three months. Pharaoh Necho conquers Jerusalem, captures him, places Jehoahaz's brother, Eliakim, on the throne and changes his name to Jehoiakim. He levies a heavy tribute (tax) on Judah, and takes Jehoahaz to Egypt where he will stay until his death. Evil Jehoiakim reigns badly for 11 years, during which Babylon arises as the dominant power in the region, pushing Egypt's domain back toward the Nile. In the 3rd year of Jehoiakim's reign, Nebuchadnezzar comes to Jerusalem and makes a prisoner of Jehoiakim. It appears that Nebuchadnezzar binds Jehoiakim with the intention of taking him to Jerusalem ("bound him in fetters to carry him to Babylon" [36:6]), but changes his mind and takes only some of the sacred vessels of the Temple, along with members of the royal family and others, including Daniel and his three famous friends²⁵. This is what we might think of as the first phase of Nebuchadnezzar's incremental carrying-away of the people of the Kingdom of Judah, into captivity in Babylon

Jehoiakim dies at age 36 and is succeeded by his son, Jehoiachin. Jehoiachin reigns wickedly, and he lasts only three months and 10 days²⁶. At this point, about 600 BC, Nebuchadnezzar takes him to Babylon, along with more of the sacred vessels of the Temple, and replaces him with his brother Zedekiah²⁷. We might think of this as the second phase of Nebuchadnezzar's incremental carrying-away of Judah into captivity in Babylon.

NOTE: *The nature of Jehoiakim's death and his ignominious non-burial were prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer 22:13-19). The fulfillment of this prophecy is not recorded here, nor is it recorded in the parallel passage (II Kings 24:5-6), although Josephus wrote that Nebuchadnezzar had him killed and his body thrown over the wall, and left unburied²⁸. It is significant that his name is omitted (skipped over) in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:11).*

²⁵ See in this regard Daniel 1:1-7.

²⁶ There is a discrepancy here concerning Jehoiakin's age. The parallel passage (II Kings 24:8) gives his age when becoming king as 18, not eight. The usual explanation is that for his father's last 10 years, Jehoiakin ruled with him as co-regent.

²⁷ Nebuchadnezzar also took leading citizens and members of the royal family, including Daniel and his three famous friends (see Dan 1:1-7).

²⁸ Josephus, Antiquities, 10.6.3.

34. The Curtain Falls on Judah. (36:11-21)

Zedekiah's wicked reign lasts for 11 years, during which he rebels against the Lord, in spite of gracious warnings by the prophet Jeremiah. The political leaders, and even the leaders of the priesthood, plunge zealously into the abominations of the pagans around them. Prophets, sent to turn them from their self-destruction, are mocked and abused. Zedekiah also rebels against Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God that he would reign faithfully; and he has finally gone too far. Nebuchadnezzar will not give the rebellious people of Judah any more chances to do what is right. The Babylonians return, slaughter most of the people in Jerusalem, take the rest and all the remaining valuables, burn what remains of the Temple, and carry Zedekiah, blinded and in chains, to Babylon²⁹. There the people of Judah will remain in bondage until the prophecy of Jeremiah is fulfilled by a 70-year rest for the land³⁰. And thus the curtain finally falls on the sordid finale of the Hebrew kings, which had begun so hopefully with Saul, nearly 400 years before.

35. The Amazing Decree of Cyrus. (36:22-23)

During the seventy years since Jehoiakin, Daniel, and others of the leading citizens of Jerusalem were carried off to captivity in Babylon, Cyrus of Persia has risen to power in the region, with his palace in Babylon³¹. As prophesied by Isaiah, about 150 years before the birth of Cyrus, he is the instrument of God who will liberate the Hebrew people and send them back to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple and the city³². Thus Cyrus issues his amazing decree and the stage is set for the next chapter in the history of God's people, which will be continued by Ezra, the priest and scribe.

***NOTE:** I believe (but, of course, don't know) that Cyrus, along with Nebuchadnezzar, will be in Heaven. God called Nebuchadnezzar "my servant" (Jer 25:9) and spoke (through Isaiah) of Cyrus as his instrument (his "shepherd....Cyrus, whose hand I have holden" [Is 44:28-45:1]) to accomplish the liberation and restoration of the Israelites³³. Also, Cyrus knew and spoke of God*

²⁹ For a more thorough description of the capture and blinding of Zedekiah, see II Kings 25:1-7, and Highlight 48 in the study guide to II Kings.

³⁰ Jeremiah 25:9-12.

³¹ There was obviously something special about the city of Babylon. The King of Assyria rebuilt it and made it a show place and a capitol; and, after the Persians conquered Babylon, King Cyrus did the same, and maintained a palace there.

³² Two hundred years before, as Isaiah was speaking (or writing) under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he must have been thinking "Cyrus? Cyrus who?"

³³ In Is 44:28, where Isaiah, in writing prophetically, quoting God, wrote of Cyrus, the "H" in "He is my shepherd and shall perform all my pleasure..." does not imply that Cyrus is divine; the capital "H" merely means that it is the

as "LORD God (YAHWEH Elohim)," and said that he was functioning at His direction.

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Thus saith Cyrus, King of Persia, all the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of Heaven given me; and He hath charged me to build Him an house in Jerusalem....

II Chronicles 36:23

A Closing Thought

Here, in the 400-year story of the kings of Judah and Israel, there are revealed the long-lasting effects of both righteousness, and wickedness, in the mind of God, and in His dealings with nations. Because of David's righteousness and his unfailing love of God, succeeding kings, most of whom were wicked, were tolerated and protected, "for David's sake." Conversely, because of the extreme wickedness of Manasseh, and his unfailing passion for pagan gods, the Lord finally withdrew His tolerance and protection from subsequent kings, even though some were righteous; and, as a result, the Lord decreed the final defeat of the kingdom, and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Could not this principle apply today to our nation? After all, God does not change³⁴. Our nation was founded by Christians, guided by the Word of God, giving honor to Him unashamedly, in both public and private life, opening all deliberations with prayer. Indeed, our Supreme Court, after an exhaustive study of all available historical documents, concluded in 1892 that, "Our laws and our institutions must necessarily be based upon and embody the teachings of the Redeemer of mankind...this is a Christian nation³⁵."

Does this mean that everything we have done as a nation, and as individuals within this nation, has been pleasing to God? Of course not! But it does mean that we, as a nation, and most of its citizens, have never rejected God for a pagan god, or elevated ourselves to the level of deity as the god of secular humanism. With all of our faults, sins and times of unfaithfulness, we have not, as a nation, abandoned the God of the Bible for a lesser one. But this is rapidly changing, and for the worse.

There seems to be a time lag in these cosmic relational changes--changes of values and allegiance. Israel muddled on, waxing worse and worse, for approximately 300 years, living on the dwindling inheritance of the righteousness of David and his unified kingdom at its beginning. God's people went on in a downward trend, from the beginning of apostasy during the reign of Solomon, with periodic, brief, repentance in times of desperate need, until God finally abandoned his earthly kingdom. And when He did finally abandon the nation, He delivered it up to be destroyed and enslaved by its pagan enemies, Syria/Assyria, Babylon (Iraq), and Persia (Iran).

³⁴ Malachi 3:6.

³⁵ U.S. Supreme Court, *Church of the Holy Trinity vs the United States* (1892).

Our nation, founded on the Word of God and birthed in prayer like David's, has been on the downward trend for more than 200 years now, and those same enemies, plus others as dangerous, are at our gate. If we do not repent and turn back to our God-honoring beginnings, how much longer will it be before God finally delivers us up to them? Our nation's final years may be winding down as we read these words; and this is a point worthy of our pondering.

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