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A History of the Divided Monarchy



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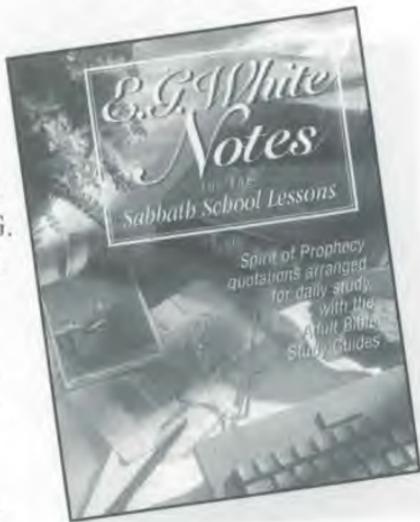
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The Bigger Picture

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (Isa. 1:1); "... which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel" (Amos 1:1). "The word of the Lord ... in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (Mic. 1:1).

Notice how each of these first verses begins a book in the Hebrew Bible: *In the days of Uzziah, in the days of Hezekiah, in the days of Ahaz*. They begin with a political context. That is because the political context cannot be separated from the social one, and the social context cannot be separated from the spiritual context—and the writings of these prophets are nothing if not spiritual. Thus, in their own way, the opening verses of these books—by establishing the political background—help establish a spiritual background, as well, one that helps us understand the *Sitz im Leben* (life situation) in which the prophets wrote.

Kings and Chronicles, our study for this quarter, does the same thing, only on a grander scale. These books present a framework upon which we can put the prophets in their particular historical and political contexts. Whereas, for example, Micah begins in "the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah," Kings and Chronicles establish the background and time line in which these kings ruled. What about the kingship of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (much less Jeroboam, Jehoram, Athaliah, and Josiah)? Who reigned before them, who reigned after them, what was happening in the nations around them, and how did that impact Israel and Judah? Though some of these questions are answered by the prophets themselves, Kings and Chronicles move us back so we can view the situation from a larger, grander perspective, that of the entire flow of the history of Israel and Judah. In short, the books give us the bigger picture.

Imagine a war and suppose that Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and Micah write about this war from the battleground itself, as shells explode overhead and bullets whizz past their ears. In contrast, Kings and Chronicles read more like a historian's view, as though someone stepped back, possibly even, in some cases, after the events, and put together various accounts not just of individual battles but of the whole war. Thus, we are given radically different—but divine—perspectives: some "up close" (from the prophets), others "farther away" (from Chronicles and Kings). Even better, sometimes Kings and Chronicles present the same material with different twists, as well (like the Gospels, perhaps).

Of course, Kings and Chronicles are not just history. They contain important spiritual lessons in and of themselves; many principles of truth, of faith, and of salvation can be gleaned from their pages, just as they can from the prophets. How much you derive from them, of course, depends on how willing you are—through study, prayer, and faith—to squeeze out what is there.

Don't worry; plenty remains to be squeezed out—and then some.

Kings and Chronicles

This quarter's Bible Study Guide covers Kings and Chronicles, at least partly. A lot of material (such as the entire book of 1 Chronicles itself) is left out. But when there is only one quarter to cover almost four hundred years of sacred history (from about 961 B.C. to 586 B.C.), much is left out. There is no other choice.

This lesson starts with, basically, the first verses of 1 Kings, which deals with the last days of King David; it ends, basically, with the last verses in the last chapter of 2 Kings, the final days of Judah's last king before the Babylonian exile (though the end of 2 Chronicles touches lightly on the restoration of Jerusalem under the Persians). What is found between these verses will be the object of our study for the next three months.

It is not always the most uplifting material. That is only because there is never anything uplifting about sin, compromise, rebellion, and apostasy—not then, not now. Nevertheless, plenty remains to be learned from the Bible, both from the good events and from the bad. In fact, though Paul was writing about an earlier period in Hebrew history, his point is still valid for our particular study: "Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Cor. 10:11, RSV).

This quarter's Bible Study Guide moves between Chronicles and Kings, which often tell the same story, from different perspectives (though, in some cases, it is clear one writer borrowed from another). The Chronicles tend to have a distinct spiritual focus, while the Kings center more on historical and political issues. All together, they paint a picture of this crucial time in Jewish and Israelite history.

No one knows for certain who wrote Kings or Chronicles. Originally, both were single volumes. Some ancient records reveal that Jeremiah probably supplied the information in 1 and 2 Kings (see *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 716: 2. "Authorship"). Chronicles is a type of daily record, known as a "book of events of the days."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 115:1. "Title." Ezra probably supplied the information.

We begin in the days of one monarchy, under David and then Solomon; next, we watch the nation split, and, finally, we follow the respective paths of the two kingdoms. We go back and forth, from the southern kingdom to the northern, to the southern, to the northern, and so forth, ending with the Babylonian captivity of the south (the north vanishes more than a century earlier, swallowed by the Assyrians).

It is incredible history, not just for the drama but for the lessons that we, the spiritual heirs of these people, can learn from the history of those who are, indeed, our ancestors, in both spirit and in truth.

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The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on September 28
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Rough Start



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?” (Genesis 18:18).

FAMILY SQUABBLERS. The books of Kings and Chronicles are, in many ways, a family history. Much of the Bible—at least the Old Testament, particularly the earliest books—is the same: It is the story of a family, not just any family, of course, but the family that comes from faithful (but flawed) Abraham, the one through whom “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 18:18).

Unfortunately, as with so many families, the examples of Abraham’s and his descendants’ families hardly present a model home. Kings and Chronicles continue what has been, and still is, a sad story—one with occasional and brilliant spasms of divine light, interspersed between the constant current of human darkness.

In Kings, starting in the first chapter, both the light and darkness are presented. Let us learn from both. Each has lessons for us, as we seek to cling to the Light amid the rush of darkness that surrounds us in this fallen world, just as it surrounded those of whom we are about to read.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why did Adonijah rebel? What was the cause of his rebellion? Why did Nathan side with David and Bathsheba? Are sins ever partially forgiven? Where is the foundation of forgiveness to be found? Can we still suffer from forgiven sins?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 6.

"I WILL BE KING."

"Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him" (1 Kings 1:5).

The book of 1 Kings begins with what was to become a perennial problem in Israel and Judah, that of royal ascension. Israel was not, originally, supposed to have a king; God Himself would be their ruler (Judg. 8:23; 1 Sam. 12:12). However, once they had a king, it was not too long before they suffered from the many political problems associated with earthly government. Part of the book of Samuel, in fact, deals with David fleeing the wrath of Israel's first king, Saul, who saw David as a political threat to his throne. The book of Kings itself starts with a similar problem, only now with the next generation. It was a rough start, indeed.

Who was Adonijah, and why did he think that he should be king? See 1 Kings 2:22. What other factors (see 1 Kings 1:6) contributed to his rebellious attitude?

Notice the words that Adonijah spoke: "I will be king" (vs. 5). How interesting that they reflect the words of another privileged biblical character, Lucifer, who exclaimed: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isa. 14:13, 14). Adonijah reflects the same attitude of self-exaltation, the same desire for supremacy, that led to the fall of Lucifer, even to the point where he was willing to rebel. Read through verses 7-10 in 1 Kings 1 to see some of the things Adonijah did in an attempt to secure the throne, things that mirrored Lucifer's acts during his rebellion in heaven (read Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 495).

Whatever valid reasons Adonijah might have had for thinking the throne belonged to him (after all, he was the older brother [see 1 Kings 2:22]), his attitude and actions reveal a spirit of rebellion and self-exaltation. Can you find, in your own life, traces or hints of this same attitude? If so, how does looking at Jesus, at His acts and expression of self-renunciation and self-denial, protect us from this common and, oftentimes, subtle sin?

FORGIVEN SIN.

"Wherefore Nathan spake unto Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, saying, Hast thou not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith doth reign, and David our lord knoweth it not?" (1 Kings 1:11).

Notice who first revealed to Bathsheba the plot against her and her son. It was Nathan the prophet, the same Nathan the prophet who had exposed David's sin of adultery many years ago (2 Samuel 11; 12). Now, however, he is taking the side of David and Bathsheba, the two parties in that terrible episode.

Though we do not focus much on her part (the biblical emphasis was on David), Bathsheba suffered the consequences of adultery, as well. In contrast to David, Scripture gives numerous examples of those who, in similar situations, refused to succumb to pressure from above—whatever kind it was: Joseph (Genesis 39), Vashti (Esther 1), Daniel (Daniel 6), to name a few.

What biblical examples can one find of those who refused to give in to people who attempted to use political power to bully them?

Nevertheless, regardless of David's sin, he was forgiven. When forgiven, we are *completely* forgiven. Those who have accepted Christ's righteousness (the only means of forgiveness) are covered in His perfection, the perfection that He wrought out in His life here. When God looks upon us, who have accepted Christ as our Righteousness, He no longer sees our sins, our failings, our shortcomings. Instead, He sees Jesus in all His holiness and sinlessness. There is no such thing as being partially forgiven. We are either wrapped in the robe of Christ's perfect holiness or we stand in the shame of our own nakedness. When we are forgiven, our sins are, in a sense, *forgotten* by God.

"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 8:12). "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 10:17).

No wonder Nathan the prophet could side with David and Bathsheba, despite their terrible past.

The good news of the gospel is that, no matter what our history has been, regardless of our past, or however low we have fallen, through the righteousness of Jesus, God, in a sense, *wipes our past slate clean*. Even more than that, He replaces that slate with the record and the perfection of Jesus. Dwell on what that good news means for you. Share with someone the freedom, the liberation, and the joy that this most wonderful of all truths provides.

THE WAGES OF FORGIVEN SIN.

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7).

A man had been sexually abusing his young daughter for years. One night he had a miraculous conversion. Repenting, he dropped to his knees with bitterness and sorrow of heart and soul, confessed his sin, and with acid tears, pleaded with Jesus for forgiveness.

If his repentance was genuine, would he be forgiven? Be careful how you answer, because if you say Yes, then you are saying that this child molester, this man who perhaps a day before had been having sexual relations with his daughter, was now *perfect* in Christ. *Perfect*? Are you saying that this heinous sin was now pardoned by the blood of Christ and that this man now stood clothed in the perfect righteousness of Jesus? (See Rom. 3:22.)

Are you prepared to say that?

What else can you say? Where sin abounds, grace abounds more, right? (Rom. 5:20). Pardon to the chief of sinners, right? (1 Tim. 1:15). Christ died for the ungodly, right? (Rom. 5:6).

There is another side to the equation, however. Through Christ, God promises that our sins can be forgiven (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). David's and Bathsheba's lives are great examples of that promise. God, however, never promises that we will be spared the immediate, earthly consequences of our sins, even those sins that have been forgiven.

Though the father could have been pardoned instantly from the legal consequences of his foul acts, the results of those foul acts were not disposed of so easily. One night of bitter weeping did not eradicate the results. On the contrary, the abused little girl had crumbled into an emotionally destroyed adult, who, for years, suffered from alcoholism, suicidal depression, and drug use that destroyed two marriages, leaving in her wake four children, all of whom paid dearly because of their mother's emotional woe—all brought upon them by sins that had long ago been pardoned!

Ellen White tells us that even though David's sin had been forgiven, the results were seen for generations afterward. Who knows, perhaps Adonijah's rebellion indirectly resulted from the lack of respect that fomented in the house because of sins that already had been forgiven. How nice, indeed, if relief from the consequences of our sins could come as fast as pardon for them does. It, however, rarely works that way. What lessons can we learn from this painful story?

THE PLOT UNCOVERED (1 Kings 1:11-27).

Nathan the prophet goes to Bathsheba and warns her about Adonijah's political machinations and plots. The issue here, at least as far as she and her son are concerned, is greater than just who will be the next king.

What did Nathan say would happen to Bathsheba and Solomon if Adonijah became king? Why would such a measure be taken if Adonijah succeeded?

It is interesting that Nathan would be so sure that Adonijah's succession would lead to the death of Bathsheba and Solomon. Maybe he was looking at how Saul had responded to the threat of David; maybe he was looking at what happened to the nations around them. Whatever the reasons, even in this early stage of Israel's history, when there had been only two kings so far, Nathan saw the danger that awaited those who lost out in the bid for power. *All this was happening in the nation that was to represent the true God to the world?* See Deuteronomy 4:5-8. How quickly the corruptions of the world had infiltrated the Hebrew nation! No wonder God did not want them to have an earthly king.

David had promised Bathsheba that Solomon, her son, would reign after him. Why did David make that promise to her?

First Chronicles 22 makes it clear that Solomon was to follow his father on the throne. "And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the Lord my God: But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight. Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days" (1 Chron. 22:7-9). David, obviously, felt a divine imperative to stop Adonijah. His choice was not arbitrary. He was simply following God's Word to him.

Look at the royal mess caused by Israel's choice to have an earthly king. Why did the Lord, who knows the beginning from the end, allow them to make such a disastrous decision? In the same way, in our own lives, we have the same freedom to make right or wrong choices. How crucial that we weigh our options before turning them into decisions.

THE PLOT FOILED (1 Kings 1:28-53).

“And the king sware, and said, As the Lord liveth, that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress, even as I swear unto thee by the Lord God of Israel, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead; even so will I certainly do this day” (1 Kings 1:29, 30).

In haste, and probably in a certain amount of fear, Solomon was named by David as his successor to the throne. More than likely this was not how David envisioned his son to succeed him, even though great rejoicing erupted in the city (vss. 39, 40). David was able to bring some personal good out of it, though: “‘ ‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who has given one to sit on my throne this day, while my eyes see it!’ ’ ” (1 Kings 1:48, NKJV). David was able to see the promise being fulfilled that God had made long ago to him. No doubt, he viewed this as another way in which the Lord was being gracious to him.

Meanwhile, Adonijah had tried to usurp that throne, not just from Solomon but from David, who was still alive and still king when the son proclaimed “I will be king!” (vs. 5). Thus, this was a coup against the reigning monarch, not just a bid for power between rival contenders. His was a full-blown revolution in which he had a lot of support, even from within the king’s own family (see 1 Kings 1:9).

After his revolt failed, Adonijah obviously felt that he had reason to fear, now that Solomon was king, which is why he found sanctuary and asylum by taking hold “on the horns of the altar” (vss. 50, 51). Though, perhaps, Solomon could have felt justified in immediately putting to death the one who, more than likely, would have had no qualms about eliminating him, Solomon, instead, gave him a chance to redeem himself: “And Solomon said, If he will shew himself a worthy man, there shall not an hair of him fall to the earth: but if wickedness shall be found in him, he shall die. So king Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar. And he came and bowed himself to king Solomon: and Solomon said unto him, Go to thine house” (1 Kings 1:52, 53).

In what ways can one see, in Solomon’s words to Adonijah, hints of the new king’s wisdom, graciousness, and greatness in this, his first recorded act as sovereign? Though, as it turns out, his first act probably was a mistake (see 1 Kings 2:13-28), Solomon at least erred on the side of mercy and graciousness. If we, who usually do not have the wisdom of Solomon, are going to err at times, as well, why should it not be on the side of mercy and grace too?

FURTHER STUDY:

In the context of what went on in the first chapter of the first book of Kings, read these words: "Though the books of Kings present the history of the Hebrew rulers from the death of David and the reign of Solomon to the final destruction of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the primary purpose is not to present the facts of history for the sake of history. There is history, but it is presented with a purpose—to show how the experiences of the Hebrews relate to the plans and purposes of God. The object was not so much to write a detailed chronicle of the bald facts of history as to present the lessons of history. The compiler of these books had a deep religious motive and a very practical aim. The children of Israel were the people of God, and it was their task to fulfill the divine purpose and live out on earth the principles of the kingdom of heaven. Righteousness was to be the foundation for national prosperity. Sin could end only in ruin. If true to its divine mission, the nation would grow in strength and greatness. If kings and rulers failed to live up to the divine purpose, Israel as a people would perish. The nation could not exist without righteousness and without God."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 717: "Theme."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Further discuss this notion that we can suffer greatly even from sin that has been forgiven. What does that mean? Does the God who has the power to forgive sins not have the power to protect us from the consequences of them? Give some examples, either from the Bible or anywhere else, where God has intervened and has spared people the consequences that their sin, otherwise, would have brought upon them.
2. Place yourself in the role of Adonijah, elder brother to Solomon. In what ways could he have easily justified his desire for the throne, even though God had told David that Solomon should be the heir? What should that tell us about the dangers of acting on pure rational thinking alone?
3. Discuss this notion of erring on the side of mercy and grace. Why is it better to err that way than the other way of pure justice and precise punishment? In what ways can we go too far, perhaps, in extending mercy and grace to others; or, considering the mercy and grace extended to us, can we ever go too far? Explain your answers.



The Teacher Learns a Lesson

Melchie Tonog

I was a new student missionary in the Manobo village. My partner had gone to Mountain View College for our monthly report, leaving me alone in the village. I planned to use her absence to get to know my students and work on learning the language.

But my partner did not return when she planned. A week passed, and still she had not returned. Then I learned that she had to go home to care for her seriously ill mother. I was on my own. The Manobo children comforted me and helped me cope. After class I visited homes in the village. At one little home I found a young mother crying.

"What is wrong, Ayo?" I asked. Then I heard her baby's gasping breath. He was congested with thick phlegm and could barely breathe.

I checked his temperature; it was dangerously high. I had no medicines, but I sponged him to bring his fever down, but it remained high. "Ayo," I said, "Let us ask God to heal your baby." She consented.

"Dear God," I prayed, "You are the Great Physician. We need Your presence and Your help. Please touch this baby with Your healing and make him well again. In Jesus' name, Amen."

"Thank you," Ayo said.

The baby's breathing did not improve. Desperate, I told Ayo, "We must take the baby to the hospital."

Ayo looked at me, puzzled. "But why? We've prayed, haven't we? We need only to trust in God, and my baby will be well."

"But Ayo, I am not a doctor, and your baby is so sick!" I pleaded.

Ayo looked straight at me. "Town is a three-hour hike down a steep mountain and across many rivers. Then we must ride two more hours on the rough road to the nearest hospital. My baby might die on the way. And when we get to the hospital, the doctor will charge us much money for medicine. Do you have money?" I shook my head No. "It is enough that we prayed. God will heal my baby," she smiled confidently.

I stayed with Ayo and her baby a while longer. Before leaving, I offered another prayer.

The next morning I hurried to check on Ayo's baby. "He's well!" Ayo greeted me with a smile. I took the baby's temperature. The fever was gone. *He was well!*

Choked with tears, I offered a Thank-You prayer. Then silently I added, *Lord, please help me to have faith like Ayo.*

Melchie Tonog is a SULAD student missionary from Mountain View College serving in the village of Dapilo-an in southern Philippines.

The Wisdom of Solomon



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY VERSE: “And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days” (1 Kings 3:14).

SOLOMON ON THE THRONE. Last week’s lesson ended with Solomon ascending to the throne; this week starts out with him firmly securing it. It is not always a pretty picture. Israel, in choosing to have a king, would suffer for the rest of its days from that unfortunate decision. Things in the chosen nation were not the way they should have been (What, of course, in life is?). How thankful we should all be that God is still willing to work with us, no matter how much we have messed up along the way.

This week does, however, reveal some of the most tender moments one can find between human beings and their Maker; thus, there is much here that we can learn.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What was David’s specific message to Solomon before the aged king died? What were the conditions that Solomon had to meet in order to be blessed? What unfinished business did the new king have to complete before securing his throne? What did Solomon ask for, and what did God give him? How can we, as Christians, know the difference between good and evil?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 13.

DEATHBED ADMONITION.

"Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die; and he charged Solomon his son, saying, I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man; And keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself " (1 Kings 2:1-3).

Notice David's dying words to his son: Whatever else he might have said (and one assumes he said more), the writer of Kings specified one particular aspect of David's discourse to his son, and that is the part where David said, basically, "Obey the Lord." David's words were taken, apparently, from the book of Deuteronomy, which was, in a sense, Moses' last will and testament to Israel. See Deuteronomy 4:40; 6:2; 6:17; 7:11; 12.

Notice the conditionality (see 1 Kings 2:3, 4) in David's words. The promises of blessing were made on the condition of obedience; merely being David's chosen son was not going to be enough for Solomon. Bloodline does not guarantee anything, not then and certainly not now.

Thus, David's advice was not just some nice, soapy spiritual tome. It was, instead, filled with basic practicality: *If you want to prosper, if you want all these wonderful blessings that God has promised, you must obey Him. Otherwise, ruin and destruction surely will come.* This theme appears time and again in the books of Kings and Chronicles.

Even though, of course, we are no longer under the Hebrew system, in what ways does that same principle apply to us today? For those who might think that this principle does not apply, read the following texts—all taken from the *New Testament* and written for those under the *New Covenant*—and write down a few notes about what they say regarding obedience to the Lord and His commandments:

Matt. 7:24-27 _____

Matt. 13:41, 42 _____

Col. 3:5, 6 _____

1 Pet. 4:17 _____

1 John 2:4 _____

ADONIJAH REVISITED (1 Kings 2:13-25).

Upon first reading the account in 1 Kings 2:13-25, it seems that, perhaps, Adonijah was killed in a fit of jealousy by the king, who did not want to give him Abishag. However, that is not what happened. Adonijah's request was not spurred on by any love for Abishag; instead, it was another attempt to try and usurp Solomon's power. It was a custom of the times that a new king would inherit the former king's concubines and sometimes his wives; thus, Solomon saw the request for what it was—an attempt to do through palace intrigue what was not accomplished by force. Solomon's words in verse 22 ("Ask for him the kingdom also?") show that he knew what was going on. "The real burden of his heart was probably not a romantic concern for the fair Abishag, but the kingdom he hoped to acquire by possession of her. . . . Abishag was doubtless looked upon as the last wife, or at least the last concubine, of David. For Adonijah now to ask for Abishag could be construed as asking for the throne itself."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 733:17, "Give me Abishag."

Perhaps what is most interesting about this story is that Adonijah, in verse 15, admits to Bathsheba that, though many people expected him to be king, Solomon took the throne instead. Indeed, Adonijah says "for it was his from the Lord." Here was a confession, from his own lips, that the Lord was behind his brother's ascension to the throne. How does this help us understand Solomon's actions toward him?

As human beings, we are endowed with a gift not found among other flesh-and-blood creatures, and that is reason (in fact, some say that the only thing that differentiates us from the animals is our reason). Yet, we are also creatures of emotion, of passion, of primal urges. Ideally, though our reason should be used to control our emotions and passions and urges, such is not always the paradigm. Adonijah is a good case in point. He admitted that God gave Solomon the throne, and his life, which should have been snuffed out immediately, was spared only by Solomon's graciousness. Reason, no doubt, told him, *Let it go; be glad you did not get your head chopped off.* However, it seems that his lower passions—lust for power, rebellion, jealousy, and the desire for self-exaltation—overruled what simple reason clearly showed should have been his course of action.

How many lives have you seen ruined when someone allowed brewing, stewing passions to overcome and crush out simple logic and reason? None of us are immune to this same danger. What is our only safeguard, and how does it protect us against this danger?

ABIATHAR, JOAB, AND SHIMEI (1 Kings 2:26-46).

“Thus the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon” (1 Kings 2:46, NKJV).

It is interesting how the last verse of 1 Kings, chapter 2, reads: “Thus the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon” (vs. 46, NKJV). This pronouncement occurs in the same verse that says Shimei, who had cursed King David, according to verse 8, was struck down at Solomon’s command. Likewise, Joab, who had conspired with Adonijah against Solomon, had been put to death (vss. 28-34). Additionally, Abiathar, the priest, had been sent into exile for the part he played in the treason (vss. 26, 27). In short, Solomon had to take some rather drastic measures in order to “establish” his throne.

If God put Solomon in power, why did Solomon have to do the things he did in order to establish his throne? In other words, why did he not just trust God to take care of these matters Himself? Could the Lord not have made sure that none of these men bothered or even threatened Solomon or his reign? Without, obviously, taking the example too far (after all, we are talking here about killing people), what lesson can one draw from this story about balancing faith with practical steps?

“David’s public labor was about to close. He knew that he should soon die, and he does not leave his business matters in confusion, to vex the soul of his son; but while he has sufficient physical and mental strength, he arranges the affairs of his kingdom, even to the minutest matters, not forgetting to warn Solomon in regard to the case of Shimei. He knew that the latter would cause trouble in the kingdom. He was a dangerous man, of violent temper, and was kept in control only through fear. Whenever he dared, he would cause rebellion, or, if he had a favorable opportunity, would not hesitate to take the life of Solomon.” —Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, pp. 389, 390.

Many people struggle when they read stories like these in the Old Testament. Sure, Shimei disobeyed, but all he did was cross over a river in order to seek some runaway servants. Was that worthy of death? There are other stories like this in the Bible that many of us today find hard to reconcile with a loving God. What answers can you give to someone who, reading such stories, comes away skeptical about the Bible? Hint: The Ellen G. White quote above sheds light that was not specifically in the Bible account. In other words, perhaps many of these things seem so hard because we are not given all the facts regarding them.

SOLOMON'S DREAM (1 Kings 3:5-15).

"And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day" (1 Kings 3:6).

Few chapters of Kings are more beautiful, more moving, than chapter 3. It reveals a heart surrendered to God, a heart aware of its own unworthiness, of its own fragility and need. In this chapter, Solomon's attitude, the one that gave him so much potential to be used by God, is revealed.

What specifically did Solomon say that showed his humility and dependence upon the Lord? 1 Kings 3:7-9.

It is hard to understand why Solomon would be so humble and dependent. Here he is, the favored son of a rich man, the king even, one who was not known for being a strong disciplinarian with his kids. Just look at some of Solomon's siblings; little there shows promise, either. Adonijah revolts, Absalom revolts, and Ammon rapes his own sister (Who knows what we are not told?).

Yet, amid all this decadence, ambition, pride, and lust for power, here is this young man, the favored son, the one promised and then given the throne—and he displays such humility and dependence upon God. Where did he learn it from? How did he get it? How easily his attitude could have been, *Look at me! I must be something great that I, the favored son of the great king, would be given this throne, especially at such a young age.* Compare, for example, what Solomon said here with these words of another sovereign: "The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" (Dan. 4:30). What a contrast!

In 1 Kings 3:5, the Lord says to young Solomon, "Ask! What shall I give you?" (NKJV). Imagine yourself being placed in that situation, in such a dramatic manner. What would you ask for? Would it be similar to that which Solomon asked for, or would it be for riches, revenge, and honor? Being honest with yourself, make a list of what you would request and then look at it carefully. What does it say about you, about where your heart is, about what things are important to you? Also, could you be trusted with the kind of power that Solomon had?

AN UNDERSTANDING HEART (1 Kings 3:10-15).

“Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?” (1 Kings 3:9).

How fascinating that of all the things Solomon should ask for, it would be to be able to “‘discern between good and evil’” (NKJV). Centuries later, in the New Testament, the author of Hebrews could write: “But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14).

Solomon asks God for this discernment; the writer of Hebrews says that the ability to discern right from wrong develops through the use of the senses. However one gets it (and both ways are not, necessarily, opposed), the ability to discern between good and evil is something to be sought after.

Read Matthew 6:33. In what ways did young Solomon’s request reflect this admonition?

Solomon desired a heart to be able to discern between “‘good and evil’” (1 Kings 3:9, NKJV). Of course, he is making the assumption that good and evil really exist. Today, however, many people view things like “good” and “evil” as purely subjective terms that have no meaning other than what each individual or society gives it. What is “good” or “evil” in one land might be “evil” and “good” in another. John Paul Sartre, the century’s most influential atheist, stated that he found “it very distressing that God does not exist, because all possibility of finding values in a heaven of ideas disappears along with Him; there can no longer be an *a priori* Good, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it.”—*Existentialism and Human Emotions* (New York: The Wisdom Library, 1957), p. 22. However much we might disagree with Sartre’s premise that God does not exist, his point is well-taken: Without God, how can there really be any absolute good or evil?

For the next few days, make a mental note (or write down your thoughts) of the various choices you are confronted with that, to some degree, require you to be able to “‘discern between good and evil’” (NKJV). When Sabbath comes, share with the class. One question you need to address, too, is this: How are you able to classify that which is good and that which is evil? See if others have different definitions of the terms. The results should show just how crucial it is to be able to define the two terms and then discern between them.

FURTHER STUDY:

Read Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, chapters 1–5, pp. 25–86, for some insights into what happened during Solomon's time.

"Solomon was never so rich or so wise or so truly great as when he confessed, 'I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.'

"Those who today occupy positions of trust should seek to learn the lesson taught by Solomon's prayer. The higher the position a man occupies, the greater the responsibility that he has to bear, the wider will be the influence that he exerts and the greater his need of dependence on God. Ever should he remember that with the call to work comes the call to walk circumspectly before his fellow men. He is to stand before God in the attitude of a learner. Position does not give holiness of character. It is by honoring God and obeying His commands that a man is made truly great. . . . So long as he remains consecrated, the man whom God has endowed with discernment and ability will not manifest an eagerness for high position, neither will he seek to rule or control. Of necessity men must bear responsibilities; but instead of striving for the supremacy, he who is a true leader will pray for an understanding heart, to discern between good and evil."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 30, 31.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Read the story in 1 Kings 3:16–28. What does it say about the limits of human justice? In other words, what law books or codes could have solved the problem confronted? Read the last verse of the chapter and discuss what it means to have "the wisdom of God" (vs. 28) in administering justice. Can you think of any other stories in the Bible (such as Jesus and the woman taken in adultery, in John 8:3–11) that show similar principles?
2. In Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Sofya Semyonovna Marmeladov becomes a prostitute in order to feed her starving little brother and sister. Rodion Ramonovitch Raskolnikov kills a nasty, spiteful, old loan shark and steals her money in order to help his mother and sister to advance his studies and to become someone great who will devote himself to fulfilling his humane obligations to humankind. Were these acts, given the intense circumstances that framed them, wrong? How do we know? Discuss the notion of good and evil. If there were no God who imposed an immutable moral order on the universe, what grounds can one use to categorically condemn murder and prostitution? What sort of authority can justly impose these moral restraints upon free souls? How should Christians ultimately decide what is good and what is evil?



When God Rang the Bell

J. H. Zachary

The Ukrainian Union has a special lay evangelistic program that prepares church members to visit their neighbors door-to-door. The believers offer whatever they can: a listening ear, a word of encouragement, a piece of literature, or Bible studies.

Two Adventist women were visiting their neighbors one day. They approached one home and pressed the doorbell. The women talked while they waited for someone to answer the door.

After several minutes an angry woman opened the door and shouted, "Why do you keep ringing my doorbell? What do you want?"

"I am so sorry," the woman apologized. "I must have been leaning against the bell. Please forgive me." The visitor quickly told the angry woman the reason they had come. "We are visiting our neighbors and were hoping to find someone home. We have some helpful literature that you might be interested in. May we come in and pray with you?"

At the visitor's gentle words, the angry woman relaxed and invited the women inside.

The two women entered the home and found another woman sitting on the floor. Lying beside her were several large bottles of medicine, all opened. The visitors soon discovered that these two women had planned to commit suicide. As the visitors talked to the two women, they shared their faith in Christ and encouraged the women to give God their troubles.

"Now I understand," the once-angry woman told them. "It was not you who rang my doorbell; it was God. He sent you here; He rang the doorbell just at the moment when we were preparing to end our lives. Thank you for coming at this moment. We are interested in your literature, and we need your prayers. Please pray for us."

The visitors prayed with their new friends and assured them that no problem was too great for God to take care of it. As they prepared to leave, four women said Goodbye with hearts rejoicing in God's perfect timing.

Some months later, a worker told this story at a lay-training seminar. A woman in the audience stood. "I am the woman who answered the door that day. Those two missionaries saved my life."

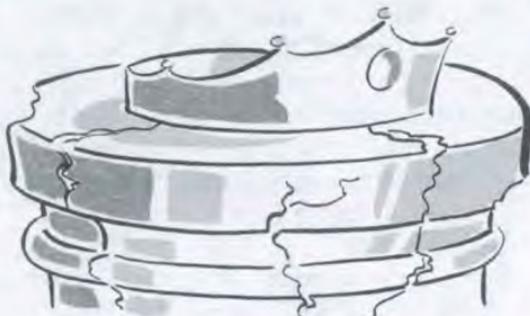
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The Rise and the Fall of the House of Solomon



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?” (1 Kings 8:27).

MANY STRANGE WOMEN. First Kings 3:3 reads: “And Solomon loved the Lord”; 1 Kings 11:1 reads, “But King Solomon loved many strange women.” Solomon vacillates from the love of God to the love of “many strange women.” What a long (or maybe a short) distance! Either way, between those two simple verses, the whole story of this week’s lesson emerges.

Perhaps these two other verses could have provided the bookends for the week: “And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing” (1 Kings 3:10); “So the Lord became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel” (1 Kings 11:9, NKJV).

Whichever pair of verses one uses to contain the account, the story remains sad, poignant, and, most of all, instructive.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why were the early years of Solomon so great? What were the conditions for that greatness? What was the purpose of the temple? Was it to be for the Jews alone? Which great spiritual truths were to be taught from it? What signs, if any, early on gave indication that Solomon was heading for disaster? What ultimately brought his downfall?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 20.

THE GOLDEN AGE (1 Kings 4).

"Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry" (1 Kings 4:20).

Never, in the long and troubled history of the Hebrew nation, had the people enjoyed such a time of peace, wealth, and prosperity as they had during the reign of Solomon. "The Bible with justice depicts Solomon's reign as one of unexampled prosperity. Israel enjoyed a security and a material plenty such as she had never dreamed of before and was never to know again. And this, in turn, allowed an amazing flowering of the peaceful arts."—John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), p. 217.

In many ways, the nation seemed to be enjoying the blessings that God had promised to the people if they would obey Him.

Read Deuteronomy 28:1-14. Compare the blessings that God said Israel would enjoy if they would "diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments" (Deut. 28:1, NKJV) with what they were experiencing in Solomon's time:

The Promises (Deut. 28:1-14)

The Results (1 Kings 4)

God had raised up the Hebrew nation for a reason: They were to preach the message of salvation by faith to the world, who—seeing the success of the Hebrew people—would come, seeking to know the source of their greatness, wisdom, and material prosperity. Read Deuteronomy 4:6-8 and compare it with 1 Kings 4:29-34. Though the focus in Kings is specifically on Solomon, the principle is the same: God blessed these people because they obeyed His laws and His commandments, and as a result of those blessings, their lifestyle made them attractive to the world at large.

How does this same principle apply to us as a church today? Read 1 Peter 2:9.

Look at yourself, look at your church, and—realizing that the issue goes far beyond mere material prosperity—ask the question, Are you living a lifestyle that would cause others to want to know more about your beliefs? Could someone, not knowing much about you, by seeing how you live, how you react, how you treat others, find something appealing that would draw him or her to want to know more?

SOLOMON'S TEMPLE (1 Kings 5-6).

"And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room, he shall build an house unto my name" (1 Kings 5:5).

God, through the promise made to the forefathers of Solomon, had raised up Israel to teach the world about the plan of salvation. At the center of salvation is, of course, Jesus Christ, "in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:14). Of all that Israel could teach the world about the true God, about hygiene, about diet, about family relations, nothing mattered more than that they teach the world about the sacrifice for sins that would come through the Messiah. That is why, no doubt, the sanctuary service in the temple that Solomon had built was at the center of Israel's worship. It was through this structure and the services performed in it that the plan of salvation was taught. No wonder it took on so much prominence in Israel.

Read through the details of the construction of the sanctuary service. It was, obviously, quite an elaborate structure, taking seven years to build (1 Kings 6:38). Think about how much time and money was spent on building it. Though Solomon had God's blessing on the project, could one argue that there was no need for such extravagance? Could the money and energy expended on something so grand not have been used elsewhere? Or, on the other hand, was there a purpose for it being built so elaborately? Give reasons for whichever position you take.

However crucial the temple was, it was not so much the building that was important, nor even the services themselves, for these were only temporary measures, earthly things that were to point to a greater reality, that of Christ and His ministry in heaven (Heb. 8:1-5). What mattered, instead, were the spiritual lessons that were to be learned from the services.

However grand and glorious Solomon's temple, the danger existed that the people would become caught up in the forms and styles of worship, thus missing the great truths behind them. This, apparently, had happened to Israel. In what ways are we, as a people, in danger of doing the same thing: becoming too caught up in forms, style, doctrines, and missing the real message behind them?

SOLOMON'S DEDICATION (1 Kings 8:22-66; see also 2 Chron. 1:6-12).

"And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive" (1 Kings 8:30).

Though there is an incredible amount of theology in Solomon's prayer of dedication, one theme comes through time and again, and that is forgiveness. How many times does Solomon talk about forgiveness in his prayer? Count them. *If we, as a people, sin, please, Lord, from heaven, forgive.* Whatever else Solomon says in the prayer, this theme comes repeatedly. God's people need forgiveness and not just in Solomon's time, either (see 1 John 1:8-10).

Solomon mentions some things, in 1 Kings 8, that his people might do that would cause them to need forgiveness. What are they? Compare these things with Deuteronomy 28, where the Lord warns Israel about the consequences of their sins.

What is it about the sanctuary service itself that makes the theme of forgiveness so appropriate? In other words, why would Solomon, in dedicating this temple, constantly talk about forgiveness? What does the sanctuary have to do with forgiveness?

Read carefully the beautiful section in 1 Kings 8:41-43. Here, clearly, we see depicted the missionary, evangelistic aspect of Israel. However much over the centuries the people had turned their religion into an exclusive club only for themselves, this was never the intention of God. God most definitely had separated Israel from the world (see vs. 53), but that was to prepare them to be His witnesses. "I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God" (Isa. 43:12). Israel was to be the center of world evangelism, and the temple was to be the focal point of that activity.

God's people, today, are not in one specific location; nor is there any single earthly structure around which their religious life centers. What, now, is the center of our faith, and in what ways is it so much better than what the earthly sanctuary provided? See Heb. 9:11-15.

SOLOMON CRASHES: PART 1 (1 Kings 11:1-13).

Looking back over our shoulders, many centuries later, most of us find it incredible that Solomon, having been given so much by the Lord, could have fallen as he did.

The first two verses of 1 Kings 11 say it all: Solomon took women from the nations that God had specifically told him not to. They did exactly what God warned about: They turned his heart away from the God of his fathers.

Notice the progression of steps in his fall:

1. He takes wives he is not supposed to take (vss. 1, 2).
2. The women turn his heart away from the Lord (vs. 3).
3. Solomon follows the “abominations” of the Ammonites (vs. 4).
4. Solomon builds a place of worship for these foreign deities (vss. 7, 8).

If someone would have said to Solomon in his earliest days, the days in which he was humbled and submitted to the Lord, that he would one day be building altars for pagans to practice their abominations (most likely involving sexual impurity), he probably would have laughed in his or her face. However, if one reads through the texts talking about Solomon, even in his glory, there are hints of his deviating, even then. Read through Deuteronomy 17:15-20 for the rules regarding a king and see where you can find, even before his fall, areas in which Solomon had compromised (see also *Prophets and Kings*, p. 56).

“And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the Lord commanded” (1 Kings 11:9, 10). Read both accounts of the occasion when God appeared to Solomon (1 Kings 3:5-15; 1 Kings 9:1-9). In both cases, whatever the great blessings were that God promised Solomon, they were always based on the condition that he obey.

The story of Solomon raises a number of interesting questions, among them this: Why did the Lord not stop Solomon in his tracks, early on, from the path of apostasy? Could He not have appeared in vision to him or not sent an angel or not done something that could have, in a very clear, startling manner, told Solomon: *My son, you better wake up, or you are heading for disaster! And not only you, but your whole nation.* If something like that did happen, nothing is recorded in the text. Perhaps Solomon had been given enough warning through God’s appearances to him twice, as well as through the testimony of the Word. In short, what does this story tell us about the freedom that God gives us?

SOLOMON CRASHES: PART 2.

According to Ellen White, it was after the Lord had pronounced judgment upon Solomon (1 Kings 11:9-13) that Solomon repented: "Awakened as from a dream by this sentence of judgment pronounced against him and his house, Solomon with quickened conscience began to see his folly in its true light. Chastened in spirit, with mind and body enfeebled, he turned wearied and thirsting from earth's broken cisterns, to drink once more at the fountain of life. For him at last the discipline of suffering had accomplished its work. Long had he been harassed by the fear of utter ruin because of inability to turn from folly; but now he discerned in the message given him a ray of hope. God had not utterly cut him off, but stood ready to deliver him from a bondage more cruel than the grave, and from which he had had no power to free himself."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 77.

In one sense, it is not hard to see how Solomon could have fallen. Look at all the prosperity he enjoyed: wealth, power, wisdom. Who could withstand such temptations? Only a soul totally dependent upon God; only a soul painfully aware of his or her own sinfulness, finitude, and unworthiness could be protected from self-exaltation under those circumstances. How could looking at the Cross and what happened at the Cross protect a person from the kind of self-exaltation that proved so damaging to Solomon?

The religion of the Bible does not speak ill of material things. God created the world, He created material things, and what He had created was "good" (see Genesis 1). God made us as material beings, wired and programmed to enjoy the material world. There is nothing evil about sensory pleasures: They are gifts from God.

Give some examples of how, through sensory pleasures, we can learn about God and God's love for us.

Solomon's problem, however, was that he allowed these pleasures to take total control of his mind. The desire for earthly goods, in and of itself not bad, consumed him until it became an end instead of the means. His bitter words, as expressed in Ecclesiastes (which he wrote after his repentance and return to God) express the painful journey that one inevitably takes when lured down the road of excessive pleasure.

What can we learn from Solomon's experience that would help us avoid falling into the snare that all but ruined his life?

FURTHER STUDY:

Read Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 25–98, for a more detailed history of the rise and fall of the house of Solomon.

“From being one of the greatest kings that ever wielded a scepter, Solomon became a profligate, the tool and slave of others. His character, once noble and manly, became enervated and effeminate. His faith in the living God was supplanted by atheistic doubts. Unbelief marred his happiness, weakened his principles, and degraded his life. The justice and magnanimity of his early reign were changed to despotism and tyranny. Poor, frail human nature! God can do little for men who lose their sense of dependence upon Him.

“During these years of apostasy, the spiritual decline of Israel progressed steadily. How could it be otherwise when their king had united his interests with satanic agencies? Through these agencies the enemy worked to confuse the minds of the Israelites in regard to true and false worship, and they became an easy prey. Commerce with other nations brought them into intimate contact with those who had no love for God, and their own love for Him was greatly lessened. Their keen sense of the high, holy character of God was deadened. Refusing to follow in the path of obedience, they transferred their allegiance to the enemy of righteousness.”—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 58, 59.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Read the above quote by Ellen White. Notice how she ties Solomon’s decline to the decline of the nation. Can a single bad leader destroy the spirituality of an entire people? What process is involved here? How does the same thing happen to an individual church?
2. Notice, too, in the above statement by Ellen White, the line: “His faith in the living God was supplanted by atheistic doubts.” What sort of principle was at work here? What would cause Solomon, someone so blessed by God, to degenerate to the point where he could question God’s existence? See Isaiah 59:2 for the key and discuss the implications in our own experience as a church.
3. As far as time allows, read through the book of Ecclesiastes, keeping in mind the background to the book: Solomon’s repentance after allowing himself to fall away from God. What does he seem to be saying that shows he learned his lesson?



Questions Lead Japanese Man to Christ

Don Jacobsen

Mr. Ookubo was a busy man, running his shop and caring for his family. But for the first time in his life, questions began to plague him. *Who is God? How did life start on this planet? Is it all by chance, or is there a Creator whom we could come to know?*

Mr. Ookubo began reading a lot of books about religion, but the books did not satisfy all of his questions. He watched other people and tried to learn from them what was ultimately real, but again he was dissatisfied.

One day as he paced the floor grappling with his spiritual questions, he noticed his small shortwave radio sitting on his desk. He turned it on and idly turned the dial, searching for something of interest to listen to.

He came across a station that was broadcasting in his native language. The program, *Voice of Hope*, filled his home and heart with truth and faith. Mr. Ookubo was fascinated by what he heard. The program offered answers to some of his deepest questions, and he kept on listening. He became convinced that there truly is a God who not only made us but loves us so much that He sent His Son to die for us. That was good news to Mr. Ookubo!

Then Mr. Ookubo heard about the Sabbath. "The same God who made all things asks us to honor Him and nurture our relationship with Him by observing His Sabbath on the seventh day of the week," the speaker said.

This news agitated Mr. Ookubo. He noted that the radio program was sponsored by Adventist World Radio, and he listened for their address. He wrote a letter to the radio speaker, telling him, "I want to keep the Sabbath. But Saturday is the busiest day of the week in my shop. For the customers' sake, it is impossible to close on Saturday. What do you think? Do I need to close my shop on Saturday? I am searching for an answer to this dilemma."

The Japanese speaker for Adventist World Radio responded carefully to Mr. Ookubo's questions, making sure that Mr. Ookubo understood that keeping the Sabbath is motivated by our love for Jesus and our desire to follow Him.

The two men exchanged many letters over a period of time. Eventually they met face to face. After a lengthy conversation, Mr. Ookubo said, "There are many hills to climb in life, but now I walk them with Jesus."

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The Rending of God's Nation



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents” (1 Kings 12:16).

THIS SPLIT. “After Solomon died, his kingdom fell apart—Judah in the south and Israel in the north. What may have appeared to be a strong and united empire broke in two. The causes are found in Solomon’s own reign. The outward glory of his kingdom—the sumptuous court ceremonials, the strong new fortress, the powerful army, the great trading enterprises with foreign nations—none of this could hide the fact that by the time Solomon died about 931 B.C., his empire was badly fissured.”—Siegfried H. Horn, “The Divided Monarchy: The Kingdoms of Judah and Israel,” *Ancient Israel*, Hershel Shanks, editor (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeological Society, 1988), chap. 5, p. 109.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What kind of sins did the Hebrew nation fall into? Where did they learn much of the evil they practiced? What caused the nation to split? How did Jeroboam in the north try to keep his people loyal? What were some of the immediate spiritual and political results of the division? What lessons can we, today, learn from what happened to Israel after Solomon’s death?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 27.

THE RENDING OF THE KINGDOM (1 Kings 11:26-39).

Ideas, it has been said, have consequences. Sin does, too, especially when that sin comes from those, such as Solomon, who have great privileges and responsibilities. That he repented at the end of his life, of course, is good: On the other hand, it made no difference regarding the fate of his kingdom. The damage had been done.

Look at 1 Kings 11:33. Notice the trinity of false gods the Israelites had come to worship. From whom did God's people learn about them?

The text itself gives the answer: They learned about them from the surrounding nations, a clear and irrefutable testimony to how culture came to influence, and destroy, true religion.

It is not hard to imagine the rationale used by those who started bringing these gods into the Hebrew worship: *We need to be progressive. We need to keep up with the times. We need to advance in faith. Times are changing. We should not be so closed-minded. What makes us think that we have a monopoly on truth? Let us try to draw as close to these people as we can; that way we can better reach them.*

On the lines below, write your responses to some of the arguments made above. How would you answer them, especially when some could, in fact, contain some truth?

Though the Lord said that they had “forsaken me” (vs. 33), it is not likely that these people openly and flagrantly denied the Lord God. Rather, they brought in aspects of these pagan religions and melded them with their worship of the true God. Nevertheless, God said they had forsaken Him. In what ways can we be guilty of doing the same?

"WHAT PORTION HAVE WE IN DAVID?" THE REVOLT AGAINST REHOBOAM (1 Kings 12:1-24; see also 2 Chronicles 10).

After the death of Solomon, his son Rehoboam reigned in his stead. Rehoboam was Solomon's son by an Ammonite wife. He was about forty years old at the time he became king and well-versed in the inner workings of the kingdom. He might have had the bloodline of Solomon, but he did not inherit any, it seems, of his father's wisdom.

First Kings 12:1 says that Rehoboam journeyed to Shechem, in the north, to be made king. No doubt that had been partially a political move, to try to help secure the loyalty of the northern tribes. It did not work.

Read verses 2-14 in 1 Kings 12. What were the people complaining about? What were they asking for? What was Rehoboam's response?

What is particularly interesting about this incident is verse 15: "Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the Lord, that he might perform his saying, which the Lord spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat." What God spoke to Ahijah was the prophecy that the kingdom would be torn apart (1 Kings 11:30-36), which is exactly what happened because of Rehoboam's arrogance and sheer political insensitivity.

How do we understand this incident? Did the Lord purposely make Rehoboam stubborn and arrogant in order to fulfill His divine purposes? (See also Exod. 14:4; Matt. 26:24.) Or does God, knowing the beginning from the end, simply use our actions to fulfill His divine purposes? Could Rehoboam have acted differently? If so, what would that have meant for the prophecy?

Read verses 16-24 in 1 Kings 12. After the division of the kingdom—Israel in the north (under Jeroboam) and Judah in the south (under Rehoboam)—the Judean king sought to create an army and invade the north. However, he was warned by the Lord not to do it, and he obeyed. Again, according to the text, “ ‘ ‘ ‘this thing is from Me’ ” ’ ” (vs. 24, NKJV), meaning that, because of Solomon's sin and the sins of the people, God had intended for the kingdom to be divided.

Rehoboam was ready to make war on his own people in order to achieve his political aims—all this in the nation that had the greatest revelation of God! What can we learn about how quickly sin can damage our spiritual perceptions and blind us to our true condition?

JEROBOAM IN THE NORTH (1 Kings 12:25-33).

Once named king in the north, Jeroboam lost no time in consolidating his position. His first move was to assure that his people would not go to Jerusalem to worship, thus weakening their loyalty to him in the north.

What was Jeroboam's method of retaining loyalty to his new kingdom? 1 Kings 12:26-33.

Notice the words he uses to describe the golden calves. “‘Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!’” (vs. 28, NKJV). Where have we heard this before? Of course, from the apostasy of the golden calf after the Exodus from Egypt (see Exodus 32), one of the darkest sagas in early Israelite history. *Now, those same words become the focal point of their worship.* How could this be, especially when the Lord, through Ahijah, told Jeroboam that he must “‘‘walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight’’”? (1 Kings 11:38, NKJV).

Why did the Lord prohibit graven images and other kinds of idols? Exod. 20:4; 1 Kings 21:26; Jer. 10:3-5; Ezek. 14:3-5.

The human mind apparently finds it difficult to separate permanently a physical religious image from reality. It does not matter if the idol is a literal graven image, a so-called statue of a saint, or a good-luck charm worn around a person’s neck. If it is given religious significance, it could itself, eventually, become the “god” it supposedly represents.

Look at the chart to get an idea of how carefully Jeroboam developed a plan to counterfeit just about every part of the Israelite worship system.

Element of Worship	God's System	Jeroboam's System
The temple	Deut. 12:4, 5	1 Kings 12:28-30
Physical images	Exod. 20:4	1 Kings 12:28
Priests	Num. 3:9-12	1 Kings 12:31
Annual festivals	Lev. 16:29-31	1 Kings 12:32

Satan is the great counterfeiter. Look around; what other counterfeits of Satan do you see? Do not just look at others or even other faiths. Have some of his counterfeits infiltrated our own lives and our own church, as well?

A DIVIDED NATION (1 Kings 14).

“But hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back” (1 Kings 14:9).

“And Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done” (1 Kings 14:22).

Read the first twenty verses of chapter 14. Just a few chapters earlier, the Lord, through Ahijah the prophet, had told Jeroboam that he would be king over Israel (see 1 Kings 11:29-33; 1 Kings 14:2); now, using that same prophet, He tells Jeroboam that He is going to tear the kingdom from him.

What reason is given for such a harsh punishment against the house of Jeroboam? 1 Kings 14:7-11.

Sadly, his blood brother in the south, Rehoboam, was not doing much better. Nor did Abijam who followed him (1 Kings 15:1-7). According to the text, Judah, under Rehoboam, did worse than all their fathers before them (1 Kings 14:22). Besides building various places of idolatry (1 Kings 14:23), they were engaging in some of the lewder “abominations” (vs. 24) of the nations around them, acts that were, in fact, the very things that caused the Lord to uproot them from the land to begin with. *And now the Hebrews (who were given that land) were doing the same thing?*

Read Deuteronomy 18:9-13 and list some of the abominations practiced by the nations surrounding Israel and Judah that they were specifically told to avoid:

Among some of the practices of the nations was male prostitution, translated “perverted persons” (1 Kings 14:24, NKJV). *All this was now happening in the nation that God has raised up to spread the truth to the world?* How could a nation, so greatly privileged, degenerate so quickly? What makes us think that we are not just as vulnerable to our own modern version of these “abominations”?

THE DIVIDED KINGDOM.

"So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents" (1 Kings 12:16).

When one reads the promises and blessings made to Israel, nothing indicates that the nation was to be divided into two rival, even at times, warring factions. It was never part of God's original plan for the nation to split; the split came as a result of the people's own sins. As a result, almost overnight the nation lost much of its empire. United, under Solomon, it was a strong, local power, able to keep its hostile neighbors under control. After all, had not the nation been promised, "The Lord shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways"? (Deut. 28:7). Divided, they became two very weak, second-rate powers overnight. When they were not fighting pagan enemies, they were fighting among themselves (1 Kings 12:24).

In short, deviation from the explicit word of God caused the nation to split into two kingdoms that even sporadically warred against each other. Thus, when a united front should have been presented to accomplish the Lord's will in spreading the truth to a world steeped in paganism, idolatry, and error, God's chosen nation was so weakened with internal strife and bickering that it became easy prey for external enemies. After accommodating pagan practices, the Israelites eventually had no protection against pagan armies.

Of course, as a church, we are not Israel, not in the sense of a theocracy. But, like Israel, we have been called out to deliver to the world a message that no one else is giving. Though we should not push the parallels too far, what can we see in our own local church today that reflects the situation back then? Is there some of the same spirit of "What portion have we in David" among us? (1 Kings 12:16). Is some of that spirit, as it was back then, even justified? If so, what can be done to rectify it? What are some of the issues that are causing contention and division among us today, either as a world church or at the local level? In what ways do these divisions weaken our ministry to our communities? What could we learn from the mistake of Rehoboam, when he refused to listen to the people? What are the principles here that can help us as we struggle with our own internal conflicts?

FURTHER STUDY:

The Lord's evaluation of Jeroboam raises the question of the rise and fall of nations and the flow of history. Ellen White writes: "Here it is shown that the strength of nations, as of individuals, is not found in the opportunities or facilities that appear to make them invincible; it is not found in their boasted greatness. It is measured by the fidelity with which they fulfill God's purpose."—*Education*, p. 175. Read also in the book *Education* the entire chapter entitled "History and Prophecy," pp. 173–184, for an overview of the issue.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss this statement from *The SDA Bible Commentary* with your class: "Jeroboam's natural talents of leadership, if dedicated to God, would enable him to do much in the cause of right, but if not, he would do much in the cause of wrong."—Vol. 2, p. 786:28, "Man of valour." What does this tell us regarding not only the conditionality of prophecy but about the conditionality of our own lives? What promises has God made to us, personally, concerning such things as salvation itself, that are conditional? Discuss.
2. Someone once said that older people are just those who had more time than younger people to be fools. In light of this week's lesson regarding the counsel that Rehoboam received from both the older and younger people in his kingdom, how would you answer that statement?
3. Erasmus wrote that if what is commanded be not in the power of every one, then all the numerous exhortations in the Scriptures and also all the promises and threatenings, together with all the forms of precepts, stand coldly useless. Discuss this thought in the light of this week's lesson. What is Erasmus saying, why do you agree or disagree, and how does it relate to the responsibility resting on Israel's shoulders? Does it help to explain why the punishment for their flagrant disobedience was so harsh?



Clothed and in His Right Mind

Charlotte Ishkanian

Gaspar Calunga was a mess. When he was not in a mental hospital, he lived on the streets of a major Cuban city, drunk. Often he felt like one of the demoniacs of Jesus' time. With uncut hair and unwashed body, he wandered the streets begging for money to buy alcohol.

One day he wandered into an Adventist church. He staggered to the front of the sanctuary and stood on uncertain legs, conducting the choir. A deacon invited him to sit down or step outside; he refused. When the music ended, he sat down on a bench.

The next Sabbath Gaspar returned to church; again he was drunk.

Then José, a church member, saw Gaspar on the street and spoke to him. "Come to my house," José invited Gaspar. Gaspar followed José home. José gave him food and a bath, then started talking to Gaspar about God. When José finished, Gaspar said, "What you say is true. I am going to quit drinking and come to church regularly. But now give me five pesos for a drink, so I can end my torment."

"I am a Christian," José said. "I cannot give you money for a drink."

A few days later José saw Gaspar. "I am drunk," Gaspar said, "but I have not forgotten what you told me."

Gaspar continued attending church. After little more than a month of attending church, Gaspar stopped drinking and began separating himself from his drinking friends. A Bible worker began studying with him. His new friends in the church encouraged him every day. When he had been alcohol free for six months, he was baptized.

Gaspar's life now is centered on the church. He cleans and repairs the church and often serves as night watchman. His mother is amazed

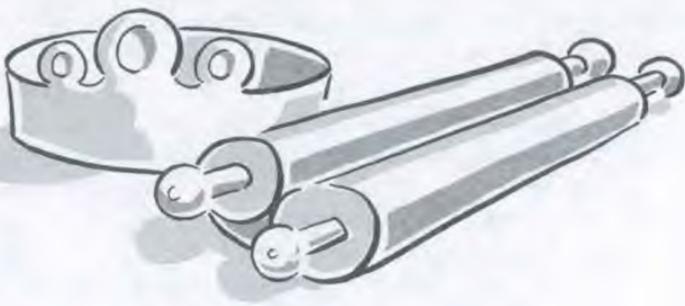
at the changes in his life. She now attends church and is looking forward to baptism.

Gaspar has sought out his former drinking friends, not to drink but to share his faith with them. One of these friends was recently baptized. When someone reminds him of his former life, he responds, "I am not the same person. I never want to return to that life."



Gaspar Calunga (left). Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of *Mission*.

The Rise of the House of Asa



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “He went out to meet Asa and said to him, ‘Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you’” (2 Chronicles 15:2, NIV).

GOOD KING ASA. First, Rehoboam reigns, then Abijam (also known as Abijah): Who says that bad leaders are a problem only for today?

Next comes Asa. Finally, the kingdom of Judah gains a decent king. It needed one. By the time Asa took the throne, the religious situation in Judah in the south (though better than in the north) called for a dire remedy. That is exactly what Asa brought it.

This week, the lesson covers the reign of Asa, both the good and the bad aspects. Though time does not permit us to delve into all the details, look at the reforms Asa instituted, which include not only eradicating false worship and ideas but promoting truth in its place. That principle, of course, still remains today.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why does the Bible compare various kings to David? Can we truly understand how David could be considered “perfect”? What kind of spiritual state was Judah in when Asa took control? What did he do to try to remedy the problem? How was God able to use Asa, despite his own lack of faith at times?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 3.

"AS WAS . . . HIS FATHER DAVID": PART 1 (1 Kings 15:1-8, (NKJV); 2 Chronicles 13).

After Rehoboam's death, Abijam, his son, reigned in his place. Abijam, clearly, was no better than his father, for "he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him" (1 Kings 15:3).

Notice what comes next in the text: It says that the king's heart was not loyal to God, "as was the heart of his father David" (vs. 3, NKJV). Scripture says farther on that "David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (vs. 5).

Many commentators, over the centuries, have struggled with this text and others that talk about how the Lord viewed David. First Kings 11:4 says that Solomon's heart was not "perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father." In contrast, 2 Chronicles 34:2 says of King Josiah that "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father." How could David, who had more than his share of mistakes (besides the horrible sin against Uriah), nevertheless be seen by God as "perfect" (1 Kings 15:3) or as someone who had "done what was right in the eyes of the Lord"? (vs. 5, NIV). How can the following verses, perhaps, help us understand the principle here?

1 Sam. 16:7 _____

1 Kings 8:61 _____

1 Chron. 12:38 _____

2 Chron. 16:9 _____

Ps. 101:2 _____

The key issue, it seems, is that Abijam did evil because *his heart* was not right with the Lord. The attitude of our hearts toward God is inevitably reflected by our works. Of course, even those whose hearts are right, like David, can sin, even seriously. But if one's heart is right with God, those sins are not counted against him or her. A heart right with God is a heart that repents; it is a heart that confesses sin; a heart that seeks victory, mercy, and grace in order to obey.

If our hearts are perfect with God, should our works not be, as well? If not, why not?

"AS WAS . . . HIS FATHER DAVID": PART 2 (1 Kings 15:3, NKJV).

Europe in the 1700s was a time of great intellectual ferment. The continent had experienced a massive revolution in knowledge. What changed was not only *what* people knew but their entire understanding of what it meant to "know" something. Previously, people "knew" only what the ancient sources and authorities had told them, nothing more. Now, however, knowledge was based on science, on reason, on what you could study and learn from natural phenomenon. For many, only what one could reason out and learn from nature and science was true; everything else was myth, or, at least, unknowable.

Fearful of the dangerous direction this attitude was taking Europe, French Huguenot Pierre Bayle tried to stem the tide by showing the limits of reason and by arguing that matters of faith extend beyond reason alone. To buttress his point, he told the story of King David—a liar, an adulterer, a murderer, a cheat—yet of whom the Lord said: "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart" (Acts 13:22). How could that be true? Bayle asked. His answer was simple: It is true, because it deals with something beyond human reason, and that is, God's grace.

However, within a century, Voltaire took Bayle's essay about David and, without many changes in the text, turned it around and used it as *an attack* on faith itself. Here was King David, wrote Voltaire, a liar, an adulterer, a murderer, a cheat, yet of whom the Lord said: "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart" (Acts 13:22). How could that be true? Voltaire asked. His answer was simple: It cannot be, because it is unreasonable and absurd. A man who kills, lies, cheats, and murders cannot be someone after God's own heart.

As Christians we would side, of course, with Bayle. Voltaire's attitude, in contrast, shows how far beyond the reach of human reason alone God's grace is, especially to the unconverted. The greatest event in all human history, the death of Jesus on the cross, is an event that goes way beyond human reason alone. No wonder Paul talked about the "mystery of the gospel" (Eph. 6:19). Nothing is more of a mystery than how God can accept sinners; such as liars, adulterers, murderers, and cheaters like David or even like ourselves.

Read carefully the following few verses: Isa. 55:8, 9; 1 Cor. 1:20-27; 2 Cor. 5:19; Eph. 1:6-9; and Phil. 2:5-8. How do these verses help us understand what Voltaire did not?

ASA IN JERUSALEM (see 2 Chronicles 14; 15).

"And the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded: And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chron. 15:1, 2).

After the short, unhappy reign of Abijam in Judah (from 913–911 B.C.), Asa, his son, reigned in his stead. According to 1 Kings 15:10, he reigned 41 years in Jerusalem. It was a time of great revival and reformation.

In the texts quoted above, a theme appears that emerges again and again in the Bible, that of blessings for obedience, trouble for disobedience. Notice how it is phrased in the above texts. It is written differently here than in some of the other places that teach, basically, the same thing.

Read, for example, 1 Kings 3:14, 1 Kings 9:4-6, and 1 Kings 11:38 and compare how they are phrased in contrast to 2 Chronicles 15:1, 2. How are the ideas related? How is the idea of being obedient to God linked to the idea of seeking Him?

Read verses 3-7 in 2 Chronicles 15. Look at the elements listed there. Israel had been without the "true God," without a "teaching priest," and "without law" (vs. 3). There was "no peace" to those who came in or went out; there was great turmoil on all "the inhabitants of the lands," and that included war (vs. 5, NKJV). Sounds like nothing but trouble. In fact, it was trouble, and in their trouble, the kingdom of Judah sought the Lord, and He was "'found by them'" (vs. 4, NKJV).

How often this principle is seen. We bring trouble upon ourselves because of disobedience, and out of that trouble we seek the Lord, who will never turn us away if we come back in faith and repentance. How much better it would be for all of us, both as a church and as individuals, to stay faithful from the start, thus avoiding the suffering that brings us back to where we should have been all along.

In 2 Chronicles 15:2, the Lord says that if you forsake the Lord, "he will forsake you." How do you understand what it means when God *forsakes* someone? Does it mean that He totally abandons him or her, with no more interest in what he or she does? Or, perhaps, does it mean He abandons an individual as a result of his or her deeds? How do you understand the concept?

ASA'S REFORMS (1 Kings 15:9-15; 2 Chron. 15:8-17).

The chronology of Asa is complicated, but he was apparently quite young when he came to the throne, which may account for the continuing influence of Maachah, the queen mother.

During the first fifteen years of his reign, Asa initiated a movement to restore the worship of Jehovah in Judah. Among the things he did were the following: He banished the religious practice of male prostitution; he removed all the idols in the land (1 Kings 15:12); he removed his own mother (or grandmother) from being queen because of her wrong practices (1 Kings 15:13); and he restored the altar of the Lord (2 Chron. 15:8).

All these outward practices, however, would be of no avail if the hearts of the people were not right, or not "perfect" toward the Lord. That is why, perhaps, of all the things that Asa did, none was more important than what was recorded in 2 Chronicles 15:9-15.

Read carefully 2 Chronicles 15:9-15. What is going on there? What was Asa trying to do? Notice how many times the texts talk about their hearts. Why, without change inside the people themselves, would all their other outward actions ultimately fail?

Notice verse 13 in regard to his mother. What do his actions imply regarding the limits that even close family ties must have when contrasted with obeying the commands of the Lord? See also Luke 14:26.

How fascinating, too, that Asa's heart is said to be "perfect" with the Lord, even if his actions weren't. He did many good things, that's clear, but he didn't do everything the Lord wanted him to. The high places weren't removed, something that he should have done as king. "Nevertheless," the text says that "Asa's heart was perfect with the Lord all his days."

Clearly, then, whatever having a heart perfect for the Lord means, it doesn't mean perfection of action, as in sinlessness.

ASA'S BLUNDERS (2 Chronicles 16).

"And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God: For he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves" (2 Chron. 14:2, 3).

"The heart of Asa was loyal all his days" (2 Chron. 15:17, NKJV).

Though depicted as loyal to the Lord, Asa had displayed some weaknesses that Satan exploited (Don't we all?). In 2 Chronicles 16, Baasha, king of Israel, invaded Judah; Asa, who in a previous military crisis (see 2 Chron. 14:9-13) trusted in the Lord, instead made a pact with a pagan king, Ben-Hadad of Syria. When rebuked by the prophet Hanani for his lack of trust (2 Chron. 16:7, 8), Asa, instead of humbly accepting the rebuke, acted in a manner more befitting some of his predecessors.

What did this king, who had been deemed loyal "all his days" (2 Chron. 15:17), do in response to the rebuke? See 2 Chron. 16:10. What were some of the other consequences of Asa's actions? See also 2 Chron. 16:9.

Toward the end of his life, after he had been stricken with a disease, Asa did not seek the Lord but, instead, sought out the physicians (vs. 12), another apparent lapse of faith on his part.

The following verse, perhaps, gives a hint regarding how God could call Asa loyal, even though Asa still shows a lack of faith at times: "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 Chron. 16:9). The text says that "*Herein thou hast done foolishly*" (emphasis supplied). In other words, the Lord pointed to this specific incident, as opposed to the tenor of Asa's whole life, which had been one of a heart "perfect" toward Him. Though Asa acted foolishly here, with some unfortunate results, He was still considered loyal to the Lord.

Second Chronicles records Asa's last act as one in which he showed lack of faith. Asa then dies. Yet, he's recorded as having been loyal? What lesson can we learn from this story? At the same time, what conclusions would be dangerous to draw from it?

FURTHER STUDY:

Read the following portraits of Asa: **Asa No. 1.** “The faith of Asa was put to a severe test when ‘Zerah the Ethiopian’ . . . invaded his kingdom. . . . In this crisis Asa did not put his trust in the ‘fenced cities in Judah’ that he had built, . . . nor in the ‘mighty men of valor’ in his carefully trained army. . . . Setting his forces in battle array, he sought the help of God. . . .

“But in time of peace Asa . . . had been preparing for any emergency. He had an army trained for conflict; he had endeavored to lead his people to make their peace with God. And now . . . his faith in the One whom he had made his trust did not weaken.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 110, 111.

Asa No. 2. “Asa was angry with the seer because of this; he was so enraged that he put him in prison. At the same time Asa brutally oppressed some of the people. In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was afflicted with a disease in his feet. Though his disease was severe, even in his illness he did not seek help from the Lord, but only from the physicians” (2 Chron. 16:10, 12, NIV).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss with the class Asa No. 1 and Asa No. 2. How is it possible to lead a revival as Asa did and then get so upset when personally rebuked?
2. Evaluate the effects of Asa’s reform movement. This was one of the most extensive reformations in Judah’s history. What was one of the weak points that allowed the revival to lapse?
3. Asa’s reforms did not spare his own mother (grandmother?) from being dethroned. How does one square away that with the command to honor one’s father and mother, especially when the commandment does not specify that the father and mother need to be loyal, faithful followers of the Lord?
4. Read 2 Chronicles 15:13. How does one understand that command with the concept of religious liberty? Or is it even unfair to use the example of ancient Israel, a theocracy, to discuss modern notions of religious liberty?



The Dry Fleece

Nettie rented a room from a Muslim family while she studied in Cote d'Ivoire, West Africa. Her landlord did his best to make her comfortable. Often during the rainy season, the metal roof over her bedroom leaked in spite of the landlord's attempts to repair it. When it rained, she simply moved her bed to a dry spot and set out pots to collect the water. It was inconvenient, but she did not mind.

Nettie was a new believer, and the truths she was learning about God set her heart afire.

One evening at prayer meeting the believers had just divided into groups to pray when Nettie heard raindrops falling on the roof, slowly at first, then rapidly until the rain beat so heavily that it almost drowned out the voices praying around her.

Nettie remembered that she had left her books lying open on her bed and the floor. Some were books she had borrowed from the friend who had led her to Christ. The books would be ruined by the rain! There was no time to run home and rescue the books. She could only whisper "Lord, remember my room."

By the time the group had finished praying, the rain had stopped. Nettie hurried home to salvage what she could of the books and dry out her room. *How would she ever be able to replace the books she knew must be ruined?* she wondered.

As she entered the house, she saw pots scattered across the floor of the main room, which seldom had a problem with leaks. *If there is so much water in the living room, what will I find in my room?*

Nettie dodged the drips and hurried toward her room. She opened the door and turned on the light, but she saw no evidence of water. She knelt down to feel the carpet. It was dry. She touched the books. They were dry! Everything was as she had left it in the morning.

Nettie called her landlord, "Uncle, come and see!" When he arrived, she pointed excitedly, "Look! It did not rain in my room!"

He surveyed the dry carpet and shouted, "Allah is great!"

"Yes," Nettie said. "God is great!" Then Nettie told him that when the rain started, she had prayed that God would keep her books dry.

Nettie did not know the story of Gideon's fleece, but God had shown her that Gideon's God is still in the business of answering prayers. Nettie shared her story the following night during testimony time.

Nettie has since been baptized. She knows that God can and does work miracles for His children today, just as he did in Bible times.

Nettie is a pseudonym. The author wants God alone to receive the glory for her testimony. Nettie continues studying computer science.

Apostasy in the North



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “Elijah went before the people and said, ‘How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him’” (1 Kings 18:21, NIV).

THE LAND FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY . . . AND BLOOD. We last left off with the northern kingdom of Israel after Jeroboam, who, having split Israel from Judah, forged golden calves, constructed idols, and did “more evil than all who were before” him (1 Kings 14:9, NKJV). After his death, he was succeeded by his son Nadab (910–909 B.C.), who also did “evil in the sight of the Lord” (1 Kings 15:26). Nadab was soon murdered by Baasha, who, after taking the throne, walked in all the sins of Jeroboam and who caused Israel to sin (1 Kings 16:2). After Baasha died (886 B.C.), Elah his son (another corrupt ruler) took the throne but was murdered by Zimri, who reigned only seven days (1 Kings 16:15), before burning himself to death rather than surrendering to the Israelite army. Enraged over the murder of Elah, the Israelite army revolted and placed Omri, the commander of the army, on the throne (1 Kings 16:8–20).

That is the good news. The bad news is that, under the house of Omri, things start to go bad.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What was the history of the house of Omri? What kind of false religion did Ahab bring to Israel? What was the role of Elijah? What can we learn from the struggle at Mount Carmel?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 10.

THE RISE OF THE HOUSE OF OMRI (1 Kings 16).

The dates for the entire dynasty of Omri are from about 885 B.C. to around 841 B.C., 44 years, one-fifth of the entire existence of Israel as a nation.

The outstanding characteristic of the dynasty of Omri is the constant repetition of the phrase that each successive ruler “did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him” (1 Kings 16:30, NIV). Probably the worst epitaph used is that Ahab “considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam” (1 Kings 16:31, NIV).

As commanding general of the Israelite army, Omri took over the kingdom after a four-year struggle with Tibni. Omri is the first Hebrew king mentioned in archaeological records outside the Bible, on the Moabite Stone, which said that Omri, king of Israel, had oppressed Moab for many days, for Kemosh was angry with his land.

Omri established a powerful dynasty and made Samaria the capital city. Years after his death, Assyrian leaders still called Israelite kings “Sons of Omri.”

THE OMRI DYNASTY

King's Name	Who Was He?	Length of Reign
Omri	Founder of the dynasty	12 years
Ahab	Omri's son	22 years
Ahaziah	Ahab's son	2 years
Jehoram (Joram)	Ahab's son	12 years

Read 1 Kings 16:25, 26: “But Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all that were before him. For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin, to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger with their vanities.”

The key thought here is this notion that he “made Israel to sin.” It is a pretty direct translation from a Hebrew verb, “to cause to sin.” How do we understand this phrase? Can someone really cause another person, or even a whole nation, to sin? The text implies that a certain amount of guilt and responsibility belong to the kings, and that is understandable, considering their role; but can anyone cause, as in force, someone to sin who ultimately does not want to? Who, in the end, ultimately is responsible for sin? At the same time, can we be held accountable for other people’s sin?

AHAB REIGNS IN ISRAEL (1 Kings 16:29-34).

If Omri were not bad enough, his son Ahab, who ascended to the throne in 874 B.C., has been immortalized for evil. No question, though, his biggest problem arose from his wife, a pagan princess from Phoenicia who determined that her pagan faith, which included the worship of Baal, dominate in Israel. Ahab seemed more than happy to oblige, though the names of his two sons—Ahaziah, “The Lord grasps,” and Joram, “The Lord is exalted”—suggest that, perhaps, he did not intend to replace the worship of Jehovah with the worship of Baal but simply to meld both faiths together.

If, indeed, Ahab simply wanted a mixture of Baal worship and that of Jehovah, why would that be so bad? Suppose he was able to find common ground in certain areas and stressed those common grounds. Would that be acceptable? Why, or why not? Can you see any example in the church today of an attempt to meld aspects of our faith with others? If so, in what ways, and is that always bad? If so, explain why?

The Canaanite religions were some of the most depraved of the time. To prompt the gods to action, worshipers performed sexual acts, and the Baal shrines were staffed with male and female attendants for this purpose. “Through the influence of Jezebel and her impious priests, the people were taught that the idol gods that had been set up were deities, ruling by their mystic power the elements of earth, fire, and water.”—Ellen G. White, *Conflict and Courage*, p. 204.

“By bringing from her homeland hundreds of cult personnel of Baal and Asherah, by introducing the rites of the Canaanite cult system and by persecuting and killing the worshippers of Yahweh, Jezebel caused a religious crisis of the first magnitude (1 Kings 18:4, 19).”—Siegfried Horn, Ancient Israel: A Short History from Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple, ed: Hershel Shanks (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeological Society, 1988), p. 121.

In the context of today’s lesson, read Romans 1:24, 25 and ask, What is it about humans that we seek to worship the creature more than the Creator? In fact, even in today’s world, without such crass idolatry in most places, how is the same principle of idolatry being manifested? In what ways can we, even in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, be subtly caught up in this perennial problem?

THE ADVENT OF ELIJAH (1 Kings 17:1-9).

"Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months" (James 5:17).

Imagine that you are king of Israel (a fairly "successful" one at that point), when, one day, apparently out of nowhere, some farm boy appears, stands before your throne, and announces, "'As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word'" (1 Kings 17:1, NKJV). Then, before you know it, he is gone. At first, you might have been tempted to dismiss him as some kook or fanatic (after all, claiming that it would not rain except at "my word" does sound a bit much)—that is, until it, in fact, stops raining, to the point that there is, indeed, a famine in the land.

Read Deuteronomy 11:16, 17; 28:23, 24; Leviticus 26:19. In light of these texts, however bold and brash Elijah's words were, why should they not have come as a surprise to the king?

The name Elijah means "my God is Jehovah," which is appropriate, considering the battle that he was engaged in.

After Elijah made his warning to Ahab, he is told by the Lord to flee to Brook Cherith, and there he could drink from the brook, and there the ravens (by God's miraculous command) would feed him. Thus, his water came from something natural (the river), his food from something supernatural (the ravens). Eventually, the water of the brook dries up "because there had been no rain in the land" (1 Kings 17:7, NKJV). Food from the ravens was fine, but if Elijah did not find water, he would soon be dead.

How many of us have ever been in a similar situation: One of seeing the miraculous providence of God at work in our lives while at the same time struggling with what appears to be a "natural" turn of events that does not seem to be working in our favor or that, in fact, seems to be undermining the providence of God? Think of similar examples from biblical history where the same thing happens. For instance, God called Abram to the Promised Land, and when he arrives there, he faces a famine (Genesis 12); and the children of Israel, right after the miraculous deliverance from Egypt, face thirst (Exod. 15:22-24). What lessons can we learn from these experiences?

CLIMAX AT CARMEL (1 Kings 18).

Read the story of the confrontation on Mount Carmel and answer the following questions:

1. Why was Obadiah so frightened to do what Elijah had asked him to do? What previous events gave him reason to be scared of the king?
2. What was Ahab's first reaction to Elijah when he appeared before him, and why was it so typical? What other examples can you find in the Bible of the same principle, that of blaming others for your own sins?
3. Read Elijah's question to the people in verse 21. What does it imply regarding the kind of worship that was practiced in Israel? In other words, was it pure paganism or a mixture of both?
4. Why did Elijah mock the prophets of Baal? Was there any need for that verbal barrage or, perhaps, was it his own personality and frustration coming through?
5. Notice the time that Elijah chose to call upon the Lord to respond from heaven and vindicate His name and power. What was significant about that specific time of the day?
6. Why was the punishment so harsh against the prophets of Baal? After all, they were following only the beliefs of their religion. Why should they be put to death for their beliefs, which—considering their actions on the altar (vs. 28)—they held sincerely?
7. The story of Elijah on Carmel is one of the more popular ones in the Hebrew Bible. Clearly, the principles derived from it are simple enough: We should not worship false gods but only the true One, the "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel" (vs. 36), the Creator of heaven and earth. The question remains, however: What can we, today, learn from it? In other words, how often are we put in situations so dramatic and clear as this? How often are we ever confronted with truth and error in such stark, unmistakable terms? How often do we expect fire from heaven to come down and devour sacrifices, wood, stone, and dust when a voice from heaven would be more than enough?

JEZEBEL (1 Kings 19:1-18).

"And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time" (1 Kings 19:1, 2).

Our God is a God of mercy, of forgiveness, of unimaginable grace. At the Cross, Jesus Christ paid the penalty for the sins of the world. All our lies, our greed, our envy, our lust, our pride, our cheating, our selfishness, and all the nasty and dirty little things we have thought and done were brought to the Cross. All the things were brought to the Cross that by themselves might not seem so bad but, if gathered together, added up, and shoved in our faces, would cause us to beat our breasts in woe. All of them were there, at the Cross, killing Christ so that when all the evil moments of our life are tallied and weighed, they do not have to ultimately, and forever, kill us. Talk about grace!

Read each of the following verses and write down what they say about salvation and grace:

John 3:16, 17 _____

Rom. 5:6 _____

1 John 2:2 _____

In this context, look at the reaction of Jezebel; that is, *after* Ahab had told her what happened at Mount Carmel. One would think that after such a powerful manifestation of the power of the true God, Jezebel would have, at best, converted, repented, and sought forgiveness from the God who had so completely devastated her gods; at worst, she would have thought, perhaps, it would be best to leave town and leave Elijah alone.

Instead, what happened?

Perhaps none of us has ever been so close to something like that day at Carmel. Perhaps there is no need for us to be convinced of God's power in such a dramatic fashion (after all, look what good it did Jezebel). Nevertheless, we all need to be careful not to allow our hearts to be so hard that, even in the face of God's incredible grace, we turn our backs on the Lord. How can we protect ourselves from doing, at least in principle, what Jezebel has done in reality?

FURTHER STUDY:

For additional information on the religious and cult practices of the Canaanites, see *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, pp. 126, 129, 162; vol. 2, pp. 38–40, and the additional note on Joshua 6.

History teaches that the peoples on the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean were as corrupt and depraved as any nation that ever existed. They made a religion of lust. They sent their children into the fires of the god Molech. Leviticus 18 presents briefly something of the moral rebellion of the Canaanites. The imagination and a little knowledge of history supply the rest. According to the Bible, the Canaanites were so vile that the very land did “spue” them out (see Lev. 18:28). No wonder the Lord was so firm with Israel that they not be contaminated with that religion.

“The priests of Baal witness with consternation the wonderful revelation of Jehovah’s power. Yet even in their discomfiture and in the presence of divine glory, they refuse to repent of their evil-doing. They would still remain the prophets of Baal. Thus they showed themselves ripe for destruction. That repentant Israel may be protected from the allurements of those who have taught them to worship Baal, Elijah is directed by the Lord to destroy these false teachers. The anger of the people has already been aroused against the leaders in transgression; and when Elijah gives the command, ‘Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape,’ they are ready to obey. They seize the priests, and take them to the brook Kishon, and there, before the close of the day that marked the beginning of decided reform, the ministers of Baal are slain. Not one is permitted to live.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 153, 154.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Read the story in 1 Kings 17:8-24. Why was this included in the account of Elijah’s life? Could these incidents have happened in order to help prepare Elijah for the test at Mount Carmel?
2. Baasha came to power only after he had murdered Nadab (see 1 Kings 15:25-28). In light of that event, how does one interpret 1 Kings 16:2, in which the Lord says to Baasha that “‘Inasmuch as I lifted you out of the dust and made you ruler over My people Israel’”? (NKJV). Is this how God puts His people on thrones? How do we understand what that text means?



Reluctant Rebel

J. H. Zachary

When Felix was a teenager, Protestant pastors occasionally came to speak at his school. Several times the students chased the pastors out of the village, and sometimes Felix joined them. But he could not deny that these pastors were different from the religious leaders he knew.

After high school, Felix started a little business, but it went bankrupt. Felix felt a great emptiness in his life. With time on his hands, he thought a lot about spiritual matters. He remembered the pastors that he had helped drive out of the village. What made them different? He remembered the importance these pastors placed on the Bible.

Felix bought a Bible and began to read it, searching for spiritual meaning to life. One day he passed a public meeting held by a Protestant group. He stopped to listen and decided to attend the meetings. He arranged for studies and planned to join this church. But before he could join, an elderly Adventist neighbor invited him to evangelistic meetings in town. Felix decided against attending the Adventist meetings, since he had found another church.

The Adventist meetings were held close to Felix's home, and he could hear the preacher from his front porch. Felix noticed that the pastor quoted many Bible texts. Felix began following the pastor's study in his own Bible. Night after night he listened from his porch.

When the message on the Sabbath was presented, Felix felt strong conviction. He left home and walked to the meeting. He arrived just as the pastor made an altar call. Felix never took his seat, but walked straight to the front in response to the pastor's invitation.

When Felix returned home, he told his brother with whom he was living about what he had learned from the Bible. He was surprised at his brothers strong resistance to his attending these meetings.

Felix decided to return to his parents' home. He knew that they would not resist his decision to follow Christ. Felix has been baptized and has found peace and happiness in working for God as a literature evangelist.



Felix Kansamugire (left). J. H. Zachary is coordinator of international evangelism for The Quiet Hour and a special consultant for the General Conference Ministerial Association.



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Myanmar is a predominately Buddhist country of almost 50 million people. The current government of the land, formerly known as Burma, restricts evangelistic efforts to church-owned property.

The Myanmar Union Mission plans to construct an evangelistic center on one of the main thoroughfares in the capital city of Yangon. There they can offer cooking classes, family life seminars, and evangelistic outreach, as well as hold regular worship services.

Help build it so they can come.

Read

MISSION

The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on September 28
supports projects in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division.

The Good and the Bad Days of King Jehoshaphat in Judah



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper” (2 Chronicles 20:20).

JEHOOSHAPHAT IN JUDAH. Nothing is boring about the days of King Jehoshaphat in Judah. His reign from 872–848 B.C. is filled with spiritual highs and lows, moments of great success followed by disaster. Who of us can, in some ways, relate?

What is most interesting about this week’s lesson are, in fact, the ups and downs of this Judean ruler. As you study the biblical texts, ask yourself, How can someone go from one extreme to another and then back again? What were the circumstances that caused him to waver as he did? What lessons can we learn from his highs and lows? Whatever the causes of his spiritual journey, his story presents an interesting case study that, probably, in some ways, reflects the spiritual walk of all of us.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why was King Jehoshaphat praised in the Bible? What formed the foundation and basis of his early attempt to bring a revival and reformation to Judah? How well did he succeed? What mistake did he make early on, and what were the results? What was the basis of his judicial reforms? What threat did Judah face right after the reforms went into effect? What was the key to the people’s successful defense against this threat? How can we apply the principles behind these stories to our own lives and experiences?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 17.

JEHOSHAPHAT IN JUDAH (2 Chron. 17:1-6).

The first six verses of chapter 17 say so much. God was with Jehoshaphat, not because Jehoshaphat was divinely chosen even before his birth, not because he had great leadership skills, not because of some inherited tendencies to goodness but simply because the king obeyed, walking in the “ways of his father David” (vs. 3).

Here, too, is revealed what has also been called the “blessing/retribution” motif, outlined so clearly in the book of Deuteronomy (see especially chapter 28) and appearing again and again in the Kings-Chronicles saga. What it means is this: If the people obey, they will be blessed; if they disobey, they will suffer retribution.

It does not get any simpler.

How does the “blessing/retribution” principle apply today, to us in our own personal lives, or to us as a church? Though we would not apply, for example, the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 28 literally to our church or to ourselves, how is the principle applicable still? Look at the following texts from the New Testament. In what ways can you find this “blessing/retribution” motif there?

Matt. 23:37-39 _____

Gal. 6:7, 8 _____

Phil. 3:16-19 _____

Heb. 2:1-3 _____

Perhaps the most exciting verse in 2 Chronicles 17 is verse 6, which reads in the Hebrew: “And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord.” Though the Hebrew word for “lifted up” often carries a negative meaning, that of arrogance, here it refers to something positive. The heart of Jehoshaphat was lifted up; that is, it exalted and rejoiced in the ways of the Lord. In other words, he was happy to do God’s will. Perhaps he had seen the devastation that disobedience had caused, both to the nation as a whole or in individual lives. Whatever the reason, no doubt he could proclaim with David: “I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart” (Ps. 40:8).

A key to having our hearts “lifted up in the ways of the Lord” (2 Chron. 17:6) is found in the just-quoted psalm. What is that key, and how can we experience that joy ourselves? See also Jer. 31:33.

THE BOOK OF THE LAW OF THE LORD (2 Chron. 17:7-10).

“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 Chron. 17:9).

A king, alone, does not make a revival and reformation. Jehoshaphat, apparently, knew that whatever changes he wanted to make, however much he desired to have God’s blessings upon his nation—he could not do it alone. Thus, the text specifies that he sent teachers throughout the land with the “Book of the Law.” Though commentators are not sure which specific book or books were used, the point is that the Written Word, the Scriptures, were at the basis of this revival and reformation.

How do you understand the role of the Scriptures here when contrasted with Jesus’ words: “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me”? (John 5:39)? Are the Scriptures an end in themselves or the means to an end? If a means to an end, what is that end?

Jehoshaphat’s heart was right with the Lord; as a result, he obeyed. His faith was manifested by his works, as *must* always be the case for those who claim to have a saving faith: “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (James 2:17).

Indeed, because we are saved by faith and not by works, it does not mean that works have nothing to do with saving faith, as the case of Jehoshaphat shows. That we can never trust in our good works for salvation does not mean that works do not play a part in the experience of salvation. Works are an outward expression of an inward relationship with our Creator and Redeemer. Works express faith, works are the personification of faith, works are the heart and soul of faith, works are the human manifestation of faith. Works are faith made real, belief made tangible, our words and profession made flesh. Works are a means of expressing, even strengthening, faith, Jehoshaphat being a great example of this crucial spiritual reality.

Read through the first nine verses of 1 Kings 17. Take note of the works that Jehoshaphat performed because of his faith. Notice that it involved two aspects: that of doing certain things, as well as of stopping certain things from being done. Applying that principle to your own life, answer this: You say you have faith—but what about your works?

" 'IS THERE NOT STILL A PROPHET OF THE LORD HERE' "? (2 Chronicles 18; NKJV; 19:1-3).

This has to be one of the most bizarre stories in the Old Testament. First, Jehoshaphat, who “sought the God of his father” (2 Chron. 17:4, NKJV), marries his son Jehoram to Athaliah, daughter of Ahab (that is the Ahab, as in Jezebel’s husband) in order to help cement a political alliance, a move that “was not in the order of God” (Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 195). Next, he agrees to form a military alliance with Ahab against Ramoth Gilead, another move that God did not approve. However, perhaps feeling some unease, Jehoshaphat wants to know if the Lord will be with them before going to war. Four hundred prophets in the north tell him “Go” (2 Chron. 18:5). Unconvinced by the chorus of pagan shamans, Jehoshaphat asks, “ ‘Is there not still a prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of Him?’ ” (vs. 6, NKJV). Micaiah, a prophet of the Lord, is brought before them. At first, he tells Ahab what he thinks Ahab wants to hear. Ahab, probably detecting the sarcasm, demands to be told the truth. Micaiah obliges and says specifically that they should not fight. Ahab, angry, has Micaiah tossed into jail. Meanwhile, Jehoshaphat, though he heard the warning from the Lord, goes to war anyway. Before they fight, Ahab disguises himself but tells Jehoshaphat to fight in his royal robes. For whatever reason, Jehoshaphat agrees, and in the battle, he is surrounded by the enemy that is about to kill him when he cries out for deliverance, and “the Lord helped him; and God moved them to depart from him” (vs. 31). Later, a random shot from a Syrian bow kills Ahab. Jehoshaphat returns home, where he is rebuked by Jehu the son of Hanani the seer, who says, “Therefore the wrath of the Lord is upon you” (2 Chron. 19:2, NKJV).

Read through 2 Chronicles 18 and write down all the wrong things that Jehoshaphat said and did; contrast them with all the good things he said and did. What conclusions can you draw from the comparison?

What could have prompted Jehoshaphat to have made the doomed alliance with Ahab to begin with? See 2 Chron. 18:1-3.

Compare 2 Chronicles 18:1 with 1 Kings 3:1. What parallels exist?

Look at Jehu’s rebuke (2 Chron. 19:1-3). What did he mean by saying, “ ‘Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord?’ ” (NKJV). What principle is seen there, and how can we apply it in our own lives?

THE JUDICIAL REFORMS OF JEHOASHAPHAT (2 Chron. 19:4-11).

Though Scripture does not say, Jehoshaphat, rebuked for his previous folly (the military alliance with Ahab), probably determined to follow the Lord more than ever, which could explain his desire to reform the nation's legal system according to God's will. Whatever the reason, Jehoshaphat decided that the court system needed a major overhaul.

Describe Jehoshaphat's judicial reforms (2 Chron. 19:4-11). Compare these reforms with the instructions in Deuteronomy 16:18-20; 17:8-13.

The emphasis of the judicial reformation was on the moral values of the system. “‘Consider carefully what you do’” (2 Chron. 19:6, NIV), “‘judge carefully’” (vs. 7, NIV), “‘no injustice or partiality or bribery’” (vs. 7, NIV), “‘serve faithfully’” (vs. 9, NIV), “‘warn them not to sin against the Lord’” (vs. 10, NIV), and “‘act with courage’” (vs. 11, NIV).

Look carefully at verse 7. What is Jehoshaphat saying here? What do the following verses say that help us understand the principle that Jehoshaphat was trying to teach the judges?

Deut. 10:17 _____

Job 34:19 _____

Eph. 6:9 _____

1 Pet. 1:17 _____

Obviously, the Lord wanted the judges to reflect the character of Himself, that of being impartial and fair with those whom they needed to judge.

Look carefully at verse 10 of 2 Chronicles 19. Notice what Jehoshaphat is telling these leaders: In the cases that you hear, you must warn the people about the consequences of their sins or else you will also be held accountable, and wrath will come upon you, as well.

Most of us, of course, are not professional jurists; we all, however, find ourselves in positions where we can be tempted—either by “bribes” or by the lure of money or of power or position—to be unfair in how we treat others. How can we fortify our minds so we do not get caught in that common pitfall?

" ' 'THE BATTLE IS NOT YOURS, BUT GOD'S' ' '"
(2 Chronicles 20, NKJV).

Chapter 20 begins on an interesting note: "It happened after this" (NKJV), meaning that after Jehoshaphat instituted all these good reforms, the nations faced a great threat. In other words, right after the king and the nation started to better serve the Lord, they were confronted with a test of faith. How many people, even in their personal lives, can attest to the same thing happening to them?

What did Jehoshaphat and the nation do in response to the crisis? The king feared (vs. 3), he sought the Lord (vs. 3), he proclaimed a fast (vs. 3), he gathered the nation together (vs. 4), he prayed (vss. 5-13), he and the nation worshiped (vs. 18), and then the people praised the Lord (vss. 19-21). Now they were ready for whatever was coming.

"Jehoshaphat was a man of courage and valor. . . . He was well prepared to meet almost any foe; yet in this crisis he put not his trust in the arm of flesh . . . [instead of in] a living faith in the God of Israel." —Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 198, 199.

Read verse 4 of 2 Chronicles 20, which says that the people came "to seek the Lord." How did they seek the Lord? What does it mean "to seek the Lord"? How can we, today, seek the Lord? Write down practical steps that we can take in our own lives as we seek the Lord:

Read Jehoshaphat's prayer (vss. 6-12). Of all that he says, two major points come through: the power of God and the weakness of the people. Notice the difference here in Jehoshaphat's attitude and actions compared to Ahab's and the ill-fated battle against Ramoth-Gilead.

"Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper" (2 Chron. 20:20). Think of examples in your own life and experience where you have seen this promise fulfilled. At the same time, have you had experiences where it seemed that it *was not* fulfilled? Or, is it possible that our concept of what it means to be "established" or what it means to "prosper" needs revising? Discuss.

FURTHER STUDY:

Jehoshaphat's reform movement did much good in Judah. He eliminated most of the high places and destroyed the practice of male prostitution that was part of Baal worship (1 Kings 22:46). He was a good military leader and a good politician who ran the country well. "Throughout the kingdom the people were in need of instruction in the law of God. In an understanding of this law lay their safety; by conforming their lives to its requirements they would become loyal both to God and to man. Knowing this, Jehoshaphat took steps to ensure to his people thorough instruction in the Holy Scriptures. . . . And as many endeavored to understand God's requirements and to put away sin, a revival was effected."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 191.

Jehoshaphat tried his hand at overseas commercial ventures (1 Kings 22:48) but without much success, primarily because it was a joint venture with people of whom God did not approve.

He redid the judicial system in Judah and established just laws for all (2 Chron. 19:4-11). Overall, the Lord commended him for what he did (2 Chron. 19:3).

For instance, Ellen White comments on his reaction to the attack by the southern coalition recorded in 2 Chronicles 20: "In conformity to the divine requirements there is a transforming power that brings peace and good will among men. If the teachings of God's word were made the controlling influence in the life of every man and woman, . . . the evils that now exist in national and in social life would find no place."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 192.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Read 2 Chronicles 20:33. How do you understand what that says in light of the successful battle against the southern coalition? In other words, can a people have some spiritual successes, yet at the same time truly not be converted to the Lord? Discuss.
2. The reign of Jehoshaphat reveals, again, a crucial principle: People do not have to be perfect in order to be used by the Lord. What, though, makes the difference, say, between a Jehoshaphat, who is commended by God, and a Rehoboam, who is condemned? Is there a fine line there, or something much more profound?
3. Discuss more this idea of a heart that takes delight "in the ways of the Lord." How does a person reach the point where he or she delights in doing God's will? How does an understanding of what happened at the Cross play a crucial role in someone coming to that spiritual level?



Radio Voice Stops a Murder

Don Jacobsen

What could lead a mother to kill herself and her own daughter?

Maria* was desperate. A single mother living in Peru, she worked long hours to provide for her teenage daughter, Angela,* and herself. Maria worried as her innocent child became a rebellious teenager. Maria seemed powerless to change the path Angela's life was taking. Angela stayed out night after night, rebelling against Maria's values.

Then it happened. Maria noticed Angela's health was failing. She tried to deny it, but the truth was evident: Her daughter had contracted AIDS. Heartbroken, Maria sought help to reverse her daughter's disease, but she found no help. Angela's health continued to decline until she was bedridden in great pain.

Maria was so depressed and heartsick that she could see only one way out. Desperate, she decided to end her daughter's pain by killing her, then turn the gun on herself and end her own life. She purchased a gun and hid it in a desk drawer, awaiting the day that she had appointed for the murders.

On the given day, Maria opened the desk drawer and removed the gun. But then something happened that changed her mind. Maria explains in her own words.

"I don't believe in miracles, but this morning, as I prepared to carry out my plan, an extraordinary thing happened. As I opened my desk and removed the revolver, the clock radio came on, and a voice said, 'In the midst of suffering and pain, Jesus understands, because He suffered just as we do.'

"I sat down and listened. It seemed as if the voice was directed at me personally. I felt a peace in my heart that I had not known. The program ended with a phone number. I called the number and asked the person who answered to tell me what to do."

The number Maria called was the Voice of Hope, and the person who answered the phone listened to Maria's story then promised to visit Maria and her daughter. In fact, several staff members visited the family, sharing God's Word and weeping with them through their suffering. Sadly, the disease had taken its toll, and Angela died.

Maria grieved over her daughter's death. But she was strengthened by God's promises and drew courage from her newfound faith in Christ and the support of her Christian friends. She was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church and now longs for the day when she will be reunited with her daughter at Jesus' soon coming.

*Not their real names. Don Jacobsen is president of Adventist World Radio.

Judah: From Jehoram to Joash



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “And Jehoiada made a covenant between him, and between all the people, and between the king, that they should be the Lord’s people” (2 Chronicles 23:16).

JEHORAM, AHAZIAH, ATHALIAH, AND JOASH: A TRAGEDY OF ERRORS. This week covers about fifty-eight years of leadership in Judah, beginning with Jehoram and ending with Joash. It is really amazing, not that these people were either corrupt or easily corruptible but that the Bible would be so open and obvious about their foibles. This was not a common practice in the ancient Near East, where official chroniclers tended (though not always) to gloss over or flat-out ignore the mistakes of their mighty and holy sovereigns.

This certainly is not the case with the Jews. On the contrary. Beginning with Jehoram, who “did evil in the sight of the Lord” (2 Chron. 21:6, NKJV), up through Joash, who started out his reign fairly well (After all, how much evil can a seven-year-old do?) only to end on a rather sour note (killing the son of the man who helped bring him to the throne), this week covers some pretty incredible events.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What were some of the bad influences on Jehoram? How did Athaliah ascend the throne of Judah? What did she attempt to do to the house of David? How was she finally overthrown? What reforms did Jehoiada attempt to institute in Judah? How did someone like Joash start out so good only to end his reign on such a bad note?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 24.

FIRST ACTS (2 Chronicles 21).

"Now when Jehoram was risen up to the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself, and slew all his brethren with the sword, and divers also of the princes of Israel" (2 Chron. 21:4).

Thus reads the first recorded act of Jehoram, firstborn of good king Jehoshaphat, new ruler in Judah (God's chosen nation) and ancestor to Jesus the Messiah. Killing all his brothers and anyone else who might have threatened his reign, young Jehoram showed that whatever he might have lacked in spirituality he made up for in political cunning (this, a few thousands years before Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*). Of course, to be fair, Solomon did somewhat the same thing (1 Kings 2), even if the circumstances greatly differed. Nevertheless, the principle remains: God's chosen nation, in seeking a king, reaped the sad results of that choice.

The rest of Jehoram's reign, as recorded in 2 Chronicles 21, reflects his first acts. A hint, no doubt, of one reason for his terrible reign is found in verse 6. He was married to a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, more than likely the marriage arranged by his father years earlier to help cement political ties with Israel (see 2 Chron. 18:1; see also 2 Chron. 21:5, 6). This presents a perfect example of how even good people reap the horrendous results of their mistakes.

Read the letter that came to Jehoram from Elijah the prophet (2 Chron. 21:12-15). What, basically, does Elijah say to the king? Why should his own children and family suffer directly from the king's apostasy? Where else in the Bible do we see this principle, that of innocents suffering for the wrong acts of others? How do we understand this consequence, in light of God's fairness and justice?

One of the problems modern readers often have with texts like these is the phrase that "the Lord will strike" you with this or "the Lord will strike" (vs. 14, NKJV) you with that. Oftentimes this is merely the Bible writer's way of expressing the natural results of disobedience, though there are unmistakable instances of God's direct retributive intervention (see Genesis 7). In other words, these evil things are not necessarily the direct result of God's supernatural action, even if Bible writers sometimes express it that way. Whatever the case, the principle is the same: Disobedience brings ruin, a point stressed over and over again in the Bible, particularly in the Kings-Chronicles saga.

THE QUEEN "MUM" RULES (2 Chronicles 22).

After the sorry and tragic reign of Jehoram in Judah (854–841 B.C.), his son Ahaziah ruled, but only for one year before being killed (2 Chron. 22:2).

Second Chronicles 22 outlines the events that lead to his death. Why would it be fitting that he should die with the house of Ahab (see vss. 2-4) in the northern kingdom?

What is most important about Ahaziah is not his rule but what followed, and that is the reign of Athaliah, mother of Ahaziah, wife of Jehoram, and daughter of Jezebel and Ahab (what family ties!). According to the text, she was so enraged by what happened to her royal family in Israel that she decided to do the same to the royal family in Judah.

Though on the surface this seemed like just another dynastic mess in Israel, more murdering and conniving for power, nothing more—a greater issue was at stake here.

In 2 Samuel 7:25 and 26 God promises David that he would establish his dynasty forever, because the Lord planned for the Messiah to come through David's bloodline (Matt. 1:1; Luke 1:32, 33; Acts 2:29-31; 13:22, 23; Rev. 3:7; 22:16). Genesis 49:10 adds, early on, that He will come through Judah. If, however, Athaliah succeeded in destroying "all the royal heirs of the house of Judah" (2 Chron. 22:10, NKJV), the bloodline would have ended. Ideally, then, the prophecies of Jesus, coming from the line of David, could not have been fulfilled.

"In this massacre all the descendants of David who were eligible to the throne were destroyed, save one, a babe named Joash."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 215.

Read 2 Chronicles 22:11. Who is Jehoshabeath? She is mentioned only twice in the entire Scriptures (see also 2 Kings 11:2). Yet, she played such a key role in preserving the royal line of David, through which Jesus the Messiah, Savior of the world, would come. It is hard to imagine such high stakes resting upon one person. This incident, though, is not the only time something similar has happened, either in the Bible or secular history. What other incidents, whether in the Bible or in extrabiblical history, show how the faithfulness and dedication of even a single person, perhaps someone not even highly esteemed, can have such important consequences? And though few of us would even be in a position such as Jehoshabeath, what does this account tell us about ourselves and about the potential for good we have in the Lord's work if we remain faithful?

PALACE COUP (2 Chronicles 23; 2 Kings 11).

"And all the congregation made a covenant with the king in the house of God. And he said unto them, Behold, the king's son shall reign, as the Lord hath said of the sons of David" (2 Chron. 23:3).

After the death of Ahaziah, his mother, the pagan Athaliah, seized the throne for six years (2 Chron. 22:12). She was not even a remote descendant of King David; her six-year rule marked the only interruption in the direct line of Davidic leadership in Judah.

Who led out in the revolt against the reign of Athaliah? What reasons did he have to justify his palace coup? After all, what does Paul say in Romans? "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation" (Rom. 13:1, 2). Though, of course, Jehoiada could not have read Paul, did the principle still not apply, all the same? Why, too, did he wait until, of all days, *the Sabbath* (2 Chron. 23:8), to institute the revolt?

Verse 16 of 2 Chronicles 23 reads, "And Jehoiada made a covenant between him, and between all the people, and between the king, that they should be the Lord's people." Jehoiada, obviously, was serious about turning the people of Judah back to the Lord; he intended that they should be "the Lord's people." What does that mean, that they should be "the Lord's people"? See Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 31:33, 34; and chapter 32:38-40 for hints. That title is obviously not something that comes automatically by blood, or there would have been no need for Jehoiada to admonish the people to renew the covenant with the Lord.

Read 2 Chronicles 23:16-21. Notice the steps that Jehoiada took to try to set the nation right with God again. Besides having the queen killed, he tore down pagan altars, killed the priests of Baal, reestablished the Levitical priesthood, and appointed gatekeepers at the gates of the house of the Lord so that "no one who was in any way unclean should enter" (vs. 19, NKJV). Does all this not sound so judgmental, so narrow-minded, so parochial? Why take such extreme measures? Did he never hear of liberty of conscience? What justification did he have for such harsh acts, and what do those acts tell us about how we, personally, need to deal with the "pagan" influences in our own lives?

THE EARLY REIGN OF KING JOASH (2 Kings 12:1-16; 2 Chron. 24:1-14).

According to the Bible, Joash (or Jehoash) had been on the throne 23 years before declaring that the temple (2 Kings 12:6), defiled by the sons of Athaliah (2 Chron. 24:7), needed repair. Notice what he says to them in 2 Kings 12:7: "Then king Jehoash called for Jehoiada the priest, and the other priests, and said unto them, Why repair ye not the breaches of the house? now therefore receive no more money of your acquaintance, but deliver it for the breaches of the house."

Apparently, the priests had been taking money from the people and using it for either themselves or for purposes other than the maintenance of the temple. For whatever reason, it was not a project the priesthood showed much enthusiasm about (see also 2 Chron. 24:5). Perhaps they knew that the more spent on the temple, the less they would have for themselves.

Where was the money to come from for the needed repairs?
Read 2 Kings 12:4, 5, 9, 10.

"Three different kinds of offerings are here referred to: (1) 'The dedicated things.' Money from persons who had made vows to the Lord or who had dedicated certain animals or objects to Him (see Lev. 27:2-28). (2) 'The money of every one that passeth the account.' That is, the money each individual was assessed. This was half a shekel, whether rich or poor (Ex. 30:13-15). (3) 'The money that cometh into any man's heart.' This consisted of freewill offerings."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 923: 2 Kings 12:4, "All the money."

Read the account of how the money was to be given for the repair of the temple as presented in 2 Chronicles 24:8-10. Why was it such a success? Could the fact that the people themselves gave, without compulsion, have something to do with why there was "money in abundance"? (vs. 11, NKJV). Compare what happened here with what happened in Exodus 36:3-6.

Perhaps the most telling verse in this whole account appears in 2 Chronicles 24:10, which says that all the leaders and all the people rejoiced. No doubt, they felt satisfaction in freely being part of this important work. In other words, because they believed in what they were doing, they were glad to do it. The lessons for us should be obvious.

THE APOSTASY OF JOASH (2 Chron. 24:15-27).

In Shakespeare's *Richard III*, a citizen says "Woe to the land that is governed by a child." This is not true in the case of Joash, who was placed on the throne of Judah at the incredibly young age of seven (2 Chron. 24:1). His earlier days were, in fact, better than his latter ones.

The Bible basically explains why. Second Chronicles 24:2 says, "And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest." (Second Kings 12:2 adds the phrase "all the years Jehoiada the priest instructed him," NIV.) Notice the caveat here: The king did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord as long as Jehoiada the priest was around. This was the priest whose wife, Jehoshabeath (2 Chron. 22:11), had first hid the child from the murderous clutches of Athaliah and who, himself, led the revolt that overthrew the queen. As long as Jehoiada guided him, Joash stayed faithful. However, once Jehoiada died, the situation changed.

Read 2 Chronicles 24:17. The text could also be translated, "And after the death of Jehoiada, the princes of Judah came and they bowed before the king; then the king obeyed them." What does this text say about the character of Joash?

Joash, obviously, was someone who easily could be swayed. That could be good, or it could be bad. People need to be open to the influence and counsel of others; that openness, however, could be a double-edged sword. The same attitude that allows a person to listen to good counselors also allows him or her to listen to bad ones, Joash being a prime example. Taking advice is one thing; learning to filter that advice, the good from the bad, is another.

Read 2 Chronicles 24:24. What principle, again, appears here?

Look at verses 21 and 22. It is hard to imagine how quickly and deeply a person can fall, once under the wrong influences. It would have been bad enough if Joash had simply ignored the warnings of Zechariah (vs. 20); but he did not stop there. Instead, he had this man, the son of Jehoiada, stoned to death! How could he do that? Notice how verse 21 starts: "They conspired against" Zechariah, "they" being, no doubt, those princes who had first talked Joash into allowing idolatry. However, according to the same text, it was the king himself who gave the command for the prophet to be killed. What a testimony to how deeply wrong influences can corrupt those not firmly rooted in faith and obedience.

FURTHER STUDY:

Please read Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 374, 375; *The Great Controversy*, p. 451; Revelation 14:6, 7.

"The blessings thus assured to Israel are, on the same conditions and in the same degree, assured to every nation and to every individual under the broad heavens."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 500, 501. "The church in this generation has been endowed by God with great privileges and blessings, and He expects corresponding returns."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 296.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. One lesson, so blatantly obvious from the story of Joash, deals, of course, with the issue of influence. We are not islands unto ourselves, as British poet John Donne once pointed out. Our words, our actions, our body language, and our tone of voice all have an influence, one way or another, on those around us. Our actions can, literally, influence someone for eternal life or eternal destruction. How can we, day by day, keep this idea in mind, that not only what we say and do but how we say and do it can have a major impact on others?
2. Read 2 Chronicles 24:6. Something very interesting happens there. It is King Joash who, in a sense, chided Jehoiada, saying, “ ‘Why have you not required the Levites to bring in from Judah and from Jerusalem the collection’ ”? (NKJV). In other words, here he is showing a little backbone and spunk, while Jehoiada, his mentor, appears a little lax. What can we learn from this account about how, perhaps, even the strongest people have moments of weakness and the weakest have moments of strength? Or is there another lesson in this account? Discuss.
3. However much we need to be careful about our influence on others, perhaps we can learn from the story of Joash lessons about what kinds of things influence our own lives. What are we filling our minds with, with whom do we associate, and what are the things we like to look at and talk about? All these things, to one degree or another, influence us. Take some time to think about just what influences you and how, remembering always the background motif of the great controversy.



A Taste of Heaven

Edward Oliphant

When I retired after years of selling literature in South Africa, I decided to return to Namibia, where I had worked in the late 1970s.

I visited one town where there had been no church. I was thrilled to find a church with 90 members. Some of the charter members were people to whom I had sold books! Others whom I had met while colporteuring have since been baptized into this church.

One couple I had sold books to lived a wild life. The husband was an alcoholic and a drug addict. I invited them to church and was surprised when they came. After the service they told me that they had lived together for 10 years, but they wanted to be married. Soon after their marriage they began preparing for baptism. Recently I met this family in church and found a faithful Christian couple.

I gave Bible studies to a woman named Susan. She wanted to be baptized, but her husband was angry about her decision. On the morning of her baptism, the pastor and I went to pick her up. We found the husband standing in his yard bare chested and angry. "So you are the guy who convinced my wife to become an Adventist!" he roared. The man charged toward us. Suddenly this huge man was lying on the ground, stunned. The pastor, a judo expert, had flipped him onto the ground. He was unhurt, but he lay quietly while Susan got into the car.

I went to visit Susan and found her happy in her Christian life. When I asked about her husband, she told me he would soon be home. I wondered if I should leave, but just then he walked in.

"Guess who this is," Susan said, smiling. She introduced me, and the man reached out his hand.

He noticed my nervousness. "Don't worry," he chuckled. "I am not cross with you. I am glad that my wife became an Adventist. I know now what my wife's decision was all about, and soon I will join her."

"My husband is preparing for baptism," Susan added.

I was not sure what I would find when I returned to Namibia, but God turned my adventure into a taste of heaven.

Edward Oliphant is a retired colporteur who has remained in Namibia to work as a Bible worker. He still sells books whenever he has a chance.



The Rule of Hezekiah in Judah



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “This is what Hezekiah did throughout Judah, doing what was good and right and faithful before the Lord his God” (2 Chronicles 31:20).

A MAZIAH, UZZIAH, AND JOTHAM. We last left Judah with the death of Joash, the child-king who apostatized later in life and who, after being wounded by Syrian invaders, was killed by his own servants as he lay wounded in bed (2 Chron. 24:23-25). Next came Amaziah, who did what was right in the sight of the Lord “but not with a loyal heart” (2 Chron. 25:2, NKJV) and who, after massacring thousands of pagans, worshiped their gods (vss. 5-16). After his death (790 B.C.), Uzziah ruled for fifty-two quite prosperous years in Jerusalem; though, lifted up with pride, he entered the temple and burned incense (which was not lawful for him to do), an act that brought upon him the instantaneous judgment of God in the form of leprosy (2 Chronicles 26). Next came Jotham, who “became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God” (2 Chron. 27:6). After his death, his son, Ahaz, who was disloyal to God (2 Chronicles 28), ruled, and then after Ahaz, Hezekiah. This week we will study the reigns of these last two kings, Ahaz and Hezekiah.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What was Ahaz’s problem? What was the state of Judah by the time Hezekiah ascended to the throne? What were the key elements of the revival he started? What role did an understanding of the gospel play in this revival?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 31.

AHAZ'S APOSTASY (2 Kings 16).

After a run of kings who, all things considered, could have been worse, Judah now suffered under the 16-year rule of Ahaz, which brought the nation to "conditions more appalling than any that had hitherto existed in the realm of Judah."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 322.

Read 2 Kings 16:1-4. What were the sins mentioned there?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Meanwhile, when Judah had been attacked by a coalition of Israel and Syria—an encounter known as the Syro-Ephraimite War—Ahaz sought help from the Assyrians, despite the counsel from the prophet Isaiah, who said that the attack would not succeed (see Isa. 7:1-9).

Read Isaiah 7:1-9 and answer the following questions:

1. **What did Isaiah say to Ahaz about the power and influence of Syria (Aram)? Isa. 7:1; of Israel (Ephraim)? Isa. 7:1-9, and what was Ahaz's reaction? Isa. 7:10-12.**
2. **Why was Ahaz's response, that of not wanting to "tempt" the Lord, the wrong answer in this particular instance? Isa. 7:12, 13.**

Read 2 Kings 16:7-18. Look at what happened. Judah received the military help it needed but at what cost? The king, possibly at the prodding of the Assyrians, ended up incorporating Assyrian paganism into the temple itself, even to the point of redoing aspects of the temple in order to accommodate Assyrian gods. He eventually cut up pieces of "the articles of the house of God" (NKJV), closed down the temple, and made for himself altars in various parts of the city (2 Chron. 28:24, 25).

Ahaz probably did not start out as corrupt as he became. It was, more than likely, a slow, step-by-step process. If early in his reign he would have been told that he would be doing some of the things he eventually did, he probably would have been appalled; however, the corrupting process came slowly, in small steps, as it usually does. Look at your own life and ask yourself, Could this same thing be happening to me, as well?

HEZEKIAH'S RUINED INHERITANCE (2 Chronicles 29).

By the time Hezekiah ascended the throne, the ravages of his father's reign were seen everywhere: "In a few well-chosen words [2 Chron. 29:5-10] the king reviewed the situation they were facing—the closed temple and the cessation of all services within its precincts; the flagrant idolatry practiced in the streets of the city and throughout the kingdom; the apostasy of multitudes who might have remained true to God had the leaders in Judah set before them a right example; and the decline of the kingdom and loss of prestige in the estimation of surrounding nations." Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 332.

How does Micah describe the spiritual condition of Judah at the time Hezekiah became king?

Mic. 2:1 _____

Mic. 2:2 _____

Mic. 3:11 (the priesthood) _____

Mic. 3:11 (the prophets) _____

Mic. 7:2-6 _____

Look at the words of Hezekiah: "For our fathers have trespassed, and done that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord our God, and have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the Lord, and turned their backs. Also they have shut up the doors of the porch, and put out the lamps, and have not burned incense nor offered burnt offerings in the holy place unto the God of Israel" (2 Chron. 29:6, 7).

Perhaps, nothing spoke louder of their apostasy than the fact that they had shut down the temple itself. The edifice that God Himself had established (Exod. 25:8), the place where He would manifest Himself to His people (Exod. 29:42, 43), the place where they should praise and acknowledge Him as Creator and Redeemer (Pss. 132:7; 138:2), the place where He reigns (Ps. 99:1, 2), the place where He had centered His salvation activity (Ps. 24:3-5)—all of this had been openly abandoned by the Judeans. What a testimony to how low they had fallen.

Judah abandoned the sanctuary and hence the truth associated with it. What lessons are here for us, who also have a sanctuary with attendant truths, as well?

REVIVAL UNDER HEZEKIAH.

"And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did. He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him" (2 Kings 18:3-5).

Read 2 Kings 18:1-4. Why would Hezekiah break apart the bronze serpent that Moses had made (Num. 21:8, 9)? Why would such a "holy" object need to be destroyed?

Among the things that Hezekiah did that were right in the sight of the Lord was that "he removed the high places" (2 Kings 18:4). That is interesting, especially because most of the previous kings, even those who were deemed as good, did not remove these high places (1 Kings 22:43; 2 Kings 12:3; 14:4). Though much speculation exists regarding the exact nature of these high places, they seemed to be altars where pagan gods were worshiped on the model of the Canaanite religion. Hezekiah is the first Judean king recorded as having removed them, a testimony to the seriousness with which he was undertaking his reforms.

Look up the following texts that deal with the reforms under Hezekiah. What part do each of these play in his reformation?

1. 2 Kings 18:5-7 _____

2. 2 Chron. 29:4, 5, 11 _____

3. 2 Chron. 29:10 _____

4. 2 Chron. 30:1-19 _____

5. 2 Chron. 31:1 _____

Not only did he reinstate proper worship, Hezekiah wasted no time in deposing all wrong practices, because he apparently knew that no matter how many good things he instituted, no matter how many proper forms and traditions were followed, the existence of sinful practices would, eventually, poison everything.

PASSOVER IN JERUSALEM (2 Chronicles 30).

One of the first reforms instituted under Hezekiah was the reinstatement of the Passover, long neglected in the nation. In fact, the chapter presents the first written reference to the Passover since the days of Joshua (see Josh. 5:10).

Read the account of the Passover in 2 Chronicles 30 and answer the following questions:

1. Who were invited to the Passover? 2 Chron. 30:1, 5.
2. Read through the letter Hezekiah sent in 2 Chronicles 30:6-9. How is the blessing/retribution cycle outlined here?
3. What was the general reaction in Israel to this call for revival? 2 Chron. 30:10, 11.
4. Verse 11 reveals the attitude of those who accepted the invitation. What was that attitude, and why is that so important for anyone who wants to serve the Lord? Can we truly serve Him without it?

Read verses 14-20 in this chapter. Notice the words of Hezekiah regarding those who had sinned by eating the Passover before they were ritually clean. "The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God" (vss. 18, 19). What a beautiful expression of the gospel: God forgives those who, having sinned, nevertheless prepare their hearts to seek the Lord (see Deut. 4:29; Ps. 105:3, 4; Isa. 55:6).

How appropriate, too, that these would be expressed during the time of the Passover, one of the Old Testament's clearest expressions in type of salvation by faith in the blood of Jesus (Exod. 12:13; 1 Cor. 5:7). These people, having no merit in themselves, could only humble themselves before the Lord and seek Him in faith, humility, and repentance.

A revival that centers around Passover? What a great idea! When one considers how Jesus Christ as our Savior and Substitute forms the hub of the whole notion of Passover, a revival centered around that makes great sense. Why would any among us who attempt a reform not centered around Jesus and the blood of Jesus be doomed to fail?

THE ASSYRIAN CHALLENGE (2 Kings 18; 19).

The situation Judah and Hezekiah had faced was this: After years of paying tribute to the Assyrians, who were then dominating the region, Hezekiah decided to revolt, allying himself with Egypt, despite the warnings of Isaiah against this policy (Isa. 30:1-5; 31:1-3). Then the Assyrians, under the reign of Sennacherib, steamrolled their way through Israel, leaving terror and destruction in their wake. With the Assyrian armies knocking (not politely) at the doors, Hezekiah changed his mind about the revolt and sent tribute to them (2 Kings 18:14-16). This, however, was not enough, and Sennacherib demanded unconditional surrender, something that Hezekiah refused to do. (Apparently, there were two Assyrian invasions, although it is difficult to tell in the biblical text where one ends and another begins.) See Friday's material for more information. Nevertheless, in one of these assaults, the Assyrians sent a letter to the Judeans, warning them not to listen to Hezekiah's promises that God would save them.

Read 2 Kings 18:28-37, the words of Sennacherib to the Judeans. From one perspective, they sound pretty convincing. After all, none of the gods of the other nations saved those people from his army. What makes the Judeans think that their God will do any better for them? *Don't listen to Hezekiah; surrender to me and spare yourselves the same fate as these others who had trusted in their gods.* Imagine being a Judean inside the city walls with a massive, vicious army outside, mocking your God and offering you wonderful promises if only you surrender. Yet, according to the text, the people "held their peace and answered him not a word; for the king's commandment was, 'Do not answer him'" (2 Kings 18:36, NKJV). Suppose, instead of this king being Hezekiah, it was Ahaz or Jehoram or any of the kings who had been in deep apostasy and who led their people into apostasy? Would the people have been so ready to listen? What was it about Hezekiah that caused them to trust him and his promises of God's deliverance? What role did the revival and reformation under him have in helping strengthen the people's faith that God would deliver them? Imagine if there had been no revival. The outcome could have been quite different. Read 2 Kings 19:35-37 to see what happened to the Assyrians.

What does all this tell us about how there are no substitutes for faithfulness, trust, and obedience when it comes to being fortified for whatever battles and challenges we face on any level? How can we take the principle of what happened here, nationally, and apply it to ourselves, personally, in the assaults upon ourselves that we, in this life, will, inevitably, in one form or another, face?

FURTHER STUDY:

There were apparently two invasions of Judah by the Assyrians about twenty-five years apart. The first one in 701 B.C. is well-documented in history. See *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, pp. 955, 956:13, "The fourteenth year," for an outline of the two views. In *Prophets and Kings*, pages 339, 349–366, Ellen White presents the information about these events as two distinct events. The biblical record mixes the two, probably because the focus is on how the Lord solved the problem and not so much on chronological concerns.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary* makes this comment about the people who took part in the Passover without being *ceremonially* clean: "Everything was not done according to the strict letter of the law, but, circumstances having made that impossible, the spirit of the law was followed. God is reasonable, and true servants of His are men of reason and prudence. Everyone engaged in the work of the Lord will find that circumstances sometimes do alter cases, and extreme situations may arise where judgment and reason must replace a strict observance of the letter of the law. This is no excuse for laxity, but emergencies must be met as the circumstances require."—Vol. 3, pp. 294, 295:19, "Prepareth his heart." Do you agree with what the commentary said? If so, why; if not, why not?
2. Notice, too, that the Assyrian king attempts to cause the people to doubt God. In what ways do we face these kinds of assaults every day? What is the only defense? Notice, too, how he tried to divide the people from their king and from their God. In what ways does Satan try that with us, even if in a much more subtle manner?
3. Paul wrote: "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). With that text in mind, think about Hezekiah's Passover celebration, as recorded in 2 Chronicles 30. In what ways does the Passover reflect the deliverance we have in Christ? What does it mean to purge out the old leaven, and does that concept relate to the whole idea of revival and reformation?



Trainman Finds His Calling

Charlotte Ishkanian

When David Nhavotso of Mozambique became an Adventist, he found a new calling in life—evangelism. He loves to share his love for Christ.

David works for the railroad. His superiors allowed him to work on Sunday instead of Sabbath, but they warned him not to share his faith at work. However, David could not keep his faith a secret. When his co-workers asked him why he no longer worked on Saturday, he told them. Soon he was giving two of his friends Bible studies.

While visiting his brother in another town, David met a Protestant pastor and shared the Sabbath truth with him. When the pastor resisted this new truth, David read him John 14:15, “‘If you love me, you will obey what I command,’ ” and Isaiah 30:21, “‘This is the way; walk in it’ ” (NIV). The pastor then said, “Come to my church tonight. Tell the people about the Sabbath. If they accept it, you may study the Bible with them.”

David presented the Sabbath message to 40 people that evening. “We have never heard this before,” they cried. “Will you come and teach us more?” David returned the next day, Sabbath morning, and again on Sunday to teach the people. He found the church packed. While some resisted the new truth, many wanted to begin keeping the Sabbath immediately. But David had to return home. He urged the people to study the Bible and let God teach them.

Several weeks later the Protestant pastor invited David to come study with several people who wanted to become Seventh-day Adventists. David took a three-week leave from work and invited his own pastor to accompany him to study with the people. They found that a number of people had been keeping the Sabbath and had saved their tithes and offerings, which they presented to David’s pastor.

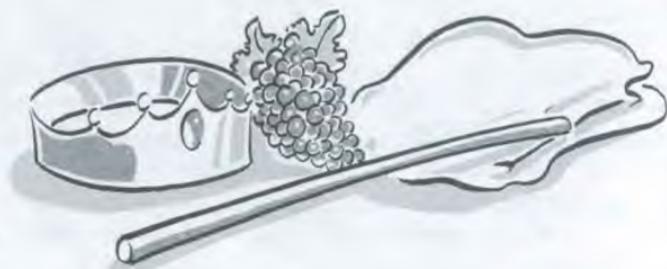
Nineteen people were baptized, including the Protestant pastor and his wife. The believers have established a new church in town which has quickly grown to 60 members. It has a weekly attendance of about 100.

David is not sitting still. He has begun giving Bible studies to interested people in another village where there is no Adventist congregation.



David Nhavotso (left). Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of *Mission*.

Meanwhile . . . Back in the North



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY VERSE: “But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron?” (2 Kings 1:3).

THE LAST DAYS OF THE OMRIDE DYNASTY. We last left off our study of the kingdom of Israel with the ill-fated war against Ramoth-Gilead (853 B.C.), in which Ahab was killed and Jehoshaphat (by the grace of God) barely escaped alive (2 Chronicles 18). This week we backtrack, looking more closely at Ahab's reign and those who followed: his son Ahaziah, Ahaziah's brother Joram (the last of Omri's seed to sit on the throne of Israel), and then Jehu, who seized power in a military coup blessed of the Lord. We will also take a peek at the last “earthly” days of the incredible Elijah, not only a great presence in the Old Testament but who, in fact, makes a cameo appearance in the New Testament, as well.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What did Jezebel do to Naboth in order to possess his vineyard for Ahab? What were the results of that plot? Who was Ahaziah, and what crucial, but common, mistake did he make? Why was Elijah so important? What principles can we, today, thousands of years after Elijah's ministry, learn from the story of his life and last days? How did the Omride Dynasty finally end? Why were Jehu's reforms so drastic, and why did the Lord approve of what Jehu did to the house of Ahab?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 7.

AHAB AND NABOTH (1 Kings 21).

Even after the encounter at Carmel with Elijah, things seemed to go relatively well for the weak-willed King Ahab of Israel. He defeated the Syrians in two wars (1 Kings 20:1-34) that, apparently, left him well off economically.

Read the story of Ahab, Jezebel, and Naboth, at least as far as verse 16 in 1 Kings 21. According to *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Naboth apparently believed that it was “against the spiritual purpose of the Levitical law for him to transfer his inheritance to the king.”—Vol. 2, p. 834:3, “The Lord forbid it.” Whether he understood the law correctly or not, Naboth was determined not to give his land to the king. Obviously, he felt a responsibility to a higher authority. In the context of this story, answer the following questions:

What did Ahab offer Naboth for the vineyard? Was it a fair price? Read 1 Kings 21:9 and 10, which record Jezebel’s plot. Notice the irony. She calls a “fast” and wants Naboth stoned because he “‘blasphemed God’” (NKJV). Was this not the same woman who at one point tried to eliminate the worship of the Lord? Maybe—with the defeat of her gods and death of her priests—she had converted to the true faith in an experience similar to Saul of Tarsus who, having been a persecutor of the Lord, suddenly became a follower. Or did Jezebel have other motives? If so, what were they?

Read the rest of the chapter. Notice the phrase Elijah uses when he confronts Ahab: “‘Because you *have sold yourself* to do evil in the sight of the Lord’” (vs. 20, NKJV, emphasis supplied). It implies that there was some good in the king, that he knew what was right, but he allowed himself to sell his principles for a price. Verse 25 repeats the same idea but adds the expression that he sold himself because “Jezebel his wife stirred him up” (NKJV).

Perhaps all this helps explain what happens next. After being denounced, Ahab “rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly” (vs. 27). Apparently, this was not just for show. He had truly repented, for the Lord told Elijah, “‘See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days’” (vs. 29, NKJV).

Fraud, violence, theft. Yet, God accepted Ahab’s repentance? Parallel this story with the story of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11 and 12). What do the stories have in common, and where do they differ? What lessons can we learn from both?

AHAZIAH, SON OF AHAB (2 Kings 1).

Read the account of Ahaziah, in 2 Kings 1, who ascended the throne after the death of his father Ahab. His request (vs. 2) shows that whatever victories the followers of the Lord had in Israel, the problem of paganism had hardly subsided. Here was the king, finding himself in dire straits, seeking after pagan deities for help.

Look at the words the angel of the Lord gave to Elijah to speak to Ahaziah: “Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron?” (2 Kings 1:3). What spiritual principle is operating here? How often we find ourselves doing the same thing, that of seeking answers in the wrong places. Write down different ways in which people, in a sense, might be enquiring of the “god of Ekron” all the while the Lord God of heaven and earth is waiting there to help. Understand, too, that turning to a source of help outside of God can be a very subtle thing, in that we do not realize what we are doing. For example, some people look to science as the answer to all human questions. Others believe the answers exist within themselves, within something deep and profound inside them. What other “gods of Ekron” are there?

Read the account of what happened when Ahaziah sent soldiers to talk with Elijah (2 Kings 1:9-18). This time fire came down from heaven and devoured, not sacrifices, but over a hundred men. By the time the third group of soldiers came, the captain pled for all their lives (he must have heard what happened to those who went before him and did not want to face the same fate). Though the Bible does not say why something so drastic had to happen, perhaps it was to reinforce to Ahaziah, in a manner reflective of Carmel, the power of the living God (if that was the reason, it did not work); or, perhaps it was to give Elijah the courage to go down and face the soldiers (after all, with something like this happening, he should not have been afraid).

Compare Ahaziah’s sin, at least as recorded here, with that of his father, Ahab, when he took the life and property of Naboth. One hardly seems comparable with the other, yet Ahab was spared the immediate punishment for his deeds, while his son was not spared the punishment for his. What is going on here? What made the crucial difference between the two? Hint: Look for what is *not* said in the case of Ahaziah as in contrast to the one of Ahab (1 Kings 21:29).

THE LAST (EARTHLY) DAYS OF ELIJAH (2 Kings 2:1-12).

Christian musician Rich Mullins wrote a song with the line, "When I leave I want to go out like Elijah." Who would not, ascending to heaven on a whirlwind of flaming horses and chariots? (2 Kings 2:11). Not a bad exit for such a colorful and dramatic character.

Elijah. He appears out of nowhere and rebukes a powerful king (1 Kings 17:1). Elijah. His prayers and supplications to God brought back a child from death (1 Kings 17:18-22). Elijah, who stared down 850 pagan prophets at Carmel and won (1 Kings 18). Elijah, who fled in death-wishing discouragement from the wrath of an angry queen (1 Kings 19:4). Elijah, who brings down fire from God and devours his enemies (2 Kings 1:10-12).

Elijah, though, is not just a giant of the Old Testament. Jesus talked about Elijah (Matt. 11:14; 17:12; Mark 9:11). Every Gospel account mentions his name (Matt. 27:47; Mark 9:5; Luke 9:8; John 1:21). Paul used him as an example (Rom. 11:2), and so did James (James 5:17).

Review the events in Elijah's life (mostly 1 Kings 17–19; 21; 2 Kings 1; 2). Was he balanced? Fanatical? Moderate? A liberal? A conservative? If he were alive today, how might he relate to your local church?

Notice how Paul and James refer to Elijah. Paul wrote: "God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal" (Rom. 11:2-4). James wrote: "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit" (James 5:17, 18).

In both cases, the human side of Elijah was shown: In Paul's example, Elijah, discouraged, thought he was the only faithful follower of the Lord and had to be rebuked for that attitude. James simply emphasized the struggle with self that Elijah had, as do the rest of us. In short, both help to make this great prophet human.

Few of us have had the kind of dramatic spiritual confrontations that Elijah had. Nevertheless, what can we learn from his story, both from his mistakes and from his victories that could help us be faithful followers of the same God in our own spiritual confrontations, whatever they might be?

THE RISE OF THE HOUSE OF JEHU (2 Kings 9).

“And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel” (2 Kings 9:7).

After the death of Ahaziah, his brother Joram (or Jehoram), last king of the Omride Dynasty (those directly descended from King Omri), succeeded him. See 2 Kings 1:17. Not surprisingly, Joram “did evil in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings 3:2, NKJV), even to the point where Elisha the prophet instigated against a military coup d’etat in which Joram was deposed and the commander of the military took the throne.

Read 2 Kings 9 and answer these questions:

1. Look at the order that Elisha gave to one of the “sons of the prophets” regarding the anointing of Jehu (vs. 1, NKJV). *Go, do it, get out, and “do not delay”* (vs. 3, NKJV). What probable reason did Elisha have for having him do it so quickly?
2. What question did Joram ask three times in response to the approach of Jehu and his men? What did his question imply about Joram’s frame of mind? What did it indicate, and why would he have reasons to be fearful?
3. The death of Joram came as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Elijah after the death of Naboth (1 Kings 21), in which—because of Ahab’s repentance—the punishment was placed instead on those who came after him (1 Kings 21:21). Ask yourself this question: In the light of the blessings/retribution motif in Kings and Chronicles, was the prophecy conditional? If Joram would have been faithful, unlike his father or brother, could the prophecy not have been fulfilled? Give reasons for whichever answer you choose. Where does 2 Kings 9:25 say that Joram’s body was to be cast? Was this fate fair, especially since Joram did not have anything to do with his parents’ treachery anyway? Or, perhaps, was it a symbol of something else? If so, what?
5. What did Jezebel say to Jehu when he approached her? What message was she trying to convey? Zimri had been the one who had killed King Baasha in Judah (1 Kings 16:12). The answer, perhaps, is found in 1 Kings 16:15 and 16.

JEHU REFORMS ISRAEL.

Thus began the dynasty of Jehu. Jehu ruled from 841 to 814 B.C. He eradicated Baal worship as thoroughly as he could. For his righteous zeal in this respect he was commended by the prophet Elisha, and a promise was made that his descendants would sit on Israel's throne to the fourth generation (2 Kings 10:30). Accordingly, his dynasty reigned over the country for about 90 years, nearly half the time of Israel's existence. However, Jehu did not break with Jeroboam's calf worship, and his reform was, as a result, considered incomplete (2 Kings 10:31)." — Siegfried H. Horn, "The Divided Monarchy: The Kingdoms of Judah and Israel," *Ancient Israel: A Short History From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1988), p. 125.

Second Kings 10 recounts Jehu's actions against the house of Ahab in Israel and against those who worshiped Baal. On the following lines, read the text given and write down what happened in order that the "word of the Lord which the Lord spoke concerning the house of Ahab" (2 Kings 10:10, NKJV) would be fulfilled:

2 Kings 10:7 _____

2 Kings 10:14 _____

2 Kings 10:17 _____

2 Kings 10:25, 27 _____

After reading these texts, someone might be tempted to say that all this carnage could be attributed simply to Jehu's excessive zeal. However, read what the Lord says to Jehu in verse 30 after all these "reforms" took place and how he did right in "mine eyes." How are we to understand this? Or can we, here, thousands of years later in a totally different culture, without having all the facts at our disposal?

Jehu was quite adamant about eliminating Baal worship from Israel. However, the text says that he did not "turn away from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin, that is, from the golden calves that were at Bethel and Dan" (2 Kings 10:29, NKJV). Why would he be so firm about eliminating one form of paganism and idolatry and not another? Why would he be less inclined to eliminate the golden calves as opposed to Baal worship, and what lesson is in this for us who might be selective in which sins we keep and which ones we dispose of?

FURTHER STUDY:

The Elijah Message. In this age, just prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, God calls for men who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord. Just such a work as that which John did, is to be carried on in these last days. The Lord is giving messages to His people, through the instruments He has chosen, and He would have all heed the admonitions and warnings He sends. The message preceding the public ministry of Christ was, Repent, publicans and sinners; repent, Pharisees and Sadducees; ‘for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Our message is not to be one of peace and safety. As a people who believe in Christ’s soon appearing, we have a definite message to bear,—‘Prepare to meet thy God.’”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1184:5, 6.

“It was because of His compassion for those whose moral power was weak that He raised up Jehu to slay wicked Jezebel and all the house of Ahab. Once more, through a merciful providence, the priests of Baal and of Ashtoreth were set aside and their heathen altars thrown down. God in His wisdom foresaw that if temptation were removed, some would forsake heathenism and turn their faces heavenward, and this is why He permitted calamity after calamity to befall them. His judgments were tempered with mercy; and when His purpose was accomplished, He turned the tide in favor of those who had learned to inquire after Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 254, 255.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways does the above quote in *Prophets and Kings* help answer some of the hard issues raised in Thursday’s lesson? At the same time, what questions does it leave or, in fact, create? Discuss.
2. Second Kings 10:31 reads: “But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin.” This text came immediately after the one in which God commended him for wiping out the house of Ahab. The verb there for “took heed” in the Hebrew is a very common one used time and again in the Hebrew Bible in the context of Israel “taking heed” to do the will of the Lord. Yet, no matter how zealous he was in his actions against the house of Ahab, Jehu had some blind spots. What lessons can we learn from this account? Does God excuse our blind spots, or does He work with us despite them? Justify your answer.



Would-Be Murderer Meets Christ, Part 1

J. H. Zachary

Zachariah grew up in a Hindu village in eastern India. As a youth he turned to crime and became the leader of a gang. He carried a weapon wherever he went.

Zachariah married a woman who was a Christian. When she realized how Zechariah hated Christians, she waited until he was asleep to read her Bible or pray. But one day he caught her praying. "If you are a follower of Jesus, you have no place in my home," he shouted.

Quietly she replied, "While I love Jesus, I will always be a faithful wife to you."

"You will not bring a strange God into my home!" he ordered.

For two years Zachariah did not talk to his wife. Then one day he abruptly sent her back to her parents. The elders from her village tried to reconcile the couple. "Your wife is a good wife to you. Let her worship her God. She will not disturb you," they pleaded. But Zachariah told them he would not have a Christian in his home.

Zachariah was determined to keep all Christians out of his village. If an itinerant preacher tried to conduct a religious meeting in his village, he sent his gang to disrupt the meeting and take their musical instruments. He could not stand the sound of Christian music in his Hindu community. Inevitably the Christian pastor would come to request the return of the instruments, and Zachariah would threaten, "The next time you try to hold meetings in this village, you will die."

For two years his wife remained in her parents' village. Then she returned to Zachariah. He met her with these words, "If you enter this house, one or the other of us will have to die. I will not permit your religion in my village." He beat her severely and dragged her body into the street.

Zachariah's wife survived. She fasted for three days and prayed that God would change her husband's heart. When she tried to return

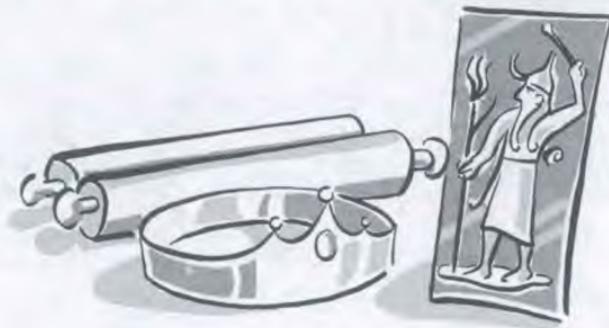
home, Zachariah beat her again. Then he grabbed his knife and lifted it above his head to kill her. Suddenly he saw a bright light above her.

(continued next week)



J. H. Zachary (left) is coordinator of international evangelism for The Quiet Hour and a special consultant for the General Conference Ministerial Association.

The Last Days of the Northern Kingdom



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets” (2 Kings 17:13).

THIS WEEK IS THE FUNERAL MARCH FOR A NATION. This week begins the funeral march for the northern kingdom. Actually, the march began near the beginning of this quarter, with Jeroboam making the golden calves. Things pretty much went from bad to worse since. Indeed, after a tragic history of a little more than two hundred years (921–722 B.C.), Israel—born in a spirit of rebellion—ended under the oppressive weight of the brutal and merciless Assyrians.

No wonder. Twenty kings, each ruling on an average of about ten and a half years, sat upon Israel’s throne. Seven had murdered their predecessors in order to reach the top spot. All promoted an idolatrous cult of Yahweh, while others added Baal and Asherah to their pantheon of pagan abominations. From the tireless ministry of Elijah, Elisha, and others, no one can say the people had not been warned. They had been, more than once; they just did not listen.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What happened in the reigns of Jehoahaz and Jehoash? If people are not watchful, what can time, itself, do to truth? What was the role of Elisha? How did Baal worship, so thoroughly eradicated by Jehu, creep back into the nation?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 14.

**LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON, LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON,
LIKE FATHER, . . . (2 Kings 13:1-13).**

"And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, and followed the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom" (2 Kings 13:2).

"And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord; he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin: but he walked therein" (2 Kings 13:11).

Thus reads the texts regarding the reign of Jehoahaz and the reign of Jehoash. In short, they followed after Jehu, the founder of their dynasty, who—though quite fanatical about eradicating Baal worship—nevertheless clung to a particular home-grown version of idolatry (2 Kings 10:31), thus continuing the downward spiritual momentum that eventually destroyed the northern kingdom.

How could this happen?

Plato, in his *Republic*, helps give an answer. In this book, Socrates recounts the "magnificent myth," a tale that would help the people accept whatever their social status happens to be. The myth went like this: When God created people, He created some with gold in them, some with silver, and some with bronze. Those with gold were to be the Guardians, the highest political and social level in the nation. Those with silver would be the Auxiliaries, the next level. Finally, those with bronze would be the lowest class. If the people believed this myth, he said, they would be content with whatever their station was in life, because it was ordained by God. When asked, "Do you know of any way of making them believe it?" Socrates's response was one of the most frightening, and insightful, in all ancient literature. "Not in the first generation," he said, "but you might succeed in the second and later generations."

In other words, give any lie or myth enough time, and *eventually* people will believe it.

How does this story from the *Republic* fit with today's lesson? Israel's sin with the golden calf after the Exodus (Exodus 32) was one of the worst spiritual moments in its history. However, generations later, Jeroboam set up a whole cult around what had been a terrible religious apostasy. How could something so bad be deemed by later generations as something good? What does that tell us about the power of time alone to dilute, or even pervert, truth? What examples of this principle can we see today in our own church, our own families, or even our own lives, and what can we do to reverse it?

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF ELISHA (2 Kings 13:14-21).

Imagine being Elisha, called to the prophetic ministry during the reign of Ahab and Jezebel, while his predecessor, Elijah, leaves the scene in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2).

Despite the terrible moral conditions of the nation and the many challenges he faced, Elisha stayed faithful to his calling: "Thus the man of God continued to labor from year to year, drawing close to the people in faithful ministry, and in times of crisis standing by the side of kings as a wise counselor. The long years of idolatrous backsliding on the part of rulers and people had wrought their baleful work; the dark shadow of apostasy was still everywhere apparent, yet here and there were those who had steadfastly refused to bow the knee to Baal. As Elisha continued his work of reform, many were reclaimed from heathenism, and these learned to rejoice in the service of the true God. The prophet was cheered by these miracles of divine grace, and he was inspired with a great longing to reach all who were honest in heart. Wherever he was he endeavored to be a teacher of righteousness."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 259.

Read 2 Kings 13:14-21. Joash, an idolatrous king, comes to weep over dying Elisha? It was not a common event, that of a king coming to visit a dying prophet. Why would he care about Elisha? Or did he? Notice that he called him not only "my father" but the "chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." What, possibly, did he mean by that? Keep in mind the context of the moment: Israel was being threatened by the Syrians.

What does this scene indicate about the influence of Elisha, even on those who apparently did not listen to him? What other examples exist in the Bible of those who, while the prophets were alive, ignored or even attacked them, only to hail and praise them after they were gone? Think, for instance, of Moses and how Israel acted after he had died (see Deuteronomy 34). Listen to these words of Jesus to the religious leaders of His time: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets" (Matt. 23:29, 30).

Have we, in our own lives, mocked or scorned or ignored someone while he or she was around, only later—after this person is gone—begun to realize just what a blessing he or she had been? In what ways do we "garnish the sepulchres" of those we might have stoned, had they been with us?

JEROBOAM II (2 Kings 14:23-29).

After the death of King Joash, Jeroboam II (as if one had not been enough) ascended to the throne. He reigned for what were, in many ways, 41 very prosperous years in which the nation had both political and material success. As with his predecessors, however, he “did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin” (vs. 24, NKJV).

Read 2 Kings 14:25-28. Notice the military success of Jeroboam II. He took back land lost to foreign powers in the region. What reason did the Lord allow them to have these successes? Vss. 26, 27.

It was about this time that both Hosea and Amos arose in the northern kingdom to rail against the sins that were eating away at the moral fabric of the nation and leading it to inevitable doom.

What were some of the evils these prophets warned against?

Hos. 4:1, 2 _____

Hos. 6:10 _____

Amos 2:6, 7 _____

Amos 3:10 _____

Amos 4:1 _____

Among the corruptions mentioned by the prophets, Hosea (2:8, 13, 17) mentions Baal worship. Where did that come from? Had great-grandfather Jehu not eliminated that problem thoroughly after he took the throne and killed the king and all his family, threw Jezebel's body to the dogs, eradicated “all the worshippers of Baal” (2 Kings 10:21, 25), destroyed the temple of Baal, and turned it into a garbage dump? The resurgence of Baal worship, however, should not be surprising. Sin, by nature, is not self-restricting. Once the door is open to one sin, others, often worse, easily follow.

Why is it that many people—through the indulgence of one “little sin” (after all, worshiping Yahweh, even as a golden calf, is “better” than worshiping Baal)—suddenly find themselves trapped in things that are much worse?

"THEY HAVE SET UP KINGS, BUT NOT BY ME" (Hos. 8:4).

Read 2 Kings 15:8-31; 2 Kings 17:1-4.

When Jeroboam II died, he was succeeded by his son Zechariah, who "did evil in the sight of the Lord, . . . he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat" (2 Kings 15:9, NKJV); unlike his father, however, who ruled for 41 years (14:23), Zechariah was deposed within six months, thus ending Jehu's dynasty (see 2 Kings 15:8, 12). He had been murdered in front of the people by "Shallum the son of Jabesh" (vs. 10, NKJV), who then seized the throne but before long was murdered by Menahem, who seized the throne and reigned ten years in the northern kingdom (vs. 17).

Read 2 Kings 15:19, 20. What challenge did Menahem face, and how did he respond? Was he ultimately successful?

After the death of Menahem, Pekahiah, his son, took the throne, and he "did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin" (2 Kings 15:24, NKJV). However, after two years, he was murdered and replaced on the throne by Pekah (vs. 28, NKJV). He ruled about twelve years before he was murdered and replaced by "Hoshea the son of Elah" (vs. 30, NKJV).

According to the text, Hoshea "did evil in the sight of the Lord, *but not as the kings of Israel who were before him*" (2 Kings 17:2, NKJV, emphasis supplied). The text does not specify what that different evil was. In the end, it really does not matter; sin is still sin, whatever version it manifests itself in.

What did Hoshea do to try to save his kingdom, and did it work? 2 Kings 17:4.

"This was Israel's suicide. Egypt had at the time broken up into a number of unimportant rival states and was in no position to help anyone. . . . No real aid could be expected from him [the king of Egypt], and none came. In 724, Shalmaneser attacked. Hoshea, who apparently appeared before his master hoping to make peace, was taken prisoner."—John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981, third edition), p. 275.

Reviewing what you have studied of the northern kingdom this quarter, if you could describe, in one or two sentences, what caused its downfall, what would you write?

THE END OF ISRAEL (2 Kings 17:5-23).

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them" (Deut. 31:16).

Even the most cursory reading of the history of Israel, the northern kingdom, should reveal one simple point that, even today, God's people seem to have a hard time grasping, and that is, *God says what He means, and He means what He says*. Again and again the Lord said, Repent, confess, forsake your evil ways, and I will forgive, heal, and restore. "'Seek Me and live'" (Amos 5:4, NKJV). "Seek good and not evil, that you may live" (Amos 5:14, NKJV). "Come, and let us return to the Lord; for He has torn, but He will heal us" (Hos. 6:1, NKJV). The problem was, however, that the people did not listen.

Read 2 Kings 17:5-17. Write down the specific sins that Israel had committed:

Vs. 7 _____

Vs. 8 _____

Vs. 9 _____

Vs. 10 _____

Vs. 11 _____

Vs. 12 _____

Vs. 15 _____

Vs. 16 _____

Perhaps what is so amazing about these sins is that most are the ones the Lord had, specifically, warned them about in Deuteronomy (see Deut. 8:19, 20; 9:16; 12:2, 3, 30, 31; 29:17, 18).

Notice how much of the evil came to Israel from outside influences. Do we, either as a church or as individuals, have any reason to think that we are any more immune to dangerous outside influences than they were?

FURTHER STUDY:

In the terrible judgments brought upon the ten tribes the Lord had a wise and merciful purpose. That which He could no longer do through them in the land of their fathers He would seek to accomplish by scattering them among the heathen. His plan for the salvation of all who should choose to avail themselves of pardon through the Saviour of the human race must yet be fulfilled; and in the afflictions brought upon Israel, He was preparing the way for His glory to be revealed to the nations of earth. Not all who were carried captive were impenitent. Among them were some who had remained true to God, and others who had humbled themselves before Him. Through these, ‘the sons of the living God’ (Hosea 1:10), He would bring multitudes in the Assyrian realm to a knowledge of the attributes of His character and the beneficence of His law.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 292.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Few of us today, even under the influence of the “pagans” around us, are going to worship golden calves or set up “pillars and wooden images on every high hill” (2 Kings 17:10, NKJV) or cause our “sons and daughters to pass through the fire” (vs. 17, NKJV). However, suppose the Israelite nation were transplanted in your country, today, and fell away from the Lord just as it had done in the eighth century B.C. in Palestine. If you were to rewrite 2 Kings 17 (which describes the sins that Israel fell into due to outside influences) in your contemporary context, what would you write? What are some of the prevalent practices and beliefs around us today that parallel the practices that tempted and, eventually, overwhelmed the Israelite nation?
2. What is it about time itself that can have such a leavening effect on truth? As the years pass while we wait for the Second Coming, what can we do to protect ourselves, both individually and as a church, against the potential dangers that time carries with it?
3. Read 2 Kings 17:13. No matter how bad they were, time and again the Lord pled with them to turn around, and He would forgive. In fact, according to His promises (Deut. 4:27-29), even after they had gone into captivity, if they repented, He would forgive. What does this tell us about God’s grace? How can we apply that knowledge to ourselves in a way that can help us avoid the same mistakes in our own cultural and political context, wherever we live?



Would-Be Murderer Meets Christ, Part 2

J. H. Zachary

Zachariah hated Christians and wanted none in his village in eastern India. When he discovered that his wife was a Christian, he sent her back to her parents, but when she returned, Zachariah beat her.

After three days of fasting and prayer, she again tried to enter his home. This time he beat her, then he grabbed his knife to kill her. But before he could strike the fatal blow, he saw a bright light above her.

Suddenly he found himself lying on the floor, looking into the light. He saw a person in the light, a person with a kind face. The Being stood close to the fallen man and reached out as if to embrace Zachariah.

Zachariah cried out, "Who are you?"

"I am the One you are fighting against," the Being answered.

Zachariah began to weep. When he opened his eyes, the light was gone. Only he and his wife were in the room.

Zachariah testifies that "At that moment my whole life changed. Anger drained from my body." The very next Sunday Zachariah was in church. He went to the pastor whom he had so often mistreated and asked forgiveness.

To his wife's great joy, Zachariah allowed her to remain in their home. He began to pray with her, and after several weeks, he was baptized.

Zachariah's family rejected him and tried to beat his wife. The couple had to move to another village.

Zachariah met a Protestant pastor and began assisting him in evangelistic outreach. Because he no longer could work in his family's business, he became a full-time pastor. He has organized churches in three villages that now have 160 members.

Then early in 2000, he met an Adventist Christian who pointed him to the Bible Sabbath. Zachariah began studying the Bible with an Adventist doctor who often visited his village. Zachariah and his wife accepted the new Bible truths they discovered, and both were baptized.

Zachariah attended a training session for pastors who have converted to the Adventist Church from other faiths. He now shares his new Bible knowledge with his three churches in the hope that these sincere Christians will follow the new light he has found.

The modern-day Saul-turned-Paul rejoices in God's love for His erring people, even the most cruel and stubborn among them.

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Manasseh and the Early Days of Josiah



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “He [Josiah] did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left” (2 Chronicles 34:2, NIV).

WE LEFT OFF IN LESSON 9 WITH JUDAH, in the last days of King Hezekiah, whose nation faced the Assyrian juggernaut, which had devastated their Israelite “brothers” to the north. Fortunately, through the mighty intervention of the Lord (see 2 Chron. 32:20-22), Jerusalem was spared, and the Assyrians went home defeated. After that amazing victory, Hezekiah was something of a hero, “exalted in the sight of all nations thereafter” (2 Chron. 32:23, NKJV). Apparently, though, like many of his successful predecessors, Hezekiah did not deal well with wealth, power, and prestige, none of which apparently did him much spiritual good (see 2 Chron. 32:27-33; 2 Kings 20:12-19). This problem was manifested with particular clarity during the visit of the Babylonian ambassadors. Unfortunately, as often with kings, his spiritual faults had devastating consequences for his nation.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: After the death of Hezekiah, who took the throne, and what were the sins this new king brought with him? What events led to his repentance? How could the Lord forgive such evil? What happened under the rule of Josiah? How did he respond to the discovery of the book of the law? What does his reaction tell us today about how important the Bible is to faith?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 21.

MANASSEH (2 Kings 21:1-17; 2 Chron. 33:1-9).

After the death of Hezekiah, his son Manasseh took the throne. He was twelve years old. He ruled for 55 years in Judah, one of the longest reigns in the nation's history. To get an idea of how long that was, think back (in whatever nation you live in): Who was the leader in your land 55 years ago?

Perhaps one hint as to why Manasseh was so corrupted could be found in his age. His father, Hezekiah, toward the end of his reign, was influenced negatively by all this wealth, power, and prestige. Young Manasseh, raised in the court of a father who was deviating from the Lord, most likely did not have the best spiritual start himself. If that were the reason, it is a powerful testimony to the importance of parental influence upon children.

Read through 2 Kings 21 and write down the list of evil things Manasseh had done:

Vs. 2 _____

Vs. 3 _____

Vs. 4 _____

Vs. 5 _____

Vs. 6 _____

Vs. 7 _____

Vs. 9 _____

Few kings have such a vile record as Manasseh. According to ancient Jewish sources, Manasseh, to add to his sins, had Isaiah sawn in half (perhaps the writer of Hebrews 11:37 is alluding to the time when Isaiah talked about those faithful ones who "were sown asunder").

Read carefully verses 2, 9, and 11 in 2 Kings 21. What does each one of them have in common? When one considers the whole purpose of the Hebrew nation, that of being a light to the world regarding the true God, the texts become even more revealing. It is bad enough following in the sins of the world around them. But to be doing even worse than the surrounding nations? What about ourselves, our own lives, we who profess to be the spiritual heirs of Judah? If someone were to write a spiritual history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, could they make the same charge against us?

MANASSEH'S PUNISHMENT (2 Chron. 33:10-17).

"And the Lord spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken" (2 Chron. 33:10).

How often those words have been, in one way or another, repeated, not just in the history of the Hebrew nation but all through sacred history. From Eden down through the final demise of Babylon, God has spoken; but people do not listen. What about ourselves, either individually or as a church? Is God speaking to us? If so, what is He saying? Is it much different than what He said to Eve, to the inhabitants of the world in Noah's day, to Abraham, to Moses, to Israel, to the ancient church, or to the church of the last days? Are we any more prone to listen than those who have preceded us?

Write down what you think God's basic message to all people essentially always has been, even if the particular circumstances have changed:

Eventually, because of the apostasy, the Lord punished Manasseh. Read about what happened in 2 Chronicles 33:10-13. There are some interesting historical records about this event too. The Assyrian kings, Esarhaddon (681–669 B.C.) and Ashurbanipal (669–627? B.C.), both list Manasseh among the kings of Western Asia who were their vassals. *The SDA Bible Commentary* notes that "Assyrian reliefs picture distinguished captives as being led away by hooks passed through their lips or nostrils."—Vol. 3, p. 305:11, "Thorns" and "Carried him to Babylon." (See Isa. 37:29; Amos 4:2.) Perhaps, among those who were led away with hooks in their noses was King Manasseh of Judah, ruler of God's chosen nation. No doubt, if he were not prone to listen before, a hook in his nose would, if nothing else, get his attention.

According to 2 Chronicles 33:12, it was in his affliction, that of being taken away captive by the Assyrians, that Manasseh humbled himself and repented of his sins. Often it takes the consequences of our sins to bring us to our senses. Some would say, perhaps, that it was only because he was suffering that he repented and that if no punishment came he might have gone on in his evil ways as before. How would you respond to that argument?

MANASSEH'S REPENTANCE.

"Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God" (2 Chron. 33:13, NKJV).

Perhaps the only thing more amazing than the human capacity for evil is the Lord's capacity to forgive that evil. What is even more amazing is not just that God *could* forgive our sins but that He *wants* to, that no matter what we or anyone have done, the Lord wants to pardon, to heal, to restore us to Him and thus spare us the ultimate and final consequence of sin, which is eternal destruction (2 Thess. 1:9; Rom. 6:23).

If, at the Cross, Christ died for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2), that included the sins of Manasseh, sins that were more than just making an image of some animal and worshiping it. Besides sacrificing his sons and burning them upon an altar, he shed "very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem" (2 Kings 21:16, NKJV). Thus, in addition to being an idolater, he was a murderer, as well.

Nevertheless, and regardless of the circumstances that brought his repentance, Manasseh was forgiven (2 Chron. 33:13).

Look up the following verses and write down what they say that helps us understand how (and why) God could forgive sins, even as bad as the ones committed by Manasseh:

Isa. 53:5 _____

Jer. 31:3 _____

Rom. 3:22 _____

Rom. 3:28 _____

Gal. 3:13 _____

Note: If one were to read the story of Manasseh from 2 Kings 21 alone, one would have a radically different view of his end than one would have who read the account in 2 Chronicles 33 alone. Neither account contradicts the other, even though they appear to give opposite conclusions. There is a good lesson here that can help us deal with some of the hard stories in the Bible: If we had more information, many of the things that seem so hard to understand would be made clearer. Until then, it is important not to jump to rash conclusions about things we do not understand. Instead, we need to rely on faith, trusting that one day we will understand what now seems incomprehensible.

JOSIAH OF JUDAH (2 Chronicles 34).

After the death of Manasseh, Ammon, his son, took the throne for two years before being killed by his servants (2 Chron. 33:21-25). Ammon's son, Josiah, who was eight years old, became ruler in Judah.

The text starts out saying that he did right in the sight of the Lord, turning not aside to "the right hand or to the left" (2 Chron. 34:2, NKJV), an interesting expression. Taking that same idiom and using it today, could one not say that he was theologically neither too far to the left nor too far to the right? Whatever the phrase exactly means, it suggests a steady course, a right balance in his actions.

How old was Josiah when he started to "seek the God of his father David"? Vs. 3, NKJV. What happened as a result? See verse 3.

Verses 3-7 describe some of the steps that Josiah took to eradicate false worship. Not only did he tear down some of the idols and images, he had them beaten into powder or broken down into dust.

Where, perhaps, did he get the idea for pulverizing the idols? See Exodus 32:20. Was there any practical purpose for grinding them into dust? Would a ruined heap not be enough? Or was there some symbolism? If so, what? Hint: See Daniel 2:35.

Read in 2 Chronicles 34:8-28 the story of the workmen who found "the Book of the Law of the Lord given by Moses" (vs. 14, NKJV) as they were repairing the temple. More than likely, it was the book of Deuteronomy (though scholars are not sure).

Look at Josiah's response after it had been read to him (vs. 19). Why should he have been so upset? After all, this happened in the eighteenth year of his reign (vs. 8), ten years after he started his reforms, which included crushing to dust idols and cleansing both Judah and Jerusalem.

The answer, perhaps, is seen in the words of the prophetess Huldah, particularly in verses 23-25. What is she saying about the people? In other words, though the king was attempting reforms, and there were outward changes, the hearts of the people were still not right.

What does this story tell us about how important the Word of God is? However much we might flatter ourselves that we are doing right, the only true standard we have to know right from wrong, good from evil, obedience from sin, is the Word of God. Why is that so? See Heb. 4:12, 13.

JOSIAH'S RULE (2 Kings 23).

This chapter puts another spin on the story of Josiah and the reforms he instituted. In contrast to Chronicles, which mentions reforms Josiah made *previous* to the discovery of the book of the law, 2 Kings places all the reforms after. Both agree, however, that in the eighteenth year of his reign the law was read to Josiah, so, more than likely, he had begun the reforms mentioned in 2 Chronicles 34 even before the great discovery of the law (a fact omitted in Kings). Once the law was found, the revival and reformation began even more earnestly.

Why would any attempt to bring revival and reformation flounder that did not lean heavily on the Bible? After all, how would people even know what to reform, or why they need to revive, if they did not have the Bible?

Though it is almost a litany by now, write down the things the king attempted to do to restore true faith and worship to the nation and ask yourself, again, *How could God's chosen nation have wandered so far into apostasy?*

2 Kings 23:4 _____

Vs. 5 _____

Vs. 6 _____

Vs. 7 _____

Vs. 10 _____

Vs. 11 _____

Vs. 12 _____

Vs. 14 _____

Vs. 15 _____

Vs. 20 _____

Look at 2 Kings 23:25. What is the key idea or word there that we have seen earlier that, ultimately, separates the faithful from the unfaithful?

FURTHER STUDY:

The writer of 2 Kings indicates that Manasseh provoked the Lord "to anger" (2 Kings 21:6). After repeating the stipulations of the covenant made with David (vss. 7, 8), the author says that Manasseh not only ignored these conditions but had actually "seduced" the people "to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed" (vs. 9, NKJV). He did worse "than all the Amorites who were before him" (vs. 11). Faithful followers of the Lord were dealt with severely (2 Kings 21:16). The Jewish historian Josephus says that Manasseh "barbarously slew all the righteous men that were among the Hebrews; nor would he spare the prophets, for he every day slew some of them."—*Antiquities of the Jews*, book X, p. iii.

"The long-lost manuscript was found in the temple by Hilkiah, the high priest, while the building was undergoing extensive repairs in harmony with King Josiah's plan for the preservation of the sacred structure. The high priest handed the precious volume to Shaphan, a learned scribe, who read it and then took it to the king with the story of its discovery.

"Josiah was deeply stirred as he heard read for the first time the exhortations and warnings recorded in this ancient manuscript. Never before had he realized so fully the plainness with which God had set before Israel 'life and death, blessing and cursing' (Deuteronomy 30:19); and how repeatedly they had been urged to choose the way of life, that they might become a praise in the earth, a blessing to all nations. 'Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid,' Israel had been exhorted through Moses; 'for the Lord thy God, He it is that doth go with thee; He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.' Deuteronomy 31:6."

—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 393.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Read 2 Kings 21:9. It says that Manasseh "seduced" the nation to do evil. The Hebrew meaning is more along the lines of "to cause to err." Yet, at the same time, the people were held responsible for their deeds. Discuss what all this means about accountability.
2. If we believe that it is through faith in Jesus that we are forgiven our sins, how is it that Manasseh, who lived long before Jesus came, could have been forgiven? What does his forgiveness tell us, if anything, about those who have never heard of Jesus still having the possibility of salvation?



Help Me Find a Church

Kim* lives in Southeast Asia. She is a good student in school and an active teenager. While she was a member of a popular Christian church, she seldom attended worship services and did not often read her Bible. Then one day she turned the dial on her radio and found a program that interested her. The program, produced by Adventist World Radio, changed her life.

She could spend less than an hour a day listening to the radio, but she took careful notes. She began reading her Bible again. When she discovered the Sabbath, she determined to honor the Lord's commandment to keep it holy.

However when she tried to share what she was learning with her mother, Kim was met with strong opposition. Her mother warned her that following a faith not approved by their government can be dangerous. But Kim was determined to follow God's commandments. When she decided to stop attending school or studying on the Sabbath, her mother called her action insane.

Kim wrote to Adventist World Radio. "I have been blessed by listening to your broadcast," she said. "You are helping me to discover new horizons. Truly I believe that God loves me and guided me to your radio broadcast.

"Thanks to your sermons, I now read the Bible often, something that I did not do before. I also have discovered the fourth commandment, which I have never noticed before. From now on and through God's power, I will keep the Sabbath day holy and look forward to it every week. It is a day when I rejoice and communicate with the Almighty God and study His Word. I have made up my mind to worship God and obey His commandments. . . .

"I wish to worship with people of the same faith on the Sabbath. Please show me how to contact a Seventh-day Adventist church in my city. Please help me quickly, because I am reading the Bible alone on Sabbath.

"I want to advertise your radio broadcast and share God's Word with my friends, but the people around me do not seem interested."

Millions in Southeast Asia do not know God. In many areas, Adventist World Radio is the only pastor, the only teacher that can reach them. Pray that many in Southeast Asia who are hungry to hear of God's love will find what Kim has found through Adventist World Radio.

*Not her real name. Adventist World Radio's broadcasts reach thousands in the Southeast Asia region.

The Curtain Falls on the Southern Kingdom



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY VERSE: "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me" (Jeremiah 32:40).

AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE." "And now therefore thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning this city, whereof ye say, It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence; Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: And they shall be my people, and I will be their God: And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me" (Jer. 32:36-40).

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What was the foundation of Josiah's reforms? How do they relate to what it means for our faith as Christians? What ultimately happened to Josiah? Who ruled after him? What was the basic message of the prophets to the nation? Is it any different than their message to us today? Even after all their sin, all their rebellion, and all their apostasy, what was God's message to His people?

*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 28.

JOSIAH AND THE PASSOVER (2 Chron. 35:1-19).

According to Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived in the first century A.D., Josiah was a man of most excellent disposition, who was naturally virtuous and followed the actions of David as a pattern in the whole conduct of his life.—*Antiquities*, book X, p. iv, adapted. Though Josiah diligently and faithfully attempted to reform Judah, Ellen White wrote that it was, nevertheless, clear to him that Judah had little hope of escaping final destruction (see *Prophets and Kings*, p. 398).

Read the account in 2 Chronicles 35 about the Passover. Did we not read about another king who attempted to do the same in Judah? (See 2 Chronicles 30.) To review: What was it about the Passover, and what the Passover symbolized, that made it so crucial to a revival?

Josiah's attempted revival centered around two things (besides the eradication of pagan practices): the law and the sanctuary service (the temple itself). The sanctuary service, we understand, is basically a model of the plan of salvation: the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 2:8; Heb. 4:2; Rev. 14:6). In short, what Josiah did was center his revival around the law and the gospel, which are, really, the foundation of all true faith and worship.

What is your understanding of the role of the law in the plan of salvation? See Rom. 3:20; 7:7; James 2:10-12; 1 John 3:4.

What is your understanding of the role of the gospel, as foreshadowed in the sanctuary service and fulfilled in Jesus, in the plan of salvation? (See Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:26; 10:10-12; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19.)

How do the law and the gospel complement each other?

Why, in light of the role of the law and the gospel, would any attempt at reform that excludes one or the other be doomed to fail?

If the reforms ultimately did not spare the southern kingdom from destruction, what was the purpose of them? If it were too late for the nation as a whole, why bother with the reforms at all?

THE DEATH OF JOSIAH (2 Chron. 35:20-27; 36).

The story in Chronicles contains more details than does the account in Kings regarding the death of Josiah in a battle with Pharaoh Necho of Egypt. Necho was allied with Assyria against the Babylonians, who were expanding toward the west and would soon become a threat to Egypt itself. Judah found itself caught geographically between Babylon and Egypt. According to Jeremiah, a strong pro-Egyptian party arose in Palestine. The struggles between this party and the pro-Babylonian party would eventually tear Judean society apart and lead to the capture and destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

Read the account of Josiah's death in the battle against Egyptian forces (608 B.C.) in 2 Chronicles 35:20-24. Why would a good king, one who attempted to restore true faith and worship in Judah, face such an untimely death? Or was it really untimely? See 2 Chronicles 34:28. How does that single verse help us understand Josiah's fate?

During the reign of Josiah, the political and military situation of the region was drastically changing. The mighty Assyrian nation to the north, who, about a hundred years earlier, overran and ended the Israelite nation, was crumbling, a situation that could have, at least for a while, made it easier for Josiah to attempt his reforms in Judah. At the same time, however, as Assyria crumbled, the Babylonians were rising in power. This, of course, is the Babylon that eventually destroyed the southern kingdom and took many of its elite into captivity and formed the background for the book of Daniel.

After the death of Josiah, it was not long before the curtain fell on the nation. Four kings came after him:

1. Jehoahaz (2 Chron. 36:2, 3)
2. Eliakin (2 Chron. 36:4-8)
3. Jehoiachin (2 Chron. 36: 9, 10)
4. Zedekiah (2 Chron. 36:11-14)

The texts regarding them speak for themselves.

Read 2 Chronicles 36, which in one chapter describes the final days of Judah and the end of the first temple period. Write down in a short paragraph what major spiritual lesson we can learn from the demise of Judah.

A MERCIFUL GOD, A REBELLIOUS CREATION.

"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 Chron. 36:15, 16).

Perhaps some of the saddest verses in all the Bible are the two quoted here. In many ways, they capture not only the story of the southern kingdom but the story of the entire great-controversy drama, beginning with Lucifer in heaven and ending with the demise of this present world.

Read what Ellen White wrote about the earliest stages of the great controversy, even before it reached earth: "God in his great mercy bore long with Lucifer. He was not immediately degraded from his exalted station when he first indulged the spirit of discontent, nor even when he began to present his false claims before the loyal angels. Long was he retained in heaven. Again and again he was offered pardon, on condition of repentance and submission. Such efforts as only infinite love and wisdom could devise were made to convince him of his error. The spirit of discontent had never before been known in heaven." —*The Great Controversy*, pp. 495, 496.

Notice the principle: the Creator pleading, offering pardon and forgiveness to the creature, who spurns that offer. How often this scenario has been repeated here on earth, as well.

Write down other examples from the Bible of this same principle: God pleading with His people to repent, to obey, to accept pardon, and the people mocking or rejecting Him. Write down, too (where the information is given), how much time God spent trying to get the people to listen. It is the same thing, over and over again, even if the specific conditions change. Are things any different today?

Sample: Cain rejecting God's pleas to obey in Genesis 4.

"EAT YE WHAT IS GOOD."

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness" (Isa. 55:1, 2).

What is the milk, the wine, the bread, that God offers without price? What are the good things that God is calling everyone to eat? Why is it "without price"? What does that mean?

However sad Judah's fate, the Lord never stopped pleading with them, as a nation or as individuals. Isaiah, who ministered during the rule of "Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (Isa. 1:1), uttered the most eloquent pleas for the people to turn away from the useless, vain, and empty things that were leading to their destruction.

His words in 55:1, 2 capture the essence of that message: Why struggle and work so hard for what, in the end, cannot satisfy you, cannot meet your most basic needs? Only the Lord can meet all those needs, and He can do that only to the extent that we allow Him to. Thus, whether you are living in seventh-century (B.C.) Judah or twenty-first-century Argentina or France or Zaire, the basic issue between humanity and their Creator remains the same.

Look up the following verses, all from Isaiah (30:7; 41:29; 52:3; 44:9; 57:13; 59:4) and then write down the essence of their message, the common theme in these verses:

No matter how different our circumstances from Judah's, we face the same issue: Whom do we serve? Is it the living God who alone can satisfy our needs, or do we serve the vain, empty, useless things, the things of wind, confusion, and vanity? The answer, of course, is obvious, but it probably would have seemed obvious to the people living back then too. Knowing the right answer is not the hard part; the hard part is acting upon it. Why is that so? Look at your own life. How might the words of Isaiah 55:1, 2 apply to you? If you think they do not, at least, to some degree, more than likely you are kidding yourself.

"THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE, AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD" (Jer. 32:38).

When the Romans hung Jesus on the cross, He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). In other words, despite all that these people had done, despising His words, rejecting His teachings, mocking His messengers, and now finally crucifying Him, the Lord's desire was for only one thing: that even these sinners, despite their sins, be forgiven.

Over the centuries, some commentators have claimed that the God of the New Testament, the God who reveals Himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ, is different; that is, kinder, more loving, more forgiving than "the scowling, complaining, and threatening God of the Old Testament."

However, when one reads texts such as Jeremiah 32:36-44, a view of the same compassionate God appears here in the Old Testament, as well. Here is the same God who sought forgiveness for His assailants while He hung on the cross.

Read Jeremiah 32:36-42. What is the Lord saying to His people? Write down the specific promises. In what ways can you see the character of Christ represented in these words?

Vs. 37 _____

Vs. 38 _____

Vs. 39 _____

Vss. 40, 41 _____

How amazing: After thirteen weeks of reading about one king after another who "did evil in the sight of the Lord" or about a people who followed one abomination after another, despising God's words, rejecting His teachings, mocking His messengers, we now read these verses in which the God whose words were despised, teachings rejected, and messengers mocked still offers promises of hope, restoration, and healing to the nation that did the despising, the mocking, and the rejecting.

Then, again, all we have to do is look at Jesus, at His willingness to heal, to forgive, and to restore those who, however undeserving, are willing to accept what He offers, and suddenly it all makes better sense.

Thus, in many ways, the message of Kings and Chronicles is not so much about the apostasy and sins of God's people but about the compassion, forgiveness, and mercy of a God who loves us despite our sins, a God who loves us so much He cannot keep silent about our sins, which do so much damage to those whom, indeed, He does love.

FURTHER STUDY:

The battle of Carchemish was the turning point for the Babylonians when Nebuchadnezzar defeated Necho in 605 B.C. The book of Jeremiah outlines the play and counterplay of the pro- and anti-Egyptian forces within Judah. Jeremiah, instructed by the Lord, clearly told the people that Babylon would be victorious and that Egypt would not save them (Jer. 2:36).

The final years of Judah record continual apostasy and internal political fighting that ultimately led to the Babylonian captivity.

Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, pp. 89–99, for more information on these years.

"The first years of Jehoiakim's reign were filled with warnings of approaching doom. The word of the Lord spoken by the prophets was about to be fulfilled. The Assyrian power to the northward, long supreme, was no longer to rule the nations. Egypt on the south, in whose power the king of Judah was vainly placing his trust, was soon to receive a decided check. All unexpectedly a new world power, the Babylonian Empire, was rising to the eastward and swiftly overshadowing all other nations."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 422.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. After all these weeks of studying Kings and Chronicles, what comes through the clearest regarding the message that God has for us with these accounts of the history of the Hebrew nation from the days of Solomon until the Babylonian captivity? In other words, why did the Lord have this history recorded, preserved, and placed in the Bible?
2. Notice this point: Early on in the Kings-Chronicles saga, the temple plays an important role. Almost all that is recorded of the early reign of Solomon in both Kings and Chronicles deals with his building and *dedication* of the temple. However, notice, too, that the end of the saga talks about the *destruction* of the temple (2 Chron. 36:18, 19; 2 Kings 25:9-15). How interesting that these books would be capped on both ends with the temple. Thus, the saga begins with the dedication of the temple and ends with its destruction. What significance do you see in these facts, and what could they say to us, today, whose faith is intricately tied up with the ministry and temple that exists in heaven? (see Heb. 8:1-6).



One Foot on Ship and One on Shore

Barbara Trecartin

Robin Willison, ADRA South Sudan's program director, was on his way by ship from Britain to Australia. When the ship stopped in the Canary Islands, the captain announced that the passengers could leave the ship and tour the island. But they must return at a given time.

The captain said, "When you hear a long blast from the ship's horn, you have only one hour to return to the ship. One half hour later you will hear two blasts. If you are not already on the ship, you better start running. The ship will leave promptly, and there is no way to know who has not returned."

The passengers streamed down the gangplank. At the appointed hour, a single long blast echoed across the island. Willison made his way toward the dock. Thirty minutes later he heard two horn blasts. He hurried toward the gangplank with the other passengers. He joined the other passengers crowded along the ship's rail. The ship's deck trembled as the huge engines roared to life. The crew hauled in the lines that had held the ship in place. Only the gangplank remained to be taken up.

Suddenly they saw in the distance a horse-drawn carriage racing toward the dock. A man jumped from the carriage and started running. He reached the gangplank and placed one foot firmly on it and the other on the shore, hoping to prevent the ship from sailing.

The man looked frantic as the ship began to swing slowly away from shore, and the space between the gangplank and land widened. But he kept his feet planted. Some folks on shore pulled him off the gangplank just in time to prevent an unplanned swim.

They called to the family to get into a small boat anchored nearby. The tiny boat sped across the water to catch up with the ship. It maneuvered around the side to where a door opened just above sea level, and the family managed to board the ship.

Willison finished his story by saying, "That man was the first Seventh-day Adventist I ever met. Later we studied the Bible together, and I joined the Adventist Church. But whenever I think about this event, I wonder how many of us are still trying to keep one foot on this earth and the other on the ladder to heaven!"

When she wrote this, Barbara Trecartin was the administrative assistant for ADRA South Sudan and lived in Nairobi, Kenya. She and her husband have since returned to the United States.

Bible Study Guide for Fourth Quarter, 2002

We will look at *Living the Advent Hope*—the hope explicit in the promise of Christ's coming in the clouds of glory. This quarter's set of lessons, written by Jonathan Gallagher, will not so much be a doctrinal study as a realistic and experiential look at how we put this hope into practice.

Lesson 1: The Need for Hope

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

Sunday: The Creation.

Monday: The Fall.

Tuesday: Crushing the Head.

Wednesday: The Essence of Hope.

Thursday: False Hopes.

MEMORY TEXT: Genesis 3:15.

SABBATH GEM: Hope is as fundamental an aspect of the human condition as is breath. Our great hope points us not only to this new creation but to the promise—made certain through the atoning death of Jesus—that we, ourselves, will be part of it.

Lesson 2: Old Testament Hope

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

Sunday: Hope Amid the Deluge.

Monday: Hope and the Nations.

Tuesday: The Hebrew Hope.

Wednesday: The Messianic Hope.

Thursday: Jesus and the Old Testament Hope.

MEMORY TEXT: Psalm 78:7.

SABBATH GEM: This week's lesson looks at various examples of hope expressed in the lives and in the experiences of those who are present in the Old Testament.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired

The regular Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette for visually impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact the Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.

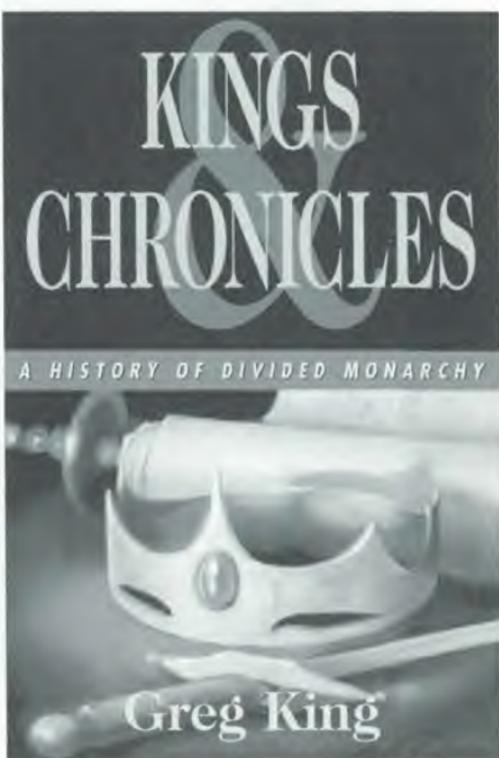
Book FOR 3RD Quarter, 2002

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