

Bible History 2



**Joshua thru
Malachi**

Richard Rogers

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Bible History II

by Richard O. Rogers



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This book is dedicated to
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Preface to the Sunset Bible Study Library

Since 1962 Sunset International Bible Institute has been a leader in teaching God's Word, training local church leaders and preparing preachers and missionaries for effective ministry. Developed in the laboratory of preacher training and proven in the crucible of practical ministry, the Sunset curriculum has grown to forty core courses used both in our resident school and distance learning applications. In 1989 the Sunset Video Studio was inaugurated to record each course of study in a professional format. Those courses, each with a companion study guide, have been used to teach thousands of individual students and develop a world-wide network of video satellite schools in local congregations and mission fields.

Now in printed form that same library of trusted Bible study material is available through Sunset Institute Press for an even wider circle of Bible students, thanks to a benevolent God, an excellent editorial staff and a number of faithful supporters who believed in the project.

This book is the result of a multi-step process which began with a videotaped course. The voice track of the videotape was first transcribed then formatted and edited from spoken to written style. The goal of the editorial process has been to produce a readable document while protecting the course content and the style and personality of the teacher. We believe the goal has been achieved and that each of the forty books planned for the Sunset Bible Study Library will likewise achieve that goal.

Special gratitude must be expressed to Cline Paden and Truman Scott who began the video course series in 1989, to Bob Martin, who directed Sunset Video Studio, to Virgil Yocham and the staff of Sunset External Studies Division who wrote the study guides, and to the staff of Sunset Translation

Center who edited the manuscripts and to each faculty member of Sunset International Bible Institute who took extra time to prepare and present these courses in the studio.

In addition to the English version, this book and its companion volumes are being translated into the major languages of the world to produce a Bible study library which can be used on the mission fields of the world to mature Christians, train church leaders and grow churches that plant other churches.

Conquest of Canaan (1)

Introduction

This chapter begins the second part of the study of Old Testament Bible history. The first part covered the history of the Hebrew family. It began with the Creation and later centered on Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and the land of Egypt. It ended with Israel's deliverance from Egypt (God used Moses to help His people flee from slavery). While the first part in this series covered the history of the Hebrew family, the second part will cover the history of the Hebrew nation.

After many years of wandering in the desert (after they had left Egypt), the Israelites were finally ready to go back into the land that had originally been promised to Abraham in Genesis 15. This land would extend from the Wadi of Egypt (down south on the border between Egypt and Palestine) to the Euphrates River, and from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River. Israel actually conquered more land than this when they defeated Sihon of Gilead, Og of Bashan, and Balak of Moab during battles on the east side of the Jordan at the end of their period of wandering. They were allowed to inherit that land, even though it had not been originally promised to them.

At the beginning of this second period in their history, the Israelites, under Joshua's leadership, would conquer the Promised Land. The land would at first be ruled in a loose confederacy by judges and later be ruled in a tight monarchy by kings (this study will cover the sins of those kings). The Israelites would then lose the land that had been promised to them in accordance with a covenant that God had made with

the people during the time of Moses (cf. Deuteronomy 28 – 30). God had told the Israelites that as long as they obeyed His will, they would always be blessed and live in their land. He had said that if they rebelled and served other gods, however, they would lose their land and be taken into captivity (all of this will be included in this study of the Hebrew nation). The covenant had also promised, though, that if they were taken into captivity yet repented and began to obey Him according to the Law, they would be allowed to come back to their land and rebuild their temple. That is exactly what would happen, and those events would mark the end of Old Testament history.

The Invasion and Conquest of Canaan

God's Charge to Joshua

This part of the study begins with the conquest of Canaan, which is found in the book of Joshua. In the first chapter of Joshua, God had a charge for Joshua, Moses' aide, as he prepared to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. There were three things that He told Joshua: to take the land, to be courageous, and to charge His people. Joshua 1:1–2a says, *"After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: 'Moses my servant is dead. Now then . . .'"*

The people had not been allowed to enter the Promised Land until Moses had died. Moses had sinned by getting water from the rock without trusting God (cf. Numbers 20:7–13). Because of that, God had told Moses that he would not enter the Promised Land. Moses had been allowed to climb to the top of Pisgah, Mount Nebo, and look across the Jordan and see the Promised Land. Moses had died and had gone to his reward. God continued His instructions to Joshua in Joshua 1:2b–5a:

Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them — to the Israelites. I will give you every place

where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates — all the Hittite country — to the Great Sea on the west. No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life.

Notice God's promise: "*'As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you'*" (Joshua 1:5b). That was His first charge. He told Joshua and the Israelites to take the land and that He would be with them as they crossed the river. They did not need to be afraid. Just as He had been with Moses and had delivered him from his enemies, so He would be with them and deliver them from all their enemies.

Joshua, although a courageous man, did not fully believe that he was able to do what God had told him to do. So God had another charge for him, "*'Be strong and courageous . . .'*" (Joshua 1:6a). The word "*strong*" was not referring to physical strength, because one cannot command a person to be physically strong if he is not already physically strong. God was talking about mental strength. He wanted Joshua to be strong in his mind. God told Joshua to be courageous in his heart because he would lead the Israelites to inherit the land that He had sworn to give to their forefathers. However, that charge was evidently not enough either because in Joshua 1:7, God added:

*"Be strong and **very** courageous [this time He added the adjective "very" to courageous]. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go."*

Notice what it would take for Joshua to be successful and inherit the land. It would not take ability. It would not take intelligence. It would not take oratory skills. What it would take

was wisdom. Joshua would have to be wise enough to be strong mentally. He would have to be courageous in his heart and careful in his obedience. If he was strong, courageous, and careful, then he would inherit the land. Joshua 1:8a says, “*Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth . . .*” It seems more likely that God would have said “heart,” but instead He said “mouth.” Not only was Joshua to be strong, courageous, and careful, but he was to teach others from the law, the Word of God. God said further: “*. . . meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful*” (Joshua 1:8b).

God was really stressing to Joshua the heart that he needed to have, the life that he needed to live, and the words that he needed to speak. Joshua 1:9 says: “*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.*” God never gives a commandment to a person without giving him the resources that enable him to obey it. God was telling Joshua that He wanted him to be strong, courageous, careful, and obedient, and that He would be with him. He would give him the power to do that.

Then God told Joshua to order the Israelites to do what God had told him to do:

So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: “Go through the camp and tell the people, ‘Get your supplies ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own’” (Joshua 1:10–11).

Joshua simply repeated the words that God had given to him. He told the people that they would be able to take the land. However, two and a half tribes had decided to live east of the Jordan. The Reubenites, the Gadites, and half of the tribe of

Manasseh preferred the land that they had taken from Sihon, Og, and Moab, so they had asked permission to live in that land. Joshua charged them in Joshua 1:12–15a:

But to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, “Remember the command that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you: ‘The LORD your God is giving you rest and has granted you this land.’ Your wives, your children and your livestock may stay in the land that Moses gave you east of the Jordan, but all your fighting men, fully armed, must cross over ahead of your brothers. You are to help your brothers until the LORD gives them rest, as he has done for you, and until they too have taken possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving them. After that, you may go back and occupy your own land, . . .”

Joshua told them that they could not inherit the land that they wanted to live in until all their brothers had inherited the Promised Land. Israel would live in tents until they occupied all of the Promised Land. They could not rest until the covenant was fulfilled. How would the people east of the Jordan respond? They had already conquered their land. They were ready for their wives, children, and flocks to settle down. How would they react to the command to cross the Jordan and conquer the land that their brothers would live in? Joshua 1:16–18 says:

Then they answered Joshua, “Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses. Whoever rebels against your word and does not obey your words, whatever you may command them, will be put to death. Only be

strong and courageous!"

It is interesting that the people said to Joshua exactly what God had said to Joshua. Joshua told the Israelites what God had said, and they charged Joshua with exactly the same words that God had charged him with: "*Only be strong and courageous!*" These people were ready to enter the Promised Land. They had another good leader. Moses was dead, but Joshua had the Spirit of the Lord upon him (cf. Deuteronomy 34). Joshua was also a humble man that needed to be encouraged for mental strength, a courageous heart, and the will to obey the Word of God.

Joshua Sends the Spies to Jericho

A wise general or conqueror should spy out the land that he is trying to conquer so he can know as much as possible about it before going in. That is why Joshua sent two spies to Jericho. It is interesting that there were only two spies and not twelve as there had been before. Joshua evidently chose two men that he could trust. He told them to go into the land and spy it out, especially the city of Jericho. Jericho was the strong, fortified city just across the Jordan River. The two spies went to Jericho and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab. There is a lot of argument over the word "*prostitute*" used in these passages (cf. Joshua 2:2; 6:17, 22, 25). It is thought by many that it referred to an innkeeper. It is thought by others that it referred to a sacred woman. She might have been tied to the religion of that day, which would mean that she was a prostitute. The word might simply have meant prostitute. Bad people are used by God in good ways and become good people. No matter what we think about what Rahab was before she encountered the spies, she became a woman of God and was in the lineage of Christ. The Messiah came through the marriage of that woman to one of the Jews.

The king of Jericho was told that some Israelites had come to spy out the land (it is not known how those who told him had found out), and he took action: "*So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: 'Bring out the men who came to you and*

entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land” (Joshua 2:3). But Rahab had already taken the men and hidden them, so she replied to the king’s messengers:

“Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, the men left. I don’t know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them.” (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.) (Joshua 2:4b–6).

Do not try to justify her lie. Her lie cannot be justified. Hebrews 11 justified this woman because she was a woman of faith. The books of Genesis and Exodus illustrate the fact that men and women of God are not perfect. They make mistakes and sin just like other people do. However, Rahab was walking by faith. She had faith in God and not in the gods that she had known before.

The king’s messengers went to where she had told them the spies had gone. Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up to the roof and said to these two men of God:

I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below (Joshua 2:9b–11).

God's providential guidance of His people and His marvelous gift of victory over all their enemies had convinced not only this woman but many people in her land that Israel was powerful. This was Rahab's plea:

Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death (Joshua 2:12–13).

In response, the spies said, “*Our lives for your lives!*” (cf. Joshua 2:14a). They were saying that if she continued to help them (if she gave them peace and prosperity, dealt faithfully with them, and delivered them from their enemies), then they would remember her when they came back to destroy that city. Rahab gave them good advice: “. . . ‘*Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way*’” (Joshua 2:16b). The two men told Rahab that as long as she stayed in the house and did not go outside, then when they came back to lay siege to the city, she would be saved if she hung a scarlet cord (rope) out the window. It is interesting that they chose a scarlet cord. There is a connection running throughout all the Old Testament. That connection is seen in God or Jesus as He saved the people again and again.

Rahab and her whole house agreed to do this. The men left, went to the hills, and stayed there three days. Then they went back and told Joshua all that they had seen in the land, particularly in the city of Jericho. They told Joshua, “. . . ‘*The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us*’” (Joshua 2:24b). This time the two spies brought back a united word. Not only were they united in their report about the condition of the land, but they were also united in their faith because they believed that

they could take the land.

Crossing the Jordan River

Joshua and all Israel would then cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land. Joshua 3:1– 3 describes how the Israelites prepared for that entrance, and verses 14–17 tell how they crossed over. The priests marched with the ark of the covenant to the Jordan River. When they put their feet in the river, the water quit flowing miles away upstream. God put a wall in place and all of the water flowed into the Dead Sea. Israel again crossed an impassable body of water by the miraculous power of God. The priests took the ark of the covenant and stood in the middle of the Jordan, and all of Israel passed by.

The Central Campaign

After they had crossed the river, one man from every tribe was chosen to carry a stone from the middle of the Jordan to their camp on the other side. Joshua built an altar to commemorate the fact that God had brought them safely through an impossible barrier once again. Israel had their feet in the Promised Land. The first thing they did was pitch a new camp to establish a new center of operations. The previous one had been located at Shittim on the east side of the Jordan. The new one would be at Gilgal on the west side of the Jordan. As soon as the camp was built and they were in the Promised Land, the manna ceased (cf. Joshua 4:19–5:12). Then God made a covenant with them that the land would sustain them. They would eat from crops and drink from vineyards they had not planted. They would anoint themselves with oil from trees they had not planted. They would live in houses they had not built because they would possess all that the people of the Promised Land possessed. That was the promise.

Before the conquest of the Promised Land occurred, all of the males were circumcised. Then Joshua determined that they were ready to take the land. Jericho was the first city that

needed to be conquered (cf. Joshua 6:1–27). The angel of the Lord appeared with a sword in his hand and gave Joshua instructions on how to conquer Jericho (he did not appear as he had appeared in the case of Balaam when the angel had been there to kill him). Joshua knew the Lord was his commander-in-chief, and he knew the angel of the Lord would go before him.

God gave Joshua a very unusual battle plan for conquering Jericho. He wanted to use all the fully-armed fighting men for this battle (the inner forty thousand that fought beside Joshua). They were not the thousands and thousands of soldiers that made up the whole army. They were the special soldiers of Joshua and God. God wanted those soldiers, the priests with their trumpets, and all the people of Israel to march around the city one time every day for six days. He wanted the priests to blow their trumpets, but He wanted the people to march in total silence. The Israelites did as God commanded. Try to imagine what the people inside Jericho were thinking about those actions. Were they frightened? Were they amused? Were they confused?

On the seventh day, God's plan was revealed. Instead of marching around the city only once, the Israelites marched around seven times. On the seventh time around, the priests sounded the trumpet blast. Joshua gave the signal, all of the people shouted, and the wall crumbled. It did not simply fall, but it collapsed like a building that had been blown up. The walls sunk all the way to the ground, and Joshua and his people entered the city of Jericho. They were told by God that it was a devoted city, so they were not permitted to take anything for themselves. All the gold, silver, clothes, and everything else was to be put into God's treasury. God said that city was devoted to Him: everybody and everything in it belonged to Him.

The Israelites celebrated a great victory as Jericho lay in ruins, so it would seem that they had done all that God had commanded. However, Joshua 7:1 states that the Israelites had

acted unfaithfully. A man named Achan had taken some devoted things from the city for himself, so God's anger burned against Israel. There are blessings in being part of a nation, but there can be tragedies as well. One Israelite's sin involved the entire family of God. God's anger burned against Israel because one person had taken some of the devoted things.

Israel went to the small city of Ai next, and the spies said that they would only need a handful of people to take that city. Israel sent three thousand men, but because the Israelite camp was not pure, the men of Ai pursued those three thousand and killed thirty-six of them. When Joshua heard this, he fell on his face and essentially asked God, "Should we have stayed on the other side of Jordan? Are we ever going to be able to win?" God told Joshua to get up and look within the camp because there was something wrong. Anytime the people of God were not winning, there was something wrong in the camp. They needed to cleanse the camp.

So Joshua investigated the people tribe by tribe. The tribe of Judah was taken. Each family was investigated, then each person, until finally Achan was chosen by lot. As Achan stood there by himself, Joshua asked him to give honor to God and tell what he had done. Achan replied:

"When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylon, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath" (Joshua 7:21).

Achan was basically saying, "I saw. I coveted. I took. I hid." These had been the steps to sin. Joshua sent messengers to dig where Achan had said the items were hidden, and they found the gold, the silver, and the robe.

Joshua 7:24–26 tells what the people did next:

Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold wedge, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor. [“Achor” meant trouble.] Joshua said, “Why have you brought this trouble on us? The LORD will bring trouble on you today.” Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them. Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Achor ever since.

The next day Israel went out to attack Ai again. Joshua took five thousand men and led them toward the city while the rest of the army hid behind the city. The men of Ai chased Joshua and his men as they ran away from the city. The Israelites who had been hiding behind the city came out and attacked. The army of Ai was trapped between the two armies of Israel, and the city of Ai fell. The anger of the Lord was turned away from Israel.

When sin was in the camp, it sometimes existed for a time without the leaders' awareness of it. It always involved more than just the sinner. Thirty-six Israelites had died, and Israel had been defeated because Achan had sinned. Today, sin also causes the body not to be able to stand before its enemies. Sin needs to be made known to the whole congregation. It is a time for action and not just a time for prayer. Sin is caused by looking, coveting, taking, and hiding. When sin has been purged, God's blessings will begin again. When the people of God return to being faithful, they will win.

After the defeat of Ai, the people of Gibeon (only 15 to 20 miles — 25 to 30 kilometers — away) came to see Joshua. They were dressed in old clothes, carried cracked wine skins, and were covered in dust so that it looked as if they had come from a long distance. Joshua had already made one mistake

because he had not inquired of God. He did not inquire of God again concerning the Gibeonites and made a covenant with them. He said that Israel would not harm them, but then he found out that they were really his neighbors. Joshua and the people of God were angry. What were they to do? Joshua could not break his word, so he made the Gibeonites their slaves. He told the Gibeonites that they would cut wood, draw water, and work for Israel as slaves forever. The next chapter in this study, however, will cover how Joshua came to their defense, and how God used the Gibeonites to stir up trouble and help Joshua conquer the land.

God will only bless people if they follow Him. If there is “sin in the camp,” purge it today so that victory will occur tomorrow.

Conquest of Canaan (2)

Introduction

Chapter 2 in this study of the history of the Hebrew nation continues in the book of Joshua. After over 400 years of being away from the Promised Land, Israel had returned to the land of their inheritance. It was the land of Abraham, the holy land. Israel began the task of conquering the land. The city of Jericho fell first. The troops marched around the city for seven days. On the seventh day, the priests blew the trumpets as the people gave a great shout, and the city walls collapsed. The Israelites conquered Jericho, but because Achan had sinned when he had taken some of the plunder from the city, they lost their second battle to a very insignificant city called Ai. After Joshua had cleansed the camp and Achan had died, all of the sin was removed. The purified people of God won a great victory.

Then the Gibeonites, a people who lived near the Israelites, came to the Israelites disguised as if they lived a long distance away. Joshua agreed to help them and entered into a covenant with them. He should have inquired of God to see if He had wanted the Gibeonites saved or not. A priest with the Urim and Thummim had been available and could have been used so that Joshua would have known whether or not the Gibeonites were telling the truth. However, since Joshua made a covenant with Gibeon, the Gibeonites would be protected.

Conquering the Land

The Southern Campaign

There were five kings in the south who did not like the fact

that Gibeon had made an alliance with Joshua. This resulted in the southern campaign, which consisted of one single battle and a few smaller battles. Joshua would capture everything in the southern part of the Promised Land.

Joshua 10 begins with the words “*Now Adoni-Zedek.*” Notice that the last letters in this king’s name look like Melchizedek. This word *Adoni* meant “Lord” just as *Melchi* meant “priest.” *Zedek* marked Melchizedek as a Jebusite king. He was the king of Jerusalem. Jerusalem had previously been called Salem, which are the last five letters of the word Jerusalem. In Melchizedek’s day, Jerusalem had been called “Salem of the Jebusites.” It was later called “Jebus-Salem” and finally shortened, for pronunciation’s sake, to Jerusalem. So Adoni-Zedek was a Jebusite, but he was not a priest of God. His great-great-grandfather may have been Melchizedek, who was not only king of Salem but also a priest of God most High. Adoni-Zedek had taken upon himself the name “the Lord the King,” so he was not a priest of God.

Adoni-Zedek heard that Joshua had taken Ai and destroyed it. He also heard that Joshua had made a treaty with the Gibeonites. Adoni-Zedek, along with the four other kings did not like the fact that Gibeon had made an alliance with Joshua. Joshua 10:1–2 says:

Now Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had taken Ai and totally destroyed it, doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king, and that the people of Gibeon had made a treaty of peace with Israel and were living near them. He and his people were very much alarmed at this, because Gibeon was an important city, like one of the royal cities; it was larger than Ai, and all its men were good fighters.

The people of Jerusalem believed that if war came, the men of Gibeon would ally with the men of Joshua and they

would have an even stronger enemy to defeat. So they made an alliance with five kings from the surrounding area (“*So Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem appealed to Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhia king of Lachish and Debir king of Eglon*” [Joshua 10:3]). These men were the kings of five capital cities in the south: Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon. They combined their armies and came out to fight against Joshua. That was convenient because Joshua did not have to fight all five of their fortified cities. They came out against him, and when he had defeated them, he was able to take their cities with very little trouble. These five kings had gone against Gibeon and had surrounded it. So Gibeon had sent word to Joshua: “... ‘Do not abandon your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us! Help us, because all the Amorite kings from the hill country have joined forces against us’” (Joshua 10:6b).

Joshua had to honor their request because he had made a covenant with them. The covenant theme will be covered in more detail later, but the concept was that when a person made a covenant with someone, all of that person’s friends were the other person’s friends, and all of that person’s enemies were the other person’s enemies. All of one’s gold was the other one’s gold because they were bound by covenant. They shared in every success and in every trouble. Gibeon was in trouble, so Joshua was in trouble as well.

Joshua 10:7 states, “*So Joshua marched up from Gilgal with his entire army, including all the best fighting men.*” These were the forty thousand fighting men (cf. Joshua 4:13) that were his best soldiers. Then God told Joshua: “... ‘Do not be afraid of them; I have given them into your hand. Not one of them will be able to withstand you’” (Joshua 10:8). God continually encouraged Joshua because he was always outnumbered. Joshua had the tendency to fear losing the battle, and he was absolutely right. On his own Joshua did not have enough men or the power to win. Nobody wins a battle unless that is part of God’s plan. God told Joshua that He would be

with him, and therefore, he would win.

Joshua was a shrewd general. He was famous for the all-night march. Armies usually slept at night and watched during the day. However, Joshua would march all night so that when his enemy awoke the next day, he was right there (“*After an all-night march from Gilgal, Joshua took them by surprise*” [Joshua 10:9]). It is interesting that God had promised to be with Joshua, but Joshua still used his wisdom to help win the battle. God’s divine providence and foreknowledge do not destroy or do away with the necessity for us to do our very best. Joshua employed a shrewd military tactic at Gibeon, but the fact that God had been with him was why he won. The account continues in Joshua 10:10–15:

The LORD threw them into confusion before Israel, who defeated them in a great victory at Gibeon. Israel pursued them along the road going up to Beth Horon and cut them down all the way to Azekah and Makkedah. As they fled before Israel on the road down from Beth Horon to Azekah, the LORD hurled large hailstones down on them from the sky, and more of them died from the hailstones than were killed by the swords of the Israelites. [The Lord was using His power as well as Joshua’s power as He was killing them from heaven and not just on earth.] *On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel: “O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon.” So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the LORD listened to a man. Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel! Then Joshua returned with all Israel to the camp at Gilgal.*

God won the victory that day with hailstones that killed more than the swords of Israel did. He won by lengthening the daylight hours so that Joshua and all his army would have time to defeat the combined armies of these five kings. They fled and hid in a cave. Joshua said:

“Roll large rocks up to the mouth of the cave, and post some men there to guard it. But don’t stop! Pursue your enemies, attack them from the rear and don’t let them reach their cities, for the LORD your God has given them into your hand” (Joshua 10:18b–19).

Joshua 10:29–43 describes the fall of these southern cities that Joshua conquered: “*Then Joshua returned with all Israel to the camp at Gilgal*” (Joshua 10:43).

The Northern Campaign

Then the Lord began the work of delivering all the strong, powerful tribes over to Israel. These cities and territories were large empires. They could bring thousands and hundreds of thousands of men to battle. In comparison, if Joshua had brought all of the 600,000 fighting men of Israel, they would have still been outnumbered by the combined armies of these five kings. This was not some minor clash that took place. This was a great war which God’s people would not have won without direct intervention from God. God had not only taken the city of Jericho and the central part of the Promised Land, but He had also taken the huge territory to the south. The only thing that remained was the country to the north.

Chapter 11 of Joshua describes the conquest of the North. God had brought all the kings from the South together for one great battle so that Joshua would not have to go from city to city to conquer them. God did the same thing with the people of the North. Joshua 11:1 names the king who was going to be the leader of this Northern confederacy: “*When Jabin king of*

Hazor heard of this, he sent word" This is followed by a list of the kings that Jabin sent word to. The names of the kings are not as important to remember as are the tribes that they represented. Jabin sent a message:

. . . to the Canaanites in the east and west; to the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites and Jebusites in the hill country; and to the Hivites below Hermon in the region of Mizpah. They came out with all their troops and a large number of horses and chariots — a huge army, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. All these kings joined forces and made camp together at the Waters of Merom [that was in the northern part of the land], to fight against Israel (Joshua 11:3–5).

Once again Israel was outnumbered. This fact alone was reason to be afraid. Since Israel was prone to being afraid, God spoke to them:

The LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them, because by this time tomorrow I will hand all of them over to Israel, slain. You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots" (Joshua 11:6).

In one single day, they would defeat that entire army. Israel was supposed to make sure that they could never wage war again. The chariot was the invention of the Hittite people. An army with chariots against the Israelites would be like bringing a tank into a battle when the other army had only foot soldiers. This was a great advantage. There was no way that Israel could win unless God took a direct hand. Israel needed to win, so God used these tribes' strength against them. He used Israel's weakness and turned it into strength. Joshua 11:7–9 says:

So Joshua and his whole army came against them suddenly at the Waters of Merom and attacked them,

and the LORD gave them into the hand of Israel. They defeated them and pursued them all the way to Greater Sidon, to Misrephoth Maim, and to the Valley of Mizpah on the east, until no survivors were left. Joshua did to them as the LORD had directed: He hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots.

The geographical area of this battle was mountainous. They were fighting on a plain, but God gave them immediate victory by the element of surprise. When the enemy began to run, they had to drive their horses and chariots through mountainous territory. It was better to be a foot soldier on mountainous terrain than it was to be in a chariot. Joshua 11:10–13 continues:

At that time Joshua turned back and captured Hazor and put its king to the sword. (Hazor had been the head of all these kingdoms.) [When Hazor fell, all of the rest were to fall.] Everyone in it they put to the sword. They totally destroyed them, not sparing anything that breathed, and he burned up Hazor itself. Joshua took all these royal cities and their kings and put them to the sword. He totally destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded. Yet Israel did not burn any of the cities built on their mounds — except Hazor, which Joshua burned.

Notice the word “yet.” There was always a “yet.” Israel was obeying God — yet. They were doing what God had said — yet. They needed to get rid of the “yets.” They needed to obey God completely rather than obeying God with a “yet.” Joshua obeyed the Lord and did everything the Lord had commanded through Moses. The people, however, were beginning to take things for themselves that belonged to God. Joshua 11:14–15 says:

The Israelites carried off for themselves all the plunder and livestock of these cities, but all the people they put to the sword until they completely destroyed them, not sparing anyone that breathed. As the LORD commanded his servant Moses, so Moses commanded Joshua, and Joshua did it; he left nothing undone of all that the LORD commanded Moses.

The enemy had been defeated, but the battles continued for a long time (“*Joshua waged war against all these kings for a long time*” [Joshua 11:18]). It took a full year for Joshua to finally lay down the sword and send Israel back to their camp. During this time, Israel defeated an unusual group of giants called the Anakites. Later on, Israel would deal with one of the Anakites named Goliath (cf. 1 Samuel 17).

At that time Joshua went and destroyed the Anakites from the hill country: from Hebron, Debir and Anab, from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel. Joshua totally destroyed them and their towns. No Anakites were left in Israelite territory; only in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod did any survive. So Joshua took the entire land, just as the LORD had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the land had rest from war (Joshua 11:21–23).

Division of the Land

It was then time for the division of the land to occur (a map illustrating the division of the land among the twelve tribes can be found in chapter two of the Bible History 2 study guide). Everybody went back to their place of inheritance, and the boundaries were named. The people seemed to be victorious, but there was still a lot of land that needed to be conquered. This land is described in Joshua 13. God left some pockets of

resistance in the land as tests for them: some of the Philistines, the Jebusites, the Hivites, and the Amorites. Israel had already shown that total obedience was hard for them. They had already taken some of God's things. God left the people in Jerusalem and other cities scattered around the Promised Land under the control of Israel. As long as the Israelites were doing God's will, they had those people in control. Anytime Israel did not do God's will, those people were no longer under Israel's control. They became thorns in the side of Israel to warn them that they were no longer being obedient to God. This was not just the result of God's judgment, but also the result of God's mercy. This occurred because of the covenant of blessings and curses that He had made in Deuteronomy 28, 29, and 30.

Chapters 13–22 of Joshua discuss the division of the land among the twelve tribes, the cities of the Levites, and the cities of refuge. Joshua 13:8ff. talks about the tribal division for the people that lived east of the Jordan: Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh. In Joshua 14, Hebron was given to Caleb because Moses had promised Caleb that if he would war significantly, he could have anything he conquered. Caleb conquered Hebron, one of the royal palace cities of the South, when he was 85 years old. His natural strength had not yet weakened. He told Joshua that Moses had promised him the territory called Kiriath-Arba. That area had earlier been named after Arba who was the greatest giant among the Anakites. Caleb approached the task with a spirit of "I can do it—I can conquer anything in the world if God is with me." Caleb was honored when he conquered the greatest city of the greatest people in the entire territory.

Joshua 15 covers Judah's territory, which also became part of Simeon's. Chapter 16 describes the territory for Ephraim and Manasseh west of the Jordan. Chapter 18 tells about the inheritance for Benjamin. Chapter 19 describes the allotment for Simeon, Zebulon, Asshur, Naphtali, Dan, and Joshua. Joshua was given a city to live in for the rest of his natural life, and he was given the peace that his wars had won him. Joshua

19:51 states:

These are the territories that Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun and the heads of the tribal clans of Israel assigned by lot at Shiloh in the presence of the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. And so they finished dividing the land.

Israel was not only in the land, but they had territory in that land. Every tribe had its tribal territory; every family had its family territory, and every person had his personal territory. Everyone had inherited at least a house, a vineyard, and an olive garden. The priests, who all came from the tribe of Levi, were given 48 cities to live in (cf. Joshua 21). They did not get a tribal territory of their own because the Lord was their inheritance. They were scattered throughout all of Israel because they were the teachers of Israel.

Joshua 20 recounts how God told the Israelites to establish six cities of refuge. There were three cities on the east side of the Jordan and three on the west. Each one was scattered out so that the people would be no more than a day's journey from one of them. These cities were set up so that if someone accidentally killed somebody, they could flee to one of these cities and make an appeal to the judges. The judges would hear their case, and if they were found innocent, they could live in that city of refuge. They could bring their cattle there and feed in the pasture land outside the city. They could bring their family there until the high priest died. At the time of the high priest's death, they could return home. This, of course, reminds us of the refuge that we have in Christ and in the kingdom of God today.

Joshua 22 describes what happened when the Eastern tribes went back home. As soon as they crossed the Jordan, they built a great altar. This act was misunderstood by the people west of the Jordan. The people of those tribes came to those on the east side of the Jordan and asked them if they were

going to do what had previously been done at Peor when twenty-four thousand Israelites had died. In response, the Eastern tribes told the others that they had misunderstood. The altar was not for sacrificing. They said that they planned to go back to the tabernacle to sacrifice. The altar was to remind their children that they had had a part in everything that had taken place on the other side of the Jordan. It was to remind their children, themselves, and the other tribes that they were one people. Once this was understood, there was peace in the land again.

Joshua's Farewell Address

Joshua was an old man. The time had come for him to die since Israel at that time possessed every bit of the land that had been promised to Abraham. There were two great farewell discourses given in chapters 23 and 24. Chapter 24 is the most famous. Joshua challenged the people to fear and honor the Lord. The people needed to choose the god that they were going to serve ("*. . . choose for yourselves this day . . .*" [Joshua 24:15a].) The Israelites needed to choose right then between the gods on the other side of the Euphrates river that their forefathers had served, the gods of the Egyptians (from whom they had been delivered), the god of the Amorites (whom they had just defeated), or the one true living God. Joshua declared, "*. . . But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD*" (Joshua 24:15b). The people declared that they too would serve God. Joshua questioned the people's resolve and warned them about forsaking God. The people again declared that they would serve the Lord and swore to do so from that point on. With that, Joshua made a covenant for the people and set up a stone that would be a witness to the Israelites that they had sworn that they and their families after them would serve the Lord.

It would soon be evident that they did not serve the Lord. After Joshua and all of the elders who outlived him had died, the people began to turn and serve the gods around them. This is what will be discussed from the book of Judges in the next

chapter of this study of Bible history. This quick survey of the last part of the book of Joshua teaches that God will provide victory and a place to dwell, and therefore God and God alone is to be worshiped. Jesus said it this way: *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”* (Matthew 6:33).

The Judges (1) — Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar

Recap of the Conquest and the First Three Judges

The Roots and Fruits of Apostasy

This chapter in the study covers the first part of the book of Judges. The book of Judges begins by reviewing the conquest of the Promised Land step by step and recalling how Joshua defeated the cities of the central area, the southern area, and the northern area. Then there is a review of how Joshua defeated the rest of the resistance. However, the statement is made over and over that the Israelites did not totally conquer or absolutely possess the people they had fought against. God had left pockets of the enemy in the middle of Israel's territory so that when Israel was living righteously and following the Law, the enemy would be subject to them. If Israel were to disobey God, however, their enemies would rebel and take power, proving that Israel had not done the will of God. God had left these enemies in the land to test Israel's genuine obedience toward God and their fellowship with Him.

Judges 2:1b–6, the passage which ends the accounts of the conquest and possession of the land, tells how the angel of the Lord appeared to Joshua and said:

"I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you

shall break down their altars. ' Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this? Now therefore I tell you that I will not drive them out before you; they will be thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you. " When the angel of the LORD had spoken these things to all the Israelites, the people wept aloud, and they called that place Bokim [Bokim meant "weepers"]. There they offered sacrifices to the LORD. After Joshua had dismissed the Israelites, they went to take possession of the land, each to his own inheritance.

Judges 2:7 says, "*The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel.*" Israel remained faithful during the time the first generation of people who had fought the battles and had seen the power of God in victory after victory was alive. Those people told their children and their children's children the stories of the day the sun had stood still, the day Jericho's walls had fallen, and how the power of God had been manifested when they had conquered the land in which they were now able to live in peace. Sadly, however, the following generations did not continue this process:

Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers [after the generation who had been in the battle had died], another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel (Judges 2:8–10).

The Israelites were worshiping in the tabernacle, hearing the Law read, singing the songs, eating the meals, and observing the Passover, but they did not know the Lord. They knew how to worship God, but it was only legalistic tradition. They did not know Him, nor did they know His power. This can occur today. People can become so wrapped up in the details of worship that they forget the Lord they are supposedly worshiping. What happens when that occurs, and a heart is no longer centered on God? What happens when people no longer intimately know Him and recognize His power? Judges 2:11–14a describes what happened with the Israelites:

Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. [They became just like everybody else who lived around them.] They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They provoked the LORD to anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. In his anger against Israel the LORD handed them over to raiders who plundered them.

When Israel obeyed God, He blessed them, but when they disobeyed, He cursed them. This fulfilled what Moses had warned the Israelites about in Deuteronomy 28. Judges 2:14b–15 says:

He sold them to their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the LORD was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress.

When Israel became distraught and no longer trusted in Baal (because Baal had brought them to this valley of distress), they repented. God was merciful once again: “*Then the LORD*

raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders" (Judges 2:16). As soon as Israel was delivered, however, they went right back to serving the other gods:

Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. Unlike their fathers, they quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the LORD's commands. Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the LORD had compassion on them as they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them. But [the word "but" or "yet" meant that something bad was about to happen in Israel] when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways. [Notice God's reaction.] Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and said, "Because this nation has violated the covenant that I laid down for their forefathers and has not listened to me, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the LORD and walk in it as their forefathers did." The LORD had allowed those nations to remain; he did not drive them out at once by giving them into the hands of Joshua (Judges 2:17–23).

This is a cycle that would be repeated over and over again in the book of Judges. Joshua had died, and then judges had been raised up by God to bring peace to the Israelites' land from all of the war around them. When they were at peace, however, they would fail to honor God or know Him, which

would cause them to fall into apostasy. That apostasy would cause God to send oppression from another nation. In the middle of that oppression, the people would repent. Because they had repented, God would bring deliverance. The peace they experienced would cause them to fall into apostasy again, which would bring about oppression, which would cause repentance, which would bring about deliverance. This pattern occurs eleven times in the book of Judges. As the cycle continued, the people were oppressed over and over again. They never seemed to learn. Somebody has said that history repeats itself as a monument to the stupidity of man. In this case, it would be true. The Israelites would never learn their lesson. God would use the judges to keep Israel alive as a nation and as a seed that would bruise the devil's head and bring blessings upon all mankind. That is what the study of the book of Judges is all about.

The word "judge" usually describes someone who sits in a court and listens to evidence which is presented in a trial and then makes decisions concerning that evidence. It is someone who guides by his counsel and brings about judgment. That is not the meaning of the word "judge" as it is used here. Some of the judges, like Deborah and Samuel, were similar to judges in legal systems today, but most were not. Most of them were military leaders, or as in the case of Samson, a one-man army.

The period of the judges was a very important period of time for Israel because God was trying to teach them the futility of idolatry and the stupidity of disobedience. The judges' work was threefold. **First**, the judges had a spiritual responsibility. They upheld the cause of the Lord. Several of the judges were also prophets, and the female judge, Deborah, was a prophetess. The nation of Israel could find out what God's will was from the judges because the judges were men (or in the case of Deborah, a woman) of God. They had an intimate relationship with God. When they prayed, God listened. God talked to them. He spoke His Word to them and gave wise counsel. They were given the ability by God to judge the people. They were

expected to uphold spirituality because of God.

Second, the judges had judicial responsibilities. They settled tribal and personal disputes. Deborah sat by her palm tree, and all of Israel came to hear the Word of God from her. They brought their disputes about territory or personal disagreements before her. If there was a dispute between tribes, rather than fight it out, they would have a righteous judge and counselor settle it. Spiritually, the judges upheld the Word of God. Judicially, they settled personal and tribal disputes.

The **third** and primary responsibility of the judges was a military one. Militarily, the judges led the army in times of war. The only exception was Deborah, because it was not a woman's place to wear armor, to swing a sword, or to lead the people of God into battle. She chose a general named Barak to lead her army. All of the pictures that show Deborah looking like Joan of Arc in full armor riding on a horse and carrying a spear are not scriptural. She sat by a palm tree and judged the people according to God's Word. When it came time to go to war, she called a general to lead the army into battle.

Salvation Through an Old Man — Othniel

Israel repeatedly went into oppression or captivity because of their disobedience to God. Judges 3:7–8 says:

The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs. The anger of the LORD burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram Naharaim, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years.

The name Cushan-Rishathaim meant “doubly wicked.” He was not just wicked but was doubly wicked. He was mean. God gave Israel over to Cushan-Rishathaim for eight years, and they were mightily oppressed in slavery again. God heard Israel's cries and sent a deliverer: “*But when they cried out to the LORD*

[peace led to apostasy, apostasy to oppression, and oppression to repentance], *he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, who saved them*" (Judges 3:9). The word "saved" is the same word which is translated "judge." God judged them, and He delivered them. This is the same root word used for Joshua, Hosea, and Jesus. It means savior, so the judges were literally saviors spiritually, personally, tribally, and politically.

The first judge was Othniel. Caleb promised his daughter and great territory to Othniel if he fought well. Othniel was awarded the territory and became Caleb's son-in-law and the first judge for Israel. The secret of success for the judges was seen in Judges 3:10–11:

The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, so that he became Israel's judge and went to war. The LORD gave Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him. So the land had peace for forty years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died.

God brought peace to Israel through Othniel, a great servant of God, by putting the Spirit of the Lord upon him. The Spirit of the Lord was upon the judges just as the Spirit of the Lord would be upon the kings, the prophets, and the psalmists. The Spirit of the Lord would be upon wise women and men so that they would have the wisdom to serve as the political, spiritual, and military leaders. This nation was prone to sin. As long as they had a strong leader, they would follow that leader, but as soon as that leader died, they would turn to follow the people who lived around them. What they needed was a firm and significant faith in God, but they did not have that.

Salvation Through a Left-Handed Man — Ehud

After Othniel died, Israel went back to evil again:

Once again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and because they did this evil the LORD gave Eglon king of Moab power over Israel. Getting the Ammonites and Amalekites to join him [this oppression was not by Moab alone because Eglon, the king of Moab, got the Ammonites and the Amalekites to join him, which resulted in three great nations coming to war against Israel], Eglon came and attacked Israel, and they took possession of the City of Palms [this was Jericho]. The Israelites were subject to Eglon king of Moab for eighteen years (Judges 3:12–14).

God had extended the period of time Israel was in oppression. They always repented when they were in deep trouble. They always wanted God's help when they found themselves in the valley of oppression. Israel repented, and God sent them a judge named Ehud:

Again the Israelites cried out to the LORD [strangely enough, the Lord heard them — He is the God of the second chance], and he gave them a deliverer — Ehud, a left-handed man [this was an important characteristic], the son of Gera the Benjaminite. The Israelites sent him with tribute to Eglon king of Moab (Judges 3:15).

As far as the Israelites were concerned, they were just paying their yearly bribe to Eglon. Ehud planned to do more than just bring tribute: “Now Ehud had made a double-edged sword about a foot and a half long [16 to 22 inches or about 50 centimeters], which he strapped to his right thigh under his clothing” (Judges 3:16). A right-handed person would normally carry his sword on the left side. The guards searched the left side but not the right side. Ehud carried his sword on his right side, because he was left-handed. This explained how Ehud was

able to get his sword into Eglon's palace. Judges 3:17–30 continues the story of Ehud:

He presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab, who was a very fat man. After Ehud had presented the tribute, he sent on their way the men who had carried it. At the idols near Gilgal he himself turned back and said, “I have a secret message for you, O king.” The king said, “Quiet!” And all his attendants left him. Ehud then approached him while he was sitting alone in the upper room of his summer palace and said, “I have a message from God for you.” As the king rose from his seat, Ehud reached with his left hand, drew the sword from his right thigh and plunged it into the king’s belly. Even the handle sank in after the blade, which came out his back. Ehud did not pull the sword out, and the fat closed in over it. Then Ehud went out to the porch; he shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them. [He wanted everyone to believe the king was alone and perhaps asleep.] After he had gone, the servants came and found the doors of the upper room locked. They said, “He must be relieving himself in the inner room of the house.” They waited to the point of embarrassment, but when he did not open the doors of the room, they took a key and unlocked them. There they saw their lord fallen to the floor, dead. While they waited, Ehud got away. He passed by the idols and escaped to Seirah. When he arrived there, he blew a trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went down with him from the hills, with him leading them. “Follow me,” he ordered, “for the LORD has given Moab, your enemy, into your hands.” So they followed him down and, taking possession of the fords of the Jordan that led to Moab, they allowed no one to cross over. At that time they struck down about ten thousand Moabites, all

vigorous and strong; not a man escaped. That day Moab was made subject to Israel, and the land had peace for eighty years.

Ehud brought a long period of peace to the people because he had conquered the kings of the Moabites, Ammonites, and Amalekites. No one else had the nerve to come and fight against Ehud since Ehud had led Israel to victory over the three greatest kings of the day.

Salvation Through a Gentile — Shamgar

During Ehud's time, there was a man named Shamgar, son of Anath. He struck down 600 Philistines with an ox-goad and saved Israel. The Philistines, the other powerful nation, were put under the heel of God's people because one man of faith killed 600 Philistines with a thick stick and saved Israel. This is all the Bible says about Shamgar.

It is good to stop periodically to think about what this history means. What is the message behind these stories? God was keeping the covenant that He had made with Abraham. Faithful people were able to conquer a land that they did not have the ability to conquer by their own power. When people are faithful to God, God brings power into their lives to enable them to do things far beyond their ability.

When people turn away from God, God brings judgment upon them just as quickly as He brings victory. Therefore, both victory and defeat were because of God's love and not just because of the power or the sin of the people. God did not just punish the wicked among His people. He used judgment to cause them to repent. God was and is a God who was always anxious to give another chance. It did not matter how wicked the people became or how deeply they went into sin. If the people had stayed in sin, they would have been judged eternally, but God was not only willing but anxious to give them another chance.

When God's people repented, God brought them victory again. God brings honor to people who admit that they are wrong and confess their sins and turn to Him. God always had another great man ready to help deliver His people. It did not matter what the occasion was. It did not matter how deeply the people of God were in trouble. It did not matter how strong the enemy was. God had the single man who was going to bring peace again to the people of God. God was faithful to His promise. The seed of God was preserved so that the One who was going to bruise the serpent's head would come. He could never have come if it had not been for faithful men like Joshua, Caleb, Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar, and women like Deborah. These leaders inspired the people of God to come back to God and stand firm so that they would be able to enjoy the peace that He had for them. Romans 8:28 assures those who love God: "*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*"

The Judges (2) — Deborah and Gideon

Introduction

Chapter 4 of this study of Old Testament history continues in the book of Judges. Chapter 3 showed the reason judges were appointed by God. They were sent to help Israel discontinue the apostasy and idolatry in their land. They were expected spiritually to uphold the Word of God. They were expected in a judicial manner to make decisions for tribes and individuals about their relationship to the law. Primarily, however, they were military leaders who delivered the people from their sin-induced bondage and oppression.

A constant cycle was repeated during the time of the book of Judges. The people would gain peace under one of the judges. In that peaceful state of idleness and ease, however, they would become apostate. They would turn to idols, causing God to send an oppressing nation to persecute them severely. From their depths of trouble, they would cry out to God. They would repent, and God would send a deliverer who would bring them peace. This would start the cycle all over again.

Chapter 3 of the book of Judges covered the first three judges: Othniel, the son-in-law of Caleb, who delivered them from the Midianite oppression of Cushan-Rishathaim; Ehud, who brought deliverance from Moab; and Shamgar, who released them from the idolatry of the Philistines. This part of the study will continue the history of the judges after the time of Ehud and Shamgar.

Salvation Through a Woman

The Need for Salvation

Judges 4:1 says, “*After Ehud died [this again shows that Shamgar was a judge during Ehud’s day], the Israelites once again did evil in the eyes of the LORD.*” This passage says “once again.” Over and over again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord. While Ehud was alive, they had done what was right. But as soon as Ehud had died, they did evil in the eyes of the Lord. Ehud had been their strength instead of the Lord. Judges 4:2–3 says:

So the LORD sold them into the hands of Jabin, a king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth Haggioim. Because he had nine hundred iron chariots and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the LORD for help.

This Canaanite oppression lasted longer than any other oppression. The reason that it lasted so long was because Israel was no longer as quick to repent as they had once been. They were cruelly oppressed by a king who had 900 iron chariots, which would be like having 900 tanks in a present-day army. There is no way to tell how large his entire army was.

The Tools of Salvation

Since the people had cried out to God, God raised up a deliverer. There were women prophets and wise women throughout the Bible, but Judges 4 tells the story of the only woman judge:

Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading [the word “leading” simply means “judging” or “saving”] Israel at that time. She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in

the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided (Judges 4:4–5).

Deborah served in a judicial and spiritual capacity. She was a prophetess who upheld the Word of God. She solved the Israelites disputes and judged in their courts, but she also needed to serve in a military capacity. She solved their disputes herself, but in the military capacity, she served only as God's representative. She called a man to be the general who would lead the army against the Canaanite people:

She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, “The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: ‘Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead the way to Mount Tabor. I will lure Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands’” (Judges 4:6–7).

There was no way, using ordinary military power, that Barak and his army of 10,000 men could defeat Sisera and his army that possessed 900 iron chariots. The Lord would need to take a direct hand in bringing about the victory. Barak recognized what he was up against. He knew that wherever Deborah went, God went with her because she was a prophetess and the judge of Israel. He was not sure if the Lord was with him, but he knew God was with Deborah. Judges 4:8–11 states:

Barak said to her, “If you go with me, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go.” “Very well,” Deborah said, “I will go with you. But because of the way you are going about this, the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will hand Sisera over to a woman.” [This makes it sound like Sisera was going

to be defeated by Deborah, but this would not be so. Deborah would not go to the battlefield and kill Sisera, but neither would Barak.] So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh, where he summoned Zebulun and Naphtali. Ten thousand men followed him, and Deborah also went with him. Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law, and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaanannim near Kedesh. [This verse, which does not seem to fit, helps explain whom God was going to use to deliver Sisera. It would be Heber's wife who would kill Sisera in the end.]

The Day of Salvation

Judges 4:12–16 describes what happened when they encountered Jabin's army:

When they told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, Sisera gathered together his nine hundred iron chariots and all the men with him, from Harosheth Haggioym to the Kishon River. Then Deborah said to Barak, “Go! This is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the LORD gone ahead of you?” So Barak went down Mount Tabor, followed by ten thousand men. At Barak’s advance, the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera abandoned his chariot and fled on foot. But Barak pursued the chariots and army as far as Harosheth Haggioym. All the troops of Sisera fell by the sword; not a man was left.

The song of Deborah in Judges 5 explains why Sisera abandoned his chariot. God had caused the Kishon river to overflow its banks. An iron chariot in mud caused by a flood would have been very hard to maneuver. They were trying to

drive their chariots in the muddy Kishon valley, and they could not do it. So Barak's army of 10,000 men on foot were able to slay every single person in Sisera's army. A soldier could move faster on foot in that situation, so Sisera left his chariot and ran. However, running would not save him.

The Completeness of Salvation

Judges 4:17–21 tells what happened to Sisera next:

Sisera, however, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite [cf. Judges 4:11], because there were friendly relations between Jabin king of Hazor and the clan of Heber the Kenite. Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, “Come, my lord, come right in. [They had a good relationship, and Sisera thought he would be safe in Jael’s tent.] Don’t be afraid.” So he entered her tent, and she put a covering over him [seemingly to hide him]. “I’m thirsty,” he said. “Please give me some water.” She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up. “Stand in the doorway of the tent,” he told her. “If someone comes by and asks you, ‘Is anyone here?’ say ‘No.’” But Jael, Heber’s wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died.”

They did not have refrigeration in those days, so the milk that Jael gave him would have been warm milk. He was pressured and tired, and the warm milk helped put him to sleep. Jael drove a tent peg all the way through his head. God delivered Sisera by the hand of a woman named Jael. Judges 4:22–24 states:

Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. “Come,” she said, “I will show you the

man you're looking for." So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera with the tent peg through his temple — dead. On that day God subdued Jabin, the Canaanite king, before the Israelites. And the hand of the Israelites grew stronger and stronger against Jabin, the Canaanite king, until they destroyed him. [In one battle, Israel weakened Jabin's hold on them. In later battles, they took his power away and escaped his yoke of oppression.]

Judges 5 contains the song that Deborah sang. Deborah had not been on the battle field. She had been on Mount Tabor observing the battle. She had seen everything that had happened. She had seen the Kishon overflow and the chariots bog down. She had seen all of the soldiers being killed, and she had watched Sisera as he had run away. She had heard about Jael nailing Sisera's head to the ground. That act of Jael's, along with the great victory that had been won by Israel, led Deborah to write a song of praise.

Salvation's Strange Song

Judges 5:1–2 says, “*On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song: ‘When the princes in Israel take the lead, when the people willingly offer themselves—praise the LORD!’*” A better translation of “when” in this verse would have been “in this way.” The princes in Israel had taken the lead, and the people had offered themselves willingly. Praise the Lord! This was the way God wanted it to be in Israel and how He wants it to be in the church today. God wants the leaders to take the lead. He wants the people to offer themselves willingly. He wants to be praised.

The remainder of Chapter 5 finishes Deborah's song:

“Hear this, you kings! Listen, you rulers! I will sing to the LORD, I will sing; I will make music to the LORD, the God of Israel. O LORD, when you went out

from Seir, when you marched from the land of Edom, the earth shook, the heavens poured, the clouds poured down water. The mountains quaked before the LORD, the One of Sinai, before the LORD, the God of Israel. In the days of Shamgar son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the roads were abandoned; travelers took to winding paths. Village life in Israel ceased, ceased until I, Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel. When they chose new gods, war came to the city gates, and not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel. My heart is with Israel's princes, with the willing volunteers among the people. Praise the LORD! You who ride on white donkeys, sitting on your saddle blankets, and you who walk along the road, consider the voice of the singers at the watering places. They recite the righteous acts of the LORD, the righteous acts of his warriors in Israel. Then the people of the LORD went down to the city gates. 'Wake up, wake up, Deborah! Wake up, wake up, break out in song! Arise, O Barak! Take captive your captives, O son of Abinoam.' Then the men who were left came down to the nobles; the people of the LORD came to me with the mighty. Some came from Ephraim, whose roots were in Amalek; Benjamin was with the people who followed you. From Makir captains came down, from Zebulun those who bear a commander's staff. The princes of Issachar were with Deborah; yes, Issachar was with Barak, rushing after him into the valley. In the districts of Reuben there was much searching of heart. Why did you stay among the campfires to hear the whistling for the flocks? In the districts of Reuben there was much searching of heart. Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan. And Dan, why did he linger by the ships? Asher remained on the coast and stayed in his coves. The people of Zebulun risked their very lives; so did Naphtali on the heights

of the field. Kings came, they fought; the kings of Canaan fought at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo, but they carried off no silver, no plunder. From the heavens the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera. The river Kishon swept them away, the age-old river, the river Kishon. March on, my soul; be strong! Then thundered the horses' hoofs — galloping, galloping go his mighty steeds. 'Curse Meroz,' said the angel of the LORD. 'Curse its people bitterly, because they did not come to help the LORD, to help the LORD against the mighty.' Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, most blessed of tent-dwelling women. He asked for water, and she gave him milk; in a bowl fit for nobles she brought him curdled milk. Her hand reached for the tent peg, her right hand for the workman's hammer. She struck Sisera, she crushed his head, she shattered and pierced his temple. At her feet he sank, he fell; there he lay. At her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell — dead. . . . So may all your enemies perish, O LORD! But may they who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength." Then the land had peace forty years (Judges 5:3–27, 31).

Deborah was a great prophetess, a great judge, and a great deliverer. Barak did his job well. The river Kishon drowned Jabin's army that was led by Sisera.

Strength in Weakness

The Need for Salvation

The next judge was Gideon. The familiar pattern emerged again, "*Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD . . .*" (Judges 6:1a). Deborah died, and Barak died. The people did evil after they had enjoyed forty years of peace. God had

granted them this period of peace, but because of their evil actions, God gave them over to the hands of their enemies once again:

... and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count the men and their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help (Judges 6:1b–6).

Israel was not only oppressed for seven years, but they also lost their crops and livestock. As before, they cried out to the Lord for help. This time the Lord sent a prophet. He was tired of just delivering them. He was going to deliver them, but He wanted them to realize that He was going against His justice and delivering them only through His mercy.

A Prophetic Explanation

God sent a prophet to the people who told them:

... “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. I snatched you from the power of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors. I drove them from before you and gave you their land. I said to you, ‘I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of

the Amorites, in whose land you live.’ But you have not listened to me” (Judges 6:8b–10).

God said that He was still going to deliver them, but He wanted them to know that He was fully aware that they were going to go right back to idolatry whenever it was over. God was telling them that they were not fooling Him. He said that they should stop fooling themselves because they did not intend to follow Him.

The Call of a Deliverer

Then the angel of the Lord appeared to a man named Gideon:

The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, “The LORD is with you, mighty warrior” (Judges 6:11–12).

Imagine Gideon’s surprise. Perhaps he wondered why the angel of the Lord was calling him a mighty warrior. Perhaps he felt like a coward threshing wheat out of fear. However, the angel of the Lord told Gideon to go and save Israel because He was sending him. Then Gideon asked: “*But Lord . . . how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family*” (Judges 6:15). This qualified him for the job anyway because as it says in Matthew 5:3, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” The Lord told Gideon that He would be with him and that Gideon did not have to be a special person because God was going to be with him. Judges 6:16 says, “*The LORD answered, ‘I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together.’*” Then Gideon asked the Lord to let him go get an offering and give it to Him. He brought an offering of an ephah of flour and a young goat, and he offered it to the Lord. Gideon built an altar

there because he thought he had seen the Sovereign Lord face-to-face. Because of that, Gideon believed that he would have to die. Judges 6:23–24 states: “*But the LORD said to him, ‘Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.’ So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it The LORD is Peace.*”

God told him to take the second bull from his father’s herd and offer it on the new altar he was to build on the ruins of his father’s altar to Baal. He took ten of his servants and broke down his father’s altars to the Baal god and the Asherah pole that was beside it, and he sacrificed the bull as God had commanded. That caused the men of the city to want to kill him. But Joash, Gideon’s father, refused to hand him over to them and told the men that if Baal wanted to contend with Gideon, then Baal could contend with Gideon, but that they should leave Gideon alone. However, in spite of all of those things, Gideon was still not sure that he had the power to go and defeat the Midianites. He asked the Lord to give him a sign:

... “*look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.*” And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew — a bowlful of water. Then Gideon said to God, “*Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew.*” That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew (Judges 6:37–40).

The Methods of Faith

Gideon then had his signs. He knew God was going to be with him, so he was ready to go into battle. Gideon blew the

trumpet and 32,000 Israelites (cf. Judges 7:3) came out to serve in his army. This was the largest army Israel had assembled since Joshua had died. God told Gideon that there were too many men, even though Israel would be outnumbered 50 to 1. God said that if Israel went into the battlefield with this many, they would take the credit for the victory and not give Him the credit. He told Gideon to let all the cowards go home — that if anybody was trembling with fear, he should let them go home. 22,000 cowards went home. Then Gideon had 10,000 men. That was still a good-sized army. That had been the size of Barak's army that had gone down the mountain to fight. But the Lord said that there were still too many. He told Gideon to take the men down to the river and let them drink. He told Gideon to send home anybody who got down on his hands and knees and drank like a dog would drink. God told Gideon that he should take with him the ones who put their hands into the water to drink. Nine thousand seven hundred careless compromisers were sent home. Gideon had started the day with 32,000 soldiers, and ended with 300. That was like what happened in John 6. There were many people who followed Jesus, but He chose only 12. For Gideon's army, there would be 300 consecrated and committed soldiers reduced to such holy desperation that they had to let God make the difference.

Gideon went down to the camp of the Midianites at night and overheard a man telling about a dream. This dream indicated that Gideon was going to win the next day. God had given Gideon the sign of the fleece, and He had given him the dream. Gideon knew that he was going to win even though he only had 300 men. God gave those 300 men the strangest battle plan they had ever heard. It was even stranger than what He had told the people to do at Jericho. When God had helped the Israelites destroy Jericho, He had told them to walk around the city and wait until the walls fell. In this case, He told Gideon to give each of the 300 men a torch, a pitcher, and a trumpet. These items were not normal weapons for a war. Gideon placed a trumpet and a pitcher with a torch inside in the hands of each

one of his men. The 300 soldiers surrounded the Midianites in the valley below. Gideon told them to follow his lead, and they all blew their trumpets and smashed their pitchers at the same time. The soldier whose job it was to blow the trumpet during a battle usually marched in front of a battalion. The Midianites would have assumed that there were 300 battalions surrounding them. Thousands of people would have been represented by 300 trumpets.

The Defeat of Midian

The key to the success of this battle was the fact that every man stood in his place. There were no careless compromisers in this army. There were no cowards because they had all been sent home. Cowards and compromisers would have yelled, "Hey! Wait a minute. There are not very many of us." They would have been frightened, yet these 300 desperate men went into that valley without a single sword or spear. All of this caused so much confusion in the Midianite camp that they began to stab each other with their spears and swords. Gideon's 300 men picked up those swords and spears and began to kill the people with their own weapons. They killed the two captains, Oreb and Zeeb, and pursued the two princes, Zebah and Zalmunna, killing them also. Gideon became the ruler and judge of all Israel after this battle.

Judges 8:28 says: "*Thus Midian was subdued before the Israelites and did not raise its head again. During Gideon's lifetime, the land enjoyed peace forty years.*" The story of Gideon and his army teaches that God is not impressed with numbers. Often Christians want to be able to count huge numbers of people before they feel successful. The Lord's hand is not shortened to save by the many or by the few. He had saved Israel by using Joshua's great army as it had swept through the land, but He had also saved them through Gideon's army of 300 men.

This story also teaches that perhaps God's camp needs to be reduced. Sometimes growth needs to happen by subtraction.

Maybe the family of God needs to find out just how many in the household of God are really serious. Maybe they need to find out who the cowards are, and if necessary send them home. Christians need to stop all the compromising and become consecrated and committed people that in desperation trust the Lord to make the difference. Christians need to do away with trusting in what they know and do. Christians need to do away with putting the trust in the leaders and teachers and begin to trust in the Lord Jehovah. Then, like Gideon, the church will go down into the valley of unbelief and not only redeem people by the hundreds and the thousands, but find great honor and great joy in being the people of God. The people of the church need to be “Gideons” for the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Judges (3) — Abimelech, Tola, Jair, and Jephthah

Introduction

Like the two previous chapters in this study of Old Testament history, Chapter 5 covers the book of Judges. It begins with the conclusion of the story of Gideon. Gideon had brought peace to the land of Israel. It was a peace that lasted forty years; a peace that was brought about by the defeat of the most powerful oppressor that Israel would ever know. The nation of Midian had entered into battle against Israel with 950 iron chariots, yet Gideon had brought a great victory to the people of God. Judges 8:28–33a tells about Gideon delivering Israel and about his death:

Thus Midian was subdued before the Israelites and did not raise its head again. During Gideon's lifetime, the land enjoyed peace forty years. Jerub-Baal [Gideon] son of Joash went back home to live. He had seventy sons of his own, for he had many wives. His concubine, who lived in Shechem, also bore him a son, whom he named Abimelech. Gideon son of Joash died at a good old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals.

It is interesting to note that just as soon as Gideon had died, Israel bowed down before the Baal gods (Judges 8:33b–35 says:

They set up Baal-Berith as their god and did not remember the LORD their God, who had rescued them from the hands of all their enemies on every side. They also failed to show kindness to the family of Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) for all the good things he had done for them”.

Not only was Israel a dishonorable nation of people, but they were also an ungrateful nation of people.

Abimelech —Tragic Ambition, The Self-Appointed Judge

Sinful Ambition Unleashed

Judges 9 tells the story of Gideon’s son, Abimelech, who was born to him by a concubine. Abimelech decided to make himself a judge. He was not called or appointed by God. He ran a campaign for the office. He would be the only judge who was not chosen by God. Judges 9:1-6 describes the conspiracy that was created and carried out by Abimelech:

Abimelech son of Jerub-Baal went to his mother’s brothers in Shechem and said to them and to all his mother’s clan, “Ask all the citizens of Shechem, ‘Which is better for you: to have all seventy of Jerub-Baal’s sons rule over you, or just one man?’ Remember, I am your flesh and blood.” When the brothers repeated all this to the citizens of Shechem, they were inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, “He is our brother.” They gave him seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith, and Abimelech

used it to hire reckless adventurers, who became his followers. [At that time, Abimelech was a soldier of fortune and hired people to follow him.] *He went to his father's home in Ophrah and on one stone murdered his seventy brothers, the sons of Jerub-Baal.* [Unknown to him, however, he let one escape.] *But Jotham, the youngest son of Jerub-Baal, escaped by hiding.* Then all the citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo gathered beside the great tree at the pillar in Shechem to crown Abimelech king.

Sinful Ambition Exposed by Jotham's Fable

Abimelech was only a self-appointed judge, but the text does say that he judged Israel and that the people also wanted to make him king. However, the youngest of Gideon's house, Jotham, was bold enough to cry out against this:

When Jotham was told about this, he climbed up on the top of Mount Gerizim and shouted to them, "Listen to me, citizens of Shechem, so that God may listen to you. One day the trees went out to anoint a king for themselves. They said to the olive tree, 'Be our king.' But the olive tree answered, 'Should I give up my oil, by which both gods and men are honored, to hold sway over the trees?' [The olive tree said he was doing too significant of a job to be appointed king over the trees.] Next, the trees said to the fig tree, 'Come and be our king.' But the fig tree replied, 'Should I give up my fruit, so good and sweet, to hold sway over the trees?' [The fig tree said his job feeding people was too important to want to be king over the trees.] Then the trees said to the vine, 'Come and be our king.' But the vine answered, 'Should I give up my wine, which cheers both gods and men, to hold sway over the trees?' [Even the puny vine refused to be king over the trees because quenching the thirst and

hunger of man was much more important than swaying over the trees and simply being king.] *Finally all the trees said to the thornbush, ‘Come and be our king.’ The thornbush said to the trees, ‘If you really want to anoint me king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, then let fire come out of the thornbush and consume the cedars of Lebanon!’* (Judges 9:7–15).

This was not a literal story—it was a fable. A thorn bush does not provide much shade to rest under. It is covered with thorns, which makes it very uncomfortable. Who was the thornbush in this fable? This thornbush was Abimelech. Jotham’s application to the fable says:

“Now if you have acted honorably and in good faith when you made Abimelech king, and if you have been fair to Jerub-Baal and his family, and if you have treated him as he deserves—and to think that my father fought for you, risked his life to rescue you from the hand of Midian (but today you have revolted against my father’s family, murdered his seventy sons on a single stone, and made Abimelech, the son of his slave girl, king over the citizens of Shechem because he is your brother)—if then you have acted honorably and in good faith towards Jerub-Baal and his family today, may Abimelech be your joy, and may you be his, too! But if you have not, let fire come out from Abimelech and consume you, citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo, and let fire come out from you, citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo, and consume Abimelech!” Then Jotham fled, escaping to Beer [perhaps Beersheba], and he lived there because he was afraid of his brother Abimelech (Judges 9:16-21).

Sinful Ambition Thwarted

The people knew that they were being ruled by a thornbush. They knew that they were going to be abused by Abimelech because he was not an honest man. He was not a honorable judge, but he ruled over Israel anyway. Abimelech governed Israel for three years (cf. Judges 9:22). The word “govern” is the same word that is translated judge, rule, or save. Even though he was a self-appointed judge who had gained the office by trickery, deceit, and murder, he was still their judge. Judges 9:22-29 states:

After Abimelech had governed Israel three years, God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem, who acted treacherously against Abimelech. God did this in order that the crime against Jerub-Baal's seventy sons, the shedding of their blood, might be avenged on their brother Abimelech and on the citizens of Shechem, who had helped him murder his brothers. In opposition to him these citizens of Shechem set men on the hilltops to ambush and rob everyone who passed by, and this was reported to Abimelech. Now Gaal son of Ebed moved with his brothers into Shechem, and its citizens put their confidence in him. [There was a contestant to the judgeship and kingship of Abimelech.] After they had gone out into the fields and gathered the grapes and trodden them, they held a festival in the temple of their god. While they were eating and drinking, they cursed Abimelech. Then Gaal son of Ebed said, “Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should be subject to him? Isn't he Jerub-Baal's son, and isn't Zebul his deputy? Serve the men of Hamor, Shechem's father! Why should we serve Abimelech? If only this people were under my command! Then I would get rid of him. I would say to Abimelech, ‘Call out your whole army!’”

Sinful Ambition Punished

Judges 9:34-41 tells what happened when Gaal's words were put to the test:

So Abimelech and all his troops set out by night and took up concealed positions near Shechem in four companies. Now Gaal son of Ebed had gone out and was standing at the entrance to the city gate just as Abimelech and his soldiers came out from their hiding place. When Gaal saw them, he said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains!" [However, those that were with him thought that he was seeing shadows.] . . . But Gaal spoke up again: "Look, people are coming down from the center of the land, and a company is coming from the direction of the soothsayers' tree." Then Zebul said to him, "Where is your big talk now, you who said, 'Who is Abimelech that we should be subject to him?' Aren't these the men you ridiculed? Go out and fight them!" So Gaal led out the citizens of Shechem and fought Abimelech. Abimelech chased him, and many fell wounded in the flight — all the way to the entrance to the gate. Abimelech stayed in Arumah, and Zebul drove Gaal and his brothers out of Shechem.

Abimelech besieged and captured Thebez. Inside the city was a strong tower to which all the men and the women had fled to lock themselves inside. Judges 9:52–53 tells what happened next: "*Abimelech went to the tower and stormed it. But as he approached the entrance to the tower to set it on fire, a woman dropped an upper millstone on his head and cracked his skull.*"

A Prophetic Explanation

A millstone was about 2 to 3 feet (60 to 90 centimeters) wide and 6 to 12 inches (15 to 30 centimeters) thick. When this very heavy stone hit Abimelech, it killed him. As he was dying, he said to his armor-bearer:

... “Draw your sword and kill me, so that they can’t say, ‘A woman killed him.’” [Being killed by a woman was the biggest dishonor that a soldier could have ever had.] So his servant ran him through, and he died. When the Israelites saw that Abimelech was dead, they went home. Thus God repaid the wickedness that Abimelech had done to his father by murdering his seventy brothers. God also made the men of Shechem pay for all their wickedness. The curse of Jotham son of Jerub-Baal came on them.
(Judges 9:54b–57)

This was a tragic moment in Israel’s history. They had been following a false judge. The fact that the people had been following someone who had been self-appointed brought condemnation on them as well the self-appointed judge.

Two Minor Judges — Tola and Jair and Israel’s Apostasy

The Judgeship of Tola

Judges 10:1-5 mentions two judges briefly. The first one is Tola, who lived in Shamir, in the hill country of Ephraim. He judged Israel for 23 years and died.

The Judgeship of Jair

Tola was followed by Jair of Gilead who judged Israel for 22 years. Interestingly, he had 30 sons who rode 30 donkeys and ruled over 30 towns in Gilead. He died and was buried in

Kamon. Those two judges brought temporary and provincial relief east of the Jordan. However, Israel was still being deeply oppressed by the Philistines, Canaanites, Midianites, and Ammonites.

Tragedy Intensified

The Ammonite oppression began with the judgeship of Jephthah. He was a God-appointed judge. However, he was also a judge who made a foolish vow. It is understood that there are no perfect people—even judges—but at this time, God did not have any significantly godly, faithful people to deliver Israel. Regardless, Israel had to be delivered because God had made a promise to a woman (Eve) that her seed would crush the head of Satan. He had made a promise to Abraham that his seed would bless all the nations on the earth. He had also made the same promise to Judah, and because of those promises, God needed to keep the seed preserved. But Gideon, Abimelech, Tola, and Jair had all died. After the deaths of each of these judges, whether self-appointed like Abimelech or appointed by God, Israel had returned to its evil ways. Judges 10:6–10 says:

Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD. They served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines. [They worshiped the gods of all the people who lived in the land with them. This did not go unnoticed by God.] And because the Israelites forsook the LORD and no longer served him, he became angry with them. He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites, who that year shattered and crushed them. For eighteen years they oppressed all the Israelites on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead, the land of the Amorites. The Ammonites also crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah, Benjamin and the house of Ephraim; and

Israel was in great distress. Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD, “We have sinned against you, forsaking our God and serving the Baals.”

The people had assessed their situation correctly, but their repentance was very shallow. The Lord reminded them of their shallowness:

The LORD replied, “When the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you and you cried to me for help, did I not save you from their hands? [But what had they done in return?] But you have forsaken me and served other gods, so I will no longer save you. Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble!” [Elijah would later say the same thing to the people on Mount Carmel (cf. 1 Kings 18:20–21).] But the Israelites said to the LORD, “We have sinned. Do with us whatever you think best, but please rescue us now.” (Judges 10:11–15).

At that point, their repentance was a little deeper. When God reminded them of the fact that He had delivered them in the past and they had not honored Him, they told the Lord that He was right. They asked Him to punish them in any way that He needed to punish them and to do what He thought was best, but to rescue them immediately.

They proved their sincerity by throwing away all of their idols, “*Then they got rid of the foreign gods among them and served the LORD*” (Judges 10:16a). They began to build the altar of God and to bow before Him again. They cried out to God, “. . . And he could bear Israel’s misery no longer” (Judges 10:16b). There is a very important lesson here. In the midst of the most tragic, sinful moments, God still bears His children’s misery. God still has fellowship with His children.

He still supports them so that they can come to the end of their misery and turn to Him in honesty and faithfulness. Praise the Lord for His mercy and for His patience.

Jephthah — An Outlaw Leader

Jephthah — The Outcast

Judges 10:17 begins the account of the Israelites' deliverance from their oppressors:

When the Ammonites were called to arms and camped in Gilead, the Israelites assembled and camped at Mizpah. The leaders of the people of Gilead said to each other, “Whoever will launch the attack against the Ammonites will be the head of all those living in Gilead.”

The people said that they needed a general and that they would make whoever came to be their general ruler over all of the people. Jephthah was the one whom God raised up to be the next deliverer of Israel:

Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior. His father was Gilead; his mother was a prostitute. Gilead's wife also bore him sons, and when they were grown up, they drove Jephthah away. “You are not going to get any inheritance in our family,” they said, “because you are the son of another woman.” So Jephthah fled from his brothers and settled in the land of Tob, where a group of adventurers gathered around him and followed him (Judges 11:1–3).

Was God showing His sense of humor? He was using someone to deliver them that the people would detest, but they had to make him their ruler because that was what they had said

they would do.

The Ammonites came with the intention of making war. The people knew that they needed to act quickly:

... the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. "Come," they said, "be our commander, so we can fight the Ammonites." Jephthah said to them, "Didn't you hate me and drive me from my father's house? Why do you come to me now, when you're in trouble?" The elders of Gilead said to him, "Nevertheless, we are turning to you now; come with us to fight the Ammonites, and you will be our head over all who live in Gilead." Jephthah answered, "Suppose you take me back to fight the Ammonites and the LORD gives them to me — will I really be your head?" The elders of Gilead replied, "The LORD is our witness; we will certainly do as you say." [The elders swore to Jephthah that he would be their ruler.] So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them. And he repeated all his words before the LORD in Mizpah (Judges 11:5–11).

King of Ammon — The Tragedy of Stubbornness

Judges 11:12-13 tells what Jephthah did next:

Then Jephthah sent messengers to the Ammonite king with the question: "What do you have against us that you have attacked our country?" The king of the Ammonites answered Jephthah's messengers, "When Israel came up out of Egypt, they took away my land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, all the way to the Jordan. Now give it back peaceably."

Jephthah said no to the Ammonites. He told the

Ammonites that when Israel came out of Egypt they had passed through Edom and Moab and had wanted to bypass the Ammonites also. He told them that the Israelites had asked for permission to go through the land of the Ammonites and had promised not to take anything to eat or drink. He said the Ammonite king, Sihon, had refused to let Israel pass through peacefully, and that was why Israel had fought the Ammonites and now possessed the land. Jephthah ended his message by saying:

“I have not wronged you, but you are doing me wrong by waging war against me. Let the LORD, the Judge, decide the dispute this day between the Israelites and the Ammonites.’ The king of Ammon, however, paid no attention to the message Jephthah sent him”

(Judges 11:27–28).

Sihon did not believe in the Lord. He just wanted his territory back.

Judges 11:29a repeats the secret of the judges' success: “*Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah.*” It was not their military prowess. It was because of the power of God. Jephthah needed God's help. He was going to war against a superior force with an inferior army, and unless God took a direct hand he would not be able to win. This was true with each of the judges. There was not a single judge who ever won a victory by his own ability or numbers. They all won by the power of God. This was written so God's people would learn.

Jephthah's Tragic Vow

Before Jephthah began battling the Ammonites, he made a vow to God:

He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites. And Jephthah [here comes his

big mistake] *made a vow to the LORD* [vows should not be made hastily — there is nothing wrong with making a vow if one is careful and remembers that it is better not to vow at all than to vow and not honor it]: “*If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD’s, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering*” (Judges 11:29b–31).

Jephthah, having made his vow, went out to war. Judges 11:32–33 describes what happened:

Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the LORD gave them into his hands. He devastated twenty towns from Aroer to the vicinity of Minnith, as far as Abel Karamim. Thus Israel subdued Ammon.”

In one long battle, Jephthah won the victory. The Lord had given him victory over the Ammonites, so he had to honor his vow. Whatever came out of his house to greet him had to be sacrificed to God. The Bible does not tell us what Jephthah had expected to greet him, but what did walk out first was surely not what he had planned to sacrifice. The story continues in Judges 11:34–37:

When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of tambourines! She was an only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter. When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, “Oh! My daughter! You have made me miserable and wretched, because I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break.” “My father,” she replied, “you have given your word to the LORD. Do to me just as you promised, now that the LORD has avenged you of

your enemies, the Ammonites. But grant me this one request,” she said. “Give me two months to roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry.”

She did not say that she wanted to go out to weep because she was going to die. The law stated that the firstborn of both animal, man, and woman belonged to the Lord. The firstborn son could be redeemed by offering an animal instead. According to the law, when a child needed to be sacrificed as a burnt offering, an animal was offered instead. The child was then dedicated to spend the rest of his life in service to God. Jephthah’s daughter did not die. He sacrificed an animal in her place, and she became the Lord’s. Judges 11:38 says: “*You may go,’ he said. And he let her go for two months. She and the girls went into the hills and wept because she would never marry.*” It did not say that she was allowed to go because she would die. She was allowed to go and weep because she would never be able to marry.

Judges 11:39a continues: “*After the two months, she returned to her father and he did to her as he had vowed. And she was a virgin.*” The Hebrew language said she remained a virgin. She would be like Anna, who spent 80 years in service to God in the temple. Jephthah’s daughter would give the rest of her life as a virgin unto God. The story of Jephthah’s daughter is concluded in Judges 11:39b–40: “*From this comes the Israelite custom that each year the young women of Israel go out for four days to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.*”

Ephraim’s Tragic Pride

The men of Ephraim called out their forces and came to Jephthah. They said, “. . . ‘*Why did you go to fight the Ammonites without calling us to go with you? We’re going to burn down your house over your head*’” (Judges 12:1b).

There were a lot of people that wanted to participate in the

flag waving even though they had not gone and fought in the battle. They wanted to wave a flag and rejoice about the victory, but they had not gone and fought with Jephthah. Jephthah was a very wise man on this occasion. He had made a foolish vow, but he was wise later with his critics. Jephthah said to the Ephraimites:

I and my people were engaged in a great struggle with the Ammonites, and although I called, you didn't save me out of their hands. When I saw that you wouldn't help, I took my life in my hands and crossed over to fight the Ammonites, and the LORD gave me the victory over them. Now why have you come up today to fight me? (Judges 12:2–3).

However, they did not listen to him. So Jephthah called the Gileadites, and they fought against the Ephraimites at the Jordan River. Jephthah and the men of Gilead were able to tell who the Ephraimites were by making them say the word “Shibboleth.” The Ephraimites were not able to pronounce the word the way that the Gileadites did. Jephthah and the men of Gilead killed 42,000 Ephraimites that day.

Judges 12:7 concludes the story of Jephthah: “*Jephthah led Israel for six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died, and was buried in a town in Gilead.*” Jephthah’s story teaches that God does not want our vows. He does not need someone to bargain with Him by swearing that they will do certain things if He does certain things. God’s people must belong to Him totally. They must give God their all and tell Him that whatever He wants to do with them is fine. If God’s people are to be victorious, it is to His praise. If they are to be defeated, it is to His praise. No one lives to himself and no one dies to himself. Live to the Lord. Die to the Lord. A “yes” should just be “yes,” and a “no” should just be “no.”

The Judges (4) — Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, and Samson

Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, and Samson are the last four judges of the thirteen that are covered in the book of Judges. The final two judges, Eli and Samuel, are found in the book of 1 Samuel.

Three Minor Judges

The first three men mentioned above are called minor judges. They are not considered minor in the sense of being insignificant: they brought Israel deliverance and salvation from their enemies. They are minor because not much is said about them.

Ibzan was first:

After him, Ibzan of Bethlehem [Bethlehem was south of the city of Jerusalem] led Israel. He had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He gave his daughters away in marriage to those outside his clan [this was not a normal custom in that day], and for his sons he brought in thirty young women as wives from outside his clan. Ibzan led Israel seven years [so there was peace in the south for seven years]. Then Ibzan died, and was buried in Bethlehem (Judges 12:8–10).

Then there was Elon: “*After him, Elon the Zebulunite led Israel ten years. Then Elon died, and was buried in Aijalon in the land of Zebulun*” (Judges 12:11–12). Aijalon was in the north above the Sea of Galilee.

The last of these three was Abdon. He lived in Ephraim, just above the Dead Sea, which was the center territory where Ebol and Gerazim were. Judges 12:13–15 tells about Abdon:

After him, Abdon son of Hillel, from Pirathon, led Israel. He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy donkeys. He led Israel for eight years. Then Abdon son of Hillel died, and was buried at Pirathon in Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites.

Each one of these judges had peace during his rule. They had a total of 25 years of temporary peace. They brought peace for a short period of time just as Jephthah had done for six years (cf. Judges 12:7).

Manoah's Vision and Samson's Birth

First Appearance of the Angel

The following statement is repeated over and over again in the book of Judges: “*Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, . . .*” (Judges 13:1a). The Israelites did evil in the sight of Jehovah, “. . . so the *LORD delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years*” (Judges 13:1b). There was apostasy and oppression for Israel once again. With oppression, however, God also sent a deliverer:

*A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was sterile and remained childless. The angel of the *LORD* appeared to her and said, “You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son. [God was going to do things in the midst of these people.] Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean, because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the*

boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, . . . ”Judges 13:2–5a).

The book of Numbers tells about the Nazirite vow. It was a vow that was normally taken for a short period of time. It was a period of special dedication to God where one drank no wine, ate nothing unclean, touched nothing dead, and did not shave or cut his hair. However, this boy was going to be a Nazirite from birth.

Judges 13:5b says, “*. . . and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines.*” Israel would be oppressed throughout the time that this boy, who was named Samson, served as a judge. They would also later be oppressed throughout Eli’s judgeship, and into Samuel’s judgeship. However, Samson would begin to deliver them. Judges 13:6–7 continues:

Then the woman went to her husband and told him, “A man of God came to me. He looked like an angel of God, very awesome. I didn’t ask him where he came from, and he didn’t tell me his name. But he said to me, ‘You will conceive and give birth to a son. Now then, drink no wine or other fermented drink and do not eat anything unclean, because the boy will be a Nazirite of God from birth until the day of his death.’”

Second Appearance of the Angel

Manoah wanted his wife’s vision to be confirmed:

Then Manoah prayed to the LORD: “O Lord, I beg you, let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born.” God heard Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman while she was out in the field; but her husband Manoah was not with her. The woman

hurried to tell her husband, “He’s here! The man who appeared to me the other day!” Manoah got up and followed his wife. When he came to the man, he said, “Are you the one who talked to my wife?” “I am,” he said. So Manoah asked him, “When your words are fulfilled, what is to be the rule for the boy’s life and work?” [Notice that Manoah did not question — he just believed. He wanted to know what to do.] The angel of the LORD answered, “Your wife must do all that I have told her. She must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, nor drink any wine or other fermented drink nor eat anything unclean. She must do everything I have commanded her.” Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, “We would like you to stay until we prepare a young goat for you.” The angel of the LORD replied, “Even though you detain me, I will not eat any of your food. But if you prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the LORD.” (Manoah did not realize that it was the angel of the LORD.) [Manoah wanted to feed the man. He did not understand that he was talking to God Himself.] Then Manoah inquired of the angel of the LORD, “What is your name, so that we may honor you when your word comes true?” He replied, “Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding.” [The angel was saying that He was the Lord. He had a non-understandable name — not an unpronounceable name. Anybody can say Yahweh, but no one can understand its depth.] Then Manoah took a young goat, together with the grain offering, and sacrificed it on a rock to the LORD. And the LORD did an amazing thing while Manoah and his wife watched: As the flame blazed up from the altar toward heaven, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame. Seeing this, Manoah and his wife fell with their faces to the ground. When the angel of the LORD did not show himself again to

Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized that it was the angel of the LORD. “We are doomed to die!” he said to his wife. “We have seen God!” [They called God the “angel of the LORD.” God was manifested in some fleshy form so that He could talk to these people.] But his wife answered, “If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and grain offering from our hands, nor shown us all these things or now told us this” (Judges 13:8–23).

Birth and Growth of the Child

Judges 13:24–25 says:

The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the LORD blessed him, and the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him while he was in Mahaneh Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

The real secret of Samson’s strength was found in God rather than in his hair. He was already beginning to have experiences with God. The first thing that showed God’s power in Samson’s life was that Samson had been conceived by the power and the prediction of God and was empowered immediately by the Spirit of God.

The Riddle — Deceit and Deception

The next thing covered regarding Samson’s life was the marriage riddle that he used to confuse the Philistines. Samson made several trips during this time which all related to him finding and wanting to marry a young Philistine woman. The first three trips were to Timnah, and the last one was to Ashkelon.

The Attraction Trip

The story begins in Judges 14:1–4:

Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman. When he returned, he said to his father and mother, “I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife.” [His parents were grieved because Samson had chosen a Gentile woman. She was a pagan, and evil companionship did corrupt good morals. Samson continuously had trouble because he loved the wrong kind of women.] His father and mother replied, “Isn’t there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?” But Samson said to his father, “Get her for me. She’s the right one for me.” (His parents did not know that this was from the LORD, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel.)

The Arrangement Trip

Judges 14:5–7 describes what happened when Samson returned to Timnah with his parents to see the young woman:

Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and mother. As they approached the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. But he told neither his father nor his mother what he had done. Then he went down and talked with the woman, and he liked her.

The Celebration Trip

Judges 14:8-18 describes the trip Samson and his parents made to take part in the wedding feast. An incident on the way to the feast prompted the riddle in Samson's mind and, after he arrived, he told it to the men who were serving as his companions:

Some time later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion's carcass. In it was a swarm of bees and some honey, which he scooped out with his hands and ate as he went along. When he rejoined his parents, he gave them some, and they too ate it. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the lion's carcass. Now his father went down to see the woman. And Samson made a feast there, as was customary for bridegrooms. When he appeared, he was given thirty companions. [Samson had not brought any of his friends, and the Middle Eastern custom required a man to marry in the company of his companions.] "Let me tell you a riddle," Samson said to them. "If you can give me the answer within the seven days of the feast, I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes. [This would be one for each person.] If you can't tell me the answer, you must give me thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes." [Samson would be wealthy if they were not able to answer his riddle.] "Tell us your riddle," they said. "Let's hear it." He replied, "Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet." [Knowing Samson's story, the riddle is easy to answer: the lion was the "eater," and the honey was "something sweet."] For three days they could not give the answer. On the fourth day, they said to Samson's wife, "Coax your husband into explaining the riddle for us, or we will burn you and your father's household to death. Did you invite us

here to rob us?" Then Samson's wife threw herself on him, sobbing, "You hate me! You don't really love me. You've given my people a riddle, but you haven't told me the answer." "I haven't even explained it to my father or mother," he replied, "so why should I explain it to you?" She cried the whole seven days of the feast. So on the seventh day he finally told her, because she continued to press him. She in turn explained the riddle to her people. Before sunset on the seventh day the men of the town said to him, "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?" Samson said to them, "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have solved my riddle."

The Philistines could only have known the answer to Samson's riddle because someone told them. Samson knew they had gotten the answer from the woman he had come to marry.

The Vengeance Trip

Judges 14:19–20 describes how Samson got the clothes for the thirty men who had served as his companions:

Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power. He went down to Ashkelon, struck down thirty of their men, stripped them of their belongings and gave their clothes to those who had explained the riddle. [This was the second time that the Spirit of the Lord had come upon Samson. He killed thirty Philistines to dress thirty Philistines.] Burning with anger, he went up to his father's house. [Samson did not complete the marriage. There was no consummation at the end of the feast.] And Samson's wife was given to the friend who had attended him at his wedding.

Samson told a riddle and lost a wife, but in all of this, he

began to judge Philistia.

Three Examples of Samson's Vengeance

Judges 15 contains three examples of God's vengeance through Samson against the Philistines. Each Philistine provocation was met with swift and devastating vengeance.

First Provocation and Response

Judges 15:1–5 describes the first instance:

Later on, at the time of wheat harvest, Samson took a young goat and went to visit his wife. He said, “I’m going to my wife’s room.” But her father would not let him go in. “I was so sure you thoroughly hated her,” he said, “that I gave her to your friend. Isn’t her younger sister more attractive? Take her instead.” Samson said to them, “This time I have a right to get even with the Philistines; I will really harm them.” So he went out and caught three hundred foxes and tied them tail to tail in pairs. He then fastened a torch to every pair of tails, lit the torches and let the foxes loose in the standing grain of the Philistines. [Samson tied the animals together so that they would run in circles to free themselves. His purpose was to spread the fire through all the Philistines’ fields.] He burned up the shocks and standing grain, together with the vineyards and olive groves.

Second Provocation and Response

Judges 15:6–8 continues the story:

When the Philistines asked, “Who did this?” they were told, “Samson, the Timnite’s son-in-law, because his wife was given to his friend.” So the Philistines went up and burned her and her father to death. Samson said to them, “Since you’ve acted like

this, I won't stop until I get my revenge on you." He attacked them viciously and slaughtered many of them. Then he went down and stayed in a cave in the rock of Etam.

God avenged the persecution of His people by the Philistines through one man, Samson. First Samson killed thirty of them, and then he killed many more. The Philistines were being slaughtered and weakened.

Third Provocation and Response

The **first** thing recorded in the book of Judges about the life of Samson was the vision of his birth. The **second** thing was the riddle and the foxes (followed by Samson's attack on the Philistines to avenge the murder of his intended wife and her father). After these came the **third** thing, the story of the jaw-bone:

The Philistines went up and camped in Judah, spreading out near Lehi. The men of Judah asked, "Why have you come to fight us?" "We have come to take Samson prisoner," they answered, "to do to him as he did to us." Then three thousand men from Judah [they really honored Samson by sending 3,000 soldiers just to talk to one man] went down to the cave in the rock of Etam and said to Samson, "Don't you realize that the Philistines are rulers over us? What have you done to us?" He answered, "I merely did to them what they did to me." They said to him, "We've come to tie you up and hand you over to the Philistines." Samson said, "Swear to me that you won't kill me yourselves." "Agreed," they answered. "We will only tie you up and hand you over to them. We will not kill you." So they bound him with two new ropes [Two new ropes would have been very difficult to break] and led him up from the rock. As he

approached Lehi, the Philistines came toward him shouting. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power. The ropes on his arms became like charred flax, and the bindings dropped from his hands. Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men (Judges 15:9–15).

Samson was only one man, but with him the Spirit of the Lord was with him. The Spirit of the Lord enabled him to go beyond his great strength and slaughter 1,000 Philistine men. The Lord was really taking vengeance on the Philistines through Samson. Judges 15:16–17, 20 states:

Then Samson said, “With a donkey’s jawbone I have made donkeys of them. With a donkey’s jawbone I have killed a thousand men.” When he finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone; and the place was called Ramath Lehi. . . . Samson led Israel for twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

Samson’s Downfall and Death

The Gates of Gaza

The next event in Samson’s life involved the gates. Judges 16:1–3 says:

One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her. [He loved the wrong kind of women.] The people of Gaza were told, “Samson is here!” So they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the city gate. They made no move during the night, saying, “At dawn we’ll kill him.” But Samson lay there only until the middle of the night. Then he got up and took hold of the doors of the city gate, together with the two posts, and tore them loose, bar and all. He lifted them

to his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.

In doing this, Samson had brought shame to the city of Gaza. That was why they would later shame him.

Delilah's Seduction and Betrayal

The **fourth** and perhaps last lesson to learn from Samson's life was the haircut:

Some time later, he fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. [Once again it is obvious that he loved the wrong kind of women] The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, “See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver.” [That was 28 pounds or about 13 kilograms of silver which would have been a fortune. The Philistines wanted to get rid of Samson. He had begun by killing only 30 of them, but by that time, he had killed over 1,000.) So Delilah said to Samson, “Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued.” Samson answered her, “If anyone ties me with seven fresh thongs that have not been dried, I’ll become as weak as any other man.” [Delilah took seven bow strings and tied him up.] . . . With men hidden in the room, she called to him, “Samson, the Philistines are upon you!” But he snapped the thongs as easily as a piece of string snaps when it comes close to a flame. So the secret of his strength was not discovered. Then Delilah said to Samson, “You have made a fool of me; you lied to me. Come now, tell me how you can be tied.” He said, “If anyone ties me securely with new ropes that have never been used,

I'll become as weak as any other man." So Delilah took new ropes and tied him with them. Then, with men hidden in the room, she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" But he snapped the ropes off his arms as if they were threads. Delilah then said to Samson, "Until now, you have been making a fool of me and lying to me. Tell me how you can be tied." He replied, "If you weave the seven braids of my head into the fabric [on the loom] and tighten it with the pin, I'll become as weak as any other man." So while he was sleeping, Delilah took the seven braids of his head, wove them into the fabric and tightened it with the pin. Again she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and pulled up the pin and the loom, with the fabric. Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength." With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death. So he told her everything. "No razor has ever been used on my head," he said, "because I have been a Nazirite set apart to God since birth. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man." When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines, "Come back once more; he has told me everything." So the rulers of the Philistines returned with the silver in their hands. Having put him to sleep on her lap, she called a man to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him. Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had left

him” (Judges 16:4–7, 9–20).

More in His Death Than in His Life

Judges 16:21–31 concludes the story of Samson:

Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding in the prison. But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved. [The secret was not in his hair, but in his dedication. Samson was going to die as a righteous ruler of God’s people.] Now the rulers of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to celebrate, saying, “Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hands.” . . . So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them. When they stood him among the pillars, Samson said to the servant who held his hand, “Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them.” [They put him where his hands could touch the center columns that held the temple together. The temple was crowded with people, and there were about 3,000 men watching him from the roof.] . . . Then Samson prayed to the LORD, “O Sovereign LORD, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes.” Then Samson reached towards the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines!” Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived. Then his brothers and his father’s whole family went down to get him. They

brought him back and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had led Israel twenty years.

Samson brought peace to Israel for 20 years. He was one of the most interesting people in the book of Judges. God used Samson's lust, his desire for strange women, and the Philistines' own tricky ways to bring judgment to Philistia.

Anarchy existed in Israel during the period of time covered in the last few chapters of the book of Judges. Every man did that which was right in his own eyes. There was no rule or authority, and everyone was free to do whatever they wanted to do. In that situation, no nation would be able to stand for long. Israel needed to recognize its tragic standing before God and repent, or judgment would come upon them. By that time in history, the loosely federated nation of Israel had become so wicked that they would need a strong-handed ruler to lead them to repentance. They would get that ruler in their first king, Saul. Before Saul, however, there would be two more judges. The lesson to remember from this chapter is that sin always leads to disorder, decay, and destruction. Remember to honor the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

The Judges (5) — Eli and Samuel

Introduction

Chapter 7 of this study of Old Testament history is the closing chapter for the period of the judges. The book of Judges ended with the exploits of Samson, as God used him and his lust to judge the Philistines. Israel was still under Philistine oppression after Samson's death because he had killed a great number of the Philistines but had not ended the stranglehold that Philistia had on Canaan. It would take two more judges to free Canaan: Eli, the priest and judge, and Samuel, the priest, prophet, and judge. The first eight chapters of 1 Samuel relate the ending of the period of judges. This period in Israel's history ended with the beginning of the monarchy. This monarchy began with the enthronement of Saul as the first king of Israel. Those were stirring times. This chapter will survey all of the material from that period of time.

Eli was the fourteenth judge of Israel. Not much is known about his judgeship other than the fact that it touched the life of Samuel. The conclusion of the oppression of Philistia upon Israel is found in 1 Samuel 1.

Dedication and Commitment of a Mother and Child

Hannah's Predicament

Notice the birth of Samuel in Chapter 1 as it begins with the prayer and vision of Hannah:

There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. [This located him only geographically because in 1 Chronicles 6:27, he was listed with the sons of Levi. Samuel would be a priest in later days.] He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none. [God often used barren women to show that power is not in the flesh but in Him.] Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the LORD Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the LORD. Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the LORD had closed her womb. And because the LORD had closed her womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. Elkanah her husband would say to her, “Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don’t you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don’t I mean more to you than ten sons?” (1 Samuel 1:1–8).

Hannah’s Prayer of Entreaty

1 Samuel 1:9–18 relates what happened on one occasion when Hannah was in Shiloh:

Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the LORD’s temple [at this time it was still the tabernacle]. In

bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD. And she made a vow, saying, “O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.” [He would be dedicated in the Nazirite vow.] As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, “How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine.” “Not so, my lord,” Hannah replied, “I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.” Eli answered, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.” She said, “May your servant find favor in your eyes.” Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

Hannah’s Presentation of Samuel

As it is related in 1 Samuel 1:19–20, Hannah’s prayers were answered:

Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the LORD and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah lay with Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel [which meant “heard of God”] saying, “Because I asked the LORD for him.”

The name Samuel was much like the name Simeon. Simeon meant “God is heard,” and Samuel meant “heard of God.” In essence, Hannah was saying to all who heard, “This one came in answer to my prayer in the tabernacle.” She had promised that whenever that child was born, he would be dedicated completely to God all the days of his life. Those in the tabernacle had no way to nurse children so the child needed to stay with his mother to be nursed by her until he was able to eat and take care of himself. Then he would be dedicated to God. 1 Samuel 1:21–28 describes those events:

When the man Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the LORD and to fulfill his vow, Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, “After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the LORD, and he will live there always.” “Do what seems best to you,” Elkanah her husband told her. “Stay here until you have weaned him; only may the LORD make good his word.” So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him. After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh. When they had slaughtered the bull, they brought the boy to Eli, and she said to him, “As surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD. I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD.” And he worshiped the LORD there.

The boy was then old enough to take care of himself and offer his worship to God. Hannah presented him to the Lord. She had no other children, but her shame had been taken away

before the other wife of Elkanah because she had borne a child.

Hannah's Prayer of Praise

The prayer of Hannah is found in 1 Samuel 2. She made several tremendous statements in that prayer:

"There is no one holy like the LORD . . ." (1 Samuel 2:2a).

" . . . for the LORD is a God who knows . . ." (1 Samuel 2:3b).

"The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up" (1 Samuel 2:6).

"It is not by strength that one prevails; those who oppose the LORD will be shattered. He will thunder against them from heaven; the LORD will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed" (1 Samuel 2:9b–10).

Hannah first acknowledged in her prayer, as she gave her son to the Lord, that God had given Samuel to her. She was simply returning to the Lord that which was His.

The Doom and Demise of Eli's House

The Sins of Eli's Sons

1 Samuel 2:11 says, *"Then Elkanah went home to Ramah, but the boy ministered before the LORD under Eli the priest."* Samuel became Eli's assistant. He was not a priest but an attendant. He helped the priest. The contrast between the righteousness of Samuel and the wickedness of Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, began at that time:

Eli's sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the LORD. Now it was the practice of the priests with the people that whenever anyone offered a sacrifice

and while the meat was being boiled, the servant of the priest would come with a three-pronged fork in his hand. He would plunge it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot, and the priest would take for himself whatever the fork brought up (2:12–14a).

Eli's sons did not do what they were supposed to do. They sent their servants ahead of time and told them to give them the best part of the animal before they sacrificed the lamb. The people pleaded with the servants not to do that because it was against custom. It was not against the law, as there was no law in this matter, but it was against custom. 1 Samuel 2:17 says, “*This sin of the young men was very great in the LORD’s sight, for they were treating the LORD’s offering with contempt.*” This was an example of the sins of Eli's sons.

1 Samuel 2:18 says, “*But Samuel was ministering before the LORD — a boy wearing a linen ephod.*” Each year as Samuel grew, his mother would bring him a larger robe. 1 Samuel 2:20–21 tells what happened while they were there:

Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, “May the LORD give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the LORD.” Then they would go home. And the LORD was gracious to Hannah; she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the LORD.

So the Lord was gracious to Elkanah and his wife, and she had six children (Samuel, whom she gave to the Lord, and five more who stayed at home). Eli was getting very old when he heard about the evil that his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were doing (cf. 1 Samuel 2:22). They were even sleeping with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 1 Samuel 2:23–26 describes Eli's reaction:

So he said to them, “Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours. No, my sons; it is not a good report that I hear spreading among the LORD’s people. If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?” His sons, however, did not listen to their father’s rebuke, for it was the LORD’s will to put them to death. And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with men.

The Prophecy Against Eli’s House

A man of God came to speak to Eli. He reminded him that it was a privilege to be a priest of God and rebuked Eli for honoring his sons more than God. His punishment was that his priesthood and his sons were going to be taken away from him (cf. 1 Samuel 2:27–34). The man of God said:

I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. I will firmly establish his house, and he will minister before my anointed one always (1 Samuel 2:35).

That statement was referring to Samuel and to Christ.

Samuel’s Vision and Call

In 1 Samuel 3, the Lord spoke to Samuel. In the middle of night, the Lord called: “‘Samuel! Samuel!’” (cf. 1 Samuel 3:4, 6, 10). Samuel thought that it was Eli calling him, so he went to him and said, “*Here I am; you called me*” (1 Samuel 3:5, 6, 8). Eli replied, “*I did not call; go back and lie down*” (1 Samuel 3:5–6). Samuel went back to bed and heard the voice calling a second time. He went to Eli again and said the same thing. Again Eli responded, “*I did not call; go back and lie down.*” This happened a third time, and Eli realized that it had been the Lord who had been calling Samuel. In 1 Samuel 3:9–14, Eli

gave Samuel the following instructions:

So Eli told Samuel, “Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’ So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” And the LORD said to Samuel: “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family — from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them. Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, ‘The guilt of Eli’s house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering. ’”

Samuel awoke the next morning and did not want to tell Eli about the vision:

... but Eli called him and said, “Samuel, my son.” Samuel answered, “Here I am.” “What was it he said to you?” Eli asked. “Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you.” So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. [Samuel told Eli that his house was to be rejected and his sons were going to die.] Then Eli said, “He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes” (1 Samuel 3:16–18).

This was complete commitment to the Lord. Eli did not want his sons to be killed, but he considered the will of the Lord his own. The remainder of this portion of Samuel’s life is summed up in 1 Samuel 3:19–4:1a:

The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word. And Samuel's word came to all Israel.

Defeat of Israel

Eli was rejected as the priestly house, and Samuel was chosen. 1 Samuel 4 relates the account of the death of Eli and his sons. Israel was still warring with the Philistines, and the Philistines had captured the ark of the covenant. The battle was going badly, and Israel superstitiously thought that they needed the ark of the Lord in their camp to win. However, if the Lord had been there, they would not have been able to lose. It had nothing to do with the ark of the covenant. On the other hand, the Philistines thought that they had to fight harder because God would be with Israel even more since the ark was among them. Hence the Philistines fought harder, and Israel was defeated on the same day that Hophni and Phinehas died. These two wicked sons were killed in battle, and when Eli heard about it, he fell over backwards. Since he was a heavy man, he broke his back in the fall and died. The house of Eli was destroyed.

In that battle, Israel lost 30,000 foot soldiers (cf. 1 Samuel 4:10). Israel had gone to war against a large army, and the ark of the Lord's covenant was captured. When Phinehas' wife heard about this, she went into labor and the child was born. She named him Ichabod which meant "glory has gone into captivity." As far as she was concerned, all the glory of the Lord had departed from Israel when her husband and father-in-law had died, when the ark of the Lord had been captured, and when Israel had been defeated. The Philistines had possession of the place where God had caused His presence to be known. God had indeed departed from Israel, and the sign of that

occurred when they lost the ark of His covenant.

Samuel was a true judge. He defeated the Philistines, he made decisions about the problems of Israel, and he upheld the way of the Lord.

Defeat of Dagon, the Philistine God

After all of this, the foremost thing to be done was to recover the ark of the Lord's covenant. God would not be pleased with the ark of the covenant dwelling outside of the tabernacle. After capturing the ark, the Philistines put the ark at Ashdod where the god Dagon was. When they went into the temple where Dagon was, they discovered that Dagon had fallen on his face before the ark of the Lord as if he was worshiping it. The Philistines had to prop him back up each morning. On the third morning, he had not only fallen over, but his head and his hands had broken off and were laying on the threshold. After this, no Philistines ever stepped on that threshold because that was where Dagon, their god, had died before Jehovah, the God of Israel.

They carried the ark down to Eckron. The same thing happened there. God afflicted evil upon the city of Eckron. He threw the city into great panic, so they wanted to move the ark again. They were afflicted with tumors, so they carried the ark outside of Philistine territory and set it up at Beth Shemesh. Problems arose even there, however, so they moved the ark over to Kiriath Jearim (which was inside the Promised Land), and the anger of Jehovah departed (cf. 1 Samuel 5–6).

Revival and Victory Over the Enemy

Samuel warred against the Philistines at Mizpah (cf. 1 Samuel 7:5–11). He was not a warrior by trade or desire, but he assembled all of Israel at Mizpah to draw water. He poured the water out before Jehovah, and they fasted. They confessed: “*We have sinned against the LORD.*” And Samuel was leader of Israel at Mizpah” (1 Samuel 7:6b). When the Philistines heard this, they came up to Mizpah to defeat the Israelites as

they had done time and time again for over 40 years:

While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the LORD thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites (1 Samuel 7:10).

Was it a storm? Was it lightning? No one really knows how the Lord took a direct hand. Israel routed and pursued the Philistines. They slaughtered them along the way until they came to a place called Beth Car. The battle was not over, but the people needed encouragement to continue the battle. Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He pointed to the stone and named it “*Ebenezer*” (the word Ebenezer meant “the stone of help”). As he did this, Samuel said, “*Thus far has the LORD helped us*” (1 Samuel 7:12b). So the Philistines were subdued because Samuel and the people had sacrificed, because they had acknowledged the Lord’s help, and because they had continued the battle. This is what it took to win: offer a sacrifice, acknowledge the Lord’s help, and continue the battle.

Israel’s Demand for a King

Throughout Samuel’s lifetime, he judged Israel, and they were freed from Philistine control. He judged year after year as he went in circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah then always back to Ramah where his home was (cf.1 Samuel 7:16). He built an altar there to the Lord.

Israel finally had a faithful judge. They needed nothing else. However, they wanted something else and for a good reason. In 1 Samuel 8, the elders of Israel came to Samuel and told him that his two sons, Joel and Abijah (God’s name was in both of his boys’ names: Joel means “Yah is God.” Abijah means “Yah is my father.” In this way, he honored the Lord.),

were dishonest men. They told Samuel that his sons did not walk in his ways. They took bribes and perverted justice. The Lord did not blame Samuel. The boys had evil companions and evil hearts. No one knows what had caused the boys' wickedness, but it was not Samuel's instruction. The Lord did not judge Samuel as He had judged Eli for not restraining his sons. Good sons sometimes grow up in spite of bad fathers, and bad sons sometimes grow up in spite of good fathers.

Samuel was not judged, but the people did not want Samuel to be their judge anymore. They were afraid that when he died, his two wicked sons would take his place. The people came to Samuel and asked him to give them a king to lead them so that they might be like all the nations around them. This displeased Samuel, and he took his complaint to the Lord. The Lord told Samuel not to think they were rejecting him. God said they were not rejecting Samuel, but they were rejecting Him as their king. Samuel was their judge, and God was their king. God told Samuel to go tell them that they would get a king. He told Samuel to tell them the kind of king they would get: he would take their sons and daughters to be his servants and their crops to be his crops. God said he would make them poor and impoverish them. He told Samuel to tell them that when the day came that they cried out for relief, He would not hear them but tell them to go tell it to the king that they had chosen. Samuel told the people everything that God had said. They should have responded, "We were wrong. We do not want a king. We want our sons and daughters to belong to us. We want our crops to belong to us. We are sorry we asked for a king, Samuel. You can be our judge, and God will be our king." However, they said they wanted a king over them. When people want something badly enough, God will sometimes give it to them even when it is not for their betterment. So Samuel went before the Lord and repeated their desires. The Lord told Samuel: "*'Listen to them and give them a king.'* Then Samuel said to the men of Israel, '*'Everyone go back to his town'*'" (1 Samuel 8:22).

The people of Israel were given permission to anoint the kind of king they had seen in the nations around them. They wanted a powerful, strong, masculine, war-like king. This was what they would get. The people of God needed to be very careful about what they wanted because what they wanted was usually what they asked God for. What the church asks God for is going to determine what they get. Be satisfied with the provision of God in the leaders that He gives us, and work for Jehovah the Lord under the guidance of good, godly men. Never want to be like the other nations. Be ready for action when the Lord brings that day to you. It will not be a day for planning.

Saul's Reign (1) — The First King

Introduction

The previous chapter in this study covered the closing period of Samuel's judgeship as the last judge of Israel. He was getting old, and his two sons, Joel and Abijah, were wicked men. That chapter closed with Israel's request to Samuel to appoint a king to rule over them. Samuel had warned them about the kind of king this man would be. He would be one that would tax them heavily. He would take their sons for his army and their daughters to be perfumers and bakers. He would take all the best of their crops and the best of their land. Samuel had told them that the man they chose would be a wicked man and not a righteous one. They had to choose between the unrighteous sons of Samuel or an unrighteous king of Israel. Their only good choice would be to choose God. However, the Israelites felt they needed a king, so that is what they demanded.

The account of the period of kings begins in 1 Samuel 8. This period in the study of Bible History 2 will extend through the book of 2 Chronicles. There are two divisions in the period of the kings: the United Kingdom (when there was only one king and one kingdom) and the Divided Kingdom.

Saul's Appointment as Israel's First King

Saul Selected

1 Samuel 9:1–2 says:

There was a Benjamite, a man of standing, whose

name was Kish son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of Aphiah of Benjamin. He had a son named Saul, an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites — a head taller than any of the others.

I have had the experience of traveling through Japan with a young man who was 6 feet 8 inches tall (about 2 meters). As we walked among some young Japanese people, I was a head above them much of the time. He, however, was head and shoulders above all of them. I never had any trouble finding him. He stood out in the crowd, and that is the way it was with Saul. He was a big man able to fulfill what the Israelites wanted and lead them in battle against other people. The account continues in 1 Samuel 9:3: “*Now the donkeys belonging to Saul's father Kish were lost, and Kish said to his son Saul, ‘Take one of the servants with you and go and look for the donkeys.’*”

Saul looked through all the districts of Shaalim, Shalisha, and Zuph, and finally:

When they reached the district of Zuph, Saul said to the servant who was with him, “Come, let's go back, or my father will stop thinking about the donkeys and start worrying about us.” But the servant replied, “Look, in this town there is a man of God; he is highly respected, and everything he says comes true. Let's go there now. Perhaps he will tell us what way to take [whether they should continue to look for the donkeys or go back to Saul's father].” Saul said to his servant, “If we go, what can we give the man? The food in our sacks is gone. We have no gift to take to the man of God. What do we have?” [In that day, when they went to ask a prophet for help, they took the prophet a gift.] The servant answered . . . “I have a quarter of a shekel of silver [that was one quarter of a day's work]

I will give it to the man of God so that he will tell us what way to take." (Formerly in Israel, if a man went to inquire of God, he would say, "Come, let us go to the seer," because the prophet of today used to be called a seer.) "Good," Saul said to his servant. "Come, let's go" (1 Samuel 9:5–10a).

As Saul and his servant entered the town, they met some girls and asked:

"Is the seer here?" "He is," they answered. "He's ahead of you. Hurry now; he has just come to our town today, for the people have a sacrifice at the high place. As soon as you enter the town, you will find him before he goes up to the high place to eat. The people will not begin eating until he comes, . . ." They went up to the town, and as they were entering it, there was Samuel, coming towards them on his way up to the high place. . . . Now the day before Saul came, the LORD had revealed this to Samuel: "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over my people Israel; he will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked upon my people, for their cry has reached me" (1 Samuel 9:11b–16).

Since Samuel was old at that time, and his sons were wicked, God had allowed the Philistines to take control of Israel again. God was choosing Saul to deliver them from the Philistine oppression. 1 Samuel 9:17–20 says:

When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the LORD said to him, "This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people." Saul approached Samuel in the gateway and asked, "Would you please tell me where the seer's house is?" "I am the seer," Samuel replied.

"Go up ahead of me to the high place . . . and in the morning I will let you go and will tell you all that is in your heart. As for the donkeys you lost three days ago, do not worry about them; they have been found. And to whom is all the desire of Israel turned, if not to you and all your father's family?"

Notice Saul's answer. Saul was a good man at the beginning of this story. He was a big man, but he was also a humble man. Saul gave his answer to Samuel in 1 Samuel 9:21:

" . . . 'But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?'" Notice that he did not ask, "Am I not the least in all of my clan, in all of my family?" Humble men do not lie. He was not the least; he was the biggest, the best, and the greatest in his tribe. Instead, he said that his tribe was the smallest tribe in all of the nation, and his clan was the smallest in all of the tribes. He wondered how Samuel could say that he was to be king. His humility was what actually qualified him to be Israel's king. Jesus' first public words were, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 5:3). It really does not matter what size the man is: it is determined by the smallness of his attitude toward himself. Saul had a big body and a small ego. Samuel began the process of making Saul the new king of Israel:

Then Samuel brought Saul and his servant into the hall and seated them at the head of those who were invited — about thirty in number. Samuel said to the cook, "Bring the piece of meat I gave you, the one I told you to lay aside." So the cook took up the leg with what was on it and set it in front of Saul. Samuel said, "Here is what has been kept for you. Eat, because it was set aside for you for this occasion, from the time I said, 'I have invited guests.'" And Saul

dined with Samuel that day. After they came down from the high place to the town, Samuel talked with Saul on the roof of his house. They rose about daybreak and Samuel called to Saul on the roof, “Get ready, and I will send you on your way.” When Saul got ready, he and Samuel went outside together. As they were going down to the edge of the town, Samuel said to Saul, “Tell the servant to go on ahead of us” — and the servant did so — “but you stay here awhile, so that I may give you a message from God” (1 Samuel 9:22–27).

Samuel anointed Saul privately, and later he would be recognized publicly. The story continues in 1 Samuel 10:1–8:

Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul’s head and kissed him, saying, “Has not the LORD anointed you leader over his inheritance [the inheritance was Israel, God’s people]? When you leave me today, you will meet two men near Rachel’s tomb. . . . [Samuel told Saul this to give him evidence that this was all true.] They will say to you, ‘The donkeys you set out to look for have been found. And now your father has stopped thinking about them and is worried about you. He is asking, ‘What shall I do about my son?’’’ [Those two men would be the first sign.] Then you will go on from there until you reach the great tree of Tabor. Three men going up to God at Bethel will meet you there. One will be carrying three young goats, another three loaves of bread, and another a skin of wine. They will greet you and offer you two loaves of bread, which you will accept from them. [That would be the second sign.] After that you will go to Gibeath of God, where there is a Philistine outpost. As you approach the town, you will meet a

procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, tambourines, flutes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying. [That would be the third sign.] *The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person.* [What had been the secret of all the judges' victories? It had been the Spirit of the Lord coming upon them. This was also going to be the secret of Saul's victory.] *Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you.* [Samuel wanted Saul to know that once these signs had been fulfilled, whatever he did would be blessed by God.] *Go down ahead of me to Gilgal. I will surely come down to you to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, but you must wait seven days until I come to you and tell you what you are to do.*"

So Saul had been privately anointed by God through Samuel to be the leader and king. He looked like a king. He walked like a king. He even thought like a king. He was humble, and he wanted to give God the credit for what he did. He should have stayed that way. Saul began his journey:

As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day. When they arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he joined in their prophesying. When all those who had formerly known him saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, "What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" [God wanted Israel to recognize their king. He wanted them to know that Saul was the king that He was giving to them because they had demanded a king.] *A man who lived there answered,*

“And who is their father?” So it became a saying: “Is Saul also among the prophets?” After Saul stopped prophesying, he went to the high place. Now Saul’s uncle asked him and his servant, “Where have you been?” “Looking for the donkeys,” he said. “But when we saw they were not to be found, we went to Samuel.” Saul’s uncle said, “Tell me what Samuel said to you.” Saul replied, “He assured us that the donkeys had been found.” But he did not tell his uncle what Samuel had said about the kingship. [Saul was still a humble man, so he did not boast about the fact that he would soon be king. Samuel would tell the people when he arrived.] Samuel summoned the people of Israel to the LORD at Mizpah and said to them, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I brought Israel up out of Egypt, and I delivered you from the power of Egypt and all the kingdoms that oppressed you.’ But you have now rejected your God, who saves you out of all your calamities . . . And you have said, ‘No, set a king over us.’ So now present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and clans”

(1 Samuel 10:9–19).

Samuel told Israel that they were going to have the king they wanted, but it was not what God wanted. They had one more chance to deny their desire and to be led by God rather than man. God had chosen a good man. Saul was a big, powerful, and humble man, but he was not what God desired for His people. They had rejected God as being their ruler. People need to be careful of what they want. In the final analysis, God will give His people what they want. The church needs to want the Lord God to reign over them.

1 Samuel 10:20–21 says:

When Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, the tribe of Benjamin was chosen. [They were making a

selection perhaps by casting lots.] Then he brought forward the tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan, and Matri's clan was chosen. Finally Saul son of Kish was chosen. [That was power in the hand of God.] But when they looked for him, he was not to be found.

That showed Saul's humility. He knew that they were going to choose him as king, but because he did not want to be king, he was not there. A good leader is someone who accepts his job the job as an assignment rather than as a political position. The account in I Samuel continues:

So they inquired further of the LORD, "Has the man come here yet?" And the LORD said, "Yes, he has hidden himself among the baggage." They ran and brought him out, and as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others. Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see the man the LORD has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people." Then the people shouted, "Long live the king!" [Saul looked like a king. He was not a ruddy kid like David would be. Saul looked like he could conquer any enemy. This was the kind of king Israel was looking for.] Samuel explained to the people the regulations of the kingship. He wrote them down on a scroll and deposited it before the LORD. Then Samuel dismissed the people, each to his own home (1 Samuel 10:22–25).

The “*regulations of the kingship*” were the things that Samuel had told them regarding the kind of king they would have. The king was going to take their sons for his army and their daughters to be his servants, his cooks, his bakers, and his perfume makers. He would take their lands and crops and make them poor. Samuel wrote all that down and laid it before the people. The people could have still said no to their desire to have a king, but they did not.

1 Samuel 10:26–27 continues:

Saul also went to his home in Gibeah, accompanied

by valiant men [those would have been his inner army or personal guards] whose hearts God had touched. But some troublemakers [this is translated in the NIV as “troublemakers” — the Hebrew language says “some worthless men” — or men who were worth absolutely nothing] said, “How can this fellow save us?” They despised him and brought him no gifts. But Saul kept silent.

The Hebrew language had some humor in it. The text says, “*But Saul kept silent.*” A better translation would be, “But Saul pretended as if he were deaf.” When worthless fellows speak, what do people do? They act like they are deaf. A worthless person’s accusation is worth exactly what he is worth — nothing. So Saul played like he was deaf. Saul did not have the support of everybody in the land accepting him as king, so the first war that he would fight would be a war that he would need to win so that the people would recognize him as king.

God’s Choice Vindicated

Saul’s first war was with the Ammonites. They were the people produced by the incestuous relationship between Lot and his youngest daughter. They were fighting against one of the cities that belonged to Saul. 1 Samuel 11:6b says, “. . . the Spirit of God came upon him in power . . .” This was the secret of Saul’s victory. Saul told his messengers to tell the men of Jabesh Gilead that he would be there the next day to deliver them. So Saul marched all night long and “. . . separated his men into three divisions; during the last watch of the night . . .” (1 Samuel 11:11a). Saul must have been studying Joshua’s battle plans, because early in the morning the three companies attacked “. . . the Ammonites and slaughtered them . . . Those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together” (1 Samuel 11:11b). It is possible that this phrase “no two of them were left together” is an idiom, or it could be a literal translation. Either way, they were put in such holy fear that they fled in a totally disorganized way. If the phrase is literal, everybody fled by himself. There was absolutely no union there. They brought Saul to Samuel and said:

... Who was it that asked, "Shall Saul reign over us?" Bring these men to us and we will put them to death." But Saul said, "No one shall be put to death today, for this day the LORD has rescued Israel" (1 Samuel 11:12b-13).

If Saul had memorized that sentence and kept thinking in that way, he would have been alright all the days of his life.

Then all of Israel recognized the fact that Saul was king. He had won his first war against the Ammonites. Saul was going to be involved in seven wars very quickly. That first war with the Ammonites strengthened him as king.

1 Samuel 12 contains Samuel's farewell speech. 1 Samuel 13 contains Samuel's rebuke of Saul because he had not fought the way he should have. 1 Samuel 13 also relates the account of the first Philistine war, which caused the people to reject Saul.

Saul Rejected as King

The First Philistine War—Saul's House Rejected

1 Samuel 13 tells of the Philistine response to their outpost having been attacked: "*The Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore*" (1 Samuel 13:5a). Their situation was critical. Saul was waiting at Gilgal for Samuel. 1 Samuel 13:8a says, "*He waited seven days . . . but Samuel did not come . . .*" Since Samuel had not come, Saul offered the sacrifice. Just as Saul finished offering the sacrifice, Samuel came to him and asked him why he had offered the sacrifice. Saul replied that he had waited for Samuel, but he had not arrived by the appointed time. He told Samuel that the people were scattering from him, so he had to do it. He had violated the will and the law of God in order to keep himself surrounded by the army. He had trusted himself and his army, but he had not trusted God.

Samuel said:

"You acted foolishly . . . You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he

would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people [this had not yet happened, but it would], because you have not kept the LORD's command." Then Samuel left Gilgal and went up to Gibeath in Benjamin, and Saul counted the men who were with him. They numbered about six hundred (1 Samuel 13:13–15).

Samuel was telling Saul that if he had kept the law and waited for him, then his kingdom would have been made steadfast and would have endured, but because he had sinned, his kingdom would fall.

Saul's Foolish Zeal

Saul then had only 600 men in his army against three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. Saul's son, Jonathan, made the suggestion to his armor-bearer that they should go up to a Philistine garrison at Micmash. He said that if the Philistines called down and told them to come up and fight, then that would be the sign that God would deliver them into their hands. If the Philistines told them to stay there, however, then they would not go up to them. Jonathan believed that God had delivered them into his hands. He called up to the Philistine camp, and they said:

... "Come up to us and we'll teach you a lesson." So Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "Climb up after me". . . . Jonathan climbed up, using his hands and feet, with his armor-bearer right behind him. The Philistines fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer followed and killed behind him. [Perhaps Jonathan was using a stick to hit the Philistines and cause them to fall. His armor-bearer was behind him with the sword.] In that first attack Jonathan and his armor-bearer killed some twenty men in an area of about half an acre. Then panic struck the whole army. . . . It was a panic sent by God" (1 Samuel 14:12b–15).

The Philistines began to flee and Saul's men began to chase and kill them. The war was going well, so Saul told the Israelites that they needed to fight as long as that day went on. He said they had to defeat them that day. He told them that if anybody ate anything, then they would have to die at Saul's hand. Jonathan saw some honey on the ground and put his spear into the honey to taste it. His strength was renewed, and he fought harder. A soldier reported to Saul that someone had eaten. Saul said that whoever had done it must die. The people cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonathan. Saul told Jonathan that he would have to die. The people said they were not going to let Saul kill Jonathan because Jonathan had brought them victory that day. 1 Samuel 14:45b says, "*So the men rescued Jonathan, and he was not put to death.*" Saul could not even get his army to follow his commands.

After that battle with the Philistines, there were three quick wars: the Moabite war, the Edomite war, and the Syrian war. Saul took all of the land east of the Jordan. He took the land south of the Dead Sea. He took the land in the middle between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea.

Saul's Blatant Rebellion

In 1 Samuel 15, Saul fought the war with the Amalekites (in the exodus from Egypt, the Amalekites had been the ones that Joshua had met, and God had told Joshua that they would take care of those people later). God told Saul that He wanted him to go against the Amalekites. He said He wanted Saul to kill man, woman, and child. He did not want anybody spared. Saul did not follow God's commands. He brought back Agag (the king), the women, the cattle, and all the good things. Saul's army only destroyed the shameful things and the things they did not want. When Samuel came into the camp, Saul told him that they had won a great victory for God. He said he had done what God had told him to do. 1 Samuel 15:14 gives Samuel's response: "*But Samuel said, 'What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?'*" Saul replied, in essence: "It is the people's fault. I tried, but the soldiers brought all this back with them." Samuel told Saul that because he had done this, God had rejected him as king. He said that Saul was no longer king. He said that God had already

Rejected his house and how He would reject him. He told Saul that God had someone among them who would be king over all of His people.

David Anointed at Bethlehem

God had rejected Saul as king over Israel, so He sent Samuel to Bethlehem where Jesse lived with his sons. God showed Samuel that David, Jesse's youngest son, was the one to be anointed. Samuel took a horn of oil and anointed David. From that day forward, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him. The Spirit of the Lord had left Saul, and he was tormented by an evil spirit from the Lord. David, the son of Jesse, was chosen to play the harp before Saul to soothe his heart. Saul liked David so much that he made David one of his armor-bearers.

Saul's Leadership Weakens

Saul sent David to battle against the Philistines. God routed the Philistines by David's hand, and it was a victory like they had not seen since Samson's day. The Philistines fell before David as they had fallen before Samson. When David came back into the camp, the people were singing, “. . . *Saul has slain his thousands* [Saul was proud when he heard thousands had been attributed to him, but then he heard . . .], and *David his tens of thousands*” (1 Samuel 18:7b). Saul wondered what the people would give David then. 1 Samuel 18:8b continues Saul's thought, “‘*What more can he get but the kingdom?*’” Saul knew somebody was going to get the kingdom. There was a man who the people were honoring above him, so Saul was very suspicious. He was afraid this ruddy lad, who was one of his generals who had defeated the Philistines, would be the very one who would take his throne. Saul began to eye David jealously from that time forward.

In the Ammonite war, Saul had strengthened his position as king. In the first Philistine war, Saul's house had been rejected. In the Amalekite war, Saul himself had been rejected. In the second Philistine war, it was becoming clear that God had accepted David. From that day forward, Saul began to plot how to kill David. The next chapter of this study will cover Saul chasing David through sixteen stations in an attempt to kill him.

Saul's Reign (2)—The First King

Introduction

Chapter 8 in this study covered Saul's wars. The last war that Saul fought, before David really became the key character in this study of Bible history, was the second Philistine war. During that war between the Israelites and the Philistines, David and Goliath fought perhaps the most famous battle ever fought (cf. 1 Samuel 17). The Philistines encamped in the Valley of Elah and drew their battle line against the Israelites. The Philistines occupied one hill, and the Israelites occupied another hill. The battle took place in the valley below.

Saul's Faltering Leadership and David's Rise to Prominence

The Arrogant Challenge of Goliath

The story of David and Goliath begins in 1 Samuel 17:4–11:

A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall. [The Hebrew says 6 cubits and a span. This would have made him about 3 meters or 9 feet 6 inches tall.] He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels [that was about 125 pounds, or 57.5 kilograms]; on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. His spear shaft was like a weaver's rod, and its iron point

weighed six hundred shekels [that was 15 pounds, or 6.9 kilograms]. His shield-bearer went ahead of him. [This was one big man. He was over 9 feet tall, his armor weighed more than 125 pounds, and the head of his spear weighed over 15 pounds.] *Goliath stood [in the valley] and shouted to the ranks of Israel, ‘Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us.’ Then the Philistine said [this one single Philistine challenged the Israelite army], ‘This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other.’* [If Saul had still had the spirit of God, his 6-foot-plus stature would have been more than enough to take care of this 9-foot-plus giant.] *On hearing the Philistine’s words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.*

The Mission of David

It is interesting that the huge army of Israel was terrified. The true hero of the story was a single shepherd boy:

Now David was the son of an Ephrathite named Jesse, who was from Bethlehem in Judah. Jesse had eight sons, and in Saul’s time he was old and well advanced in years. Jesse’s three oldest sons had followed Saul to the war: The firstborn was Eliab; the second, Abinadab; and the third, Shammah. David was the youngest. The three oldest followed Saul, but David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father’s sheep at Bethlehem. [David played the harp to soothe Saul’s evil spirit and also tended his father’s sheep.] For forty days the Philistine came forward ever morning and evening and took his stand. Now Jesse

said to his son David, “Take this ephah of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread for your brothers and hurry to their camp. Take along these ten cheeses to the commander . . . See how your brothers are . . .” Early in the morning David left . . . He reached the camp as the army was going out to its battle positions . . . Israel and the Philistines were drawing up their lines facing each other. David left his things with the keeper of supplies, ran to the battle lines and greeted his brothers. As he was talking with them, Goliath [the 9-foot-6-inch giant], the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it. When the Israelites saw the man, they all ran from him in great fear. Now the Israelites had been saying, “Do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to defy Israel. The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his father’s family from taxes in Israel.” [This was a gift that would give David great wealth. He would get the king’s daughter, and he would not have to pay any more taxes.] David asked the men standing near him, “What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1 Samuel 17:12–26).

David was basically saying: “I do not care if he is 9 feet 6 inches tall. I do not care if he has 125 pounds of armor. I do not care if he has a spear, the head of which weighs 15 pounds. I do not care about any of that. This guy is uncircumcised. He cannot stand before the people of God.” The account continues in 1 Samuel 17:27–29:

They repeated to him what they had been saying and

told him, “This is what will be done for the man who kills him.” When Eliab, David’s oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men . . . [he said,] ‘. . . I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle.’ “Now what have I done?” said David. “Can’t I even speak?” [the elder brother was either jealous or angry].

David continued to ask others about this giant. Someone overheard David and told Saul. Saul asked David to come to him. Their discussion is recorded in 1 Samuel 17:32–40:

David said to Saul, “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.” [David was a ruddy little kid who was essentially saying, “Do not worry; I can take care of him.” He was a simple shepherd boy talking to the over-six-foot-tall giant who was the king of Israel.] Saul replied, “. . . you are only a boy . . .” [Saul wondered how a shepherd boy would take care of this 9-foot-6-inch Philistine who had been a warrior since he was a boy.] But David said to Saul, “Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep . . . Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” Saul said to David [Saul was desperate], “Go, and the LORD be with you.” Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them. [The

Hebrew text says, “He tried to go and could not.” David tried to walk around with the armor on.] “*I cannot go in these,*” he said to Saul, “*because I am not used to them.*” So he took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd’s bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.

There was only one giant, so why did David pick up five stones? This giant had either four brothers or four sons depending on how one reads it (cf. 1 Chronicles 20:4–8). Perhaps David took one stone for the giant, and one stone for each of his four brothers or four sons.

The Battle and Victory

David went out to meet the Philistine. The Philistine mocked David and cursed him saying:

“*Come here . . . and I’ll give your flesh to the birds of the air . . . !*” David said to the Philistine, “*You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air* [Instead of David’s body, the birds would be eating the Philistine armies’ carcasses.] *All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD’s, and he will give all of you into our hands*” (1 Samuel 17:44–47).

It would be wonderful if all the world could live by 1 Samuel 17:47. All the world needs to know is that it is by the

power of God that we live and not by the sword or the spear or by our power.

The Philistine ran toward David. David ran toward the Philistine. David took a stone out of his pouch, put it in his sling, swung the sling over his head, and threw the stone. The stone struck the Philistine in the forehead and killed him. 1 Samuel 17:51 says:

David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine's sword and drew it from the scabbard. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword. When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran.

This ruddy kid had killed this giant of a man. How? He had gone with the Lord. Then the Israelites chased and destroyed the Philistines.

The King and His Rival

The Friendship of Jonathan

After David returned from battling Goliath, Saul asked to speak with him:

"Whose son are you, young man?" Saul asked him. David said, "I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem." After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself (1 Samuel 17:58–18:1).

David and Jonathan made a covenant together which meant that all of Jonathan's enemies would become David's enemies. All of their friends would become each other's mutual friends. Their money would be mutually shared, and they would take care of the other's family if one of them died. Jonathan gave David his robe, tunic, sword, bow, and his belt

as a sign of the covenant. Whatever David went to do, God went with him.

The Adoration of Israel

1 Samuel 18:5 says: “*Whatever Saul sent him to do, David did it so successfully that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the people, and Saul’s officers as well.*” When the women of Israel went out to greet Saul, they began to sing a song: “‘*Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands. ’ Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him . . . And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David. The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul*’” (1 Samuel 18:7b–10a). This was a turning point in Saul’s life. He tried to kill David twice by nailing him to a wall with his spear: “‘. . . But David eluded him twice. Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with David but had left Saul’” (1 Samuel 18:11b–12).

The Love of Michal

Saul did not give Merab to be David’s wife as he had promised (because David refused out of humility). David later married Michal, another of Saul’s daughters who was in love with David.

Saul’s Pursuit of David

Jonathan continued to be David’s protector and pled with Saul not to kill David. Saul then even tried to kill Jonathan. This was a tragic hour in Saul’s life. This humble giant had become a proud peacock of a man, so from that time forward, Saul continued to try to kill David. The pursuit of David by Saul is covered in 1 Samuel 19–27. David showed himself to be not only king quality but merciful in all of his treatment of Saul, who was trying to kill him. There were sixteen stations in this pursuit, which will be briefly covered below.

The first station was **Gibeah**, the hometown of Saul. Saul continued to try to kill David. He made an oath (or swore) that “. . . ‘As surely as the Lord lives, David will not be put to death’” (1 Samuel 19:6). Yet, time and time again he tried to kill David. Time and time again Michal, who was by that time his wife, and Jonathan, his covenant brother, tried to save David (cf. 1 Samuel 19:1–17).

David went to **Ramah** to visit Samuel for the last time. Saul even went to Ramah to try to kill David. The spirit of the Lord came upon Saul and all the men that he had sent to kill David, and they all prophesied. This happened so that Saul would know that when he was doing God’s will, he would be blessed, and when he was not, he would be cursed (cf. 1 Samuel 19:18–24).

David went back to **Gibeah** to find out whether or not Saul was really going to continue to try to kill him or if he was going to accept him as a loyal captain or general of high rank in his army. He asked Jonathan to go and talk to his father. David wanted Jonathan to ask what he had done — what evil thing had he done against Saul. David wanted Jonathan, in essence, to say on his behalf: “Have I not served you as a loyal soldier? Have I not been faithful to every command that you have given me?” The answers to those questions were all yes. David had no intense hatred toward Saul and no desire to be king. He just desired to serve God and His anointed one. Saul had sworn earlier that he would not try to kill David (cf. 1 Samuel 19:6). David knew down deep within himself that this was a lie.

Jonathan told David that he would go to his father. He said that if things were alright, he would come out and, after shooting three arrows, tell his young man that the arrows were on the near side of him. He said that if he told the young man that they were beyond him, however, that would mean that his father, Saul, still wanted to kill David. As Jonathan was pleading for David’s life, Saul threw his spear at him (this may have been the same moment that the evil spirit of Jehovah came upon Saul). So Jonathan told his boy that the arrows were

beyond him. Jonathan sent the boy back home so that he and David could meet. They made a last covenant together. Jonathan would not pursue David for wrong, and David would not pursue Jonathan or his family for wrong. They agreed that neither of them would harm anyone within each other's family.

David made this covenant and kept it faithfully. David knew that he would have to spend the rest of Saul's life running from Saul. Saul was always the "spear thrower." David and Jonathan were the "spear dodgers." They were not warriors trying to kill their own kin as Saul was. Saul had been so disturbed by another person's success that he had become a murderer (cf. 1 Samuel 20:1–42).

Then David left Gibeah and went to a place called **Nob**, which was a priestly place. There, Ahimelech the priest helped David by providing him with a place to stay. Ahimelech fed David the showbread (this was the bread that showed God's presence) which was unlawful for David to eat, but man takes precedence over the law (cf. Matthew 12:1–8). So David and his men were sustained by the showbread, but Saul heard that Ahimelech had helped David. Ahimelech would be in trouble later. Saul came to Nob, chasing David. David fled Nob so that Ahimelech and his family would not be destroyed (cf. 1 Samuel 21:1–9).

David fled to **Gath**. David's small army threatened the king of Gath, and he was going to kill David. David pretended that he was crazy. He slobbered all over his beard and acted like a crazy man. The king of Gath basically asked: "Do I not have enough crazy men in my court already? Why have you brought me this guy? I do not lack for crazy men." Then he let David go. David was a smart fellow. He recognized the fact that his life was in danger from this Philistine, so he pretended to be mad (cf. 1 Samuel 21:10–15).

David then fled to the cave of **Adullam**. Everybody that was in distress or depressed or in debt came to David. Desperate men joined this desperate man in the cave. In a short while, David would have 400 men who could conquer anybody

anywhere in any battle. Men reduced to holy desperation have to trust God. That was what David and these 400 men would do from then on. Sometimes there would be 600 men, but often 200 of them would be left behind somewhere. These 400 men were David's expert troops, and they were led by 38 mighty men (cf. 1 Samuel 22:1–2).

David gathered his army and fled Adullam and went to **Mizpah**. He left his family in safe-keeping at Mizpah. He knew they would be safe there because that was where Saul had been anointed. It was a priestly and honorable place (cf. 1 Samuel 22:3–5).

David fled again to the forest of **Hereth**. At about that time, Saul gave the order to slay Ahimelech and the other priests from Nob. While he was in the forest of Hereth, David heard that Saul had slain the priest, Ahimelech of Nob (cf. 1 Samuel 22:6–23).

Next David fled to **Keilah** where he saved that entire city. When David heard that Saul was planning to come to Keilah and the city would be threatened by Saul's large army, he left again. He did not want anybody harmed because of Saul's hatred for him (cf. 1 Samuel 23:1–13).

David fled next to **Ziph** where he and his men stayed in the desert strongholds and in the hills. Jonathan came to David at Horesh, and they talked to one another for the last time. He encouraged David, and they renewed their covenant (cf. 1 Samuel 23:14–23).

Then David and his men went to the Desert of **Maon**. Saul pursued David there. Saul had David in his hand, but the people of Maon went out and fought Saul for just a moment, and David fled (cf. 1 Samuel 23:24–28).

Saul went into a cave in the Desert of **En Gedi** (where he was looking for David) to relieve himself. David and his men were hidden further back inside the cave. David crept up behind Saul and cut off a bit of his garment without Saul even knowing it. David's men wanted David to kill Saul, but David said, “... *The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my*

master, the Lord's anointed . . . ” (1 Samuel 24:6b). So David stepped outside the cave and asked whose garment that had been. Saul had to say it was his, and David asked Saul if he had done wrong to him. Saul said that David had not. David pleaded with Saul to spare his life. Then Saul asked David to swear to him that he would not destroy his family. David gave his oath to Saul. One man would keep his oath, but the other man would not. David kept his oath and never pursued Saul's family. Saul continued to pursue David (cf. 1 Samuel 24:1–22).

David had peace for a while and went to **Carmel**. David married Abigail while he was there. She was his third wife, according to scripture. David heard of Samuel's death while he was at Carmel (cf. 1 Samuel 25:1–44).

Once again, David fled to **Ziph**. David spared Saul again, and once again Saul admitted he had been wrong and swore he would not pursue David anymore. David said he would not hurt any of Saul's family. One man kept his oath, but the other man did not (cf. 1 Samuel 26:1–25).

David decided to leave Israel, and he went to the city of **Gath** in the land of the Philistines. This was the chief Philistine city. David asked for and was given refuge (cf. 1 Samuel 27:1–4). David asked Achish, the king of Gath, to give him a town to live in. Achish gave David the town of **Ziklag**. David lived among the Philistines. David and his men joined themselves to the Philistines so that when the Philistines went out to war, they went with them. David helped the Philistines again and again (cf. 1 Samuel 27:5–12).

The Philistine Invasion

When the Philistines were preparing to fight against Israel, Achish, the king of Gath, made David his bodyguard. The Hebrew soldiers marched in the rear of the Philistine army with Achish (cf. 1 Samuel 28:1–2).

Samuel had died, so Saul was not able to go and talk to

him personally about what he should do. Saul could not find a righteous prophet in all of his land to ask about God's will. Saul inquired of God, but God did not answer. One of his men told him that there was a witch, a woman who was a medium, in the city of Endor. Saul disguised himself so that the woman would not know it was him. He told her that he wanted her to inquire of her spirits for him. She told him that Saul had said that anybody who used a medium was going to be killed, so she could not do it. He assured her that she would have no problem with Saul. The witch began her magic, and Samuel appeared. The text says that she was frightened and surprised. She had not expected anything to happen because she had practiced this evil deed for years and nothing had happened before. Samuel was there, and he spoke to Saul. This was the last Word of God to Saul. He told Saul very plainly:

“Because you did not obey the LORD or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites [he had not killed all of them], the LORD has done this to you today. The LORD will hand over both Israel and you to the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me [Saul and his sons, in other words, were going to die]. The LORD will also hand over the army of Israel to the Philistines” (1 Samuel 28:18–19).

When the woman saw that it was Saul, she begged for her life. She fed him, and that same night he got up and left (cf. 1 Samuel 28:3–25).

Saul went out to fight the Philistines one last time. Before the battle began, Achish sent David and his men home to Ziklag. David asked why he was being sent home. He reminded Achish that he had always been loyal to the men of Gath. The Philistines did not want to fight the Israelites with David and his men. David would have made a mistake by going to war against Saul because he had made a covenant that he would not fight Saul or Saul's family. So God used the good sense of the

men of Gath to preserve David from the sin that he would have committed (cf. 1 Samuel 29:1–11).

David had fought with the men of Gath all during that time. After they sent him home, he did not want to stand around and do nothing. He went out against the Amalekites and defeated them. He was working for the preservation of his kingdom even before he had it (cf. 1 Samuel 30:1–31).

The Philistines fought against Jonathan, Saul, and the army of Israel. They defeated them so severely that Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malki-Shua were all killed. The fighting grew so fierce around Saul that they wounded him critically. 1 Samuel 31:4–13 says:

Saul said to his armor-bearer, “Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me.” But his armor-bearer was terrified and would not do it; so Saul took his own sword and fell on it [Saul committed suicide]. When the armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died with him. . . . When the Israelites . . . saw . . . that Saul and his sons had died, they abandoned their towns and fled. And the Philistines came and occupied them. The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the dead, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. They cut off his head and stripped off his armor, and they sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to proclaim the news in the temple of their idols and among their people. They put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths and fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan [they were dishonoring Saul before all the land to show that the Philistines had defeated Israel and their God]. When the people of Jabesh Gilead [that was the first city that Saul had righteously delivered] heard of what the Philistines had done to Saul They took down the bodies of

Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth Shan and . . . burned them. Then they took their bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted seven days."

Saul, the king of Israel, was dead. He had started as a righteous, effective servant of God but had taken the credit that had belonged to God for himself. He died by suicide in shame and ridicule. God can use people in mighty ways. If those people love Him and are faithful and constantly give Him the credit (taking no credit for themselves), He will continually bless them.

David's Reign (1)

Introduction

Chapter 9 in this study completed the account of the reign of Saul. Chapters 10–13 will cover the reign of David. When Saul died, it was evident that he had been cursed by God. The Philistines had again taken control of Israel. God had called to the throne a young man named David of the house of Jesse. He had been anointed by Samuel and would now be the king. The story of David's reign begins in 2 Samuel.

David's Reign Over Judah Alone

David Mourns for Saul and Jonathan

David did not find out about Saul's death until a man from Saul's camp came to Ziklag. David and all the men with him mourned and wept over the death of Saul and Jonathan. David had nothing against Saul even though Saul had chased him and tried to kill him all those years. His heart was still turned toward Saul, and he loved Jonathan as his own soul. 2 Samuel 1:1–14 says:

After the death of Saul, David returned from defeating the Amalekites and stayed in Ziklag two days. On the third day a man arrived from Saul's camp, with his clothes torn and with dust on his head. When he came to David, he fell to the ground to pay him honor. "Where have you come from?" David asked him. He answered, "I have escaped from the Israelite camp." "What happened?" David asked. "Tell me." He said, "The men fled from the battle.

Many of them fell and died. And Saul and his son Jonathan are dead.” Then David said . . . “How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?”

“I happened to be on Mount Gilboa,” the young man said, “and there was Saul, leaning on his spear, with the chariots and riders almost upon him. When he turned around and saw me, he called out . . . ‘Who are you?’ ‘An Amalekite,’ I answered. Then he said to me, ‘Stand over me and kill me! I am in the throes of death, but I’m still alive.’ “So I stood over him and killed him, because I knew that after he had fallen he could not survive. [That was a lie. Saul had killed himself, but the man was looking for honor from David. He thought that David and Saul were enemies.] And I took the crown that was on his head and the band on his arm and have brought them here to my lord.” Then David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them. They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the LORD and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. David said to the young man . . . “Where are you from?” “I am the son of an alien, an Amalekite,” he answered. David asked him, “Why were you not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the LORD’s anointed?”

David did not see things as the Amalekite did. He did not see it as an honorable thing that this man wanted to take credit for killing Saul. David had the opportunity to kill Saul twice and had not. Why would he honor this man for killing him? The remainder of 2 Samuel 1 describes David's subsequent actions:

Then David called one of his men and said, “Go, strike him down!” So he struck him down, and he

died. For David had said to him, “Your blood be on your own head. Your own mouth testified against you when you said, ‘I killed the LORD’s anointed.’” David took up this lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan, and ordered that the men of Judah be taught this lament of the bow (it is written in the Book of Jashar): “Your glory, O Israel, lies slain on your heights. How the mighty have fallen! Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon [do not tell the enemies about this, in other words], lest the daughters of the Philistines be glad, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice. . . . Saul and Jonathan—in life they were loved and gracious, and in death they were not parted. They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. O daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold. How the mighty have fallen in battle! Jonathan lies slain on your heights. I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women. How the mighty have fallen! The weapons of war have perished!” (2 Samuel 1:15–20, 23–27).

David described the love of a friend that had been deeper than the love of a woman. David did not believe that he had gained anything in Saul’s death. He believed the deaths of Saul and Jonathan were a great loss to Israel. David was still living in Ziklag, the land of the Philistines. David went up to Hebron and was appointed king over all of Judah.

David’s Reign Challenged

2 Samuel 2:1–4a relates the story of David being anointed king of Judah:

In the course of time, David inquired of the LORD.

“Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah?” he asked. The LORD said, “Go up.” David asked, “Where shall I go?” “To Hebron,” the LORD answered. So David went up there with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel. David also took the men who were with him, each with his family, and they settled in Hebron and its towns. Then the men of Judah came to Hebron and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.

David had been anointed by God through Samuel’s hands as the king of all the land, but this was recognition by Judah, the southern part of the Promised Land.

David sent a message to the men of Jabesh Gilead when he found out that they were the ones who had buried Saul: *“Now then, be strong and brave, for Saul your master is dead, and the house of Judah has anointed me king over them”* (2 Samuel 2:7).

Now Abner, who had been the captain of Saul’s army, took Ish-Bosheth, the last surviving son of Saul, and made him king over Gilead, Ephraim, Benjamin, and all of Israel. There were two kings then: David, the king over only Judah, and Ish-Bosheth, the king over everything else. Ish-Bosheth reigned for two years. David reigned over Judah seven years and six months (cf. 2 Samuel 2:11). There was warfare, jealousy, and fighting between the house of Abner and the house of Joab. Joab was the captain of David’s army. The three brothers that were David’s generals in his army were Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. Abner met Joab and said:

... “Let’s have some of the young men get up and fight hand to hand in front of us.” ... So they stood up and were counted off—twelve men for Benjamin and Ish-bosheth son of Saul, and twelve for David. Then each man grabbed his opponent by the head and

thrust his dagger into his opponent's side, and they fell down together. So that place in Gibeon was called Helkath Hazzurim [24 men died that day, so that place was called the “field of daggers” or the “field of hostility” and a battle began]. The battle that day was very fierce, and Abner and the men of Israel were defeated by David's men. The three sons of Zeruiah were there: Joab, Abishai and Asahel. Now Asahel was as fleet-footed as a wild gazelle. He chased Abner [who was running away], turning neither to the right nor to the left as he pursued him. Abner looked behind him and asked, “Is that you, Asahel?” “It is,” he answered. Then Abner said to him, “Turn aside to the right or to the left; take on one of the young men and strip him of his weapons [Abner did not want to kill Asahel]; But Asahel would not stop chasing him. Again Abner warned Asahel, “Stop chasing me! Why should I strike you down? How could I look your brother Joab in the face?” But Asahel refused to give up the pursuit; so Abner thrust the butt [not the head with the iron point on it, but the end] of his spear into Asahel's stomach, and the spear came out through his back [because of the force of the army running toward him]. He fell there and died on the spot [that was going to cause trouble since Abner had killed Joab's brother]. . . . But Joab and Abishai pursued Abner. . . . Abner called out to Joab, “Must the sword devour forever? Don't you realize that this will end in bitterness? How long before you order your men to stop pursuing their brothers?” Joab answered, “As surely as God lives, if you had not spoken, the men would have continued the pursuit of their brothers until morning” (2 Samuel 2:14b–27).

Joab told Abner that he would have surely killed him that day. So Joab blew the trumpet and did not pursue Israel, nor did

the men fight anymore. Joab spared Abner, but Joab never forgot. Joab was not a righteous man, but he was a good warrior. 2 Samuel 2:30–3:1 says:

Then Joab returned from pursuing Abner and assembled all his men. Besides Asahel, nineteen of David's men were found missing. But David's men had killed three hundred and sixty Benjamites who were with Abner. . . . Then Joab and his men marched all night and arrived at Hebron by daybreak. The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time. David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker [that would be for two years because Ish-Bosheth would reign for two years].

David's Reign Solidified

2 Samuel 3:6–7a begins the story of Abner's cooperation with David: “*During the war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner had been strengthening his own position in the house of Saul. Now Saul had had a concubine . . .*” Ish-bosheth accused Abner of sleeping with his father’s concubine. Abner became very angry because he had not slept with Rizpah. Abner told Ish-bosheth that he could have handed him over to David a long time before that. The story continues:

“May God deal with Abner, be it ever so severely, if I do not do for David what the LORD promised him on oath and transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and establish David's throne over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beersheba.” Ish-bosheth did not dare to say another word to Abner, because he was afraid of him. Then Abner sent messengers on his behalf to say to David, “Whose land is it? Make an agreement with me, and I will help you bring all Israel over to you.” “Good,” said David. “I will make an agreement with

you.” . . . Abner conferred with the elders of Israel . . . Abner also spoke to the Benjamites . . . Then he went to Hebron to tell David everything that Israel and the whole house of Benjamin wanted to do (2 Samuel 3:9–13a, 17a, 19).

So David made a feast for Abner and accepted Abner as a part of his army. David promised Abner that he could work and be a general in his army. David sent Abner home in peace. It is important to know that there was no warfare between David and Abner. There was peace between David’s house and Abner’s house, but Joab was not going to allow that to continue. Joab did not want a rival to be the captain of David’s army.

2 Samuel 3:24–29 relates the story of Joab’s revenge on Abner:

So Joab went to the king and said, “What have you done? Look, Abner came to you. Why did you let him go? Now he is gone! You know Abner son of Ner; he came to deceive you and observe your movements and find out everything you are doing” [Joab might even have believed that since he was a general and a warrior rather than the wise counselor and king that David was]. Joab then left David and sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the well of Sirah. But David did not know it. Now when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into the gateway, as though to speak with him privately. And there, to avenge the blood of his brother Asahel, Joab stabbed him in the stomach, and he died. Later, when David heard about this, he said, “. . . May Joab’s house never be without someone who has a running sore or leprosy or who leans on a crutch or who falls by the sword or who lacks food.”

David was angry with Joab because of what he had done to his friend, Abner. Joab felt like he was the avenger of blood by avenging Asahel's blood, but that blood had been shed in war. He had no right to shed the blood of his enemy during a time of peace. 2 Samuel 3:32 says: "*They buried Abner in Hebron, and the king wept aloud at Abner's tomb. All the people wept also.*"

All the people encouraged David to eat, but David had taken an oath to eat nothing before the sun set. 2 Samuel 3:36–37 says:

All the people took note and were pleased; indeed, everything the king did pleased them. So on that day all the people and all Israel knew that the king had no part in the murder of Abner son of Ner.

The only one who could challenge David's right to the throne was Ish-Bosheth, the son of Saul. Ish-Bosheth had refused to act like a righteous man, so he was murdered. Once he was gone, there was no one else but David to take the throne.

The Union of Palestine Under David's Rule

Coronation at Hebron

David was appointed at Hebron to be the king, not just of Judah, but of Judah and Israel. He reigned a total of forty years:

David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned for forty years. In Hebron he reigned over Judah for seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah for thirty-three years (2 Samuel 5:4–5).

David went from Hebron in the South up to Jerusalem, at

the northern end of the Dead Sea, and became the ruler of all of Israel and Judah.

Capture of Jerusalem

David promised that whoever led the attack on the hill of Zion would be his commander-in-chief (cf. 1 Chronicles 11:4-9). Joab wanted to be commander-in-chief no matter what it took, so he and a small army of men marched up the hill of Mount Zion and defeated the Jebusite fortress that had stood there since Joshua's day. David appointed Joab to be the captain of all of his empire. Zion (Jerusalem) became David's home.

Recognition by Hiram and Growth in the Family

Hiram, the king of Tyre, sent messengers to David along with men and supplies to help him build a palace in Jerusalem. This became his home. He took more wives and concubines, and more sons and daughters were born to him.

Victories Over the Philistines

Then David fought some wars of union. He fought not only the Jebusite war, but he also fought the Philistine war. David put his chief enemies under his control. 2 Samuel 5:17-25 says:

When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, they went up in full force to search for him, but David heard about it and went down to the stronghold. Now the Philistines had come and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim; so David inquired of the LORD, “Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?” [It is good to see that David was not like Saul. He did not go to battle without the Lord’s permission. Every time he got ready to go to war, he asked God.] The LORD answered him, “Go, for I will surely hand the

Philistines over to you.” So David went to Baal Perazim, and there he defeated them. He said, “As waters break out, the LORD has broken out against my enemies before me.” So that place was called Baal Perazim [which meant “the Lord who breaks out”]. The Philistines abandoned their idols there, and David and his men carried them off. [The Philistines had the ark of the covenant, and now David had all of their idols.] Once more the Philistines came up and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim; so David inquired of the LORD, and he answered, “Do not go straight up, but circle around behind them and attack them in front of the balsam trees. As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, move quickly, because that will mean the LORD has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army.” So David did as the LORD commanded him, and he struck down the Philistines all the way from Gibeon to Gezer.

David had to fight two battles to totally defeat the Philistines. Each time, before he went to war, he inquired of God what he should do.

David Recaptures the Ark

David had defeated his prime enemy, but he had left the ark at Kiriyath-Jearim. The ark was not in the tabernacle, which literally meant that God was not yet fully among His people. The ark had to be in the tabernacle. There had to be *shekinah*, the glory of God, that was upon the ark of the covenant. This glory had to be upon the mercy seat to change the judgment of God into mercy for Israel. 2 Samuel 6:1–5 begins the story of the recovery of the ark:

David again brought together out of Israel chosen men, thirty thousand in all. He and all his men set out

*from Baalah of Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name [the Hebrew name would be **Jehovah**], the name of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim that are on the ark. [It was very important for the Israelites to get the ark back.] They set the ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. [That was a big mistake! They had not sought God's instructions "... about how to do it in the prescribed way" (1 Chronicles 15:13b). The laws of God stated that poles of the acacia wood should be placed through the golden rings on both sides of the ark. The Levites should have borne that ark upon their shoulders. Instead, the Israelites decided to move it in a more effective and secure way, so they put it on a new cart.] Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart with the ark of God on it [they should have been carrying the ark on their shoulders], and Ahio was walking in front of it. David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals.*

That was a great day for Israel. They were worshiping as they celebrated. They were bringing the ark of God back to the house of God, but they were not doing it according to God's laws. The account continues in 2 Samuel 6:6–11:

When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. [The ordinance said that anybody who touched the ark would die (cf. Numbers 4:15–20).] The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God. Then David was angry because the LORD's wrath had

broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called Perez Uzzah [that simply meant “an outbreak against Uzzah”]. David was afraid of the LORD that day and said, “How can the ark of the LORD ever come to me?” He was not willing to take the ark of the LORD to be with him in the City of David. Instead, he took it aside to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months, and the LORD blessed him and his entire household.

Uzzah thought he was doing a good thing by steadying the ark so that it would not fall. First, he made the mistake of not doing it the way God had said to do it. His second mistake was trying to protect what belonged to the Lord. The Lord can protect what belongs to Him.

David was angry with himself and with Israel because they had not followed God “. . . according to the ordinance” (1 Chronicles 15:13b, NASV). Anytime God’s people are not obedient to God, they can expect trouble. David was also afraid of God. The ark of God was back in the land. It was not yet where it ought to be, but at least it was back in the land.

2 Samuel 6:12–19 tells of the celebration as David finally brought the ark to Jerusalem:

Now King David was told, “The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has, because of the ark of God.” So David went down and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing. When those who were carrying the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets. As the ark of the LORD was

entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart. [She thought he was not acting like a king because he was humiliating himself before the the people by dancing in front of the ark.] They brought the ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the LORD. After he had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD Almighty. Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women. And all the people went to their homes.

This was not a sorrowful occasion. Those sacrifices and that feast were things of joy before the Lord. David had blessed all the people and had given them gifts. 2 Samuel 6:20–23 relates what happened next:

When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, “How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!” [Michal was being sarcastic. David was wearing only an ordinary linen robe rather than his kingly garments.] David said to Michal, “It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the LORD’s people Israel — I will celebrate before the LORD. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor.” And

Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death.

There is a great lesson here of being humiliated for the Lord. David was humiliated before the people, specifically Michal, but he did not humiliate himself before God. God's people sometimes need to be so dedicated to God that they are looked upon by the world, and maybe even by some of their own brothers and sisters, as fanatics. David had such a commitment to God that he allowed himself to do what seemed to be a very undignified task. God may call His people to do undignified tasks just as He Himself did when He took care of people's physical needs (such as washing the dirty feet of His disciples). He may call someone to wash the wounds of a leper or to care for an old lady. He may call someone to serve by washing the dirty wounds of a widow day after day without anyone except God knowing of the task. This could be considered a humiliating and undignified task by people who do not know God. If God's family renders their services to God and not to man, they may serve in ways that may seem shameful to other people. The significance of the service is not determined by the applause of the crowd but by God, who is being served. Serve the Lord God and take whatever criticism comes.

David's Reign (2)

Introduction

Chapter 11 in our study of Old Testament history covers the history of the Hebrew nation during the period of the United Kingdom. This is the second chapter that covers David's reign over Israel and Judah. This chapter deals with the Messianic promise given to David and the wars of expansion. It also covers how the beautiful relationship that David had experienced with Jonathan was going to help and benefit Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth.

Messianic Promise — Prophetic Anticipation

David's Desire to Build God a House

David had a legitimate and godly desire to build a permanent dwelling place for the ark of God. David's relationship with God was so strong that he felt guilty because he lived in a cedar palace and the ark of God was still in a tent.

After David had fought the wars of consolidation, he later had to fight the wars of expansion. He had beaten the Ammonites, the Jebusites, and the Philistines. He had consolidated his empire and found rest from his enemies. 2 Samuel 7:1–2 says:

After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, he said to Nathan the prophet, “Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent.”

This was a legitimate but immature thought. David thought that he was living in a better environment than God. He did not stop to think that God inhabited the universe. David was thinking that he was providing better for himself than for God. The desire to provide for God better than for self is a noble way for all men to think. It is a legitimate, godly thought though an immature mind-set.

Nathan also thought it was a good idea: “*Nathan replied to the king, ‘Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you’*” (2 Samuel 7:3). Neither one of them had asked God what He wanted. When David went to battle, he always inquired of God, but now that he was doing this as a good deed or a favor for God, he did not ask God for guidance.

God’s Promise to Build David a House

God had a rather surprising answer for David. David found out some things about God and His desires. God told David that He had absolutely no desire for a house to live in. He said He did not need a house built for Him. God spoke to Nathan:

That night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying: “Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”’” (2 Samuel 7:4–7).

The Israelites had begun living in cedar houses as soon as they had entered the land because they lived in the houses that had been built by the seven tribes and the Canaanites, Hittites, Perazites, etc. They were living in houses of rock or cedar that

had been built and sealed by other people. God had never told a single one of the fifteen judges that he needed a house to live in. He did not really even live in the movable tent they called a tabernacle. That was just the place where He put the sign that He was among them. God said He had never desired a physical place to live because a Spirit that was omnipresent could not live in a physical house or a tent. He said He had no desire for David to build a house in which He could live. Yet He was going to bless David. God said that David had wanted to bless Him, and He wanted to honor that desire. He was going to bless David personally, then He would bless David's seed. God's promise was made to David personally but was spoken through Nathan. 2 Samuel 7:8–11a says:

“Now then, tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty [El-Shaddai] says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.’”

God made these promises to David because David had had a legitimate (though immature) desire to build a house for God. It is good to know that God does not demand maturity before He bestows His blessings. He does not demand a total and complete understanding of His word, His way, and His will before He bestows great blessings upon His people. He said that He would make David a prince over His own people. It

was a blessing to be the ruler over God's people. He said that He had blessed David in everything he had done and that He had made him victorious over all of his enemies. Those were the past blessings that He had bestowed upon David, and David was at that time enjoying the benefits of being king. God said, in essence, "I have blessed you physically. I have made you victorious over all of your enemies." Not a single enemy had been able to stand before David.

God said that He was going to give David two future blessings. First, He said that He would make David's name great. David had wanted God's name to be great. He had wanted God to dwell in a place much superior to the place that he himself was dwelling in. Even today, people honor the name of David. In Judaism, in Islam, and in Christianity, David's name is honored greatly. Second, God said that it would be through David that He would cause Israel to have a secure place to stand. He said that David had wanted Him to have a place to live. Because of that, God would take David and his power, strength, and faithfulness, and give Israel a secure place to stand. That did not refer to Christ or the church at that point. God had only said to David that He would bless David personally, and He would bless David's seed. That referred to those that would come after David and Solomon and their future generations. They were going to be blessed physically and spiritually.

In 2 Samuel 7:11b–17, God was still speaking to Nathan, and Nathan was speaking to David on behalf of God:

"The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: [in other words — you want to build Me a house, but I will build you one] When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring [seed] to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the

throne of his kingdom forever. [The first part of this could have referred to Solomon, but the second part could not.] I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.’’ Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation.

What was God saying He would do? This time it was not just for David, but for David’s seed. First, He said that He would make a house for David. He did not mean a physical dwelling place made of wood, stone, marble, and precious stones. He meant a progeny or a prosperity. God was telling David that he would have a people to follow him. God was going to make David a long, great house (or family) like the English house of Tudor or the Dutch house of Orange. These kingly houses were a line of royal generations and ruling dynasties.

Second, God said that after David’s death, He would establish his seed’s kingdom. He would make David’s offspring into a kingdom after he had died. It would become a ruling house or dynasty. Third, God said that David’s seed would build God a house for God’s name. This promise definitely referred to Solomon. As soon as David was dead and Solomon was the king, Solomon would begin to build the house that David had wanted to build (cf. 1 Kings 6). This passage also referred to Christ, for the writer of Hebrews said that we are God’s house and that the Son, Christ, is the builder of that house (cf. Hebrews 3:1–6). Jesus also said, “...on this rock, I will build my church . . .” (Matthew 16:18). Jesus has built us upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (cf. Ephesians 2:20). We are the household of God, and God’s house was going to be built by David’s seed. This was not just

the physical house built by Solomon, but the spiritual house of which that physical house is only a type or shadow. God also said that the throne of David's seed would be established forever. As Jesus was being announced in the book of Luke, the angel said to Mary, "*The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever . . .*" (Luke 1:32b–33a). The phrase "*his father David*" referred to Solomon in that God did establish his throne, but Solomon's throne ceased to exist with Coniah—or Jehoiachin—(cf. Jeremiah 22:24–30). The seed of Solomon would not reign anymore after that. That dynasty would cease to exist. God said in Jeremiah 22:30, "*Record this man [Jehoiachin] as if childless . . . none of his offspring . . . will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah.*" The promise made to David would be fulfilled when Jesus was born. Jesus was that long-awaited seed of David that would sit on the throne of David forever. Finally, David's house and kingdom were the seed's house and the seed's kingdom, which would last forever. We dwell today in an eternal house, in an eternal "*kingdom that cannot be shaken*" (cf. Hebrews 12:28). This kingdom that we are in is sometimes called the "house of David" and the "house of Abraham." The "seed promise" in Genesis 3:15 can be traced through Abraham to David, and that seed is the Messiah — Jesus Christ. His house and His kingdom will last forever.

David's Prayer

David's humble prayer before the Lord begins in 2 Samuel 7:18–20:

Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said: "Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, O Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. Is this your usual way of

dealing with man, O Sovereign LORD? What more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Sovereign LORD.”

As soon as David heard the revelation from Nathan, he believed it because he knew it was coming from God through God’s prophet. David humbly approached God with his prayer. He said he did not feel at all worthy of anything that God had said He would do for His servant. David said God had done so many things for him. He said he had not even thought of asking any more for himself. The reason God was blessing David was because he was thankful for what God had done. He made no requirements upon God about what God should do. He said, in essence: “Lord I am your servant. Do whatever you think best. If I am to be blessed, I will accept your blessing and give you credit for it. If I am to be cursed, it is beyond anything I deserve. Whatever happens to me is more than I really deserve to happen to me.” That was a great attitude for prayer. David was basically asking, “Who am I that I should expect this great thing?”

The prayer continues in 2 Samuel 7:21–24:

“For the sake of your word and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to your servant. How great you are, O Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears. And who is like your people Israel — the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself, and to make a name for himself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations and their gods from before your people, whom you redeemed from Egypt? You have established your people Israel as your very own forever, and you, O LORD, have become their God.”

David told God, in essence: “It is for You, Lord. I recognize that Your name, Your will, and Your word is to be magnified by this. There is nobody like you, Lord. Do it because You deserve the honor, and Your name needs to be magnified. Do it for Yourself and for Israel, just as You, for Israel’s sake, brought them out of Egypt and drove out all the tribes before them in the land of Canaan. Do it for that reason, Lord. Do it for Yourself, and do it for Israel.”

David’s prayer is concluded in 2 Samuel 7:25–29:

“And now, LORD God, keep forever the promise you have made concerning your servant and his house. Do as you promised, so that your name will be great forever. Then men will say, ‘The LORD Almighty is God over Israel!’ And the house of your servant David will be established before you. O LORD Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to your servant, saying, ‘I will build a house for you.’ So your servant has found courage to offer you this prayer. O Sovereign LORD, you are God! Your words are trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant. Now be pleased to bless the house of your servant, that it may continue forever in your sight; for you, O Sovereign LORD, have spoken, and with your blessing the house of your servant will be blessed for ever.”

David wanted his house to bless God. He wanted God’s name, rather than his own name, to be great. It may sound strange, but David seemed willing at that point to accept the blessing. Earlier he had basically inquired of God: “Who am I that I should receive this blessing? [However, he came to a realization and continued . . .] Oh, I see, You are doing it for Your name. You are doing it for Israel’s name. So use my house, oh Lord, to bless Your name forever.” Wasn’t that a great way to look at God’s blessings? God’s people need to

think: "Yes, Lord, though I do not deserve it, I am willing to accept your blessings. Now bless me so that my house and my life may be a blessing to You." Much of the promised blessings referred to Christ, but most of it referred to David himself and his seed after him.

David's Wars of Expansion

Against Old Enemies

David had consolidated his empire. Israel and Judah had both accepted him as king. God had made great promises about his future because it was in his heart to do God's will, to build God a house, and to cause God's name to be known through all the earth. A time then came when David needed to go to battle to extend Israel's borders back to the promised limit. These boundaries extended from the river of Egypt, to the wadi down in the South, to the great river — the river Euphrates. David had defeated the Philistines, but then he had to fight the Moabites:

In the course of time, David defeated the Philistines and subdued them, and he took Metheg Ammah from the control of the Philistines. David also defeated the Moabites. He made them lie down on the ground and measured them off with a length of cord. Every two lengths of them were put to death, and the third length was allowed to live [so he killed two-thirds of the people of Moab]. So the Moabites became subject to David and brought tribute (2 Samuel 8:1–2).

Why did David use this method to fight Moab instead of killing man, woman, and child as he had done in the battle against Gath? Who were the Moabites? Where had they come from? They were a result of the incestuous relationship between Lot and his eldest daughter when they had fled Sodom. That made them kinsmen. Those were not people that could be

slaughtered. They had to be taught by God not to rebel against God's appointed leader. He was merciful and let one-third of them live and become servants to David.

Next, David fought a war with Zobah. Zobah was the territory from Damascus to the Euphrates River. The area from Damascus and below was Syria, but Zobah was that northern-most territory. In Moab, he had defeated the area to the south and to the east. In Zobah, he defeated those to the north. 2 Samuel 8:3–7 tells of that battle:

Moreover, David fought Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah, when he went to restore his control along the Euphrates River. David captured a thousand of his chariots, seven thousand charioteers and twenty thousand foot soldiers. He hamstrung all but a hundred of the chariot horses. [David was not going to multiply his horses as later his son, Solomon, would—in violation of the commandment in Deuteronomy 17:16—but Zobah had been defeated.] When the Arameans of Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, David struck down twenty-two thousand of them. [David was truly a mighty warrior. He killed twenty-two thousand Syrians.] He put garrisons in the Aramean kingdom of Damascus, and the Arameans became subject to him and brought tribute. The LORD gave David victory wherever he went. David took the gold shields that belonged to the officers of Hadadezer and brought them to Jerusalem.

David's next war was against the Edomites. They were the people in the South. Most of the Promised Land was restored with the completion of this battle. There was still the middle territory east of the Jordan, which he would have to conquer in the Ammonite war. 2 Samuel 8:9–14 says:

When Tou king of Hamath heard that David had defeated the entire army of Hadadezer, he sent his son Joram to King David to greet him and congratulate him on his victory in battle over Hadadezer, who had been at war with Tou. Joram brought with him articles of silver and gold and bronze. King David dedicated these articles to the LORD, as he had done with the silver and gold from all the nations he had subdued: Edom and Moab, the Ammonites and the Philistines, and Amalek. He also dedicated the plunder taken from Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah. And David became famous after he returned from striking down eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt. [At this point, David and his army had either slaughtered or captured over 100,000 people, along with thousands of chariots and horses.] He put garrisons throughout Edom, and all the Edomites became subject to David. The LORD gave David victory wherever he went.

The Keeping of a Covenant

Chapter 9 of 2 Samuel contains a beautiful illustration of the result of a covenant. Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, had been down in the desert country. He had been crippled when he and his nurse had fled from Saul's house after learning of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. He was getting along on a crutch down in the desert. He had always been afraid because he believed that David wanted to kill him. One day David's war wagons rolled into Mephibosheth's village. Mephibosheth thought they had come there to kill him, but instead they put him in a chariot and brought him to David. David told Mephibosheth that he had hunted for him, not to judge him, but to give kindness to the one remaining child of Jonathan. David said that he had made a covenant with Jonathan, and therefore his entire house belonged to Mephibosheth. He told Mephibosheth that he was as one of his sons. David gave him

servants to bathe and clothe him. He gave him a place at his table, and David's tablecloth covered his crippled legs as he ate at the royal table. Imagine that someone came in one day and said, "What are you doing here at David's table?" Mephibosheth might have replied, "I do not know. Ask the king." David might have said, "Go down the hallway and look on the wall. You will see a shield, a garment, a spear, and a sword. That is what Jonathan gave me as the sign and token that our blood was mingled. By our covenant, we are blood brothers under a blood covenant. Mephibosheth eats at my table because I made a covenant with his father."

Today God's family eats at the table of the Lord because our Lord made a covenant with the Father. He takes care of His family and feeds them. Today God's family is Mephibosheth, the crippled one. They are crippled in sin. They are now being honored and fed by the King. They are being housed and clothed by the King. The King, who is also the Father, provides all of their needs.

Conclusion

2 Samuel 10 covers a war that David and Joab fought with the Ammonites. They won three different battles against the Ammonites, but the Ammonites were a powerful nation and not easily subdued. At the end of the third battle, the war was over for a while, and they each returned to their own place.

If God's name is made great and blessed on this earth by His people, then God will make their name great, and they will be blessed in all the earth. Seek God and His kingdom first, and all these things will be added unto you (cf. Matthew 6:33).

David's Reign (3)

Introduction

As a young man, David had been honored by his father. He had played the harp in the king's household so that the king could have relief from an evil mind. He had later been blessed by God to be able to kill the giant and give Israel victory over the Philistines. Everywhere David went and everything that David did was blessed by God. He honored God and had honored God's anointed, Saul, and had not fought against him. Finally, after Saul had died, David had been appointed king over Judah. He had reigned over Judah alone for seven years and six months. During that time, David had not fought against his enemy, the Philistines, as much as he had fought against Ish-bosheth, the remaining son of Saul. After Ish-bosheth had been murdered by his own men, Abner had come over to David's side. The children of Israel and the children of Judah had united, and David had been appointed king over all of them.

David had brought consolidation and peace to the kingdom by defeating the Jebusites and the Philistines, who had been the Israelites' enemies during Saul's time. God had put these enemies before Israel so that they would know that they had not been faithfully doing His will. After the war had ended, David had expressed a lover's heart as he wanted God to be better provided for than himself. God had blessed that desire. He had not let David build the temple, but He had blessed David and had said that David would be blessed personally in all of his life. He had told David that after he was dead and

gone, his seed would build a house for God. David's seed, through Jesus, would establish a house and a kingdom that would last forever.

David had fought wars against the Moabites, the Zobites, the Syrians, and the Ammonites. Over and over he had fought and had been victorious in all of them.

This takes us to the middle of David's life. There was no one who was perfect—not even this man after God's own heart. This sweet shepherd of Israel, this singer of the finest songs that anyone had ever sung, was not perfect. David, this one whose seed was going to bless all the earth and through whom the promised seed would come to bruise the devil's head, was still not a perfect man. He, too, had trouble and calamities in his life. There had been glories, victories, and honor, but calamities would come soon.

The Calamities of David's Reign

The Temptation and the Fall

The first calamity of David is simply referred to as “David and Bathsheba.” David was tempted, and he fell:

In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. [David was a king. His nation was at war. Where should he have been? Spring was the season when kings went out to war. David should have been with his nation on the battlefield. This passage should say “David went,” which would have been a blessing for David, but instead it says, “David sent.” He had someone else do what he should have been responsible for doing.] They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 11:1).

There is a phrase, “An idle mind is the devil's workshop.”

This proved to be true for David. He was bored, and a bored mind always leads to trouble:

One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, “Isn’t this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” (2 Samuel 11:2–3).

Bathsheba had not intended to tempt David. The houses at that time had walls around them for privacy and protection. David had been in the wrong place at the wrong time. Did David know who Uriah was? Yes, Uriah was the final name listed among David’s mighty men (cf. 2 Samuel 23:39). Those men were David’s finest troops and his personal guards. They were men who had bound their souls to David, and David had bound his soul to them. To David, they were the most trusted men in all the world. If David had been thinking with his head rather than with desire, he would have said, “Wait! This lady is the wife of one of my own men. She belongs to a man who loves me more than he loves life and who is absolutely loyal to me.” There is no conscience in one who is aroused by lust. The story continues in 2 Samuel 11:4–5:

Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (She had purified herself from her uncleanness.) [This fact proved that Uriah could not have been the one who was the father of the baby, because she had been unclean when Uriah had gone to battle. Before she came to David, she had just been cleansed.] Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, “I am pregnant.”

Everyone sins, so no one has the right to judge David. His actions can be judged as absolutely inexplicable. It was a matter of his lust getting control of his mind.

The Attempted Cover-Up

When someone sins, the first thing they try to do is cover it up. 2 Samuel 11:6–26 contains David's great cover-up: 2 Samuel 11:6–7 says:

So David sent this word to Joab: “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” And Joab sent him to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going.

David might have cared about the battle a little bit. However, he had known how Joab was. He had known how the soldiers were doing. He had known it was just a matter of time before Joab would take the city. David had known the answers to all three of his questions. He had called Uriah there for another reason. 2 Samuel 11:8–11 says:

Then David said to Uriah, “Go down to your house and wash your feet.” [David wanted Uriah to do more than just wash his feet. He wanted Uriah to act like a returning soldier so that he could be the one to blame for the baby in Bathsheba’s womb.] So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master’s servants and did not go down to his house [David’s plan had failed]. When David was told, “Uriah did not go home,” he asked him, “Haven’t you just come from a distance? Why didn’t you go home?” Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord’s men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink

and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!"

Uriah said he would not dishonor David by going home without the victory. He said that would dishonor his lord, the king. He was not even thinking about God then. He was only thinking about his covenant with David. He said that everybody he loved—Israel, Judah, the ark, Joab, and his lord's men—were in the open field, so he could not go to be with his wife. Who was the better man in this story? Uriah made no reference to this sin being against God. He believed that it would have been a sin against David, and that was good enough for him. That should have caused David to change and confess his sin. He had started to run though, and he would keep running. He had denied his sin, and he would just keep denying. 2 Samuel 11:12–25 tells what David did next:

Then David said to him, "Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants; he did not go home. [In this instance, a drunk Uriah was a better man than a sober David. Uriah had his mind on David, on the Lord, and on the victory in Rabbah.] *In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah* [Uriah was such a loyal servant that he did not even read the note]. *In it he wrote, "Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die"* [David was going to murder this guy in order to cover up his own sin]. *So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the*

men in David's army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died. [Joab was too good of a general to withdraw completely from Uriah and let him face the battle alone. Some of the men of Judah died with Uriah the Hittite.] Joab sent David a full account of the battle. He instructed the messenger: "When you have finished giving the king this account of the battle, the king's anger may flare up, and he may ask you, 'Why did you get so close to the city to fight? Didn't you know they would shoot arrows from the wall? Who killed Abimelech son of Jerub-Besheth? Didn't a woman throw an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez? Why did you get so close to the wall?' If he asks you this, then say to him, 'Also, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.'" The messenger set out, and when he arrived he told David everything Joab had sent him to say. . . ."The men overpowered us . . . Then the archers shot arrows . . . from the wall, and some of the king's men died. Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.' David told the messenger, "Say this to Joab: 'Don't let this upset you; the sword devours one as well as another. Press the attack against the city and destroy it.' Say this to encourage Joab."

David "wiped the blood from his mouth" and acted like nothing evil had occurred. He said, "*The sword devours one as well as another.*" 2 Samuel 11:26–27 tells what happened after the death of Uriah:

When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the LORD.

David should have known that his actions would displease the Lord, but he believed that he had covered them up. God knew the truth, however, and He was going to put David on trial.

The Trial — The Prophet's Parable

2 Samuel 12:1–4a begins the story of how God showed David the error of his sin:

The LORD sent Nathan [the prophet] to David. When he came to him, he said, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep . . . but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. Now a traveler came to the rich man”

The rich man had an abundant flock of sheep. However, instead of taking any of his own sheep to feed the traveler who had come to visit, he took the poor man's ewe lamb and killed, slaughtered, and ate it.

2 Samuel 12:5–6 shows David's reaction to the story:

David burned with anger against the man [this injustice really got to David's senses] and said to Nathan, “As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.”

David wanted the man to be killed, but there was a law that said the man would be required to pay the other man back.

The Verdict and the Judgment

2 Samuel 12:7a says, “*Then Nathan said to David, ‘You are the man!’*” Nathan pointed his finger at David and told him he was the very one that they had been talking about. David had already killed Uriah. What was to keep him from killing Nathan for this accusation? The accusation continues in 2 Samuel 12:7b–12:

... “*This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah . . . and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.’ This is what the LORD says: ‘Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you [it would be his son, Absalom] and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.’*”

This accusation was made to David. He had made a mistake. His lust and his fear had taken control of him for a while, but when he was confronted with God’s word and God’s own judgment of it, David responded like a man after God’s own heart: “*Then David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the LORD’*” (2 Samuel 12:13a). David was no longer hiding. He stood before God to be judged. The law of Moses declared that anybody who did what David had done should be stoned to

death. He was willing to let God judge him as He saw fit. 2 Samuel 12:13b–14 tells of David's judgment:

. . . Nathan replied, “The LORD has taken away your sin [that was number one]. You are not going to die [that was number two]—the Lord had forgiven David and given him his life]. But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die.’” [That was number three—the Lord’s enemies would blaspheme God, and David’s son would die.]

The Execution of Judgment

2 Samuel 12:15–18 says:

After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah’s wife had borne to David, and he became ill. David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground. The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them. On the seventh day the child died. David’s servants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they thought, “While the child was still living, we spoke to David but he would not listen to us. How can we tell him the child is dead? He may do something desperate.”

David had spent seven days praying, fasting, and repenting. His servants were worried and wondered how David would react to the death of the child if he had acted that way while the child was living. 2 Samuel 12:19–23 relates David’s reasoning:

David noticed that his servants were whispering among themselves and he realized the child was dead. “Is the child dead?” he asked. “Yes,” they replied,

“he is dead.” Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate. [His servants must have thought, “What in the world is going on?”] His servants asked him, “Why are you acting in this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!” He answered, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, ‘Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.’ But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.”

The Victory

2 Samuel 12:24–25 relates how God was merciful once again:

Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and lay with her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The LORD loved him; and because the LORD loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah.

Jedidiah meant “loved by the Lord.” David and Bathsheba named him Solomon, but God named him “loved by the Lord.”

After that, David returned to his responsibilities on the battlefield:

Meanwhile Joab fought against Rabbah of the Ammonites and captured the royal citadel. . . . David mustered the entire army and went to Rabbah, and attacked and captured it. . . . Then David and his entire army returned to Jerusalem” (2 Samuel 12:26, 29, 31b).

David was at the front of his army again. He was not hiding in the palace or letting someone else do his job. David and his entire army destroyed all the cities of Ammon and then returned home.

This chapter in our study shows the tragedy of a man who forgot for a moment his standing with God. He was God's friend and a man after God's own heart. He was one of the finest, and yet a saint of the saints who sank to absolute degradation. He was tempted, and he fell. He attempted to cover it up. He lied, and he murdered. He was confronted by the word of God and the will of God, and he repented. He accepted his judgment. He was victorious when he finally recognized his place of leadership again. He took his place at the head of the army and at the head of God's people. He went out to defeat their enemies again. But repentance, forgiveness, and acceptance did not cancel the consequences of his crime. He could not give Uriah back to Bathsheba. He could not bring back the child that had died. There were three things that were going to occur in his household that would be unalterable. They would happen no matter what David tried to do. The sword would never depart from his house. From then on, there would be fighting and warfare within the house that God had promised to bless. He would bless, and He would preserve. Because of David's sin, however, there would always be warfare in that house. An evil would arise out of his own household. It would be from his own house that an enemy would rise up against him—and that enemy would be Absalom. The first child that was born to him had died, and three others would also die. David had named his own judgment. He had said, in response to the story that Nathan had told him, that the fellow who had done that deed should have died. God had said, however, that David would not die. David had said that the man who had done that deed needed to pay back fourfold the lamb that he had taken. That was exactly what would happen to David. Four sons would die: his first infant, then Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah. David would give four little lambs for the lamb that

he had taken. He would give four lives out of his own household for the one that he had slaughtered.

God will forgive sinners of their sins, but they will probably have to bear the consequences of the sinful and dysfunctional actions for the rest of their lives. This is an important lesson to learn from this chapter. We can see that David learned this lesson when we read the psalms that he wrote. He wrote four psalms from this one event.

David's Songs About This Event

Have Mercy Lord (Psalm 51)

Psalm 51:1, 2, 7, 10–12, 15–19 says:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. . . . Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. . . . Create in me a pure heart, . . . Do not cast me from your presence . . . Restore to me the joy of your salvation . . . O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

David begged God to have mercy on him. He knew what God wanted, and he knew what God did not want. David had an abundance of sheep. He could have sacrificed thousands of lambs, but he knew that was not what God wanted. It is

possible that David sang this song while he was thinking about the judgment that was to come.

Amazing Grace (Psalm 32)

Psalm 32:1–6 relates David's appreciation for God's forgiveness:

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD” — and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him.

That psalm told David's story. He had been the man who had kept silent. He had been the man whose strength had been sapped. That is what the conscience of a sinner can do. This was David's thankfulness to God for His forgiveness.

Praise the Lord (Psalm 103)

Psalm 103:1–6 says:

Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits — who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

David continued his song of thanksgiving in this psalm, which he sang to his soul. He sang of the forgiveness that God had brought upon him.

The Acceptance of Forgiveness (Psalm 116)

More of David's dedication to God can be seen in Psalm 116:1, 2, 12–16:

I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. . . . How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. O LORD, truly I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant; you have freed me from my chains.

In this psalm, David thanked God for His mercy. Then he said, in essence, “Here is what I will do. I will call on Him for as long as I live.” David would trust the Lord forever. He would do what he had promised, and he would fulfill his vows. He would live faithfully by praising, trusting, and obeying God. God’s people have been forgiven of their sins just like David. God forgives over and over again. God’s people need to praise the Lord for faithful and steadfast minds. They need to find the strength to accept the forgiveness of God and the faith to serve Him. The people of God need to be men after God’s own heart.

David's Reign (4)

Introduction

Chapter 13 in this study of Old Testament history covers the next calamity in the life of David. Chapter 12 covered the major calamity during David's reign. It involved David's sin with Bathesheba and her husband Uriah. The next event involved David's own household.

Four More Calamities in David's Reign

Amnon and Tamar—Amnon's Incest and Death

The study of the sin of Amnon against Tamar and Absalom's subsequent revenge begins in 2 Samuel 13:1–22:

In the course of time, Amnon son of David fell in love with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David [Tamar was Amnon's half sister]. Amnon became frustrated to the point of illness on account of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her. Now Amnon had a friend named Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother. Jonadab was a very shrewd man. He asked Amnon, "Why do you, the king's son, look so haggard morning after morning? Won't you tell me?" Amnon said to him, "I'm in love with Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister." "Go to bed and pretend to be ill," Jonadab said. "When your father comes to see you, say to him, 'I would like my sister Tamar to come and

give me something to eat. Let her prepare the food in my sight so I may watch her and then eat it from her hand.’’ So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill. When the king came to see him, Amnon said, ‘I would like my sister . . . to come and make some special bread in my sight, so I may eat from her hand.’ David sent word to Tamar . . . ‘Go to the house of your brother Amnon and prepare some food for him.’ So Tamar went to the house of her brother Amnon, who was lying down. She took some dough, kneaded it, made the bread in his sight and baked it. Then she took the pan and served him the bread, but he refused to eat. ‘Send everyone out of here,’ Amnon said. So everyone left him. Then Amnon said to Tamar, ‘Bring the food into my bedroom so I may eat from your hand.’ And Tamar took the bread she had prepared and brought it to her brother Amnon in his bedroom. But when she took it to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, ‘Come to bed with me, my sister.’ ‘Don’t, my brother!’ she said to him. ‘Don’t force me. Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don’t do this wicked thing. What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you.’ [She was willing to become his wife. She was just not willing to be raped.] But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her. Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. [He had loved her to the point that he was sick over it, and now he hated her more than he had loved her.] Amnon said to her, ‘Get up and get out!’ ‘No!’ she said to him. ‘Sending me away would be a greater wrong than what you have already done to me.’ But he refused to listen to her. He called his personal servant and said,

"Get this woman out of here and bolt the door after her." So his servant put her out and bolted the door after her. She was wearing a richly ornamented robe [It was a special robe — like Joseph's.], for this was the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore. Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornamented robe she was wearing. She put her hand on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went. Her brother Absalom said to her, "Has that Amnon, your brother, been with you? Be quiet now, my sister; he is your brother. Don't take this thing to heart." And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom's house, a desolate woman. When King David heard all this, he was furious. Absalom never said a word to Amnon, either good or bad; he hated Amnon because he had disgraced his sister Tamar.

Absalom had a good reason to kill the king's son, but he would wait two years to do it. He was eyeing Amnon daily to see how he could kill him. The story continues in 2 Samuel 13:23–29:

Two years later, when Absalom's sheepshearers were at Baal Hazor near the border of Ephraim, he invited all the king's sons to come there. Absalom went to the king and said, "Your servant has had shearers come. Will the king and his officials please join me?" "No, my son," the king replied. "All of us should not go; we would only be a burden to you." Although Absalom urged him, he still refused to go, but gave him his blessing. [Absalom knew the king would not bring the whole retinue down there. It would have been too much for Absalom to feed. He was after Amnon.] Then Absalom said, "If not, please let my brother Amnon come with us." The king asked him, "Why should he go with you?" [King David was a

little suspicious.] *But Absalom urged him, so he sent with him Amnon and the rest of the king's sons. Absalom ordered his men, "Listen! When Amnon is in high spirits from drinking wine and I say to you, 'Strike Amnon down,' then kill him. Don't be afraid. Have not I given you this order? Be strong and brave."* So Absalom's men did to Amnon what Absalom had ordered. Then all the king's sons got up, mounted their mules and fled.

This made two sons that David had given in payment for Uriah's death and the sin with Bathesheba. They had lost an infant son and then had lost Amnon. 2 Samuel 13:30–39 says:

While they were on their way [the king's son's were on their way home], the report came to David: "Absalom has struck down all the king's sons; not one of them is left." [That was not true. Absalom had only killed one of the king's sons. Some enemy wanted Absalom dead.] The king stood up, tore his clothes and lay down on the ground; and all his servants stood by with their clothes torn. But Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother, said, "My lord should not think that they killed all the princes; only Amnon is dead. This has been Absalom's expressed intention ever since the day Amnon raped his sister Tamar. My lord the king should not be concerned about the report that all the king's sons are dead. Only Amnon is dead." [Amnon had received what he deserved. The law said that if someone raped a woman, then he was supposed to die. (cf. Leviticus 18:9, 29; Deuteronomy 22:25)] Meanwhile, Absalom had fled. [Absalom fled because he did not know that his father was not going to believe the report that he had killed all of the king's sons.] Now the man standing watch looked up and saw many people on the road west of him, coming

down the side of the hill. The watchman went and told the king, “I see men in the direction of Horonaim, on the side of the hill.” Jonadab said to the king, “See, the king’s sons are here; it has happened just as your servant said.” As he finished speaking, the king’s sons came in, wailing loudly. The king, too, and all his servants wept very bitterly. Absalom fled and went to Talmai son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur. But King David mourned for his son every day. After Absalom fled and went to Geshur, he stayed there three years. And the spirit of the king longed to go to Absalom, for he was consoled concerning Amnon’s death.

Absalom’s Return and Restoration

This was a terrible tragedy for David and his kingdom. A righteous thing had occurred in Amnon’s death, but Absalom had to flee from the presence of his father. Joab facilitated Absalom’s return, because David was like a dead man in the palace. His love for Absalom was stronger than his hatred for what Absalom had done to the family. 2 Samuel 14:1–14 relates Joab’s plan for Absalom’s return:

Joab son of Zeruiah knew that the king’s heart longed for Absalom. So Joab sent someone to Tekoa and had a wise woman brought from there. He said to her, “Pretend you are in mourning. Dress in mourning clothes, and don’t use any cosmetic lotions. Act like a woman who has spent many days grieving for the dead. Then go to the king and speak these words to him.” And Joab put the words in her mouth. When the woman from Tekoa went to the king, she fell with her face to the ground to pay him honor, and she said, “Help me, O king!” The king asked her, “What is troubling you?” She said, “I am indeed a widow; my husband is dead. I your servant had two sons. They got into a fight with each other in the field, and no one

was there to separate them. One struck the other and killed him. Now the whole clan has risen up against your servant; they say, ‘Hand over the one who struck his brother down, so that we may put him to death for the life of his brother whom he killed; then we will get rid of the heir as well.’ They would put out the only burning coal I have left, leaving my husband neither name nor descendant on the face of the earth.’ The king said to the woman, “Go home, and I will issue an order on your behalf.” [David believed he could solve her problem.] But the woman from Tekoa said to him, “My lord the king, let the blame rest on me and on my father’s family, and let the king and his throne be without guilt.” The king replied, “If anyone says anything to you, bring him to me, and he will not bother you again.” She said, “Then let the king invoke the LORD his God to prevent the avenger of blood from adding to the destruction, so that my son will not be destroyed.” “As surely as the LORD lives,” he said, “not one hair of your son’s head will fall to the ground.” Then the woman said, “Let your servant speak a word to my lord the king.” [The woman had been telling a parable to David, and now the parable was over.] “Speak,” he replied. The woman said, “Why then have you devised a thing like this against the people of God? When the king says this, does he not convict himself, for the king has not brought back his banished son? Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But God does not take away life; instead, he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him.”

There is a very important phrase to remember in this passage: “But God does not take away life; instead he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from

him.” God is the reconciler. He wanted Absalom, as sinful as he had been, back in his father’s house. David’s answer to the woman is found in 2 Samuel 14:15–24:

“And now I have come to say this to my lord the king because the people have made me afraid. Your servant thought, ‘I will speak to the king; perhaps he will do what his servant asks. Perhaps the king will agree to deliver his servant from the hand of the man who is trying to cut off both me and my son from the inheritance God gave us.’ And now your servant says, ‘May the word of my lord the king bring me rest, for my lord the king is like an angel of God in discerning good and evil. May the LORD your God be with you.’” Then the king said to the woman, “Do not keep from me the answer to what I am going to ask you.” “Let my lord the king speak,” the woman said. The king asked, “Isn’t the hand of Joab with you in all this?” The woman answered, “As surely as you live, my lord the king, no one can turn to the right or to the left from anything my lord the king says. Yes, it was your servant Joab who instructed me to do this and who put all these words into the mouth of your servant. Your servant Joab did this to change the present situation. My lord has wisdom like that of an angel of God—he knows everything that happens in the land.” The king said to Joab, “Very well, I will do it. Go, bring back the young man Absalom.” Joab fell with his face to the ground to pay him honor, and he blessed the king. Joab said, “Today your servant knows that he has found favor in your eyes, . . .” Then Joab went to Geshur and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem. But the king said, “He must go to his own house; he must not see my face.” [That was not a good decision.] So Absalom went to his own house and did not see the face of the king.

Absalom had still not been reconciled to the king. That caused him to plot against David:

In all Israel there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no blemish in him. Whenever he cut the hair of his head — he used to cut his hair from time to time when it became too heavy for him — he would weigh it, and its weight was two hundred shekels by the royal standard [that was about 5 pounds or 2.3 kilograms]. Three sons and a daughter were born to Absalom. The daughter's name was Tamar, and she became a beautiful woman. Absalom lived two years in Jerusalem without seeing the king's face. Then Absalom sent for Joab . . . but Joab refused to come to him. So he sent a second time, but he refused to come. Then he said . . . "Look, Joab's field is next to mine, . . . Go and set it on fire." So Absalom's servants set the field on fire. Then Joab did go to Absalom's house and he said to him, "Why have your servants set my field on fire?" Absalom said . . . "Look, I sent word to you and said, 'Come here so I can send you to the king to ask, 'Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me if I were still there!'" Now then, I want to see the king's face, and if I am guilty of anything, let him put me to death." So Joab went to the king and told him this. Then the king summoned Absalom, and he came in and bowed . . . before the king. And the king kissed Absalom (2 Samuel 14:25–33).

David's Continuing Political Troubles

Absalom's Deception and Revolt

It seemed as if reconciliation had occurred, but Absalom was after something else. He only wanted the people to know

that the king had received him back for one simple reason: he wanted to steal the people's heart from the king. He stood near the gate and as the people came for judgment, he asked them why they were coming, and they told him. He told them that if he were king, he would be able to take care of that situation and would solve it in their case (He told them that he was sorry that his father had not. He told them he would be a better king than David was). With his good looks, his smooth speech, and his political promises, Absalom gained the people's heart from the righteous King David. Absalom became so bold that he led a rebellion against David. David had an army that was sufficient to put down the rebellion quickly. David could have sent his army and put an end to Absalom and his rebellion. Absalom would have been able to fight against David because it was in his heart to be a king. David could not fight against Absalom, however, because it was in his heart to be a father. David was a shepherd. Absalom was a wolf. Absalom acted like a wolf. David acted like a shepherd.

David Runs Before Absalom

David did not want to fight Absalom, so he had to flee. 2 Samuel 15:13–15 says:

A messenger came and told David, “The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom.” Then David said to all his officials . . . “Come! We must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom. We must leave immediately, or he will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin upon us and put the city to the sword.” [David could have just turned Absalom over to Joab, but he was too much of a father in that situation to be a good king. He could not fight his own son.] The king’s officials answered him, “Your servants are ready to do whatever our lord the king chooses.”

David “. . . set out, with his entire household following

him; . . .” and they were pursued by Absalom. There were “. . . all the Kerethites and Pelethites; and all the six hundred Gittites . . .” with David when he fled (cf. 2 Samuel 15:16–18). Ittai the Gittite wanted to go with David in case there was a battle. He chose David, but after they had traveled “. . . some distance away,” David told Ittai to stay with Absalom:

“. . . Go back and stay with King Absalom. [David called Absalom a king.] You are a foreigner, an exile from your homeland. You came only yesterday. And today shall I make you wander about with us, when I do not know where I am going? Go back, and take your countrymen. May kindness and faithfulness be with you.” But Ittai replied to the king, “As surely as the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be.” [In a short time this man had become very loyal to King David.] David said to Ittai, “Go ahead, march on.” So Ittai the Gittite marched on with all his men and the families that were with him. The whole countryside wept aloud as all the people passed by. The king also crossed the Kidron Valley, and all the people moved on toward the desert. Zadok was there . . . and . . . the Levites . . . carrying the ark of the covenant of God. . . . Then the king said to Zadok, “Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the LORD’s eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. But if he says, ‘I am not pleased with you,’ then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him.” . . . So Zadok and Abiathar took the ark of God back to Jerusalem and stayed there (2 Samuel 15:19b–26, 29).

David knew that he had deserved to die for the sins that he had committed against Uriah. David was not superstitious. He

did not believe that the ark would help him. He believed that he was running because of the consequences of his sin, and he did not want the ark of God to go with him. 2 Samuel 15:30–33 says:

But David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up. Now David had been told, “Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.” So David prayed, “O LORD, turn Ahithophel’s counsel into foolishness.” [Ahithophel was the wisest counselor in Israel. His counsel was as the counsel of God.] When David arrived at the summit, where people used to worship God, Hushai the Arkite was there to meet him, his robe torn and dust on his head. David said to him, “If you go with me, you will be a burden to me.”

David told Hushai to go back and pretend to serve Absalom so that he could turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness. He knew that Hushai was smart and would be able to make Ahithophel seem foolish, which would cause the people to be frustrated by his counseling.

David was running from his son. He had no priest with him. He had no ark with him. He seemed to be forsaken by God. Then a Benjamite cursed him from a hillside:

As King David approached Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul’s family came out from there. His name was Shimei son of Gera, and he cursed as he came out. He pelted David and all the king’s officials with stones, . . . As he cursed, Shimei said, “Get out, get out, you man of blood, you scoundrel! The LORD has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned.

The LORD has handed the kingdom over to your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a man of blood!" Then Abishai son of Zeruiah [Joab's brother] said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head." But the king said, "What do you and I have in common, . . ? If he is cursing because the LORD said to him, 'Curse David,' who can ask, 'Why do you do this?'" (2 Samuel 16:5–10).

David said that his own son was cursing him and that if his own son could curse him, then why should not this Benjamite also curse him? David even believed that it might be the Lord who had told the Benjamite to come out and curse him. Later on, David would tell Solomon about this event and ask Solomon to make sure that Shimei did not go to his grave in peace. David did not take revenge at that time, but he would ask Solomon to take care of it later. David continued speaking:

"It may be that the LORD will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today." So David and his men continued along the road while Shimei was going along the hillside opposite him, cursing as he went and throwing stones at him and showering him with dirt. The king and all the people with him arrived at their destination exhausted. And there he refreshed himself (2 Samuel 16:12–14).

David's flight from Absalom was a disgrace for David, and Shimei was adding more shame upon him. This was a hard time for David and all the people that followed him. Hushai, David's friend, gave Absalom the honor due a king, but he continued to serve David. He gave Absalom advice on how to fight David (which contradicted Ahithophel's advice, causing him to commit suicide because his counseling had been considered

foolish) but secretly sent a message to David warning him of Absalom's movements. 2 Samuel 18:1–3 says:

David mustered the men who were with him and appointed over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. David sent the troops out—a third under the command of Joab, a third under . . . Abishai . . . and a third under Ittai the Gittite. The king told the troops, “I myself will surely march out with you.” [He had learned the lesson not to stay behind.] But the men said, “You must not go out; if we are forced to flee, they won’t care about us. . . . you are worth ten thousand of us. It would be better now for you to give us support from the city.”

David's men encouraged him to stay behind. They were going out to fight David's own son. So David stood beside the gate of the city while his army marched past him. 2 Samuel 18:5–20 tells what happened next:

The king commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai [that would be the whole army], “Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake.” . . . Now Absalom happened to meet David’s men. He was riding his mule, and as the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom’s head got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in midair, while the mule he was riding kept on going. When one of the men saw this, he told Joab, “I just saw Absalom hanging in an oak tree.” Joab said to the man who had told him this, “. . . Why didn’t you strike him to the ground right there? Then I would have had to give you ten shekels of silver and a warrior’s belt.” But the man replied, “Even if a thousand shekels were weighed out into my hands, I would not lift my hand against the king’s son. In our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai

and Ittai, ‘Protect the young man Absalom for my sake.’ And if I had put my life in jeopardy — and nothing is hidden from the king — you would have kept your distance from me.” Joab said, “I am not going to wait like this for you.” So he took three javelins in his hand and plunged them into Absalom’s heart while Absalom was still alive in the oak tree. And ten of Joab’s armor-bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him. . . . They took Absalom, threw him into a big pit in the forest and piled up a large heap of rocks over him. Meanwhile, all the Israelites fled to their homes. . . . Now Ahimaaz son of Zadok said, “Let me run and take the news to the king” “You are not the one to take the news today,” Joab told him (2 Samuel 18:5a, 9–15, 17, 19–20a).

Joab sent a Cushite to tell David that Absalom was dead. He also allowed Ahimaaz to run behind the Cushite. Both men told David that the good news was that he had been delivered from all who had been against him. David then found out that his son was dead.

2 Samuel 18:33 says:

The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. . . . he said: “O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you — O Absalom, my son, my son!”

David was still the father and the shepherd. He was too much the father and the shepherd to see that an enemy of God had died that day. David was comforted and then returned to Jerusalem.

There was a troublemaker named Sheba. He led a rebellion against David. All the men of Israel deserted David to follow him, but the men of Judah stayed with their king. David’s

problems were not even over after he defeated Sheba. David did a very foolish thing by counting all his fighting men. A war census counted all the men over twenty who were able to go to battle. That was another calamity during David's reign. David was trusting in his horses, chariots, and army rather than in God. God cursed the people of Israel.

David's Closing Days

David was dying, and in his old age, he chose Solomon to succeed him (cf. 1 Kings 1:5–30). He gave a final charge to Solomon that he should walk in the way of God and not turn to the right or the left. David also asked Solomon to see that neither Shimei nor Joab would go to his grave in peace. He asked that Barzillai be rewarded for the good that he had done to him. David died and was buried, and Solomon reigned in his stead from the river Euphrates to the wadi Alaris (also called the River of Egypt or Wadi of Egypt). David had died being faithful to God, but had been cursed by the sins that he had committed. He was gathered to his fathers and to the throne room of God.

Solomon's Reign

Review and Preview

Chapter 14 in the study of the Hebrew nation covers Solomon's reign. David's reign over the United Kingdom had come to an end, and it was time for Solomon, his son, to begin his time as king. Right before he died, David gave Solomon some final charges. David was an old man, and he knew he was about to die. He was not even able to get warm at night so Abishag, a virgin, had been brought into David's bed. She was only there to warm him during the night, but all of Israel considered her David's last wife.

Solomon Establishes His Authority

David's Final Counsel

Before his death, David gave a final admonition to his son. 1 Kings 2:1–4 says:

When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son. “I am about to go the way of all the earth,” he said. “So be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go, and that the LORD may keep his promise to me: ‘If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man

on the throne of Israel. ’’

David gave Solomon four charges so that God would be able to keep His promise to David. God had promised David that if his descendants would watch how they lived and be faithful to Him, then one of David’s descendants would always be king of Israel. David’s first charge to Solomon was to walk faithfully before the Lord and observe all of the Lord’s decrees, commandments, laws, and requirements. He told Solomon that he needed to do this to show himself to be a man who was keeping the law of God. David continued speaking to his son in 1 Kings 2:5–6:

“Now you yourself know what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me . . . Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Jether. He killed them, shedding their blood in peacetime as if in battle, and with that blood stained the belt around his waist and the sandals on his feet. Deal with him according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to the grave in peace.”

Solomon knew how Joab had killed Abner and Amasa. David wanted him to deal with Joab, but to do it lawfully and make sure that Joab died.

David completed his charges to Solomon in 1 Kings 2:7–9:

“But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai of Gilead and let them be among those who eat at your table. They stood by me when I fled from your brother Absalom. And remember . . . Shimei . . . who called down bitter curses on me . . . When he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the LORD: ‘I will not put you to death by the sword.’ But now, do not consider him innocent. You are a man of wisdom; you will know what to do to him. Bring his gray head down to the grave in blood.”

David also wanted Solomon to take care of the sons of Barzillai because they had been faithful to him. He instructed Solomon to make sure that he used wisdom, but to also put Shimei to death.

1 Kings 2:10–12 tells of the death of David:

Then David rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David. He had reigned forty years over Israel—seven years in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established.

David was dead and buried. Solomon, his seed, was upon the throne.

Adonijah's Plot—Adonijah Executed for Treason

David wanted Solomon to be a righteous king just as he had been until the day he died. David had committed evil, but he was still considered to be righteous until the day he died. Solomon began immediately to establish his authority. 1 Kings 1 relates that Adonijah had set himself up as a rival king while David was still alive. Bathsheba had gone to her husband, David, and had told him about Adonijah, and David had announced that Solomon, Bathsheba's son, would be the king and not Adonijah. After Solomon's throne had been firmly established, Adonijah went to see Bathsheba, and Bathsheba said to him:

... “Do you come peacefully?” He answered, “Yes, peacefully.... I have something to say to you.” “You may say it,” she replied. “As you know,” he said, “the kingdom was mine. All Israel looked to me as their king. But things changed, and the kingdom has gone to my brother; for it has come to him from the LORD. Now I have one request.... Do not refuse me.” “You may make it,” she said. So he continued, “Please ask

King Solomon — he will not refuse you — to give me Abishag the Shunammite as my wife.” “Very well,” Bathsheba replied, “I will speak to the king for you” (1 Kings 2:13b–18).

Bathsheba had no problem with Adonijah’s request because she, like all of Israel, considered Abishag to have been David’s last wife. Abishag had done what Bathsheba could not by giving David heat in the last few days of his life. Adonijah knew exactly what he was doing. If he could get the woman who all Israel thought of as David’s last wife to be his wife, then Israel might look to him again as king. So Bathsheba went in to Solomon, sat on the throne beside Solomon, and asked him to grant her one request. 1 Kings 2:20b–25 continues their discussion:

. . . The king replied, “Make it [her request], my mother; I will not refuse you.” So she said, “Let Abishag the Shunammite be given in marriage to your brother Adonijah.” King Solomon answered his mother, “Why do you request Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? You might as well request the kingdom for him — after all, he is my older brother—yes, for him and for Abiathar the priest and Joab son of Zeruiah!” Then King Solomon swore by the LORD: “May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if Adonijah does not pay with his life for this request! And now, as surely as the LORD lives — he who has established me securely on the throne . . . — Adonijah shall be put to death today!” So King Solomon gave orders to Benaiah son of Jehoiada [Benaiah would be his “Joab”—his commander-in-chief], and he struck down Adonijah and he died.

This request seemed innocent enough, but Adonijah was truly trying to take the kingdom. Solomon, in his wisdom,

realized that. With Adonijah's death, Solomon's kingdom was established. The rebel brother was dead.

Abiathar's Banishment

Solomon had dealt with Adonijah. 1 Kings 2:26–27 tells how Solomon dealt with Abiathar:

To Abiathar . . . the king said, “Go back to your fields in Anathoth. You deserve to die, but I will not put you to death now, because you carried the ark of the Sovereign LORD before my father David and shared all my father’s hardships.” So Solomon removed Abiathar from the priesthood of the LORD, fulfilling the word the LORD had spoken at Shiloh about the house of Eli.

Abiathar was the priest that had, along with Joab, given Adonijah his support when he had declared himself king (cf. 1 Kings 1:7). He was from the same area that Jeremiah would come from (which leads us to think that Jeremiah might have been a priest as well). Abiathar was the last descendent of Eli to ever be a priest. Solomon had killed Adonijah and deposed Abiathar.

Joab's Execution

The next man that Solomon had to deal with was Joab. 1 Kings 2:28–35 says:

When the news reached Joab, who had conspired with Adonijah though not with Absalom, he fled to the tent of the LORD and took hold of the horns of the altar. King Solomon was told that Joab had fled to the tent . . . Then Solomon ordered Benaiah son of Jehoiada, “Go, strike him down!” So Benaiah entered the tent of the LORD and said to Joab, “The king says, ‘Come out!’” But he answered, “No, I will die here.”

Benaiah reported to the king, “This is how Joab answered me.” Then the king commanded Benaiah, “Do as he says. Strike him down and bury him, and so clear me and my father’s house of the guilt of the innocent blood that Joab shed. The LORD will repay him for the blood he shed, because without the knowledge of my father David he attacked two men and killed them with the sword. Both of them—Abner son of Ner, commander of Israel’s army, and Amasa son of Jether, commander of Judah’s army — were better men and more upright than he. May the guilt of their blood rest on the head of Joab and his descendants forever. But on David and his descendants, his house and his throne, may there be the LORD’s peace forever.” So Benaiah son of Jehoiada went up and struck down Joab and killed him, and he was buried on his own land in the desert. The king put Benaiah son of Jehoiada over the army in Joab’s position and replaced Abiathar with Zadok the priest.

Joab knew that Solomon was trying to retaliate for all the crimes that had been committed during David’s reign so he fled to the tabernacle instead of going to a city of refuge. This was the most sacred place of refuge in all Israel. Joab had no right to be in the tent since he had killed in peace as if it were in war. Solomon was fulfilling all the charges from his father.

Shimei the Benjamite Is Slain

Solomon had finished every charge that David had given him except for taking care of Shimei. He went to Shimei and told him, “. . . ‘Build yourself a house in Jerusalem and live there, but do not go anywhere else. The day you leave and cross the Kidron valley, you can be sure you will die . . .’” (1 Kings 2:36b–37a). Solomon was guaranteeing Shimei peace as long as he stayed in Jerusalem. If he tried to leave by crossing the

Kidron valley, then Solomon would hold him guilty of the sin against him, and Shimei would die. 1 Kings 2:38–46 says:

Shimei answered the king, “What you say is good. Your servant will do as my lord the king has said.” And Shimei stayed in Jerusalem for a long time. But three years later, two of Shimei’s slaves ran off . . . and Shimei was told, “Your slaves are in Gath.” At this, he saddled his donkey and went to Achish at Gath in search of his slaves. . . . and brought the slaves back from Gath. When Solomon was told that Shimei had gone from Jerusalem . . . the king summoned Shimei and said to him, “Did I not make you swear by the LORD and warn you, ‘On the day you leave to go anywhere else, you can be sure you will die’? At that time you said to me, ‘. . . I will obey.’ Why then did you not keep your oath to the LORD and obey the command . . . ?” The king also said to Shimei, “You know in your heart all the wrong you did to my father David. Now the LORD will repay you for your wrongdoing. But King Solomon will be blessed, and David’s throne will remain secure before the LORD forever.” Then the king gave the order to Benaiah son of Jehoiada and he went out and struck Shimei down and killed him. The kingdom was now firmly established in Solomon’s hands.

Solomon had established his authority. All the people knew then that he would do all that David had charged him to do and fulfill his responsibilities. He had fulfilled the four charges from his father.

Solomon Marries Pharaoh's Daughter

Solomon did something then that was outside the will of God. He made an alliance and married the daughter of Pharaoh. Those were both things that Solomon should have known not

to do because of the laws God had set up for his people. 1 Kings 3:1–3 says:

Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. He brought her to the City of David until he finished building his palace and the temple of the LORD, and the wall around Jerusalem. The people, however, were still sacrificing at the high places, because a temple had not yet been built for the Name of the LORD. Solomon showed his love for the LORD by walking according to the statutes of his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.

Solomon had a good heart. He loved the Lord and wanted to do the Lord's will, but he did not have the perfect heart that David had had. Solomon had already shown that he was more interested in authority and in alliances with the nations around him than he was in the separateness and the purity that was demanded of the people of God in his day.

Solomon's Great Wisdom Applied

Wisdom in Prayer

1 Kings 3 relates the well-known story of Solomon's request for wisdom from the Lord:

The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to . . . my father David . . . But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. . . . So give your servant a

discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself. . . . I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for — both riches and honor — . . . And if you walk in my ways . . . I will give you a long life." Then Solomon awoke — and he realized it had been a dream (1 Kings 3:4–7, 9–15a).

Solomon really wanted to worship God, but he did not understand the psalm that his father had written (cf. Psalm 51). He did not realize that the Lord does not desire burnt offerings. God wants a broken and contrite heart. Solomon was very wise already and showed that in his request to God. Since he asked for the right thing, he would gain both wisdom and riches. He knew that he would need wisdom and understanding to rule over the Israelites. When he awoke from the dream, he went back home and offered more sacrifices in Jerusalem and worshiped God.

Wisdom in Judgment

Immediately after Solomon's dream, he had the chance to exercise his wisdom. Two women came to him with a problem. Each of them had had a baby. One of the babies had died in the middle of the night because the mother had lain on the child. She had switched the babies early in the morning, but the other mother had known that the dead baby was not her own. They both went to Solomon claiming that the child that was alive was theirs. Solomon told them that the decision was an easy one. He told the women to give him the child. He said they would cut the child in two with the sword, and each of them could take

half of the baby. Immediately, the woman whose child it was said, in essence, “No! No! You can give her the child!” The other woman was more than willing to accept this generous offer. So Solomon knew then that the woman who had protested the death of the child was the one to whom the child really belonged. That story was told all over Israel, and they saw the greatness and the power of Solomon’s wisdom. Solomon had known that a true mother would not allow her own child to killed. The false mother had been willing to take someone else’s child in place of her dead one or to have the child that was not hers be killed (cf. 1 Kings 3:16-27).

Wisdom in Administration—Wisdom in Economics

1 Kings 4 gives a list of Solomon’s chief officials and his twelve district governors. Those men supplied the provisions for the king and the royal household. Each one had to provide the supplies for one month in the year. The following verses give an indication of the scope of that task:

And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt [he ruled all the Promised Land]. . . . Solomon’s daily provisions were thirty cors of fine flour [that was about 185 bushels—or about 6.6 kiloliters—of flour] and sixty cors of meal [that was about 375 bushels—or about 13.2 kiloliters—of meal], ten head of stall-fed cattle, twenty of pasture-fed cattle and a hundred sheep and goats, as well as deer, gazelles, roebucks and choice fowl. . . . Solomon had four thousand stalls for chariot horses, and twelve thousand horses. The district officers, each in his month, supplied provisions for King Solomon and all who came to the king’s table. They saw to it that nothing was lacking (1 Kings 4:21–23, 26–27).

Wisdom in Words

Solomon had power, wealth, and wisdom like no king had ever possessed before. Solomon's wisdom was famous throughout the world at that time:

God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, . . . He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He described plant life, . . . He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom (1 Kings 4:29, 32–34).

Wisdom in Negotiations and Organization

Solomon Builds and Dedicates the Temple

Hiram, the king of Tyre, had “. . . always been on friendly terms with David” (1 Kings 5:1b). Because of this, Hiram made an alliance, at Solomon's request, to trade cedar and pine logs for food and oil each year. Solomon drafted men from Israel to work in shifts in Lebanon cutting timber and stone for the building of the temple. He began to build a house for God in the fourth year of his reign. He used four and a half tons of gold to help build the temple. He used the cedars of Lebanon to build a fabulous palace for himself.

When all of the work on the temple was finished, Solomon brought in the things his father David had dedicated—the silver and gold and the furnishings—and he placed them in the Lord's temple. Then the priests brought in the ark of the Lord and all of the sacred furnishings. The entire assembly of Israel was there for the dedication. When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. The glory of the Lord filled the temple. Solomon also blessed all the people of Israel and prayed a beautiful prayer of dedication. Solomon prayed that all the people of God would come to worship and find the answers to their problems at that place. He prayed that even strangers and foreigners would be able to

come there and then know that there was a God in Israel.

The Glory of Solomon in Later Years

The Lord's Covenant With Solomon

The Lord's Warning Concerning Unfaithfulness

God made a covenant with Solomon as he had made a covenant with Abraham and with David:

When Solomon had finished building the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had achieved all he had desired to do, the LORD appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. The LORD said to him: “I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there. As for you, if you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, ‘You shall never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.’ But if you or your sons turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. And though this temple is now imposing, all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff and say, ‘Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?’ People will answer, ‘Because they have forsaken the LORD their God, who brought their fathers out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them—

that is why the LORD brought all this disaster on them” (1 Kings 9:1–9).

The Lord’s covenant with Abraham had been similar to the covenant of blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 28. Both of them had essentially said: “If you obey My will, you will always be blessed. If you do not obey My will, you will always be cursed.”

From Riches to Shame

The Glory of Material Possession

In addition to many other riches, Solomon had 20½ tons of gold because of Hiram’s covenant with him:

Now Hiram had sent to the king 120 talents of gold [that was about 4½ tons or about 4 metric tons]. . . . King Solomon also built ships at Ezion Geber, which is near Elath in Edom, on the shore of the Red Sea. And Hiram sent his men — sailors who knew the sea — to serve in the fleet with Solomon’s men. They sailed to Ophir and brought back 420 talents of gold [that was about 16 tons or about 14.5 metric tons] which they delivered to King Solomon (1 Kings 9:14, 26–28).

The Glory of Intellectual Prowess The Failures of Solomon: Wealth Multiplied—Horses Multiplied

The Queen of Sheba (the Queen of Egypt) came to see if Solomon was as wise and as powerful as she had been told. After she saw Solomon’s glory, she said, “*But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me . . .*” (1 Kings 10:7a). She also gave Solomon 120 talents of gold. The Queen left and took gifts

from Solomon back to her own country.

1 Kings 10:14 says, “*The weight of the gold that Solomon received yearly was 666 talents . . .*” Twenty-five tons of gold per year were coming into that man’s treasury. He was probably the richest king that ever was upon the face of the earth:

King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart. . . . Solomon accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses . . .” (1 Kings 10:23–24, 26a).

In spite of the fact that God had said that a king should “. . . not acquire great numbers of horses for himself” (Deuteronomy 17:16a), Solomon went against that decree. David, Adonijah, and Absalom had ridden upon mules. Solomon trusted in himself, his power, his wisdom, and his horses. He was doomed.

The Failures of Solomon: Wives Multiplied

Solomon married wives from different lands and soon became involved in religious apostasy. 1 Kings 11:1–6 relates this sad development in Solomon’s life:

King Solomon, however [the word “however” meant “in spite of all his wisdom”], loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh’s daughter [Solomon was like Samson in that he loved the wrong kind of women] — Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, “You must not intermarry with them . . .” Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his

wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done.

The Troubles of Solomon

Solomon began to build temples to these idols, the foreign gods of his wives, until finally God appeared to him and basically said, “That is it! I have rejected you. I will divide the kingdom from you and give you adversaries.” God began to raise up adversaries against Solomon, beginning with Hadad the Edomite from Egypt and Rezon, son of Eliada. They began to fight against Solomon and to take territories away. Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, was a strong adversary against Solomon and began to fight for the empire itself. Solomon ran him out of the country. Jeroboam fled to Egypt to Shishak, the king, and did not come back until after Solomon died.

Solomon began as a man of great wisdom, but he ended his journey a fool and one who followed the women in his life rather than the Lord of his life. Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, reigned after his father died:

As for the other events of Solomon's reign — all he did and the wisdom he displayed — are they not written in the book of the annals of Solomon? Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years. Then he rested with his fathers and was buried in the city of David his father. And Rehoboam his son succeeded him as king (1 Kings 11:41–43).

Solomon, in his old age, looked at all that he had done—looking for happiness under the sun — and concluded

that all the gold, all the women, and all that he had chased after was vanity and was like trying to catch the wind (cf. Ecclesiastes 1:14). He concluded in the last statement of his life, “*. . . Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man*” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Learn from Solomon. Do not do as he did. Fear God. Keep His commandments.

The Divided Kingdom

Review and Preview

Chapter 15 in this study of the Hebrew nation will be the first of several chapters that will cover the Divided Kingdom. Before beginning that period, however, it will be good to review some of the events that led up to the division. Solomon had married seven hundred royal wives and had had three hundred concubines. Those women had turned his heart away from God. He had no longer served God as he had once done. He had begun worshiping the idols that his wives had worshiped. 1 Kings 11:9–13 says:

The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the LORD's command. So the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen."

God had made a covenant with David (cf. 2 Samuel 7:11–16) that had said that one of his descendants would sit on the throne as long as there was a kingdom. God had kept that covenant in spite of Solomon’s sins and in spite of all of the sins of those around Solomon. God had told Solomon that He would give Solomon’s kingdom to one of his subordinates. Jeroboam, who was one of Solomon’s officials from Zeredah in Ephraim, would be the man who was given almost all of Solomon’s kingdom.

God had predicted through Jacob (cf. Genesis 48:13–20) that Ephraim would be the superior tribe to Manasseh. Jeroboam, who was from the tribe of Ephraim, began his reign in the North. This man and his tribe became so significant that the whole nation of Israel was sometimes called the nation of Ephraim. This was the northern nation within the Divided Kingdom. God had appeared to Jeroboam through Ahijah the prophet and had told him that he would receive ten tribes and that Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, would receive only one. When Solomon had heard about this, he had tried to kill Jeroboam, but Jeroboam had fled to Egypt, to Shishak the king, and had stayed there until Solomon’s death (cf. 1 Kings 11:40).

General Survey: 1 Kings 12–Nehemiah 13

Division of Solomon’s Empire at His Death

After Solomon’s death, Rehoboam made an ill-advised move against the counsel of the older men, and ten of the twelve tribes of Israel left him. Israel would not be united again until they were united spiritually in the kingdom of God, the church of Jesus Christ. There is a lot of geographical and historical information that needs to be covered in this chapter. There were five geographical divisions in Solomon’s empire at the time of his death. These occurred within an area that extended from one border of the Promised Land to the other border of the Promised Land, and from the river Euphrates to

the River of Egypt.

Syria consisted of all the territory north of the Jordan river to the river Euphrates. Damascus was the capital city of this nation. Syria had a very powerful and domineering ruler named Hazael. It was a warring, strong, and powerful nation (which developed steel) until 750 B.C. when it fell to Assyria under General Sargon. Even today, Damascena steel is so resilient that a person with gloves on can bend a sword in a loop so that the point touches the half way mark on the sword without breaking.

Southeast of the Dead Sea was the country of Moab, between the Arnon and the Zered rivers. This area was controlled by the northern nation of Israel whenever they had strong kings. When they did not have strong kings, this nation became independent and caused problems for Israel. This was God's way of letting the Israelites know that they were not doing the will of God.

Directly south of the Dead Sea was the territory of Edom. It was to Judah what Moab was to Israel. The nation of Edom had descended from Esau. Since Esau had been Jacob's (Israel's) brother, this made the Edomites kinsman to all the Israelites. As long as Judah was faithful to God, Edom was subject to Judah. Any time a king of Judah became unfaithful, then Edom became free. Edom acted as a barometer gaging whether or not Judah was following the will of God. The same was true for Moab. When Israel was exceedingly wicked, then Moab was free. If Edom was free, it was because Judah had been so wicked.

Israel was made up of the ten northen tribes from the northern end of the Dead Sea. Those tribes were ruled by wicked kings. Israel never had a good king. There was only one kind in all of Israel that called on Jehovah at any time, but even he walked in the way of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. The rest of the kings of Israel worshiped the golden calves that had been set up by Jeroboam (to keep the Israelites from going to Jerusalem to worship God) or they worshiped the Baal god (that

was set up by Ahab), and sometimes they worshiped both. Israel had three different capital cities: Shechem, then Tirzah, and finally Samaria. They were a nation until 721 B.C. when they were carried off into captivity by Assyria.

The nation of Judah in the south was formed by the two tribes of Benjamin and Judah. They had nearly as many good kings as they had bad kings. They even had some great kings. Judah lasted until 586 B.C. when they were conquered by Nebuchadnezzar and carried away into Babylon.

The History of the Divided Kingdom

The history that centers around the next eight chapters in Bible History 2 is very important. There is a period in Old Testament history called the Period of Division. That period lasted from 935 B.C., the time of the death of Solomon, until 842 B.C., when Jehu killed all the sons of Ahab. It helps to know this history so that the people and events will fall into order. There will be a brief discussion of these events in this chapter, and more details will be included in the following chapters.

Rehoboam gained the throne at the time that Solomon's empire broke apart. Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, refused to listen to wise advice from the elders regarding taxation, and rather than decreasing the taxation, he increased it. Jeroboam then carried the northern ten tribes away to form the nation of Israel, and they never again became one nation.

Jeroboam erected two golden calves so the northern tribes would no longer have to go to Jerusalem to worship. He had concluded that if he did not do something, he would lose their loyalty. He put one calf up at Dan in the northernmost part of his kingdom and one at Bethel in the southernmost part of his kingdom, on the very road that led to Jerusalem. He told his people to worship those gods. That drove Israel deeper into sin and further away from Judah.

Then Shishak, the king of Egypt, invaded Judah, and they lost all the treasures of David and Solomon, including the tons

of gold that had come to Solomon. That gold gone not only into Solomon's treasury, it had gone into the temple treasury as well. Shishak came and carried all of the gold to Egypt. He took so much of the gold that Judah no longer had any golden shields in the temple, so they put up brass shields. (When the sun shone on brass it looked gold, but up close it was easy to see that it was an imitation.) Shishak's invasion was just another way God told Judah that they were no longer His faithful people.

I Kings 14:30 says, "*There was continual warfare between Rehoboam and Jeroboam.*" Jeroboam and Judah went to war again while Abijah (Rehoboam's son) reigned (cf. 2 Chronicles 13:1–19). During the reigns of five or six kings, there was constant warfare between Israel and Judah as God drove them further apart because of their sin. God wanted Judah to know that He would be with them if they would be faithful to Him. Because Israel had decided to worship other gods, beginning with Jeroboam's golden calves, God never told Israel He would be with them. God put the two nations at war to teach Judah that they should no longer consider Israel as their brother because they were worshiping other gods.

Judah was invaded by the Ethiopians, led by Zerah (cf. 2 Chronicles 14:9–15). God was telling Judah again (this was fulfilling the covenant of blessings and curses from Deuteronomy 28) that they were not doing His will. He allowed foreigners to invade their land. During the periods of two kings, the Ethiopians had victory over Judah. Then Asa came to the throne of Judah, however, and defeated Zerah's army.

During his reign over Israel, Ahab introduced his people to Baal worship. That was also during the time of Elijah, the great prophet of God. He stood alone against Ahab and his gods of Baal. The Israelites no longer shunned idolatry. However, in reality, there were seven thousand who had not bowed their knees to the Baal worship. Elijah was prominent throughout all of Ahab's life because he fought and defeated the prophets of Baal again and again. The worship of Baal was a fertility rite.

The worship was concluded by the act of fornication with either a male or female temple prostitute.

Ben-Hadad, king of Aram (Syria), then brought his armies up to war against Israel at Aphek (cf. 1 Kings 20:26 ff). Ahab was killed by the Armeans at Ramoth-Gilead. This was one of the ways God let Israel know that He no longer counted them as His people — they would go out to war and always lose.

During the reign of Jehoshaphat over Judah, there was an invasion by an alliance of the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir (cf. 2 Chronicles 20:1–30). Jehoshaphat was a good king. He was greatly outnumbered, but he slaughtered an innumerable host in the valley of Jehoshaphat. God again was giving them a simple lesson: if they were with Him, He would be with them.

The history of the Hebrew nation is filled with wars, wars, and more wars. There was a war against Moab in which Israel and Judah were allies (cf. 2 Kings 3). It was a bad thing for Judah to ally itself with Israel because the Baal worship began to invade the good nation of Judah.

Finally, to tell Judah that they were not in favor with God, there was a revolt by Edom during the reign of Jehoram (2 Chronicles 21:8–10). Obadiah, a book of prophesy, was probably written at this time since he talks about Edom's sin of not coming to the aid of Judah at the time of their invasion.

This covers the period of division from 935 B.C. to 842 B.C. The Syrian period, where Syria was afflicting Judah and making alliances with Israel, was next (from 842 B.C. to 779 B.C.). That was the time Hazael came to the throne of Syria, Jehu came to the throne of Israel, and Athaliah, a woman, ruled over Judah for six years. Athaliah was the daughter of Jezebel, the most wicked woman that ever lived. They all came to the throne in the same year. Wickedness ruled the whole Promised Land during that period of time.

Jehu totally and completely destroyed the worship of Baal (2 Kings 10:18–28). He did not do this because he wanted to worship God: he did it because he wanted to stamp out the

influence of Ahab. Jehu continued to worship the golden calves of Jeroboam. He was simply seeking to strengthen his empire and not seeking God at all. Hazael, the king of Syria, defeated all of the land east of the Jordan and annexed that to his empire. Athaliah, when she came to the throne, slaughtered all of her children and grand children except one boy—Joash (cf. 2 Kings 11:1–3). He was one year old when one of the servants of Athaliah took him and hid. Jehoiada, the high priest at that time, enabled Joash to be a faithful king as long as he was under the influence of the high priest. The high priest repaired the temple (2 Kings 12:4–16), but Joash got credit for it. This was during the time when Jonah and Joel made their prophecies. It is important to know the prophets in their correct historical environments. This makes it easier to understand what they were saying and why they were saying it.

Israel became totally subject to Syria during this period of time. Hazael came down and defeated the king of Israel, set a new king on the throne, and made an alliance with him and Israel. For a while, Israel was a vassal or puppet kingdom under Hazael's rule of Syria. Hazael tried to take Judah, Gath, and the country of the Philistines on the coast, but he could not take Jerusalem or the central part because they remained faithful to God. This was all during the Syrian period.

Israel went through a time of restoration after that. The nation had sunk so low that they were the vassals or the puppet kingdom of Syria. The restoration of Israel went from 779 B.C. to 742 B.C. Jeroboam II (do not confuse him with the Jeroboam that had the golden calves) brought Israel back to its place of supremacy. He conquered Syria and all of the nations to the river Euphrates. Judah was made a tributary during this time period because Syria has conquered most of God's people. The war of Jeroboam II with Uzziah (he was also called Azariah) brought Judah back to glory. Judah became a faithful people of God once again, to a partial degree.

The next period included the fall of Israel. That went from 742 B.C. to 721 B.C. The dates are not all that important,

unless someone likes history. Assyria began its march across history. Assyria was the most cruel, crude empire that has ever stood on the face of the earth. Menahem, one of the kings of Israel, was so wicked that Israel again became subject to a foreign nation. Assyria was the most powerful, war-like kingdom of the day. During the reign of Pekah, who followed Menahem by a couple of kings, Naphtali and other northern tribes were taken captive by Tiglath-Pileser. Historically, this is Tiglath-Pileser III. Biblically, he was called Pul. He was the powerful warrior king of Assyria.

Samaria, the capital of the northen nation of Israel, fell (during the reign of Hoshea) to Sargon in 721 B.C. The northern tribes were taken captive and ceased to exist as a nation. A remnant of those people would last through the Assyrian empire and the Babylonian empire. After the fall of Babylon, they would come back with some of the remnant of Judah to rebuild the temple which would later be destroyed.

Historically, the last period of the Divided Kingdom was the fall of Judah from 721 B.C. to 586 B.C. Judah lasted 135 years after the destruction of Israel, but most of that time they were subject to Assyria or Babylon. Great kings arose during that period of time, and for a few years, Judah would be free. They would later go back under the heel of either Assyria or Babylon. Hezekiah began that period, and he reformed the entire land (cf. 2 Chronicles 30–32). He was maybe the greatest king since David had been king. In the seventh year of Hezekiah, the city of Samaria was captured, so he became king immediately after the fall of Israel. He was delivered from the attack of Sennacherib, the most powerful Assyrian king, by the direct hand of God. God sent a destroying angel and killed 185,000 soldiers overnight.

Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, was taken captive by the Assyrians. He was the most wicked king. It was his sin that caused God to say, in essence: “That is it. There is no going back. I will finally destroy this nation.” Manasseh repented in Babylon. God got him out of prison and brought him back to

the land (cf. 2 Chronicles 33:1–20). He tried to reform the land, but it was too late. His sin had already pushed them over the limit. The iniquity of Judah was full.

There were two kings that came between Manasseh and King Josiah. Josiah was a powerful, godly man, and he brought the worship of God to the city of Jerusalem again. He brought honor, integrity, and peace back to the land again. He made a tragic mistake when he went against God's will to fight Pharoah Neco at Meggido. He gave Megiddo the name "where God's enemy falls," and that was where he died. In the book of Revelation, the word "Armageddon" means the valley or hill of Megiddo. That is where God's enemy will always be defeated.

Babylon rose as a national power, and Nebuchadnezzar, the great king of Babylon, arose and began the destruction of Judah. In 606 B.C., he carried away ten thousand people, including many rulers. In 586 B.C., with the rebellion of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar came and destroyed the temple, burned the city, and carried away all of Judah except for the women and the old men. 586 B.C. marked the end of the nation of Judah. From then on, there would just be a remnant.

Elements Which Contributed to the Division in 931 B.C.

There were many elements that contributed to the division in 931 B.C. After Solomon died, there was an impetuous young ruler in the south named Rehoboam who would not listen to the wise and seasoned veterans. Instead he listened to the young men of his day. Secondly, there was a clever opponent and rabble-rouser named Jeroboam. Jeroboam not only wanted the kingdom, he had been told by God that he could have the kingdom. So he stirred up trouble. There was one guy that would not listen to wisdom, and a second guy had a hidden agenda because he wanted to be king. Thirdly, Solomon's excessive taxation contributed to the division. Taxes are of God, because a government is to be supported by its people (cf.

Romans 13:1–7), but Solomon had excessively taxed the nation. A young ruler, a rabble-rouser, and excessive taxation all three contributed to the fall of a united kingdom. There was also jealousy between the tribes of the north and the tribes of the south. They had only been a loose federation and never really united. They did not like each other. In the north, they were an industrial people, and in the south, they were an agricultural people. The fact that they did not have common interests was another contributing factor.

The different geographical situations also were a factor. Israel, the northern nation, knew all about foreign affairs. They were internationally situated. Judah, in the south, was secluded and isolated. All they knew about were their own individual needs and their agricultural pursuits. They were considered backwoodsman and ignorant bumpkins by Israel. The book of Amos gives excellent examples of this problem. The real reason for the division of the kingdom, however, was Solomon's apostasy.

The Results of Jeroboam's Sin in Erecting the Golden Calves

Jeroboam I, the son of Nebat, was a clever rabble-rouser and an official in Solomon's court, and he became the ruler in the North. He knew that if he was going to unite his people and keep them under his control, he would have to have to a different center of worship. It was very significant that he knew that if the people worshiped together, they would stay together. He believed that if his people had to travel to Judah to worship, then that would be where their allegiance would be.

In the final analysis, what matters the most to each person or nation will determine whether or not they can remain one and united. If both parties or countries can agree on the things that have the highest priorities, they stand a good chance of forming a lasting alliance. What was the result of Jeroboam's sin? There was a fourfold result:

First, the Levites in the North were driven south because

they had nothing to do. Jereboam appointed men from other tribes to serve in his temple. God had commanded that the tribe of Levi be the only ones to serve (cf. 2 Chronicles 11:13–15; 13:9).

Second, because of the Levites' move to the South, Judah was strengthened. As religious people who were in love with God, the Levites could not stay up there and worship the golden calves. They had to move to Judah so that they could worship the Lord their God (cf. 2 Chronicles 11:16–17; 2 Chronicles 13:10–18).

Third, Jeroboam and his system were totally rejected by God, which, **fourth**, led Israel into sin and destruction (cf. 1 Kings 11:38; 12:25–33; 13:33–34; 14:10). The significance of that can be seen in the fact that the phrase “*. . . walking in the ways of Jeroboam and in his sin, which he had caused Israel to commit*” (or something similar to that phrase) is recorded twenty-four times in the record of the kings (cf. 1 Kings 14:16; 15:26, 30, 34; 16:2, 7, 26, 31; 21:22; 22:52; 2 Kings 3:3; 10:29, 31; 13:2, 6, 11; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28; 17:21–23; 23:15).

The Divided Kingdom — the First One Hundred Years

Review and Preview

Chapter 16 in the study of Old Testament history will begin a detailed coverage of the Divided Kingdom. The kingdom was divided (because of Solomon's apostasy) into Israel in the North, with ten tribes, and Judah in the South, with two tribes. The two tribes that made up Judah were Benjamin and Judah. Within this chapter, there will be references to the biblical text. It is important to read these references along with this chapter.

First 100 Years of Division

Rehoboam's Ill-Advised Move and Israel's Rebellion

The first one hundred years of division were a very stirring time. There were fifteen separate kings during this time. The southern nation of Judah had six kings, and the northern nation of Israel had nine. Rehoboam had taken Solomon's throne at his death (cf. I Kings 12:1–24). Rehoboam was presented with the ideal opportunity to put down the strife and trouble that had existed during the end of Solomon's reign. The tribes of the North (the ten tribes that would become Israel) came to him and said, essentially, "Your father taxed us too heavily. If you will just relieve our burden, we will serve you as king." Rehoboam had the ideal opportunity to be a man of God. He asked for the older men and wise counselors to come and give him advice, and they listened to his dilemma. They told him that if he

would relieve those people's burden today, they would serve him all of their lives. They told him that all he had to do was that one single thing. He could even gradually raise taxes after a time, they told him. Rehoboam told the counslors to stay and he would get further advice. Then he called for counsel from the young men whom he had grown up with. He surrounded himself with his peers rather than with the wisdom of older men. Anytime a young ruler does that, the nation is in trouble. Rehoboam asked his peers what he should do. Those young men said, in essence: "Relieve their burden? You must toughen their burden. You must put on them a heavier load. You need to raise their taxes and tell them that your little finger is going to be thicker than your father's loins. Your father may have beaten them with whips, but you are going to chastise them with scorpions. Go tell them that, and they will learn their lesson. They will learn not to question your authority if you will just come down hard on them." Rehoboam's ill-advised move was that he listened to the "wisdom" of the young. The so-called "wisdom" of those who are younger does not compare to the wisdom that older men have. Rehoboam went in and told those potential enemies that he would that day become their enemy. He said he would raise their taxes. He said he would make their burden heavier. The men of Israel answered: "*'What share do we have in David, what part in Jesse's son? To your tents, O Israel!' . . . So the Israelites went home*" (1 Kings 12:16b).

Jeroboam's Two Golden Calves

Jeroboam immediately appeared and became their leader and Israel's king. Jeroboam was the official from Solomon's court that the prophet Ahijah had said would get the northern nation. He was now accepted by those ten tribes as their ruler. God then began his work to make those brothers enemies. He divided those empires from each other so He could have a righteous seed in Judah at least some of the time. Jeroboam thought that if his people were going down to Judah for the

feast days and worshiping in the city of Jerusalem at the temple, then they would begin to think God was down in Judah (cf.1 Kings 12:25–35). He thought that they would think that if God was in Judah, then He was not up in Israel. He thought that the people of Israel would then think they needed to be loyal to Judah rather than to him. Jeroboam was afraid they would kill him and be loyal to Rehoboam because their God was found in the city of Jerusalem. He did the wise political thing, but it was ungodly. Not all things that are worldly wise are godly correct. Jeroboam committed sin. He decided to make two golden calves and erect two places of worship. He put one golden calf up in Dan, at the waters of Miram (Lake Hula) in the extreme northern part of Israel, and put one in Bethel. He told the people that they needed to worship in those places. He thought he would be making it easier for them so they would not have to go all the way down to Jerusalem. The Israelites that lived in the northern part of Jeroboam's kingdom, could go to Dan. Those that lived in the southern part of his kingdom, could go to Bethel. He was practicing a religion of convenience and a religion that was opposed to God's revealed word. Instead of having a feast in the seventh month on the fifteenth day, he had a feast in the eighth month on the fifteenth day. Instead of using Levitical priests, he used priests of every tribe except the tribe of Levi. He threatened to punish any of his people who went to Jerusalem to worship and those who did not worship the golden calves. "*This thing became a sin . . .*" to Israel (1 Kings 12:30). The phrase "*walking in the ways of Jeroboam*" (or something with a similar meaning) is used over twenty-three times to describe the sins of future kings. Every single king of Israel bowed down to Jeroboam's golden calves (Ahab added Baal worship later, but they still bowed down to Jeroboam's calves). From the very beginning, Israel was doomed as a nation. From the very beginning, they said by their actions that they were not the nation of God, and God had to recognize that decision.

The Man of God From Judah

God sent a man from Judah to prophesy against Jeroboam's altar (cf. 1 Kings 13:1–34). Evidently there was no one in Israel God could send, so He sent a man all the way from Judah. God told him to go up and cry out against the altar. The man of God said that a man by the name of Josiah would come and destroy that idol and burn all the remnants of Jeroboam's altar. God had told him to go straight up there and talk to the king and then turn around and come straight home the same way he had gone up. He did not do that. After he had prophesied against Jeroboam's altar, he started back a different way. An old prophet (that is why the first man is sometimes called the young prophet) from Israel followed the man and said that God had told him to have the younger prophet come to his house. The younger prophet told him, however, that God had told him to go home without stopping. The older prophet said, in essence, "Yes, I know, but God has told me He wants you to eat on the way. You may come back to my house and eat, then I will send you on your journey." The younger man did that, but in doing so he violated God's Word. He was not doing the will of God. When he started back toward Judah, a lion killed him. The older man heard about it and came out to bury the younger prophet. He found the man's donkey and the lion standing there together looking at the body. A donkey would normally have run when a lion had killed its rider. A lion would normally have eaten the man that it had killed. It was not normal for a donkey and a lion to be standing together. This was God's way of basically saying, "When I give an assignment, I want that assignment fulfilled to the last letter." If the man was a faithful man of God, and that instance was just a temporary mistake, then when he died, he would have gone to be with God. That would be better by far. If he was a rebellious prophet, as Balaam had been, then he would have gone to his judgment—which would not be good at all.

The Sickness of Jeroboam's Son and Ahijah the Prophet

During his reign in Israel at this time, not only had Jeroboam made the golden calves, he had committed all kinds of evil. Jeroboam did not change his evil ways. Abijah, the son of Jeroboam, became ill during his father's reign (cf. 1 Kings 14:1–20). Jeroboam sent his wife in disguise to talk to the prophet Ahijah. Through Ahijah God told Jeroboam that the house of Jeroboam was going to be burned up like rubbish until it was all gone. The prophet told Jeroboam's wife that their son would die. He was the only son of Jeroboam that God had found any good in. He was the only one from Jeroboam's house that would go to his grave in peace.

Summary of Rehoboam's Reign

Rehoboam allowed idolatry to exist even in the city of Jerusalem during his reign in Judah. Shashak, the king of Egypt, invaded Judah and carried away all of the treasures of David and Solomon to Egypt. Rehoboam was continually at war with Jeroboam. He won some and lost some. Finally he died and was buried (cf. 1 Kings 14:21–31).

Abijah's Reign Over Judah

Abijah, the son of Rehoboam, began to reign over Judah (cf. 1 Kings 15:1–8). He was a wicked king just like his father. He continually warred with Jeroboam and won temporary victories, but was finally defeated by Jeroboam. He captured the city of Bethel and the surrounding towns. He was a wicked man. When he died, he had fourteen wives, twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. The man was evil politically, morally, and maritally.

Asa's Reign in Judah

When Abijah died, a good king finally came to the throne of Judah. His name was Asa. (cf. 1 Kings 15:1–8; 2 Chronicles 14:2–16:14). He led a drastic reformation. He did away with all

the idolatry in the city of Jerusalem and purged the temple. He began the true worship of God in Judah again. Zerah the Cushite (Ethiopian) came to war against him, and Asa defeated him. Asa blocked the king of Israel from building Ramah as a border blockade across the Jordan in the East. He was moral and upright. He was victorious in all the battles he fought.

Nadab's Reign Over Israel

Baasha's Reign Over Israel

Jeroboam died, and Nadab, his son, reigned over Israel for two years (cf. 1 Kings 15:25–34). Baasha killed Nadab, which ended the dynasty of Jeroboam. During this time, there were nine different dynasties in Israel but only one in Judah—the dynasty of David. Baasha began to reign over Israel. He killed all of Jeroboam's house: every man, woman, boy, and girl. He wiped them all away. He wanted the separation from Jeroboam's reign so badly that he moved the palace and the capital of Israel from Shechem to Tirzah. Baasha warred continually with Asa and Judah. He never won a battle because Asa was a righteous king. God had made a covenant that whenever his righteous people went out to war against their enemies, they would always win. Baasha reigned twenty-four years and was buried in Tirzah.

Elah, King of Israel for Two Years

Zimri Reigned One Week Over Israel

Elah was a wicked man. He came to the throne after his father, Baasha. Zimri killed him, and that ended the dynasty of Baasha. That was really a period of anarchy. If someone wanted to be king, all he had to do was kill the king and make himself king. Zimri only reigned for seven days. He was a weak king. He reigned for seven days and then took his own life by setting fire to the palace because Omri had surrounded his house (cf. 1 Kings 16:8–20).

Omri's Powerful Reign Over Israel

Omri had a powerful reign over Israel (cf. 1 Kings 16:21–28). For a little while, he had a contestant to the throne named Tibni. He went to battle with Tibni, killed him, and established himself as the ruler of Israel. He wanted his kingdom to be separated from Baasha, so he bought the hill of Samaria and moved the capital from Tirzah to Samaria. Samaria remained Israel's capital for the rest of their history. This showed the power of Omri. He was the first king of Israel to be mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions (he was paying tribute to one of the kings of Assyria).

Ahab's Evil Reign Over Israel

Ahab succeeded his father Omri as king. Ahab was probably the foulest king that ever sat on Israel's throne (cf. 1 Kings 16:29–22:40). One writer called him an evil toad that squatted on Israel's throne. He married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians. This was undoubtably the most wicked woman that ever lived. She brought Baal worship to Israel, and Ahab built a temple of Baal in Samaria. Baal worship involved fertility rites, so to finish the sacrifice and be really religious, a person had to commit fornication with either the opposite sex or the same sex. Jezebel introduced this foul, unattractive worship in Israel. Because of that, Israel had Jeroboam's calves and/or Jezebel's bull. Ahab warred with Ben-hadad, king of Syria, and won — it was two wicked people fighting against each other. Whoever was the strongest would win that battle because neither one of them had the help of God. Ahab was stronger than the strongest king of the strongest nation around him at that time.

Ahab fought constantly against Elijah's godly influence. God did not leave Ahab without testimony. Elijah came to testify again and again against the wickedness of Ahab's house. He had to spend years away from home in the widow's house down by the riverside. Ahab had told Elijah he would kill him. God took care of His prophet, Elijah, down by the brook Kerith

east of the Jordan. Ravens brought him food every day and the brook Kerith gave him something to drink. When the brook dried up, Elijah went to the widow's house in Zarephath. She had a little meal and just a little oil. Elijah asked her to make him a small cake of bread and told her the flour and oil would not run out. For the year that he was there, her little bit of flour made bread every day. Her little bit of oil lasted throughout all the time that Elijah was under her roof. He constantly told Ahab of his wickedness and of God's decree to destroy his nation. Ahab constantly resisted the word of Elijah, the great prophet of God (1 Kings 16:29–22:28).

Elijah, himself, was a powerful testimony to the power of God. On one occasion, Elijah challenged all the prophets of Baal to meet him on the top of Mount Carmel. There, with a mighty act of judgment, God showed that He was Lord. God proved that He ruled not just Judah, but also Israel. The people promised that they would serve God. That day Elijah killed 450 prophets of Baal on one stone and prayed for rain. It had not rained for two and a half years. God sent a small cloud that soon covered the sky, and the earth was replenished by the rain that came. God proved again that He was superior to Baal. Ahab still did not listen, and neither did Jezebel (cf. 1 Kings 18:16–45).

During that same period of time, Ahab looked at a vineyard next to his that belonged to a man named Naboth. The vineyard was Naboth's inheritance from his father. It had been his family's vineyard from the day that Joshua had led them across the Jordan river. Ahab offered Naboth whatever the vineyard was worth. Naboth could not sell because it was his inheritance from God. Finally, Jezebel had Naboth killed, and Ahab took the vineyard. God said, in essence, "I have seen what you have done. I have seen what Jezebel has done. You will cease to be king, and the dogs will eat Jezebel's flesh." That was exactly what happened (cf. 1 Kings 21:1–29).

Ahab made an alliance with Jehoshaphat, which was good for Ahab but bad for Jehoshaphat (cf. 1 Kings 22:1–40). (When

the righteous make an alliance with the wicked, they are always in trouble.) They wanted to fight against the king of Aram and retake Ramoth-Gilead (this may have been the nation of Gilead or the nation of Amnon). Ahab and Jehoshaphat were at a feast with the 400 Asherah prophets who were the only ones left after the slaughter of the 450 Baal prophets. They prophesied with one voice and told them to go up to Ramoth-Gilead and prosper. Jehoshaphat knew that in the wicked nation of Israel there could not be four hundred true prophets of God. So he asked if there was a prophet of Jehovah that could prophesy about what would happen. Ahab said that there was yet one man, Macaiah, son of Imlah, but that he hated Macaiah. That was the greatest compliment ever paid to a prophet. When the wickedest man in the world hates you, you must be doing something right. Macaiah was brought out of prison, and he prophesied that that was the day Ahab would die. Ahab did not want to die, so when they went to battle, he disguised himself as an ordinary soldier and let Jehoshaphat wear the king's robes. The king of Syria said his men should not kill anybody but Ahab. Someone with a bow saw a man in kingly robes and he thought it was Ahab. He drew his bow to shoot the arrow, but Jehoshaphat cried out, and they stopped pursuing him. When the man let the arrow go at random and it shot it in the air, it struck Ahab in the only place it could have killed him—between the creases of his armor. Ahab turned aside and died in the field of Naboth, and the dogs licked his blood there. Ahab was punished for bringing the wickedness of Baal into Israel.

Jehoshaphat, King of Judah

During that time, Jehoshaphat reigned in Judah (cf. 1 Kings 22:41–50; 2 Chronicles 17:1–21:3). He was a good king and a man of God. He continued Asa's reforms. He purged Judah of the worship of idols. He fortified the entire nation and made it the strong nation it once had been at the time of Solomon's death. He defeated and made all of his enemies his servants: the

Philistines, the Arabians, and the Edomites. Then, however, he made that ill-advised alliance with Ahab. That alliance affected his house so much that his son married Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel.

Ahaziah, King of Israel

Ahaziah became the king of Israel at the death of Ahab (cf. 1 Kings 22:51–53). He was as wicked as his father Ahab had been. He fell through the lattice in his house and was injured. He sent to Ekron to inquire of the god Baal-Zebub to see whether or not he would recover. Elijah met the messenger and told him to go back and tell Ahaziah that he would die. That was exactly what occurred.

Jehoram's Reign Over Israel

Jehoram (Joram), the second son of Ahab, reigned over Israel after Ahaziah died (cf. 2 Kings 3:1–27). He recovered the territory of Moab. He fought against Elijah and Elisha's godly influence. He did not listen to the older prophet or to the prophet that succeeded him. He was killed by Jehu, the fast chariot driver (who succeeded Joram as king of Israel). Jehu then chased and fatally wounded Ahaziah, king of Judah, who had been with Joram.

Jehoram's Reign Over Judah

Jehoram reigned at that time over Judah (cf. 2 Kings 8:16–24; 2 Chronicles 21:1–20). He was the son of Jehoshaphat and he married Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. She was a bad influence on Jehoram, and they began to bow down and worship the Baal gods. He was defeated by strangers rather than by Israel or by his brothers. He died from an incurable disease, and no one regretted his passing.

Ahaziah, King of Judah

Ahaziah, the youngest son of Jehoram, came to the throne of Judah because all the older sons had been killed (cf. 2 Kings

8:25–29; 2 Chronicles 22:1–9). He was killed on the same day that Jehoram of Israel was killed by Jehu, the fast chariot driver.

The time near the end of the Divided Kingdom was not a good time. Israel had always been wicked, and Judah was being influenced by the same Baal worship that pervaded Israel. God had to take a hand. God sent Elijah and Elisha to speak to the nation of Israel and to the king of Israel about his wickedness. God used a fast chariot driver and a great warrior named Jehu to destroy the wickedness. In one single day, Jehu slew both the king of Israel and the king of Judah. He destroyed the Baals from all over Israel. That gave both nations a chance to start anew. It took awhile, but it was finally a benefit to Judah. It was not a benefit to Israel at all.

During the reign of Jehoram, king of Judah, foreigners came from Arabia, Egypt, and Ethiopia and sacked the temple. They took away the temple treasures, carried away a lot of the people, and defeated the nation of Judah. During that time, the people of Edom, who were brothers to the people of Judah, could have come to their aid, but they did not. So God raised up the prophet Obadiah to speak to Judah. He spoke to Judah, but he talked about the nation of Edom. He said Edom would be convicted for two reasons. First of all, they were a prideful nation. Primarily, however, they had stood on the other side when their brothers had been in need. They had stood back and watched from afar, and they had not come to their brothers' aid. When a brother is in trouble, where should all of his brothers be? Edom should have run to protect and provide help. Judah had needed the assistance even more because they had no longer been worshiping God: they had been bowing to the Baal.

There is a lesson to learn here. Brothers in Christ need to run to each other's defense when they are criticized. When a brother is in trouble, other brothers need to come to his aid. When a brother is in need, other brothers need to meet his needs. Brothers in Christ need to practice "one another" religion. Edom was condemned because of their neutrality. Brothers need to be involved.

The Divided Kingdom — the Second One Hundred Years

Chapter 17 in the study of Old Testament history will look at the second hundred years of division. At the conclusion of the last chapter, Jehu had killed the king of Israel and the king of Judah. God had used Jehu to give both nations a chance for a brand new start.

The Second One Hundred Years of Division

Jehu's Reign Over Israel

Jehu was anointed to be king over Israel (cf. 2 Kings 9:1–10:36). That was a strange thing since the kings of Israel had not followed God at all. Since they had lived in rebellion to God, it seems that God would have written them off. God does not work that way. He wanted to give Jehu an opportunity. He knew everything, but He wanted to give Jehu an opportunity to be a man of God. So Elisha the prophet took a young man from the prophets that were learning from him and told him to take a flask of oil and go anoint Jehu to be king over Israel. In 2 Kings 9:7–10, Elisha told the young man what God wanted him to tell Jehu:

“You are to destroy the house of Ahab your master, and I will avenge the blood of my servants the prophets and the blood of all the LORD’s servants shed by Jezebel. The whole house of Ahab will perish. I will cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel —

slave or free. I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat and like the house of Baasha son of Ahijah. As for Jezebel, dogs will devour her on the plot of ground at Jezreel, and no one will bury her.” Then he opened the door and ran.

This young prophet was afraid of Jehu, but he went and spoke the Word of God. He anointed and appointed Jehu to be king over Israel with the assignment to destroy all of Ahab’s house. Jehu killed both Joram, king of Israel, and Ahaziah, king of Judah, on the battle field on the same day. The king of Judah, Ahaziah, was carried back to Jerusalem and was buried with the rest of the kings.

Then Jehu had to do what God had said to do and completely destroy the house of Ahab. He rode into the city of Samaria. Jezebel knew he was coming, so she dressed herself up. She was not doing this to tempt Jehu, for she was an old woman. She was dressing for her pride and to prepare for her burial. She knew Jehu was going to kill her, and because of her pride, she wanted to look good so people would say, “That was Jezebel! Wasn’t Jezebel something? Wasn’t Jezebel a fabulous queen? Wasn’t she a powerful woman?” She wanted honor even after she was dead.

2 Kings 9:31 says, “*As Jehu entered the gate, she asked, ‘Have you come in peace, Zimri, you murderer of your master?’*” This was an insult because Zimri was a traitor of Israel. Jehu “... looked up at the window and called out, ‘Who is on my side? Who?’” (2 Kings 9:32a). Two eunuchs looked out the window, and Jehu told them to throw Jezebel down. They threw her down to the ground, which probably killed her, but Jehu’s horses trampled her underfoot.

Jehu went in to eat and drink and began to realize that Jezebel was the daughter of the king of Sidon, so he told someone to go out and bury her. When they went out, all they found was her skull and her feet and hands. The dogs had eaten the rest of Jezebel. What was left there was left as a witness.

The dogs had not eaten all of her simply because God had not wanted them to. Nothing was left of Jezebel for anyone to say, “This is Jezebel.” Nobody was going to be able to attend her funeral. This lady would not be buried. All that was left of her was her skull, her hands, and her feet with no flesh left on them. If a person had wanted to find Jezebel, God had prophesied that Jezebel would be spread as dung on the field. That had not been a figure of speech. 2 Kings 9:37 in the King James Version says, *“And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel; so that they shall not say, ‘This is Jezebel.’”* That literally happened. If someone had wanted to find the rest of Jezebel, he would have had to follow those dogs. Wherever they excreted, he could point at that excretion and say, “That is Jezebel.” She went from deity to dog’s dung in one single day. The lady had paid for her sins.

Jehu was not through yet. He went to Samaria, the city of Ahab’s sons, and had all seventy of Ahab’s sons killed. He seized seventy heads as proof that Ahab’s sons, grandsons, and all the male slaves in Ahab’s house had been wiped out. The woman, Jezebel, was dead, and all of Ahab’s house was dead, but Jehu was still not through. Ahab and Jezebel had put something in Israel that had to be removed if Jehu was to help Israel get a new start. If Jehu was to have the opportunity of leading Israel out of the bondage that Ahab and Jezebel had placed them in, there was still one thing for him to do. He had to wipe out the worship of Baal. They could not easily kill all the Baal worshipers and priests, however, because they were too powerful and were scattered over all the land. The priests and worshipers would hide, as the prophets of God had, in caves.

If a farmer does not get rid of all of the seed in his field, the crop can come back up. Jehu knew he would not be able to kill all the priests of Baal where they were, so he brought all the people together and essentially said: “Ahab served Baal just a little bit, but Jehu is going to serve him more. I am going to offer to Baal a sacrifice that Ahab had never thought about

sacrificing. I will be the greatest worshiper of Baal. All the worshipers and all the priests of Baal must gather together in Baal's great temple here in Samaria." The word went all over the land, and all the priests of Baal and the worshipers of Baal were brought into the house of Baal in the city of Samaria. Then Jehu entered the house and said, "*Look around and see that no servants of the LORD are here with you — only the ministers of Baal*" (2 Kings 10:23b). He was basically saying: "I want nobody here but the true worshipers of Baal. Anybody here that worships Jehovah must be driven out. Do not let them be in here. I do not want anybody but the faithful worshipers of Baal here." All the worshipers of Jehovah that might have been trying to win Jehu's favor or who were a little weak were driven out of the temple of Baal. Then Jehu gave the command to close the doors. All the doors were shut, and he surrounded the temple with his army. Jehu's army destroyed all the priests of Baal and all the worshipers of Baal in one day.

Everything that Jehu had done was exactly what God had wanted him to do. The king of Israel was dead. The king of Judah was dead. All the sons of Ahab were dead. All the worshipers of Baal and all the priests of Baal were dead. He had swept the land clean, but his heart was not right with God. He had not done all these things because he had wanted to do God's will. God wanted it all done, and it was God's will that Jehu do it. But Jehu had not done it to please God. Service to God is dictated finally and ultimately by what is in one's heart. Jehu was not serving God, he was serving himself. The proof for that is in the text: "*So Jehu destroyed Baal worship in Israel. However, he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit—the worship of the golden calves at Bethel and Dan*" (2 Kings 10:28–29). He bowed down and worshiped the idols of Jeroboam. He walked in the sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. This was like an incurable cancer from the day it had been placed in Israel's bosom. The nation had had a deadly cancer from the very beginning.

Jehu had not done the will of God totally, but he had done four things that God had wanted done: he had killed both the king of Israel and the king of Judah, slain Jezebel, killed the sons of Ahab, and purged the land of the Baal worship. So God said that because he had done those four things, four of his sons would sit on the throne of Israel. The laborer is worthy of his hire even when the laborer is not a righteous man of God. God would pay Jehu for the service that Jehu had rendered to Him. If he had fully served God, turned from the worship of the calves of Jeroboam, and purged the land of idol worship completely, then his dynasty would have been as secure in Israel as David's had been in Judah. Jehu had not done all that he should have, however, so only four of his sons would sit on the throne. It is interesting that the fourth son, Zechariah, only reigned for six months. It is as if God said, "Finally, I do not have to keep My Word any longer to this ungodly line."

God wanted Jehu to know that he was not following His will. Jehu probably thought he was in God's will since God had promised that four of Jehu's sons would be upon the throne. Jehu went out to fight against Hazael, the king of Syria, and Hazael defeated him time and time again. When he was doing God's will, he was always victorious. As soon as he refused to worship Jehovah, however, he began to lose. Jehu refused to worship Baal, but he was not worshiping God either. Because of that, he lost the battles. That was by covenant. The people of God were never away from the covenant of blessings and curses found in Deuteronomy 28. When Jehu did God's will, he was blessed even if he had not done it with a perfect heart. When he did not do God's will, he was cursed by defeat at the hand of Hazael, the king of Syria.

Athaliah's Evil Rule of Judah

On the same day that Israel lost their king and Jehu began to reign there, Judah lost its king. The wicked daughter of Jezebel, Athaliah, had married Jehoram, the king of Judah. When she heard that Ahaziah her son was dead, she proceeded

to kill all of the royal seed. If the story had ended there, then the seed of David would have been destroyed and the devil would have won. But the text continues: Jehosheba, the queen's servant, took Joash and hid him. He was the only son of David that was left. That one son would be the one through whom the Christ would come. As long as Joash was a baby, Athaliah ruled in Jerusalem on the throne (cf. 2 Kings 11:1–3). She was a woman and a usurper. She was not of David's family. She was an evil Baal worshiper, but for seven years, she controlled Judah. It is possible that God never recognized her because He never placed her on the throne. She usurped the throne that rightly belonged to Joash and put herself in his place of being the ruler of Judah. She was finally slain by the people during an insurrection led by Jehoiada the priest. He was the one who presented Joash to the people (when Joash was seven years old) and put the crown on him. All the people were grateful and shouted, "Long live the king!" They were tired of being ruled by that ungodly woman (cf. 2 Kings 11: 4-21).

Joash's Reign Over Judah

Joash restored the worship of God during Jehoiada's time of helping him. With the death of Athaliah, Joash began to reign over Judah. Joash was a weak person. He did whatever he was led to do. As long as Jehoiada the high priest was alive, Joash did right. As soon as Jehoiada the high priest died, however, Joash forsook the Lord. He slayed Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, as if to say, "I am no longer under this man's control." Perhaps he had chafed at having to be righteous when his heart wanted to do evil. He gave all the temple treasures to Hazael, king of Syria, to keep him from coming and defeating his nation and taking the city of Jerusalem. That was really a stupid move. If someone pays a king to keep him from coming and conquering a land, that just makes the king want more gold once he spends what has been given. That also probably led Hazael to believe that Joash did not think his country could defeat Hazael's country, so he was sending a bribe so that

Hazael would not even try to attack. Hazael was going to think that Joash had plenty of gold to share. All Hazael would have to do was move toward Judah again, and if Joash was not willing to give him more gold, then Hazael knew he could defeat them and take all the gold (2 Kings 12; 2 Chronicles 24).

Joash was not a righteous man, and he was not smart. He was slain by his own servants when they got tired of his wickedness. He was buried in Jerusalem but not with the other kings. His servants in Judah wanted all of the world to know that they did not recognize this man as the one that was to take the righteous lead of the people. He was nearly as bad as his mother, Athaliah, had been.

Jehoahaz, King of Israel

During the period of time that Joash was on the throne of Judah, Jehoahaz was on the throne of Israel (cf. 2 Kings 13:1–9). He was the closest to a good king that Israel ever had. He was the only king of Israel that ever called on Jehovah, and because he did, God gave him victory over his enemies. God immediately blessed this man because he called on God. He prayed to God and trusted in Him. This was only a temporary thing, because the text says “*. . . they did not turn away from the sins of the house of Jeroboam . . .*” (2 Kings 13:6). He was not able to escape the cancer of idol worship, except for a moment. For a momentary time in Israel’s history, a king had called on Jehovah, and Jehovah had immediately blessed him. Jehoahaz had saved Israel from destruction by the Syrians, and then he died.

Jehoash’s Reign Over Israel

Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz, reigned over Israel. He did not call on Jehovah. He immediately refused to pray, seek God, or trust God. It is a tragedy for God’s people to become so hard-hearted and so worldly that they do not pray. A man’s value is not determined by what he knows as much as it is determined by Whom (God) he knows. The people of that time knew about

God, but they did not truly know God. They knew the Word of God, but they did not know the God of the Word. They knew the Law of God, but they did not know the lawful God. They did not know Jehovah. They continued to bow down to wood and stone. Jehoash constantly warred with Judah and King Amaziah, who was only partially a righteous man. There was a wicked man in Israel and a partially righteous man in Judah during this period of time, and they warred with one another. There was no indication as to which one was winning, and perhaps neither was. Perhaps they were just having skirmishes and guerilla warfare, but that was teaching them that they were not in God's will because if they were perfectly in His will, they would not have been able to lose a battle. There was not one enemy that could have stood before them. They would have received complete blessings if they just would have done His will. By covenant, both Israel and Judah knew that they were outside of the will of God.

Jehoash visited Elisha while Elisha was dying (cf. 2 Kings 13:14–20). He honored the prophet of God at least to that degree, so the prophet honored him. Elisha told him to take arrows in his hand, and Jehoash did. Elisha told him to smite the ground, and Jehoash hit the ground three times. The prophet was angry and said: “*You should have struck the ground five or six times; then you would have defeated Aram and completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times*” (2 Kings 13:19b). How could Jehoash have known how many times he needed to hit the ground? What should he have done? Elisha had told him to strike the ground, so Jehoash should have hit the ground until the prophet had told him to stop. When God tells us to do something, how long should we do it? When God tells us to do something, we should do it until He tells us to stop. When there are good, righteous things to do, when should we quit doing them? We should never quit. Here was a man that had partial faith in the prophet. If he had waited until the prophet had said to stop, Syria would have been totally destroyed. Since he had honored the prophet

only on a small scale, he would get three great victories over Syria. He was a powerful king because of a momentary honor given to the prophet of God.

Amaziah, King of Judah

During the time of Jehoash, Amaziah ruled in Judah (cf. 2 Kings 14:1–22; 2 Chronicles 25:1–28). 2 Kings 14:3 says, “*He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, but not as his father David had done*” — wholeheartedly. He kept the Law, but not with a perfect heart. He was observing God’s Law externally. He was honoring God with his lips, but his heart was not in what he was doing. Remember this most important thing: the right heart behind deeds performed is more important than the deeds themselves. Make sure that your heart is right with God. This will take care of all that is said and done. Jesus said, “. . . *For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks*” (Matthew 12:34b). David said, “*For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he . . .*” (Proverbs 23:7 KJV). A man is what he thinks in his heart and what he does. Do not be like Amaziah. Those who keep the Law but have no heart in it are Amaziahs.

Amaziah defeated Edom, but then he brought the gods of Edom home with him for Judah to worship. Why would they worship the gods of a nation that had been defeated? Their gods had not been able to deliver them. Judah’s God had enabled Judah to defeat Edom. Why would Judah worship Edom’s gods? There was a simple reason: Edom’s gods would allow Amaziah to do whatever he wanted to do. He had a heart for what the gods of Edom wanted: sin and immorality. He did not have a heart for what God wanted. God wants His will done and His Law kept. Amaziah warred against Jehoash of Israel, and he was defeated. God was telling him that He was not on his side. Jehoash, the king of Israel, broke down the temple wall. He took the temple gold, the silver, and the other treasures. He was no stranger. This was a brother ransacking God’s house. Amaziah was a good man externally, but an evil man internally.

Jeroboam II's Powerful Rule of Israel

During the reign of Jeroboam II, Israel had a powerful ruler (the Bible does not call him Jeroboam II, but he was the second Jeroboam). He was king over Israel for only a short time (his reign is covered in just seven verses — cf. 2 Kings 14:23–29). He restored the borders of his land to where it had been when Solomon died. Israel's boundaries were from the river Euphrates to where its land joined Judah's. Jeroboam had all of the Promised Land in the North under his possession. Jonah was a prophet during Jeroboam's time. Jonah predicted that Jeroboam would restore the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah (cf. 2 Kings 14:25). That was exactly what he did. Jeroboam brought Israel political peace and material prosperity.

Amos and Hosea also prophesied to Israel during Jeroboam's reign. They told about the excessive material prosperity. There were riches and luxuries that brought idleness and ease to Israel. That was not good because there can be too much of a good thing. Material prosperity is good, but prosperity to the degree that Jeroboam had was not good. Jeroboam was a powerful man, but he was not a righteous man. When evil men fight evil men, whoever is the more powerful of the two will win. Jeroboam was a powerful king. His name is in many of the inscriptions of Syria and other nations around because he brought wealth and physical health to Israel.

Azariah (Uzziah), King of Judah

During this same period of time (cf. 2 Kings 15:1–7; 2 Chronicles 26:1–23), a good king ruled in Judah. His name is Azariah in 2 Kings, but in 2 Chronicles, it is Uzziah. He was only sixteen years old when he began to reign, but he was already seeking God. He sought God from his youth, and because he was a God-seeker, he put down all of his enemies. He put down Edom, Moab, the Philistines, and the Arabians. He destroyed all of his enemies and extended his border to the River of Egypt. So in Uzziah's day, the people of God again

ruled all of the Promised Land in the South. At the same time, Jeroboam was ruling the people of God in all of the Promised Land in the North. The people of God were again enjoying political peace and material prosperity. Uzziah was a wise man. He promoted husbandry and agriculture rather than industry. He sent the people back to the land and to raising crops.

I studied a course in high school called Civics. We studied what makes nations powerful. Materially, agriculture makes a nation secure. One of the books said that agriculture was the backbone of any nation. Any nation that does not have a strong emphasis on farmland and on the ranching of cattle, sheep, and other animals is a nation without a backbone. It is a nation that cannot stand long.

Israel was an industrial nation. Judah was being brought back to strength by Uzziah's promoting of husbandry. However, even the best people make mistakes. For some reason late in his life, Uzziah decided that he would do what only a priest should have done. He went into the temple Holy Place to offer sacrifices. He was smitten with leprosy, and he spent the last days of his life shut up in his own infirmary. He was restricted to a hospital and not able to go out among the people. He was not able to be seen as king. God was again trying to declare to Judah that they were not pure. In spite of Uzziah's reformation and his trying to make everything right, and in spite of Uzziah's victories over Judah's enemies and his great promotion of the land and of husbandry, Judah was still not in God's will. Uzziah (Azariah) died a leper.

Zechariah's Reign Over Israel

Then the last son of Jehu came to the throne (cf. 2 Kings 15:8–12). His name was Zechariah. Like the rest of Israel's kings, he was a wicked man. This was a man who followed the way of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. That cancer was still eating at their core, so he reigned only a short period of time. A man named Shallum attacked Zechariah and killed him in front of the people. Jehu's dynasty had come to an end. The end of the

second hundred years of division was also the end of strength. That was the end of the time for Israel or Judah to be blessed. They were about to enter a period of anarchy. That was a great period prophetically. There were great prophets of God who were called to try to get Israel and Judah to see the way of the Lord. They tried to help those two nations to be able to live again in a day of political peace and material prosperity. Was the Word of God heard the next time?

Prophets of the Second One Hundred Years of Division

Introduction

This is Chapter 18 in the study of Old Testament history. The time period covered in this chapter begins about 830 B.C. God had four great prophets who spoke to the people during the second hundred years of division. These four prophets were the Word of God that the people of Judah heard in the midst of their ups and downs and the preaching that the people of Israel heard during their steady downfall. Hosea was the first prophet listed in the Bible, but he was really a prophet during a later time period. Obadiah prophesied to Edom in the year 850 B.C. concerning their lack of concern for their brother.

Prophets of the Second One Hundred Years of Division

The Prophet Joel (800 B.C.)

Joel is the second of the Minor Prophets. God called Joel in the year 830 B.C., about twenty years after Obadiah had preached. Joel preached to the people of Judah. The background of Joel's book is very interesting. There had just been a locust plague in the land. When locusts invade a land, they swarm onto the land by the millions, and they eat everything that is green. They even strip the bark off of trees. If a baby is left out in public, they will eat the flesh off the baby's face just because it is there. Locusts are made to do nothing but eat. When the locust plague flies away, they leave behind them nothing but a

devastated land and millions of eggs planted in the ground. About the time the trees start growing again and the crops start up, the locust eggs hatch. Little creatures begin to crawl around, eating wherever they crawl. As the creatures grow, they begin to hop around, eating wherever they hop. The next phase is a larger insect that begins to fly around, eating wherever it flies. They leave the area where they were hatched to go somewhere else to satisfy the insatiable hunger that they have for more. (They are like a lot of people in this world that have an insatiable hunger for more.) Once that second wave of locusts has left the land, it takes seven years before that land returns to its original state of fertility (before the first wave of locusts attacked). This is called “the years of the locust,” and it is worse than a fire.

The locusts had flown into Judah. They had eaten their fill, laid their eggs, and flown away. The eggs had hatched, and the second wave of eating had happened. The locusts had flown away, but Judah had been ruined. That was the background when Joel was called to preach. The name “*Joel*” meant “Jehovah is God,” so even his name was significant.

The locust plague that had happened was a judgment on Judah (cf. Joel 1:1–2:27). The locusts were described as the “army” of God (cf. Joel 2:5, 11, 20, 25). They were the “Air Force” of Jehovah and the servants of God. They were His mighty army and had eaten the land at the order of their Commander-in-Chief, the Lord Jehovah. The locust plague was not the only judgment. Joel prophesied that there was going to be something even worse for the coming judgment (cf. Joel 2:28–3:16). God told them that they had not seen anything yet. If they thought those locusts were a terrible judgment, He was going to send far worse to them with the nations of Assyria and Babylon. That would be the day of Jehovah.

The **first** point of the message was that the locust plague was their present judgment. The **second** point was God’s day was their coming judgment. The locust had had their day on Judah, but they had just been God’s servants. God Himself was

going to come and bring judgment upon that city and upon that nation. The **third** point was that of their coming glory (cf. Joel 3:17–21). God told them that after He was through, they would have their day. He said, in essence: “I will bring you back, and I will build your city again. I will make it glorious, and the name of the city will be ‘Jehovah is there’ or ‘The Lord is present.’ Right now I am absent because of your sin and your ungodliness as it was written during the days of Jehoram, but I will come, and I will bring glory to your city.” That is the point of the book and its background. God was saying that He had sent the locust, but that He was coming and would bring glory.

What is there in the teaching of Joel for God’s people today? **First**, Joel shows the nature of God in that time. When God comes to do His thing, His people are going to see the heart of God. Matthew 12:34b says, “. . . *For out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.*” This is true even for God. As God thinks in His heart, so He does. That is where all the actions of God come from. They come from His heart. What can be seen about God in the locust plague and His judgment through other nations taking Judah and Israel captive? What can be learned about God? He is the judge. It is an awesome thing to fall into the hands of the living God. It is a terrible and fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. In Hebrews 12, the writer of Hebrews basically says: “I am not talking to ungodly pagans, I am talking to Christians who are thinking about leaving Christ to go back to Judaism and back to legalism. You need to remember that your Father is an awesome judge. He is not to be treated lightly. He is not a doddering grandfather who can see nothing wrong in His grandchildren. He is a righteous father who demands of His children respect, obedience, and honor (cf. Hebrews 12:5b–13). That judgment is in the day of Jehovah (cf. Joel 1:15). It is a day of darkness and deep despair. Over and over again throughout the book of Joel, the phrase “*day of the LORD*” occurs, and it is found to be a day of judgment. The Lord is an awesome judge.

Second, however, “the day of Jehovah” says the Lord is a God of salvation:

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. . . . And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; . . .

(Joel 2:28–29, 32).

It is not just a day of judgment, it is also a day of salvation. Isaiah the prophet says, “. . . when your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness” (Isaiah 26:9b). God has salvation in view even in the judgment that He brings. The book of Joel teaches the dual nature of God: He is judge, but He is also savior. He will find a righteous way to save those who call on His name.

The book of Joel also teaches that God can use natural calamities, like the locust plague, or natural forces to bring people to repentance. This will become very evident in the books of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and especially in the New Testament book of Revelation. God often uses natural calamities to call people nationally and individually to repentance. There is the goodness of God amidst judgment (cf. Joel 2:12–13). When God comes in judgment, He stillmingles it with mercy and does not give people the judgment they deserve (cf. Joel 2:19–20, 23, 25–27). If people got what they deserved, they would all be burning in hell today. When God comes in severe judgment on people or a person, He mingles it with mercy as long as the people are trying to learn from Him and serve Him. The book of Joel called the nation to repentance by a locust plague, and said that if they did not repent, then they would meet God in His day. Only those who called on His name would be saved.

The Prophet Jonah (800–790 B.C.)

A few years later, sometime between 800 and 790 B.C. in the day of Jeroboam II, Jonah began to prophesy. He is mentioned by name in 2 Kings 14:25 as being the prophet that predicted that Jeroboam would extend his border back to the limits promised to Abraham in the covenant from God (cf. Genesis 15). So Jonah was King Jeroboam II's prophet. He was a royal court prophet. God appeared to him. The book of Jonah does not have much preaching in it. Jonah 3:4b ("Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned") is all the preaching there is because Jonah is a narrative drama. It would make a great play or movie. There are four parts in the chapters of the book of Jonah.

First, there is Jonah's flight to Tarsus. God appeared to Jonah and told him to go preach to Nineveh. Instead of going to preach, however, Jonah fled his assignment and ran to Tarsus. That was disobedience, so the first chapter talks about disobedience. Jonah got on a boat going to Tarsus, which was on the other side of the world from where he was. He was trying to get as far away from the difficult and unpleasant job that God wanted him to do. He went down into the heart of the ship and fell asleep. God created a storm so great that the sailors feared for their lives and began to throw everything overboard. Finally, in desperation, they began to look for the reason for this storm. They found Jonah asleep in the heart of the ship. They asked him why he was asleep. They told him to get up and call on his God. Jonah responded that he served the Lord that made the heaven, the earth, and the sea. This made them even more frightened. Jonah served the God that ruled the sea that was tempestuously against them. Jonah told the sailors that he was their problem. He might be the only preacher that ever said: "I am your problem. Get rid of me, and you have gotten rid of the problem." He told them that if they would just throw him overboard, they would be through with their problem because he was running from the assignment that God had given him. They did everything they could to keep from doing

that. They begged God not to let them die or be held accountable for killing Jonah. But finally, they threw Jonah overboard. As soon as his body hit the water, the storm stopped. The sea was at peace, and they were able to continue on their journey. Jonah 1:16 says, *“At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.”*

God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah up (cf. Jonah 1:17–2:10). Jonah repented and prayed to God from the belly of the fish in the depths of the sea. God commanded the fish to vomit him onto dry land. After this experience, Jonah was definitely converted to the fact he had to do what God told him to do whether he wanted to or not. Jonah still did not want to go to Nineveh, but he went anyway (cf. Jonah 3:1–4). Jonah had been disobedient, then repentant, and now he was obedient. He went to Nineveh with his message that Nineveh would be overthrown in forty days. The Ninevites repented, from the king down to the peasants. The king draped sackcloth upon himself and made a decree. Everything in Nineveh had sackcloth on it, even the beasts. When God looked down from heaven, all He saw was the sackcloth of repentance. Everybody in the city responded to Jonah’s preaching. This made Jonah mad (cf. Jonah 4:1–3). He said to God, in essence: “Did I not tell You that they would repent? That is why I did not want to come preach.” Jonah was too much of a patriot to be a prophet. He wanted the Assyrians’ destruction and not their salvation. Jonah ran from God, then he ran to God. He ran with God, and then he ran ahead of God.

The book of Jonah closes with Jonah going to the east side of the city and building himself a booth where he waited to see what would happen to Nineveh. God caused a vine to grow up over him. The vine shaded him, and he praised God for the shade. Then the vine withered in the night because worms damaged it. Jonah cursed God because the vine had withered. God asked Jonah why he should be concerned for that vine since he did not labor for it or work for it. He said that it had

come up in a night and had perished in a night. Then God made the point that it was understandable, however, that He should have concern for Nineveh since that city had more than 120,000 people in it as well as many innocent cattle (cf. Jonah 4:10–11). Scripture does not tell us anymore of the story of Jonah. It is possible that Jonah died out there in that booth waiting for Nineveh's destruction.

There are four things that can be learned from the book of Jonah. **First**, people can run, but they cannot hide from God. When anyone tries to hide from God, they are going to get into a storm. People cannot flee from difficult assignments (cf. Jonah 1:1–17). **Second**, in that belly of the fish down deep in the water, Jonah learned that when someone has reached the bottom, the only way to look is **up**. The only way **out** is to repent and turn to God (cf. Jonah 2:1–10).

The **third** thing that can be learned from the book of Jonah is that God is always willing and anxious to give a second chance. He wanted Jonah to go. He wanted Jonah to repent (cf. Jonah 3:1–10). The **fourth** lesson to learn is that God's people should be concerned with souls and not with vines. They can get more interested and tied up over the loss of physical possessions than over the loss of millions of people's souls. For this God's people need to repent.

The Prophet Amos (755 B.C.)

The third book of the minor prophets, written about 755 B.C. during the reign of Jeroboam and Uzziah, is the book of Amos. He was a prophet who was a shepherd of a certain kind of mountain sheep and a dresser of sycamore trees. The sycamore tree was a little tree that had buds that produced fruit. As soon as the tree began to bloom, every bud had to be pinched for it to become an edible fruit. So Amos had to climb mountains and climb trees. That poor shepherd was called to go preach in the palace of Jeroboam II in his royal church. Amos was a very humble man. He did not hide that station in life. He was wise because he did not preach above the heads of the

people. He was clever in that he caught their attention by judging all the nations around them before he judged them. He was fearless and faithful in bringing the Word of God even when he was opposed by the temple priest. Amos constantly used the statement, “*This is what the LORD says, . . .*” (cf. Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6; 3:12; 5:4; 7:17).

The book of Amos has three parts: judgment against the nations (cf. Amos 1–2), judgment against Israel (cf. Amos 3–6), and visions about the future (cf. Amos 7–9). Those visions were of locusts devouring, a fire consuming, a plumb line testing, a basket of summer of fruit that was the last fruit of the year, the Lord at the altar bringing judgment, and the restored tabernacle of David. All of that was to say that Israel was doomed, and there was no way out. There was not a bright light from this fierce prophet until the last four verses of the book of Amos. In those verses, Amos told about Israel’s restoration.

There is not as much to learn from the prophet Amos himself as there is in what he said about Israel. He said they had been trusting in strongholds that were not strong. They had false confidences. They were so much like religious people today. Their **first** stronghold — that was not really strong — was their statement that God was their God and they were His people. The people had concluded that God would not hurt them because He was their God and they were his people. The problem was that they were not living up to that claim. Their **second** stronghold was that God had brought them out of Egypt, so why, they reasoned, would He destroy them now. Amos told them that God would destroy them for the same reason He had destroyed Egypt: they were rejecting God. Their main stronghold was that they worshiped God regularly. They were always at the church and always at the assembly. Amos told them that was correct but that they left their hearts at home. They presented their bodies, but they did not present their souls.

The book of Amos teaches the kind of sins that cause God to destroy a nation. There are at least eight sins that the book of Amos names that cause a nation to fall:

- The oppression of the poor (cf. Amos 5:11)
- Judges taking bribes (cf. Amos 5:12)
- Dishonest businessmen (cf. Amos 8:5–6)
- The righteous being mistreated as slaves (cf. Amos 2:6–7)
- Sexual immorality (cf. Amos 2:7)
- Not hearing the Word of God (cf. Amos 2:12; 5:10)
- Materialism—expressed in the women’s desire for more (cf. Amos 4:1) and the people’s insatiable lust (cf. Amos 3:15; 6:1–14)
- Religious corruption (cf. Amos 2:4; 4:4–5; 5:21–27)

Whenever a nation oppresses the poor, has corrupt judges and dishonest businessmen, mistreats righteous people, has sexual immorality, does not want to hear the Word of God, is materialistic, and is religiously corrupt, that nation is doomed. Check the nation where you live and see how it fits in this list of things.

The Prophet Hosea (750–735 B.C.)

The last prophet covered in this chapter is Hosea. He prophesied from 750 through 735 B.C. It was a very beautiful situation and also a very ugly situation. There is a strange love story told in Hosea (cf. Hosea 1–3). Hosea was a righteous prophet of God in the midst of an ungodly nation. He was told to marry a woman, knowing that the woman would become an immoral whore. Hosea married Gomer. At first she was an innocent lady. That lady was more attracted to the gods and the evil of that day than she was to Jehovah or to Hosea. She finally bore Hosea three children. The first was a son named Jezreel, which meant “God scatters.” The second child was a daughter named Lo-Ruhamah which meant “unpitied or unloved.” The third child was a son named Lo-Ammi which meant “not my people.” Those names told the way Hosea was feeling when his children were born. He was scattered from his wife, unpitied and unloved by the woman to whom he had given his soul.

Finally, she bore him a son that was not his. That baby belonged to her lovers that she partied with late into night while worshiping the Baal god, or Asherah, or some god in the temple. Hosea had a wife that was immoral, unfaithful, and corrupt. God said, in essence: “Now you know how I feel. That is the way Israel has been with me since Mount Sinai.” Hosea represented God in this strange love story. Gomer represented the nation of Israel. The children represented the scattered, the unpitied, and the unloved individuals in the land. Hosea had the unique experience of feeling what God felt with His unfaithful wife, Israel. Hosea’s story gave a word to sin that needed to be remembered. “Sin” to Hosea was whoredom. Sin was the action of an unfaithful wife in the bed of another man. That is what sin is in the sight of God.

Hosea applied this autobiographical experience to Israel, and he saw their national sins and the chastisements (cf. Hosea 4–10). Their sins were the steps to their fall before Jehovah. Even in a book like this that describes an immoral woman, however, God still wanted to give His people a second chance. There was future hope held out for Israel that they could be married to God again. They could bear faithful children again. They could stand related to God as a woman ought to be related to a man: in purity, in honesty, and in unity. There is always hope.

This was all written to teach that a nation falls by following the same steps that an individual does. Hosea’s book is basically negative because he was preaching to the nation of Israel. They were an ungodly people who never had a good king, and there were very few good people among them. The book of Hosea has seven things that Hosea preaches against:

- **Lack of knowledge** — Hosea 4:6 says: “*my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; . . .*” The people willfully refused to receive the Word of God. Ignorance is not bliss: otherwise people would be

happier. Ignorance is a destructive power of the devil.

- **Pride** — All pride is based on ignorance. If God's people know themselves like they ought to know themselves, and if they know God like they should know Him, then they will never be proud. The people of Israel were full of pride. Hosea 5:5 says: "*Israel's arrogance testifies against them; . . . (they) stumble in their sin.*"
- **Instability** — Pride leads to an unstable kind of life. Hosea 6:4 says, ". . . *Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears.*"
- **Worldliness** — Instability leads to worldliness. Hosea 7:8 says, "*Ephraim mixes with the nations; Ephraim is a flat cake not turned over.*" They had mixed themselves among the people of the world.
- **Corruption** — Worldliness leads to corruption. Hosea 9:9 says, "*They have sunk deep into corruption . . .*" They deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah (when the people abused the priest's concubine all night until she was dead in the morning).
- **Backsliding** — Corruption leads to backsliding. Hosea 11:7 says: "*My people are determined to turn from me. Even if they call to the Most High, he will by no means exalt them.*" As they began to fall away, they slipped and slid away from the Word of God.
- **Idolatry** — They began to worship something other than God. Hosea 13:2 says, "*Now they sin more and more; they make idols for themselves from their silver. . . .*"

Hosea preached against ignorance, pride, instability, worldliness, corruption, backsliding, and idolatry. Hosea gave a picture of sin's true nature. In the final analysis, sin is whoredom, and the sinner is a whore. Sin ages and destroys the youthful spirit of a woman or a man. Sin is contagious and deadly. Sin robs one of the power to make moral decisions. All

of that is wrapped up in the word “*whoredom*.” God had found Israel to be a pure virgin in Egypt. He had wed her and had carried her through wilderness experiences. He had brought her unto Himself, but now He found that woman unfaithful to Him. Hosea had done that same thing with Gomer.

When God calls His children, He brings them out of the world unto Himself. He brings them into a covenant relationship with Himself. That covenant is parallel to the covenant of marriage. God’s children need to remain faithful to one Husband. He will stay faithful to them, and they will enjoy His table throughout all eternity.

There were sixteen prophets in all. The study of the four prophets that were covered in this chapter should serve as a pattern for the other prophets as they are studied. All of the Old Testament is written to teach the student that through patience and the comfort of the scriptures he might have hope. Romans 15:4 says, “*For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*”

Third and Final Period of Division

Review and Preview

Chapter 19 of Bible History 2 covers the third and final period of division. At the end of this period, Israel, the northern nation, was destroyed by Assyria. Then only Judah, the more faithful nation in the south, was left as a kingdom of God. This was a period of anarchy in Israel. Men were killing each other trying to make themselves king over Israel. Chapter 17 of this study covered the story about the fourth son of Jehu finally getting to the throne. His name was Zechariah and he only reigned for a short period of time. He was killed by Shallum (cf. 2 Kings 15:8–12). **It is important to read the references given in order to have all the details that go with this chapter.**

Shallum, King of Israel

There are only two things known about Shallum (cf. 2 Kings 15:10–15). The first thing is that he killed Zechariah. The second thing is that he was killed by Menahem. That was anarchy: Shallum killed Zechariah, then Menahem killed Shallum. He had a very short dynasty and started a period of great anarchy.

Menahem, King of Israel

Menahem killed Shallum and made himself king (cf. 2 Kings 15:16–22). He was a very cruel king. He conquered a city and ripped open all of the pregnant women so that they and the

children within them would die. He did this not only to satisfy his bloodlust but to make sure that no sons were raised being told about what Menahem had done to their city. He did not want anyone coming to him later to kill him in revenge. He was a wicked, powerful, and cruel king. Yet he was not as wicked as Pul Tiglath-Pileaser III of Assyria. This man came against Israel, threatened them, and claimed that he was going to destroy them and kill everybody there. Menahem gave Tiglath-Pileaser one thousand talents of silver to gain his support. Tiglath-Pileaser left the land with his bribe. This was ridiculous. He was going to come back after more silver whenever all of that silver was gone and he wanted more. One thousand talents of silver was about 37 tons of silver (or 34 metric tons). This was probably more than a truck could carry today. Thirty-seven tons of silver left Israel and went to Assyria just to temporarily placate the anger of this king. Remember two things about Menahem—he was very cruel and very dumb.

Pekahiah's Rule of Israel

Pekahiah, the son of Menahem, reigned after his father (cf. 2 Kings 15:23–26). The Bible does not tell much about Pekahiah. 2 Kings 15:23b–24 says: “... *he reigned two years. Pekahiah did evil in the eyes of the LORD. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit.*” Pekahiah was killed by Pekah. Other than the fact that he was evil and ungodly, the Bible only tells who killed him.

Pekah, King of Israel

Pekah wanted to be king, so Pekah killed Pekahiah. Pekah was now king of Israel (cf. 2 Kings 15:27–16:1-6). He ruled Israel and made an alliance with Rezin, king of Syria, against Pul. Pul was still trying to get more silver and more gold. His evil desires could not be satisfied. He really did not want the gold and silver as much as he wanted the humiliation that taking away Israel’s gold and silver would bring to them. He

would continue to take the gold and silver until there was no more, and then he would come and take away their city and burn it. He would put a hook in their noses and drag them all the way back to Assyria. The Bible does not tell why Pul got such pleasure out of his actions. He was never satisfied. He did not love anyone but himself. He did not care and show any concern for others. All he wanted was to be able to humiliate his enemies. He was a servant of the devil. Just as Pul got pleasure out of his actions, the devil gets pleasure from dragging the people of God down by materialism. Because the devil hates God, he also hates anything that is godly.

Israel had four kings in quick succession. Shallum slew Zechariah and was slain by Menahem. Menahem was very cruel, he ripped open pregnant women and paid tribute to Tiglath-Pileaser. His son, Pekahiah, was slain by Pekah who became king. The three different dynasties in Israel of Shallum, Menahem, and Pekah are covered in nineteen verses (cf. 2 Kings 15:13-31). This would not have been a good nation to live in. King after king and man after man killed each other to make himself king. There was no national stability. There was no national glory. There was no national honor. Those elements cannot exist when a nation rules God out of its thinking.

King Pekah showed his character and nature by making an alliance with the wicked Rezin to try to escape Pul's anger. He fought against Ahaz, the king of Judah, because Ahaz would not join that alliance. Ahaz's refusal to join the alliance was not because of his righteousness. He was a wicked, weak king, and he knew there was no way that the king of Israel and the king of Syria could stand against the king of Assyria, Pul Tiglath-Pileaser III. For that reason Ahaz refused to join the alliance of King Pekah and Rezin. That was a day of evil anarchy in Israel. They were nearly dead as a nation. They were coming quickly to the end of their existence. There was no unity, no power, and no God in their nation.

Jotham, King of Judah

What was happening in Judah during that period of time? While all of the anarchy and evil was going on in Israel, Uzziah was still alive but was no longer the king. He had gone into the Holy place and offered the sacrifice that only the priest should have offered, and because of that he had been smitten by God with leprosy. Now he lived in his own private hospital as a leper cursed by God. Jotham, his son, reigned in his stead while he was still alive. This was called a co-regency. There are times while studying the Bible where it seems there might be some discrepancies or that the chronology is wrong in the years that people reigned and the dates they had in common. During the period of the kings, there were periods of co-regencies where more than one king reigned. Sometimes they counted the king's reign as a year even when he started at the last of the year or only reigned a few days. As you study the Bible, learn the lessons of the men and the women of the Bible rather than worrying about the chronology. Those lessons are much more important than dates.

Jotham reigned as a good king (cf. 2 Kings 15:32–38; 2 Chronicles 27:1–9). He restored the worship of Jehovah. He led a reformation back to God. He was an excellent warrior. He went out and fought against the Philistines and against other enemies of Judah and God's people. He won in every single battle. That was God's way of telling Judah that He liked a particular ruler's righteousness and integrity. Jotham was a great builder. He rebuilt all of the cities that had been destroyed by Judah's enemies who had come into the land again and again.

Ahaz's Evil Reign Over Judah

It is possible that Ahaz, the son of Jotham, was a co-regent with his father for the last year of Jotham's life (cf. 2 Kings 16:1–20; 2 Chronicles 28:1–27). Ahaz was a wicked king even though his father had been righteous. Sometimes good men have evil children, and sometimes evil men have good children. Yet, they are not blamed by God. An evil child is not the reason a good father refuses to correct him. When children grow up, they make

their own decision whether or not they will be righteous. Jotham grew up and chose to be a righteous man. Ahaz grew up and chose evil. Something happened in his mental nature that was evil. He was an evil ruler over Judah. Jotham had been a good kind, but Ahaz was a wicked king. Jotham had been a great warrior, but Ahaz was a coward. Jotham had been an excellent builder, but Ahaz built temples for idols. Ahaz was the exact opposite of his father in every way. It is as if he was trying to be everything that his father was not. There are children like that in righteous homes today that cause heartache. To have a son who would not follow in his footsteps and who would not walk in the way of Jehovah must have caused Jotham great heartache.

During Ahaz's reign, Isaiah, the great prophet of God, spoke to him again and again. Isaiah came to him not just in words but in the way he lived, in what he named his sons, and in the character of his life. Isaiah tried to call Ahaz to repentance (cf. Isaiah 1-8). He worked constantly with Ahaz trying to get him to repent and be like Jotham. On one occasion, Isaiah came to Ahaz and basically said: "You can ask for any sign you want to. You can ask for it in the heaven above or you can ask for it in the earth beneath. Any sign you want to ask God for and He will give it to you as proof that He will be with you if you will just be with Him." Ahaz tried to act righteous by saying, in essence: "Who am I that I should test God? I will not ask for a sign." Ahaz was not a man of faith. Because of Ahaz's unbelief, God sent **signs** in spite of that fact that Ahaz did not want them. If God did not tell someone to ask for a sign, asking Him for a sign might have shown a lack of faith.

Isaiah had two sons that were **signs** to Ahaz. The oldest, ***Shear-Jashub***, meant "a remnant shall return." "A remnant shall return" must mean they were going to go away. The other boy's name, ***Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz*** meant "the prey speedeth, the judgment comes." This meant that it was coming quickly. So Ahaz knew there was a period of time in which this would occur. Judah would return, but they were definitely going to be destroyed and destroyed quickly. Isaiah said all of that could be stopped if

Ahaz would just repent and restore the worship in the temple again, if he would agree to follow God, all of this would be cancelled. Ahaz refused to do that. He refused to listen to Isaiah and make his covenant with God. Instead he made a covenant with Pul Tiglath-Pileaser. He made his covenant with a king of this world rather than the King of Kings. He became so wicked that later in his life he “*even sacrificed his son in the fire following the detestable ways of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites*” (2 Kings 16:3b). He was not only trying to appease Assyria, he was also trying to appease Syria. He came back from Damascus and shut the temple door. He did not let the priests in to offer their sacrifices at the altar of God anymore. He erected idols to the god of Damascus all over Jerusalem. He was a wicked, weak, ungodly king. Ahaz’s sixteen-year reign was one of the most decadent on record. Of the kings of Judah, only Manasseh and Amon received greater condemnation.

Another **sign** would be the virgin who would conceive and bear a child and call His name **Immanuel**. Isaiah 7 records the prophecy of Isaiah to Ahaz:

*Yet this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “It will not take place, it will not happen for the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people. . . .” Then Isaiah said, . . . “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him **Immanuel**. . . . But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. The LORD will bring you on you and your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah — he will bring the king of Assyria.” (Isaiah 7:7–8, 14–17).*

Before the child **Immanuel** would know the difference between right and wrong, the two kings of whom Ahaz was afraid would be gone and Israel would be taken captive by Assyria. That prophecy referred to Christ (cf. Matthew 1:22–23).

Hoshea, Last King of Israel

Hoshea was the last king of Israel (cf. 2 Kings 17:1–6). He attacked and assassinated Pekah ending that dynasty and making himself the king (cf. 2 Kings 15:30). That would be the last king for Israel. God had had all he could stand. He had had absolutely all he could tolerate of Israel's ungodliness and anarchy. Hoshea served his entire reign as an Assyrian vassal or a puppet king. He did not do anything except what Assyria told him to do. Evidently, he got tired or ashamed of that, and he sought Egypt's help. He asked Egypt to be his ally and fight against Assyria. They tried to do that, but it did not work. King Sennacherib and King Sargon came and took the city of Samaria. The year was 721 B.C. Israel, the ungodly nation that had never failed to walk in the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, was swept away just like Jeroboam had been. Israel was gone just as one sweeps away dung until it is all gone.

Assyria had an interesting policy (cf. 2 Kings 17:24). They did not destroy cities as all the other empires had. Every other empire had burned the capital cities to the ground. Assyria moved in the different kinds of people that they had captured in all their other wars, and they settled them there among the nationals to destroy the national race. That destroyed any national pride and made a mixed, mongrel, half-breed race. That was exactly what they wanted to have happen. Assyria even let them appoint some priests to try to continue the worship of God, but they mixed the worship of God with the worship of all those other nations that were among them. They became a mixed race politically, morally, and religiously. That was the origin of the New Testament people called the Samaritans. They were a half-breed people half-worshiping

God and half-worshiping the gods of this world.

Hezekiah's Righteous Rule Over Judah

The last king in this period of time was Hezekiah. Only six of his years were in this period of time, but it is a good place to study Hezekiah because while wickedness was going on in Israel, Hezekiah began a righteous reign over Judah. Hezekiah was the son of Ahaz. This is an example of a good son coming from a weak, ungodly man. Ahaz died and Hezekiah became the king (cf. 2 Kings 18–20; 2 Chronicles 29–32). Many kings in this study of Bible History have only needed four or five verses from the Bible to describe their reign, but it takes three or four chapters to discuss the greatness of Hezekiah. He was a great king. As soon as he came to the throne, he opened the doors of the temple and the priests came back in to restore the true worship of God. He sent his men throughout all of Jerusalem and throughout all of Judah to break down every single idol to any of the gods of Damascus or Assyria. He destroyed all the idols that his wicked father Ahaz had set up. He tried to get Judah back to a righteous standing with God so that they could continue to stand as a nation.

Hezekiah went out to fight battles, and he won all the battles. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, began a march in which he intended to conquer all of Israel and Judah. He swept through the territory that Sargon had destroyed and captured in 721 B. C. He swept through that land again and killed all the remaining pockets of resistance. He destroyed all the cities that needed to be destroyed. While he was fighting at Lachish, he sent his commander-in-chief, Rabshakeh, to the walls of Jerusalem. Rabshakeh cried out in the Hebrew language to all the men upon the walls and told them all that his master, Sennacherib, had done to all the other cities in Israel. He told them about Eglon, Beboer, Lachish, and all the cities of the Philistines. He said that not a single city had been able to stand before Sennacherib. None of their gods were able to overcome or stand before the god of Sennacherib. He assured them that

their God would not be able to stand either. Rabshakeh told the men of Jerusalem that they could not beat his king. He said that their God could not destroy his king. When he said they could not beat his king, that was alright, but when he said their God could not destroy his king, he was in serious trouble. Hezekiah was inside praying. Finally, Sennacherib came to destroy the city of Jerusalem and surrounded it. He shut up the king like a bird in a cage. That was how he boasted of the event in his annals. That night God sent a destroying angel and 185,000 Assyrians soldiers were dead the next morning. Sennacherib limped back in defeat. He had been defeated by the God that he had defied. He was killed by two of his sons, and Esarhaddon, his grandson reigned in his stead (2 Kings 18:19; Isaiah 36, 37).

Hezekiah was a great king primarily because he trusted God. He was a great reformer. He cleansed the temple and restored the sacrifices. He kept the best Passover that had been kept since they had left Egypt. He abolished all of the idolatry in the land (cf. 2 Chronicles 29–30). He completely cleansed his land of all idolatry and brought God back into his land. Hezekiah made a great mistake, however, after he was cured from an illness. Some ambassadors came from Babylon to ask about him. Babylon was just a little city to the east. It was not an empire at that time. Hezekiah showed all of those ambassadors all the treasures of his house and all the treasures of the temple. Isaiah told him that he had made a mistake because later on, in the day of his seed, those same people would come back for the gold and the silver that they had seen that day.

Prophets of the Period—Micah and Isaiah

Micah was a prophet during that period of time (740–700 B.C.) and prophesied in Judah. Isaiah was also a prophet in Judah (740–690 B.C.). They both preached to Ahaz. They both preached to Hezekiah. Ahaz did not listen, but Hezekiah did. Micah was a man that stressed ethical wholeness, and believed there needed to be a man-to-man relationship between people.

The following great passage in Micah 6 would be a good one to memorize:

With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? [The answer is no. He will not be pleased with that.] . . . what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:6–8).

This is a good question with which to end the chapter. What does the Lord require of His people? He asks that His people act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Micah was summing up all of the preaching of that day. He was summing up the preaching of Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah. In that one verse, Micah was saying the total thing that God required and still requires. Amos had emphasized justice—that God is a God of justice, therefore we need to do what is right in His sight. Hosea's emphasis was that God loves kindness. God loves to bestow loving kindness upon His “wife.” That was Hosea’s theme. It is God’s requirement according to Micah also. Isaiah’s emphasis was that we need to humble ourselves before God and walk in an humble, contrite way. Micah took all that preaching and wrapped it up in a single verse. This is what God requires of us today. He requires that what is right be done in regard to the law and to our neighbor. He requires a love for kindness. God requires an humble walk before Him. God loves the underprivileged, the oppressed, and the neglected. He loves to see His people serving those people. In the New Testament, this is pure religion. James 1:27 says, “*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*” God gave His people the grace to be like Hezekiah—an humble, faithful, fruitful, effective servant of God.

The Final Period of Monarchy in Judah

Introduction

Chapter 20 will complete the study of the period of the monarchy. There are eight kings in this section beginning with more study of Hezekiah and ending with Zedekiah. He will be the last puppet king to sit upon the throne before Judah goes into captivity.

Hezekiah

Hezekiah was the greatest king since David. Hezekiah became ill, and he was at the point of death (cf. 2 Kings 20:1–21). God sent Isaiah to tell him to set his house in order for he was about to die. Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed that he might live. Was Hezekiah afraid of dying? That was not why he was praying. God heard his prayer and sent Isaiah back to talk to Hezekiah. God knew what was going to happen. The text says that Isaiah had not even left the middle court before God spoke to Isaiah to send him back to Hezekiah. God knows everything. He told Isaiah to tell Hezekiah that He had heard his prayer and He would add 15 years to his life.

Look at God's powerful plan. When Hezekiah died after his extended time of 15 years, his son Manasseh was only 12 years old. It was three years after God extended Hezekiah's life before Manasseh was born. At the time of his illness, Hezekiah had no seed. There would have been no king for the throne. There would have been no "seed of the woman to bruise the serpent's head" (cf. Gen 3:15). There would have been no seed

of Abraham to bless all the nations of the earth. There would have been no seed of David to sit upon the throne of David forever. There would have been no Christ and no salvation. So Hezekiah was not praying for himself — he was not afraid of death. He was afraid of dying without a seed to continue the promise that all of the Old Testament had been talking about. God was testing his King Hezekiah. Hezekiah's life was extended, but when he was healed, he was lifted up in pride and he showed his treasures to the visiting ambassadors from Babylon. Therefore, Babylon would come to destroy his city and take the treasures that they reported when they got home. When Hezekiah died, all of Judah came to honor Hezekiah at his funeral because Hezekiah had been the greatest king Judah had ever known.

Manasseh, King of Judah

Manasseh became the next king of Judah (cf. 2 Kings 21:1–18; 2 Chronicles 33:1–20). He would be the most wicked king Judah ever had. It is interesting that the most righteous king of Judah had a son who became the most wicked king Judah ever had. Righteousness is not in the genes and it is not inherited. Righteousness is a matter of choice. Manasseh's sin was the reason for Judah's destruction. It is important to understand the sin of Manasseh to avoid imitating his sin.

Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years (the longest reign of any king in Judah). His mother's name was Hephzibah. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he also erected altars to Baal and made an Asherah pole (he brought Baal worship back into Judah), as Ahab king of Israel had done. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them. He

built altars in the temple of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, “In Jerusalem I will put my Name.” In both courts of the temple of the LORD, he built altars to all the starry hosts (he worshiped everything he could). He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced sorcery and divination, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger. He took the carved Asherah pole he had made and put it in the temple, of which the LORD had said to David and to his son Solomon, “In this temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my Name forever. I will not again make the feet of the Israelites wander. . . , if only they will be careful to do everything I commanded them and will keep the whole Law that my servant Moses gave them.” But the people did not listen. Manasseh led them astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites (2 Kings 21:1–9).

No one falls as far as a holy man of God who falls into sin. Manasseh fell deeper than the very tribes that had been cast out of the land so that Israel could possess it: “Nevertheless, the LORD did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger, which burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done to provoke him to anger” (2 Kings 23:26). The reason Judah was destroyed was because of Manasseh’s sins:

The LORD said through his servants the prophets: “Manasseh king of Judah has committed these detestable sins. He has done more evil than the Amorites who preceded him and has led Judah into sin with his idols. Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I am going to bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. I will stretch out over Jerusalem

the measuring line used against Samaria and the plumb line used against the house of Ahab. I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. I will forsake the remnant of my inheritance and hand them over to their enemies. They will be looted and plundered by all their foes, because they have done evil in my eyes and have provoked me to anger from the day their forefathers came out of Egypt until this day.” (God kept the covenant of Deuteronomy 28:30. Hezekiah had followed God’s will so God had blessed him in every way. Manasseh had not done God’s will, so he and all of the land would be destroyed.) Moreover, Manasseh also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end — besides the sin that he had caused Judah to commit, so that they did evil in the eyes of the LORD (2 Kings 21:10–16).

Manasseh not only worshiped foreign gods, he began to slaughter people and offer them to those gods. He sacrificed his own son and many of Israel until the land was filled with their blood from one end to the other.

After Manasseh had led Judah astray and they had committed more evil than all the other nations around them, God spoke to Manasseh and all the people. They chose not to listen. They had not listened to Micah’s preaching in the streets. They had not listened to Isaiah’s preaching in the palace. They had refused to hear the Word of the Lord —

So the LORD brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon” (2 Chronicles 33:11).

As a prisoner in the city of Babylon, Manasseh finally called out to God. He was no longer living in the Promised Land, and *"In his distress he sought the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers* (2 Chronicles 33:12).

Surely this time God would say, "I cannot hear this man. He is a wicked man." However, God is the God of other chances. No matter how many chances He had already given someone, no matter how wicked they have become, He is still the God who gives another chance. If someone is wrong 490 times in one day and he truly repents, God will forgive all 490 wrongs. So in prison and in a strange land, the most wicked king that Judah had ever known was brought to his knees and turned with his full heart to God:

And when he prayed to him, the LORD was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD is God (2 Chronicles 33:13).

Manasseh immediately began to take down the altars and all the idols that he had built all over the city of Jerusalem. There were no idols left in the land. They were all destroyed, but *"The people, however, continued to sacrifice at the high places, but only to the LORD their God"* (2 Chronicles 33:17). There was only partial repentance in Judah. They did not come back to the law, but they did come back to worship only the Lord. Manasseh had done his very best to wipe out all the evil that was in Judah because of all the wrong he had committed, but it was too late. Judah was already set in their sin. They were going the way Israel went; they were into idolatry, corruption and destruction. They had reached a point of no return. There is a time when God finally says, "That is it. I cannot take anymore. I cannot stand the rebellion of these people anymore." Because of Manasseh's sin Judah was headed in a direction they could return from. Judah had to be destroyed. It did not matter how much Manasseh

repented. Later, it will not matter how much Josiah reformed the land and tried to make things right, they could not be the righteous people of God.

The life of Manasseh was at point of no return for Judah even after he repented. The situation he faced in all of this was important. Manasseh had assumed the throne at age twelve when his father had died. The political situation he had faced was seemingly impossible. He had faced Esarhaddon, the strong son of Sennacherib who had taken Sennacherib's place. Manasseh had to pay tribute to Esarhaddon. He had had to offer most of his gold and silver year after year just to stay alive. He had become totally subject to the Assyrian empire. He was absolutely their puppet and their vassal. It was an impossible political situation to flourish in. The religious situation was the most apostate in all of Judah's history (cf. 2 Kings 21:2–9). Their religious corruption was the cause of their fall. Judah, with Manasseh leading them, had rebuilt the high places and, worst of all evils, they had restored the Baal worship. Human sacrifice had reappeared. Manasseh had even offered his own son in worship to one of the gods. They had begun to worship all the heavenly bodies and had brought that worship into the Temple of God. Imagine the stupidity of worshiping the stars rather than the Star Maker. Star gazers gaze at the stars rather than gazing deeply and carefully into the face of their King who called all those stars into being and causes them to come out each night. Judah stood as a nation because of His will. Why would they bow before anything or anyone except the Creator of all the universe? Manasseh had caused a religious situation with the most apostasy in all of Judah's history. Manasseh's personal situation had started out good. He had been ruler of all of the land before he was carried to Babylon and imprisoned. He had repented, turned back to God, was restored to the throne and had tried to reform the land even to the point of killing the idolatrous queen mother; but it was all too late. Judah had learned from him too well. Amon, Manasseh's son, had also learned too well his father's way.

Amon, King of Judah

Amon coming to the throne is recorded in 2 Chronicles 33:21–25.

Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem two years. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, as his father Manasseh had done. (He had watched more carefully in his father's early years than he did the last years after his father had repented and come back to God. The early years had been Amon's prime years for learning.) Amon worshiped and offered sacrifices to all the idols Manasseh had made. But unlike his father Manasseh, he did not humble himself before the LORD; Amon increased his guilt. Amon's officials conspired against him and assassinated him in his palace. Then the people of the land killed all who had plotted against King Amon, and they made Josiah his son king in his place.

Amon could not even rule his own throne and his own house. He was an evil, wicked man who was killed by his own servants. The best of the kings had given birth to the worst of the kings, whose son had watched his father's evil ways too long to really be affected by his father's righteous repentance.

Josiah, King of Judah

The last chance for Judah was about to come. Josiah, Amon's son, succeeded him as king (cf. 2 Kings 22:1-23:30; 2 Chronicles 34:1-35:27). “*Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for thirty-one years.*” (2 Kings 22:1a). When Josiah was about fifteen or sixteen years old (cf. 2 Chronicles 34:3), he began an active search for God, seeking to find out the will, heart, desire, and the Law of God. Josiah sought the Lord at an early age. The later part of 2 Chronicles continues:

In his twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of high places, Asherah poles, carved idols and cast images. Under his direction the altars of the Baals were torn down; he cut to pieces the incense altars that were above them . . . He burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and so he purged Judah and Jerusalem. In the towns of Manasseh, Ephraim and Simeon, as far as Naphtali, and in the ruins around them, he tore down the altars and the Asherah poles and crushed the idols to powder and cut to pieces all the incense altars throughout Israel. Then he went back to Jerusalem” (2 Chronicles 34:3b-7).

At age twenty, in the twelfth year of his reign, before he had come to the age Jews counted as adulthood, he was already at war against the idols. By Jewish custom you needed to be twenty-one years old to go to war. Before he was considered an adult ready for war, he had already been at war against Baal. He had learned well during the ages of 16 to 20 in his search for God. He knew God’s character, His desire, and His demand for righteousness, holiness, integrity and right worship. Josiah had cleansed the land by the time he was only 20. God needs young men today with that kind of character. That would be possible if young men would give themselves totally committed to absolutely seeking the Lord at a young age. Young people need to seek the Lord.

2 Chronicles 34:8 begins “*In the eighteenth year of Josiah’s reign . . .*” when Josiah was 26 years old he led the greatest reformation that Judah had ever seen. He found the Law of God in the Temple. Josiah returned to that Law and repaired the Temple. He removed all the idols and they observed the greatest Passover that had been observed since the exodus out of Egypt (cf. 2 Kings 23:15-20). He was a great king yet God would not deliver the people for Josiah’s sake. God had determined that the sin and iniquity that Judah was led into by Manasseh had became so full that they had to be destroyed.

Even the best of men — like Uzziah, Hezekiah, David, and Abraham — have sin recorded against them in The Book. These men who were heroes were flesh and blood.

Pharaoh Necho, the king of Egypt marched through Josiah's land. He was not there to fight Josiah. He was on his way to Carcamish to fight against the Assyrian army. Pharaoh Necho had been sent there by God. Without inquiring of God, Josiah went into the valley Meggido and fought against Pharaoh Necho. Josiah acted in rebellion against God by not inquiring of Him. He was shot by archers and died in an act of disobedience to God. For two hundred years Judah mourned Josiah's death because he was the last good king Judah had (cf. 2 Chronicles 35: 20–26). He had walked in the light and had been righteous man, but his example shows how easy it is to slip into the world's way. Josiah was the last great king of Judah. He had three sons and a grandson who later sat upon the throne.

Jehoahaz — First Son of Josiah to Rule

Jehoahaz, son of Josiah, sat upon the throne after his father died. He returned to all of the evil that his father had cleansed from the land. Immediately he restored all of the idols and all the Baal worship. He went in the opposite direction to be just like Manasseh was in his early days. Judah had learned all too well the lesson of evil to ever really be righteous again. Pharaoh Necho carried Jehoahaz to Egypt as a captive, and he died in Egypt still in rebellion against God. How tragic this was. He had had all of his years to watch Josiah his father do right, and yet he turned to the evil of the past rather than to the righteousness of his father (cf. 2 Kings 24:30–33; 2 Chronicles 36:2-4).

Jehoiakim — Second Son of Josiah to Rule

Pharaoh Necho took the brother of Jehoahaz, Eliakim, put him on the throne, and changed his name to Jehoiakim (cf. 2 Chronicles 36:4) when he was twenty-five years old:

Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for eleven years. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD his God. Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon (The year was 606 BC and this was the first captivity.) attacked him and bound him with bronze shackles to take him to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar also took to Babylon articles from the temple of the LORD and put them in his temple there” (2 Chronicles 36:5–7).

Jehoiakim was the king of Judah when the Babylonian captivity began. The captivity dated from 606 BC to 536 BC, when they returned to the land. Judah spent seventy years in Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar carried Jehoiakim, some of the nobles, and the treasures out of the temple into Babylon.

Jehoiachin — Ruled for Three Months

(Josiah’s Grandson)

Zedekiah — Third Son of Josiah to Rule

Josiah’s grandson, Jehoiachin, reigned upon the throne after Jehoiakim was taken into captivity (cf. 2 Chronicles 36:5–8; 2 Kings 24:8–17).

Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for three months and ten days. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD. (The first captivity began in 606 BC. Another captivity began in 597 BC.) In the spring, King Nebuchadnezzar sent for him and brought him to Babylon, together with articles of value from the temple of the LORD, and he made Jehoiachin’s uncle, Zedekiah, king over Judah and Jerusalem. (Zedekiah was a third son of Josiah.) Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for eleven years. He did evil in the eyes of

the LORD his God . . . ” (2 Chronicles 36:9–12a).

Zedekiah rebelled against God. As long as Zedekiah was loyal to Nebuchadnezzar, he kept the throne. But for some reason he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, “*He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him take an oath in God’s name. He became stiff-necked and . . .*” (2 Chronicles 36:13a). Zedekiah refused to follow the law that Nebuchadnezzar had laid down. So, in 586 BC, (cf 2 Chronicles 36:15) Jerusalem fell:

The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God’s messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy. He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man nor young woman, old man or aged. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar. He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the LORD’s temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. They set fire to God’s temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there. He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power. The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah (2 Chronicles 36:15–21).

The next chapter covers Jeremiah's prophecy. Think back on what brought Judah to such a low status with God. God had promised David that there would be someone on his throne forever, but there was always an "if" in God's covenant. That was "if" they kept the Word of God. They did not have to keep it perfectly. David had not kept it perfectly. He had committed murder, he had lied, had committed adultery, and he had counted the people. He had trusted in his own power rather than in God's power, but he had risen from every single stumble to walk again. He had always risen up and always walked towards God. He was always walking in the light. The lesson to learn through all of this study of the monarchy is that God's great men and God's great heroes were not perfect people. They were not porcelain figures upon a mantel, they were living flesh. They were breathing, working, loving, hating, sweating, sinning flesh, but they were always flesh that was moving towards God. They walked in the light. They walked towards the light. They walked seeking more light. Even in Babylonian captivity, while the land kept its rest and God's curse rested upon His people, there was a remnant that turned to God, prayed to God, looked to God. When God's time was right they went back into the Promised Land to rebuild their Temple and to become the glorious people of God again.

Captivity in Babylon

Review

This is Chapter 21 in the study of Old Testament history. The last chapter covered the study of the kings of Judah and Israel. This chapter will cover the prophets during the period of time after Israel, the northern nation, had gone into Assyrian captivity in 721 B. C. Judah had continued as a somewhat righteous nation for 100 years. The last 35 years of that period were a time given totally to wickedness until the time that God brought Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, down upon Judah. Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, burned the city, burned the temple, carried away all the temple treasures, and took all the strong men of Judah into captivity in Babylon. He left behind the women, old men, a few prophets, and Gedaliah, as governor. After a while, the people rebelled against Gedaliah and killed him knowing this would incur the wrath of the Babylonians.

Four Prophets of God from 625 B. C. – 586 B. C.

Jeremiah (625 B. C. – 586 B. C.)

Outline of the Book of Jeremiah

After the people had killed Gedaliah, the entire remnant fled to Egypt carrying Jeremiah the prophet with them. Jeremiah has been called the “weeping prophet” because much of his language is sad and sounds like he could be weeping. He wept primarily because no one else was weeping. In times of wickedness, the righteous people of God are filled with great sorrow, but no one was in sorrow over the fact that Judah was

going step by step into oblivion. So God called a tender-hearted prophet named Jeremiah to preach. Jeremiah was a very interesting man who wrote a very interesting book. Chapter 1 really depicts his humble character as he was called to be a prophet of God. It also gives good insight into what a prophet was and how he was called to office.

The book of Jeremiah is hard to outline because it seems to be a collection of Jeremiah's sermons about various things during the time that he preached repentance to an un-repentant nation. Jeremiah can be divided into four sections. The first section contains the call of Jeremiah in Chapter 1. His call regulated the rest of his ministry. The second section contains the prophecies to Judah in Chapters 2–45. The prophesies include a condemnation of Judah, conflicts Jeremiah had with himself and with others, the future restoration of Jerusalem, and the present fall of Jerusalem. The third section contains the prophecies to the Gentiles in chapter 46– 51. These prophecies were against all of the nations around Judah because Judah would not be the only nation judged. All the wicked nations would be judged by Chaldea/Babylon. Chaldea/Babylon itself would be judged (cf. Jeremiah 51:1–64). Jeremiah sent word that he was speaking to Babylon along with the people of God. Jeremiah told the people:

"When you get to Babylon, see that you read all these words aloud. . . . When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates. (This scroll had all the disasters that were going to come upon Babylon written upon it.) . . . say 'So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her. And her people will fall'"
(Jeremiah 51:61b, 63–64).

Jeremiah's prophecies were not just against Judah. All the nations of the world would be judged by God. The fourth section contains the fall of Jerusalem, in which Jeremiah

discussed in detail in Jeremiah 52. The four main sections of Jeremiah are: the call, the prophecies to Judah, the prophecies to the Gentiles, and the fall of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah's call from God offers great insight into what a prophet is and how a prophet is to work in the kingdom of God:

The word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:4–5).

Notice the order of God's control: “I knew, I set apart, and I appointed. I knew you before I formed you in the womb. Before you ever came out of the womb, I set you apart. When you became a man, I appointed you to be a prophet to Judah.” God is in control of everything that happens even before birth occurs. Jeremiah's response to the fact that he had been appointed to be a prophet shows that he was a reluctant prophet just like Moses. Jeremiah 1: 6–8 says:

“Ah, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.” But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.(That was the work of a prophet — to go wherever God sent and to say whatever God said.) Do not be afraid of them for I am with you and will rescue you,’ declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 1:6–8).

God did not rebuke Jeremiah for calling himself a child. Jeremiah did not try to get out of his assignment. He is simply said, “I do not have the ability to fulfill the assignment,” which was absolutely true. Jeremiah was going to stand before people who were going to refuse to hear his message. That was why God told him not to be afraid of them. God told him the assignment only involved going wherever God sent him. He did

not have to go anywhere but where God planned for him to go. He did not have to say anything except what God told him to say, and no one would harm him because God was always going to be with him to rescue him. In fact, several times the men of Judah did try to harm Jeremiah. One time they put him down in a well, but there was no way they could harm the prophet. The Word of God came to Jeremiah:

Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant” (Jeremiah 1:9–10).

Jeremiah received the Word because God put it in his mouth. Later the text shows that he actually got it through visions and explanations of the visions. That was how God was going to put the Word in his mouth. God was telling Jeremiah, “You do not have to think about what to say. You do not have to study about what to say, I am going to give you what to say. I want you to take that Word to nations and kingdoms and preach that negative and positive things will occur. Because of your preaching, I will uproot, tear down, destroy, overthrow, build and plant.” Sometimes a man has to get rid of the debris before he can build a good building or plant a good crop. So the word of the prophet had a two-fold work. One was to tear down, destroy, and take away so that the earth was now ready for the seed of God’s Word. When His Word is sown, then God is able to build and to plant. The Word of God came to Jeremiah in a vision:

The word . . . came to me: “What do you see, Jeremiah?” (In a past chapter concerning prophets, prophets were called “seer,” which indicates the use of the eyes. A prophet saw a vision before he spoke.) “I see the branch of an almond tree,” I replied. The

LORD said to me, “You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled” (Jeremiah 1:11-12).

What does the branch of an almond tree have to do with God watching over His word? It is a pun in the Hebrew language, which means that two words sound alike, but have different meanings. When Jeremiah says, “*I see the branch (rod) of an almond tree,*” the Hebrew word for “almond tree” is **shaaqueed**. When God says, “. . . *I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled,*” the Hebrew word for “watching” is **shoqueed**. Both Hebrew words sound exactly alike. There are words in every language that are this way. This is a “play” on words or a pun. What did Jeremiah preach? “I saw the branch of an almond tree?” That statement would mean nothing to his listeners, so as Jeremiah preached, he used the Hebrew word, which translated meant “God watches over His word for me.” Jeremiah 1:13–19 states:

. . . “*What do you see?*’ “*I see a boiling pot, tilting away from the north,*” I answered. The LORD said to me, “*From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land. I am about to summon all the peoples of the northern kingdoms,*” declares the LORD. . . . “*Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land — against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,*” declares the LORD.

That was during the reign of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. That was a time when Judah had gone absolutely against God. They

had erected the idols of foreign countries again and walked according to the will and the way of the king of Babylon. God called Jeremiah and said in essence: “I want you to speak against them. I want you to stand as a fortified city and bronze wall. I will be with you, and they will not be able to harm you.” A prophet was a man chosen and sent by God. He was a man empowered and instructed by God. He was a man protected by God for the purpose of saying “Thus sayeth the Lord . . .” The prophet was Jehovah’s messenger with Jehovah’s message, and he spoke the Word of God. When Jeremiah the prophet spoke, it was mostly bad news. He could not preach good news in Judah because they had gone into absolute and total destruction. That would be like whistling through a cemetery trying to convince yourself you are not afraid. Jeremiah was saddened by the message he had to preach.

Lessons From the Book

Jeremiah had a two-fold message: one was a message of doom and one was a message of hope. The message of doom was given because Israel, by divine choice, had been chosen to be a people set apart for God and they had violated that covenant relationship in religious and moral corruption. Judah was complacent. They had trusted in their own power and in a relationship with Babylon so that they lost their relationship with God. That is why this book is one of lamentation and tears from start to finish. Jeremiah, who loved his people with the love of a true patriot, had to preach about their downfall and destruction.

Jeremiah was able to occasionally interject a message of hope. That message of hope was not in the salvation of the nation, but in the preservation of a remnant. The remnant was going to be a small group within the nation that would be protected and delivered by God. He was able to offer hope in the fact that after seventy long years of Sabbath keeping, this remnant would come back to the Promised Land and build the city of God again. That new Jerusalem would be built on the

ashes of the old. Jeremiah's main message of hope is found in Jeremiah 31. He said, "I will make a new covenant with Israel and with Judah combined again as one nation (God does this in the church). God basically says, "I will make a new covenant with Israel and Judah that will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers with all its shortcomings." With all of the dysfunctions of that old covenant gone, God will make a brand new covenant with a brand new people in a brand new land, and they possess a brand new kingdom. Jeremiah ended his book with that message of hope.

The Book of Zephaniah (625 B. C.)

Outline of the Book of Zephaniah

At the same time Jeremiah was preaching to the huge crowds, Zephaniah was preaching. Jeremiah started in 625 B. C., Zephaniah preached in 625 B. C. Zephaniah's book is a book spoken to the common man. He had a very simple, threefold outline. His message is singular — God is coming. Zephaniah repeated what Joel had said, "The day of Jehovah is near." Zephaniah's message is not based on a locust plague as Joel's was. It is based on the corruption of the nation of Judah.

Zephaniah's singular message about the "*day of the LORD*" drawing near had a three-point outline: 1) it would be a day of wrath; 2) it would be a day of warning; and 3) it would be a day of joy (cf. Zephaniah 1–3). Because of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, the people of Judah had become so wicked that God had to wipe them out. He sent them into Babylonian captivity for seventy years before He wrote to them again with the message of joy that He always wants to write. God always wants joy. He always wants the Gospel, the Good News, to be known; but sometimes the rocks have to be cleaned out before you can plant a good crop. Sometimes God must come in judgment and wipe the slate clean before He can write joy on that slate.

Lessons From the Book

The first message from the book of Zephaniah is the fact that the “*day of the LORD*” is coming. Zephaniah warned Judah of this doom, but he did not leave them with only the warning of doom. The second message from the book of Zephaniah was a message of hope — he also gave them a message of hope. God sent a prophet to tell His people they needed to repent. Zephaniah said, “*Hold thy peace: . . . for the day of the LORD is at hand*” (cf. Zephaniah 1:7 KJV). He was telling them the day of Jehovah was near. He said it would be a day of terror (cf. Zephaniah 1:15–16). It would strike terror in everybody’s heart from the king to the peasant. It would be a day of judgment for sin (cf. Zephaniah 1:17). The day of Jehovah was coming as judgment because God’s people had fallen into sin. It would be a judgment that would fall on creation: man, beast, Hebrew, and Gentile (cf. Zephaniah 1:2–3, 2:1–15, 3:8). He wanted them to know that it would be an indiscriminate judgment that was coming on everybody in Judah and every nation of the world at the same time. The message of hope was that a time was coming when they would rejoice as the “*remnant of Israel*” (Zephaniah 3:13). The book of Zephaniah ends with:

“At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes,” say the LORD (Zephaniah 3:20).

The Book of Nahum (614 B. C.) Outline of the Book

Nahum was another prophet during this period of time who prophesied about the year 614 B. C. This was two years before the fall of Nineveh. Jonah would have loved to have been around during this day, because the Nineveh that he had wanted to be judged was now going to be judged over a hundred years later. The book of Nahum also has a very simply three-point

outline: 1) God is the judge (cf. Nahum 1:1–7); 2) there was a verdict of guilty (cf. Nahum 1:8–14); and there would be an execution which would be death and destruction (cf. Nahum 2–3). Nahum is a courtroom scene with the judge, the verdict and the execution. The book can be summed up with the phrase “Nineveh is doomed.” This is the message of Nahum in just one simple sentence. Even shortly after Nineveh had repented in Jonah’s day, they had become a wicked nation again, and finally now they could be destroyed.

Lessons From the Book

Nahum had two simple messages. Number one was about God, the judge. When Nahum talked about God being the judge, he described God as jealous, vengeful, furious, and wrathful. He said God is great in power, and that He would not acquit the wicked. God is not only the judge, He is also the Father. He was the judge to the wicked in Nineveh, but He is the Father to the righteous. When Nahum talked about God as the Father, he gave a good description of a father. A father is slow to anger, good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and he knows those who trust him. God is that kind of father.

The second message from Nahum was about the wicked. He said they were condemned to destruction (cf. Nahum 1:8–9). He said their name would be utterly and totally blotted out (cf. Nahum 1:10). He said God would dig their grave (cf. Nahum 1:14). He said their great wealth and their great power could not save them from that judgment (cf. Nahum 3:8–19).

The Book of Habakkuk (612–606 B. C.)

Outline of the Book

The last prophet during this period of time was Habakkuk. He prophesied somewhere between the years 612 B. C. and 606 B. C. because Chaldea had risen to be the power of the world. Chaldea/Babylon were really being recognized as a great power in the year 612 B. C. Habakkuk was a complainer and a doubter. God does not judge complaining and doubting as long

as they are expressed to Him. Do not complain or express the doubt to anyone else about Him. Take all the complaints about God to God. He is big enough, and He has a good enough self image to handle any complaints or doubts about Himself. God will teach with a lesson that may be a little strict, but He will teach that He alone is righteous. That was what Habakkuk needed to learn.

The book of Habakkuk has two parts: the problem (cf. Habakkuk 1 and 2) and the praise (cf. Habakkuk 3). The problem for Habakkuk was he looked around and saw all the wickedness, idolatry, and sin in Judah, so he went to God to complain. He said, "God, how can you allow this? Why do you not come in judgment? How can you sit there and allow your people to be so wicked? How can you be righteous and allow this wickedness?" God answered him, because God answers honest doubt. Jeremiah was also an honest doubter with the same problem. Why is God so slow in bringing judgment upon wicked people?

This is the number one philosophical problem of the ages. I took a course in philosophy thirty-five years ago. The number one philosophical problem was the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked. If you were to take a philosophy class anywhere in the world today, the number one philosophical problem would still be the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked.

Jeremiah and Habakkuk had the same question: "How can you let the wickedness go unpunished?" In essence, God's answer was: "I am not. I am raising up right now the bitter and hasty nation of Chaldea. They are going to come, and they are going bring judgment on Judah." Habakkuk thought he had a even bigger problem then. He said, "How can God take this wicked, wicked nation and destroy a nation less wicked than it? How can God use such dirty instruments?" God's answer was, "Hide and watch. Get up on this high place and watch. See what I will do and maybe then you will understand it." Sometimes the God's answer to doubt is "Trust Me. Just wait."

Have I done well in the past? I will do well today and I will do well in the future.” Sometimes God’s people just have to have the faith to hide and watch, and see what God will do.

As soon as Habakkuk was told to wait and watch, he began to sing a beautiful song of praise (cf. Habakkuk 3:1-19). He basically said: “Praise the Lord. I now have the answer. The answer is I do not have to take care of it. The answer is God is going to take care of it. I will mount on my high place. God will give me hind’s feet that I may walk upon my high places. I will praise the Lord even if I lose all sustenance of life. I will praise the Lord.” He prayed for God’s mercy. He was reminded of God’s mercy, and he trusted God’s mercy. Habakkuk is a great book that needs to be studied more.

Lessons From the Book

There are two primary lessons in the book of Habakkuk. Number one is the lesson of the universal supremacy of God’s judgment upon the wicked. Rather than man trying to solve all the problems and trying to make everything right in the world, God needs to be the judge. God says, “Let me be God. Leave me something to do. Do not question my work on the earth. I will punish the wicked. I may use the wicked to punish each other. I may use tornados or earthquakes to do it. I will do it the way I want because I am supreme. I am sovereign. I am judge. You must quit being judge.” Most complexities of life are solved when people let God be in control. The controversies between men, particularly in the church, the kingdom of God, would be solved if people would just get over the natural tendency to try to be the judge. Let God be God. His judgment is universal. His judgment is supreme. His judgment is sovereign.

The second lesson is that faithfulness is the guarantee of permanence. This lesson is very important for today’s world. The verse *“but the righteous will live by his faith — . . .”* (Habakkuk 2:4) is quoted twice in the New Testament (cf. Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11) *“The righteous shall live by*

faith." The word "*live*" does not mean they "shall work by or make progress by." It means that they will stand. They will continue and be established. What establishes the people of God? What are they saved by? What do they stand by? What do they walk and live by? What do they die by? FAITH!! What will God's people have throughout all eternity? "*Now these three remain: faith, hope and love, But the greatest of these is love*" (I Corinthians 13:13). Love is the greatest, later on and through all eternity, God's people will have faith in God. They will have hope that faith will continue and they will have love for it. Their faith, not their ability, not their numbers, not their knowledge, but their faith is what will guarantee all God's people a permanent standing in the kingdom of God.

The message of these four prophets is valuable today but it was absolutely essential to life in the closing part of Judah's existence. They refused to hear the words of these four faithful prophets. They went into captivity. God's people need to hear the Word of God. They need to believe the word of God so that they may stand in life and stand throughout all eternity.

Ezra and Esther

Review and Preview

This is Chapter 22 in the study of Old Testament history. The study of the kings and the prophets have been covered. Israel went into Assyrian captivity in 721 B. C. Judah went into Babylonian captivity in 606 B. C. with the first deportation, and for seventy years they were in Babylonian captivity. The time had now come for them to return to the land and rebuild their temple. It is not stated that Israel had repented in Babylon, but because of the covenant of blessing and cursing in Deuteronomy 28 through 30 and the consequences of that covenant they had sought God again. Historical records prove that they instituted the synagogue in Babylon. With no temple to go to in Babylon they met together in small groups on every Sabbath day to study the Law and the prophets. They sang the songs of Israel and wanted to go back and build the temple in the land of God again. It was time for them to return. The book of Ezra describes this return in the first six chapters. Historically and chronologically, the book of Esther falls after the sixth chapter of Ezra. The events in chapters 7–10 of Ezra follow immediately after the events in Esther 1–10. It is best to study Bible history chronologically that is why Ezra will be split for this chapter.

Ezra and Esther Analyzed

Restoration of the Temple Return Under Zerubbabel

Ezra begins with the return of Judah under Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest. The time period for the

first six chapters is a period of twenty years from 536 B. C.–16 B. C. Judah had built the temple of God, they had a priest, and the Passover was being observed. The emancipation of the Jews came first, and then they returned to the land:

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia (he defeated the Babylonian empire and started the Medo-Persian empire), in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah (they had been in captivity seventy years), the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia (Cyrus is unaware of how God used him) to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: “This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: ‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you — may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem. And the people of any place where survivors may now be living are to provide him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem’” (Ezra 1:1–4).

That may sound like Cyrus had a direct vision from God, but Cyrus wrote down his history. He kept annuals that can be bought in book stores today. He kept records for all the nations that were there. He had given a similar speech to every nation. He used the name of their god and told them he wanted them to go back to the land of their own god. He wanted them to build the city of their god and temple of their god. This was a wise political policy because governing a willing people was much easier than governing an unwilling people. Governing a peaceful people is much easier than governing a warring people. Cyrus wanted these people back in their own land so

they could be happy, peaceful, and fruitful. He could receive taxes and become rich from them. He was not doing this because he wanted to serve the Lord God. He was serving the Lord God in doing it, but he was not doing it because he wanted to serve the Lord God. He was doing it for politically correct reasons, but God was behind it. God was the One who had given him this attitude. God was the One who stirred up his heart to get this job done. So all the families of Judah and Benjamin, the priests, Levites and everyone whose heart God had moved prepared to go up and build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem. A number were going back, but most of the Jews that had been scattered through the Assyrian and the Babylonian captivity remained outside the Promised Land. A remnant or a small number went back to build the temple of God:

All their neighbors assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts, in addition to all the freewill offerings. Moreover, King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his god. Cyrus king of Persia had them brought by Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar (He is also called Zerubbabel.) the prince of Judah. This was the inventory: gold dishes, 30; silver dishes, 1,000; silver pans, 29; gold bowls, 30; matching silver bowls, 410; other articles, 1,000. In all, there were 5,400 articles of gold and of silver. Sheshbazzar brought all these along when the exiles came up from Babylon to Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:6–11).

That was a beautiful day. The faithful among the people of God, the ones who were the righteous and the religious, went back to build their temple. They went back with exactly the

articles that had come out of the temple. Somehow God kept Nebuchadnezzar from spending all of that gold and silver. God wanted His articles back in His house in His land. The restoration took place because of the decree of Cyrus.

Ezra 2 contains the registration list of all the exiles who returned:

The whole company numbered 42,360, besides their 7,337 menservants and maidservants; and they also had 200 men and women singers. They had 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels and 6,720 donkeys (Ezra 2:64).

That was a large number to travel all the way from Babylon to Jerusalem, but it was a very small remnant of Israel's total number. (It has always been "the few" that get the will of God done and the majority benefit.) The whole nation of Israel benefitted from the work of that righteous remnant. They were God's select few. They were the Master's minority. God has always operated through His minority as in the case with Gideon's army (cf. Judges 6:1-8:35). God calls a minority who will go and do the work for the majority. The inception of the work was the emancipation of the Jews. First, they rebuilt the altar even before they started building the temple itself (cf. Ezra 3:1-6). Just as one of the first things that Abraham did when he got to any city was to build an altar unto Jehovah and call upon Him. Abraham did this before he ever pitched his tent or established his residence (cf. Genesis 12:7,8). That was exactly what Israel did when they got back to the land. The first thing they did was to rebuild the altar of God and began to sacrifice unto God: "*On the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, though the foundation of the LORD's temple had not yet been laid*" (Ezra 3:6). There is a lesson here. The temple does not need to stand for sacrifice to be offered. Sacrifice is offered in the open. Sacrifice can be offered anytime, anywhere. Erect an altar unto God. The people

of God have an altar today. It is the body of each person. God's people can serve God anytime and any place that they wish.

Then the foundation of the temple was laid:

When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the LORD, as prescribed by David king of Israel. With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: "He is good; his love to Israel endures forever." And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid (Ezra 3:10-11).

The temple was not yet built. All they had accomplished was to lay a foundation that let them know the size of the temple that was to be built. From the very first beginning of their work, they gave praise where it belonged, not to their work and not to their ability, but to the Lord for whom they worked. It is interesting that they shouted:

*But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others **shouted** for joy (Ezra 3:12).*

In times of joy the people of God are to shout to the Lord. There was no joy among the older people because they could see that this temple was not going to be the glorious temple of the past. Solomon's beautiful temple with all of its gold, ivory and cedar was only a memory now in the older men's eyes. They liked the good old days. For the younger men, however, this was a great joy. They were building the house of the Lord. God's people need to be more like the younger men than the older men. It is not good to look back at the past as if those

days were glory days. That was such a discouragement that when Haggai, who was preaching at this time, spoke about this situation he was inspired by the Lord to say in essence: "You that were left saw this house in its former glory. How do you see it now? Is it not in your eyes as nothing? But the latter glory of this house will be greater than the former. This present glory may not surpass Solomon's glory, but when I (God) build the real temple with men and women serving me then their glory will far exceed the glory of the past temple. The people of God will become the temple of God" (cf. Haggai 2:3-9). There was so much crying and shouting going on that they were not even able to tell the difference between the two.

When the word got out that the people were building a temple, opposition arose. (As soon as someone begins to do the work of the Lord, the devil is going to oppose it.) First, all the enemies of Judah and Benjamin said they wanted to build with Zerubbabel and the people of God, but it was not their work. It was Zerubbabel's and the people of God's work. Zerubbabel told them they could not help because this was the work of the Jews only. Then these enemies sent letters to the king about the trouble as they saw it with Judah and Israel building the temple. The king decreed that the building must be stopped: "*Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia*" (Ezra 4:24). So for four long years (516–520 B. C.) they did not work on the temple. They did not do a single thing to it. The weeds grow taller than the foundation and the enemies of God were laughing at the people of God. Finally a man named Tattenai sent a long letter to Darius the king that convinced him that they had no intention of being rebellious against the Persian empire. They were faithful citizens of the Persian empire and they paid their taxes. Cyrus had said they could have the temple and they wanted to finish it. So Darius made a decree that they could build again and that the old decree was to be recognized. He returned the gold and silver that had been taken to Babylon and offered help to rebuild their temple. The

Jews started building the temple again and it is finally completed (cf. Ezra 6:15). Priests were restored and worship began again in the house of God. They observed the Passover again in remembrance, not just for their deliverance from Egypt, but also from Babylonian captivity. The land had rest.

Preservation of the Seed-line Book of Esther (484–465 B. C.)

The book of Esther fits into the time period of twenty years between Ezra 6 and 7. Esther is a beautifully, strange book. The name of God is not mentioned a single time in this book and yet the theme of the book is the providence of God. The purpose of the book is to show how God preserved the seed line. This is the seed that He promised Eve; the seed of the woman who would bruise the serpent's head; the seed that He promised Abraham would bless all the nations of the earth; the seed that He promised Judah would bring light and star and significance to all the world; the seed that He promised David; the seed that He promised over and over again. That promised seed is threatened in the book of Esther and preserved by the faithfulness of one man, Mordecai, and one woman, Esther.

The story of Esther has two parts: the great danger and the great deliverance. The great danger is that all of the Jews in all of the world would be killed by the evil desire of one proud man. The book of Esther begins when king Ashaerus (this is King Xerxes in Assyrian history) returned from his war with the Greeks. There were a handful of Spartans at Thermopylae who fought him to a standoff, though outnumbered 1,000 to 1, because they were mountain fighters and Xerxes' army was not. Xerxes' army came home not in defeat, but really lost face because they could not defeat the Spartans at Thermopylae. So Xerxes gave a great feast for all of his warlords. They were all well fed and well drunk. They did not just drink a lot, they are drunk. Ashaerus called for Vashti, his beautiful queen and his favorite wife among the hundreds that are in his harem, to come and dance before him. He asked for the dance of the Persian

veil in which the women ended up either nude or semi-nude. Vashti refused to parade her modesty before his drunken warlords. In a fit of wild rage, Ashaerus banished her from his kingdom. By decree she could never see his face again. When the king sobered up he missed this woman, and he went about the palace like a dead man. Finally one of his counselors said, “Let us have a beauty contest and chose another queen.” By the providence of God, Ashaerus had a counselor named Mordecai, who had a cousin (possibly translated as “*niece*” [cf. Esther 2:7]) named Esther. The name meant “star.” She was a beautiful lady. Mordecai entered Esther in the contest. By the providence of God this Hebrew, virgin maiden was now the queen of all the world. She sat at the right hand of the king of Persia who claimed to rule heaven and earth.

Esther was the queen because of the providence of God. Why was she there? It is a beautiful story showing God’s providence. The second-in-command in all the empire was a proud man named Haman. He rode through the streets of the city and asked everybody to bow before the king’s honored. Everyone bowed down to Haman except one stiff-backed Jew. This man was Mordecai, the queen’s cousin, and he would not bow down before any man or god except Jehovah. The consequence of Haman’s pride was that even though everyone else was worshiping and honoring Haman, because Mordecai would not worship him, his day was ruined. Haman had to do something about that so he made a plot to kill Mordecai and all his people throughout the whole kingdom. Mordecai’s people were the Jewish nation. Haman went to the king and said: “There are some people in this land who do not honor you. When our enemies come they will ally with them and we will be defeated.” The king asked Haman what he should do. Haman said, “Kill them.” The king put his ring on a decree showing that on a certain day all the Jews would be executed (cf. Esther 3). At that same time, Mordecai had uncovered the plot of some men to kill the king, and he killed the men who were involved in the plot. Mordecai was

responsible for saving the king's life. That became very important later. Mordecai heard of Haman's evil desire to kill all of the Jews and went to Esther. He told her that she must plead with the king. Esther knew that she could not appear before the king unless she was invited. If she appeared in the antechamber and he did not extend the scepter, they would take her out and kill her or banish her as they had done with Vashti. Mordecai said:

" . . . Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. . . . And who know but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:13b-14).

Esther thought about this and knew that Mordecai was right. So Esther basically said, "I will go and if I die, I die." She told the king, "I want to give a feast just for you and Haman tomorrow night." This was all part of God's plan to get Haman and her husband ready for the next night (cf. Esther 4).

Then Esther asked to prepare a feast for the king and Haman, he was in high spirits because of the great honor of attending a banquet with the king and queen. But when he saw Mordecai at the king's gate he was filled with rage. He had a 75 foot (50 cubits, 23 meters) gallows built and planned to ask the king for permission to hang Mordecai on it the next morning. That very night Ashaerus could not sleep. He called for an attendant to read to him and he was reading the chronicles of the kingdom. Since the king was a busy man, he probably did not get to have all that read to him day by day. The attendant was reading aloud and read about how Mordecai had saved the king's life. Ashaerus was wide awake and wanted to know if anything had ever been done to honor the man who had saved his life. When the attendant told him no, the king said, "Let us honor this man." Notice the calendar God has. This was providence. At that very moment, Haman walked into the antechamber. Ashaerus called him in and said, "There is a great

man in my kingdom that I have never honored properly. What do you think I ought to do?" Haman thought it was Haman himself about to be honored. So Haman said, "This is what I would do. I would put the king's robe on his back. I would the king's ring on his finger. I would put him on the king's horse and I would let the second best man in all the empire lead him through the streets and say, '*This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!*'" (Esther 6:9b). Haman thought this time Mordecai would have to give him the honor he thought he deserved. He did not know it was Mordecai who was to be honored instead. The kings said, "That is a great idea. Put my robe on Mordecai's back. Put him on my horse, and you lead him through the streets and say, '*This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!*'" (Esther 6:9b). Haman did not like this, but he did it anyway.

On the next day, Haman and the king attended the banquet Esther had prepared. Esther revealed Haman's plot to have her people killed. The king remembered all that he had recently learned and knew that Esther was telling the truth. He had been able to watch Haman's expressions as well (cf Esther 7:6). One of the king's eunuchs told the king about the gallows beside Haman's house, so the king said, "Take this fellow and hang him on his own gallows." Haman's death is an example of what pride can do to a person. Haman faced the consequences of his pride by swinging on a gallows that he had built for someone else.

The king made a new decree that granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves from any armed forces (cf. Esther 8:11-17). The Jews assembled and no one could stand against them. They struck down all their enemies with the sword killing and destroying them. They instituted a feast called the feast of Purim to honor the time when God preserved the seed through Esther. Mordecai was given Haman's position, Haman's house, and all of Haman's riches. Mordecai was now second in the kingdom. This is a beautiful story that has a simple message. God fulfills his

promise. The seed will continue!

The Return From Captivity Under Ezra

Chapters 7–10 of Ezra discuss the reformation of the people: a return to the land led by Ezra himself, with just a small number of people. It only lasted one year because the people had not yet reformed their lives. They were in the right place, the holy land. They were in the right building, the temple; but they were not in the right attitude or the right mood. So Ezra went back to preach to them. King Artaxerxes made a proclamation that Ezra had his permission and his power as he went back to reform the people themselves (cf. Ezra 7:1-28). Ezra established a faithful set of priests and Levites so that when the people came they had the right sacrifice to offer and they would be taught the Word of God (cf. Ezra 8:1-36). The number one purpose of the priest when the priesthood was instituted was to teach the Word of God, and then to offer the sacrifices (cf. Leviticus 10:11). Ezra 9 gives a good look into Ezra's heart through his prayer. The whole chapter was a prayer of intercession about the intermarriage of the Jews. There were many illegal marriages between the Jews and the Babylonian people. They had married among the people of the land, so they could not truly speak in the language of God and they could not truly worship God. Ezra interceded for them. As he was praying, the people heard him interceding, and they heard his message of truth. They confessed their sins and they laid their hearts open unto God (cf. Ezra 10:1-44). They were forgiven and became the people of God again.

Lessons From the Book

The book of Ezra teaches that God is not limited to use only the righteous. God can use wicked kings like Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes to fulfill His will. He can even use the ill will of the people around His people to get His will done. God uses His unlimited power to help His people build what He wants them to build in the kingdom, and He uses His power to

defeat all opposition to that building process. God gives His workers the strength to do what ever He wants done, and He gives the protection to get it done.

The book of Esther teaches that God touches life at every point. Even though God is never mentioned by name He is in every single incident in the book. There is no part of life that God is not interested in. There is no period or space of time in life that God is not active. Esther also teaches that the final consequence of pride and jealousy is Haman's gallows. Pride and jealousy causes man to be hung by his own rope if he is proud of his performance or jealous of someone else's'. But the main lesson from Esther that needs to be learned is that God will always raise up one person needed to do His will. God is not limited to save by the many. He can save by the few. He can save by one and He save by many. Be faithful to him. One man or one woman can risk the life God gives them so that they might make a difference for the entire world.

Book of Nehemiah

Analysis of Nehemiah (445-420 B. C.)

Preview

This is Chapter 23 of Old Testament history. This chapter is about Nehemiah the book as well as Nehemiah the man. The history that Nehemiah wrote within his book is from 445 B. C. to 430 B. C. This is the conclusion of Old Testament history. Nehemiah was an official in the court of Artaxerxes, the king of the nation of Persia which was considered to be “all the world.” Nehemiah was a high official, responsible for all that Artaxerxes ate. He made sure it was the proper quality and checked to see if it had been poisoned so that there was no threat to the king. He was a trusted man before the king.

Outline of the Book of Nehemiah

Nehemiah’s book has three divisions. The first division covers the rebuilding of the wall in Chapters 1–7. Nehemiah’s primary work was to get the walls of Jerusalem rebuilt in the providence of God. The second division, Chapters 8–10, deals with the consecration of the people. Ezra and Nehemiah were both in Judah during this time, and they brought the people to national repentance. The third division, Chapters 11–13, covers the consolidation of the work. After the temple and the walls had been built, after the people had returned to the city, and they were at peace, secure, and faithful to God; then all of the work that was planned was consolidated for the future. Religion was restored in its purity to Judah.

Nehemiah begins with the preparations for building the wall:

The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.” (No one wanted to live in a city like that. That was the city of God.) When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Then I said: “O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s house, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses. Remember instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, (Nehemiah was not thinking that God had forgotten. He was just quoting God’s covenant from Deuteronomy 28.) “If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.” (Nehemiah realized that was exactly what God had done, and he was grateful.) They

are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man. I was cupbearer to the king (Nehemiah 1:1-11).

Nehemiah was a man who trusted in God. He was the most prayerful man in biblical record. The man who was trusted by the king of “all the world” trusted the King of Kings. So he prayed to God, because he was going to ask Artaxerxes to allow him to fulfill his will. After Nehemiah had prayed for a full month about his wishes, he went before the king:

In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes . . . I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before (Time in prayer is necessary before we try to do God’s work—Nehemiah could not hide his sorrow over Jerusalem) so the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.” I was very much afraid (it was bad to be sad in the presence of the king), but I said to the king, “May the king live for ever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” (This touched the king because he liked his cupbearer.) . . . “What is it you want?” (Nehemiah did not tell him immediately, because he prayed to God again while he was standing before the king.) Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it.” Then the

king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, “How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?” (Permission was given, but the king wanted Nehemiah back as quick as possible.) It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time. (He was going to be gone nearly a year.) I also said to him, “If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king’s forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel . . . ?” And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests” (Nehemiah 2:1-9).

Nehemiah trusted God, he was bold before the king, and then he gave God the credit for the things that occurred.

Nehemiah was going to have a continual struggle as he tried to build the wall: *“When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites”* (Nehemiah 2:10). The Israelites had enemies who did not want the wall built. Those men had been in control of the land until the Israelites returned. They did not want Israel blessed.

Nehemiah was preparing himself to build the wall. He had prepared himself by prayer and by his request to the king. When he arrived in Jerusalem, he did not immediately state what he was going to do. He practiced Jesus’ admonition to be as wise as a serpent and as harmless as a dove (cf. Matthew 10:16). He did not tell them why he was there, and by night he made an inspection of the wall. He checked all the gates and found them broken and burned by fire. There were some places he could not even ride his horse because there was not enough room to go through the gate. Nehemiah knew everything that needed to be accomplished because he had inspected it himself. He knew the

job that was before him. His last act of preparation was to gather the people. He had prayed to God, he had made a plea to the king, he had investigated and examined the job to be done, so that he was ready to talk to the people. He told them about his prayer, about the king's decree, and all the help they were going to have in building the wall. He talked about the job that needed to be done and encouraged them to build a wall so that they would no longer be in disgrace: "*They replied, 'Let us start rebuilding.' So they began this good work*" (Nehemiah 2:18b). Nehemiah was a good, strong leader. He used proper biblical and servant tactics to lead the people. A study of the book of Nehemiah gives the details of what a leader of God really is.

Before the reconstruction of the wall even began there was opposition:

But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab (now they had a third man helping them) heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. "What is this you are doing?" they asked. "Are you rebelling against the king?" (Nehemiah did not answer.) ". . . 'The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it'" (Nehemiah 2:19-20).

Nehemiah was saying, "Mind your own business. If I am offending the king, the king will tell me. I do not need you to judge me. I have come here to build a wall and build a wall I will."

They began to construct the wall in Nehemiah 3. They worked but the opposition continued:

When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "What

are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? (This indicated their progress was good.) *Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble-burned as they are?" Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, "What they are building — if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!"* (Nehemiah 4:1-3).

These men ridiculed and mocked by saying, “This is nothing. You cannot get it done.” Nehemiah does not argue or debate. He did not defend himself, instead he prayed:

*“Hear us, O our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.” So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, **for the people worked with all their heart** (Nehemiah 4:4-6).*

The King James Version translation describes the people: “. . . **for the people had a mind to work.**” They had a worker’s heart. The people had a worker’s heart because their leader had such a heart. Nehemiah took the lead in Israel by being a strong worker, and the people offered themselves willingly to follow his example.

They continue to build the wall until opposition rose again. Their enemies said, “. . . ‘Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work’” (Nehemiah 4:11). Nehemiah divided his people into two groups; half of them held spears and half of them held trowels as they did the brick work. Then they would take turns and the one half would act as protectors while the other half would work until “. . . with half the men holding spears, from

the first light of dawn till the stars came out” (Nehemiah 4:21). They began to work as soon as it was light enough, and they continued to work until it was too dark to see. This is what people do when they have a mind to work. They do not seek the easy way out.

Nehemiah helped the poor among the people because they did not have the ability to feed themselves and work. He did this from his own resources without any support during the whole time he was doing it. He was not a poor man himself since he was an official of the Persian empire. He feeds himself, the poor and 150 workers. He knew the people would work as long as he gave them the encouragement and the support to work (cf. Nehemiah 5:1-19).

Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem were still trying to stop the rebuilding process. They tried to get Nehemiah to come down to one of the villages on the plain of Ono to talk to them and make a treaty. Nehemiah knew they were scheming to harm him so he said, “I am building a wall. I do not have any time to talk. I will not come to the plain of Ono. I am not coming down there because I know what you are trying to do. You are trying to get me to stop the work. If I stop, then the people will stop. I refuse to come” (cf. Nehemiah 6:1-14). Nehemiah did not stop working, the people did not stop their work and . . . *“So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days”* (Nehemiah 6:15). In 52 days, Nehemiah did what had not been accomplished for nearly 100 years. The walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt because of him. Nehemiah 7:1-73 contains a list of the exiles that returned to Jerusalem along with contributions that were made to the work. The people began to move back into the city and settle into their own towns because the wall had been reconstructed.

The consecration of the people began only after the wall had been rebuilt. Ezra read the Law for seven days from dawn to dusk. As he read the people stood from dawn to dusk to hear the Law read. As they stood and listened for twelve hours, there were Levites going in among them to explain and make things

clear while Ezra was reading. The Levites were helping the Law reach into the hearts of the people and not just into their heads: “*They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read*” (Nehemiah 8:8).

The Word of God needs to be taught in such a way that it is clearly understood. Even today the Bible needs to be translated into a language that the people can understand. The Old Testament scrolls Ezra was reading from were written in Hebrew, but the Levites made it clear by walking among the people and explaining matters that may have been hard to understand for the common man of that day.

After hearing God’s Word and understanding it clearly, the people confessed their sins and the sins of their fathers (cf. Nehemiah 9:2). James admonished the Christians in the first century and people today to do the same: “*...confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. ...*” (James 5:16). The Israelites wanted spiritual healing. They had heard the Law read, and it had been made clear to them. They had been given the meaning and as soon as their lives were contrasted to the Law, they knew they were sinners. As soon as God’s people know the meaning of God’s Word and it is contrasted to their own lives, God’s people realize they are sinners as well. The Israelites recognized that they had been indifferent to the work of the Lord. They knew their religion had not been what it should be, and their sacrifices had not been what they ought to be. Their commitment to God had not been what God desired to see. So, they confessed their sins to God and begged for His forgiveness (cf. Nehemiah 9:1-38).

The people of Israel renewed their covenant with God (cf. Nehemiah 10:1-39). The wall had been rebuilt, and the people had been reformed. Nehemiah gives a catalog of important people and events and describes the dedication of the wall (cf. Nehemiah 11:1-12:26). The wall was dedicated (cf. Nehemiah 12:27-43). The people stood before the Law and praised God for the work that He had done. They promised to live as faithful

people of God within the walls of the city that had been restored and to worship in the temple that had been rebuilt. Nehemiah concluded with these words, “*. . . Remember me with favor, O my God*” (Nehemiah 13:31).

Nehemiah had been a faithful servant of God. He had brought honor back to the city. He had brought the people back to correct religion and correct living. Nehemiah was really asking that God grant His favor to the people of Israel. Nehemiah had made it possible for the people of God to continue. With God’s help, Nehemiah had put down all of their enemies.

Lessons From the Book

There are several lessons to learn in the book of Nehemiah. There are three lessons to learn from Nehemiah’s attitude toward God’s cause of rebuilding the wall. These lessons apply today no matter what the cause of God. First, Nehemiah showed concern for the cause of God. As the most trusted man in all the king’s house in Persia he showed concern for rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. He was a rich man who had no reason to be concerned about any physical needs or desires. Yet he was more concerned with God’s cause than with his place of honor and position. Nehemiah made an earnest inquiry about the condition of his homeland. He was not called by God to be a ruler or a king in Judah. He was called by God to be an influence in the Persian palace. Outside of his prime calling, he was concerned with the cause of God throughout the world and particularly with God’s city. He had deep sorrow over Jerusalem’s woes and fasted and mourned for a month over that situation.

Just as Nehemiah had concern for the cause of God, God’s children today need to have that same concern. God’s cause today is that everybody in all the world hear of Him so that as many as possible, in all of the countries of the world, can be led to Him. Each person may receive a different primary call from God. One may be called to be an instructor, another called to be a husband and father, and yet another to be an influence in a

company or within a governmental office. Whatever the primary call from God is, that is where he should give the primary attention. God's children need to be concerned for the work of God as they follow their primary calling.

Second, Nehemiah had confidence in God's cause. He had so much confidence that he pleaded with God and with pagan kings that the cause might be fulfilled. He had concern and confidence. Third, Nehemiah cooperated in God's cause. He made sure that the work of building walls and building souls was done before he ever went back to serve his king with food and drink. These are the three lessons from Nehemiah's attitude towards God's cause.

There are also three lessons to be learned from Nehemiah's activity in God's cause. Attitude is good, but that is not enough. God blesses the work performed for Him. Nehemiah went to work in getting the wall built. First, Nehemiah was cautious in the work for God. The month he spent in prayer before he went to the king shows his carefulness. It is also seen in the secret visit he made to the walls before he ever asked the people to work. He showed caution by the division of the laborers into two camps so that half could protect and half could work. He was not foolhardy. He did not tempt God. He was a cautious person.

Second, he was courageous as a person in his activity. He refused to give in or compromise with any of his enemies' approaches to stop the work. He was determined to get the work of God done no matter who did not like it. The third lesson is most important. He was uncompromising. Once God had spoken, Nehemiah would do nothing more and nothing less than what God had said. He did God's work exactly as God had said to do it. These are the three lessons to be learned from Nehemiah's activity.

The book of Nehemiah also contains information about how you can identify troublemakers that want to stop the work of God. What is the difference between a person who is really a worker in the kingdom of God and one who is a troublemaker? Number one, a troublemaker laughs at good work. A

troublemaker is the one who says, “That is nothing. You think that is something. We need to be doing something significant” (cf. Nehemiah 2:19). Number two, they ridicule the small beginning of the work of God. They are the ones who say, “This little thing — I mean why would we want to do this little thing?” The greatest river starts with a drop of water (cf. Nehemiah 4:2-3). Number three, troublemakers threatened Nehemiah and the workers. “If you do not stop working, we are going to tell the king on you. We are going to fight you” (cf. Nehemiah 4:2-8). Number four, they attempt compromise. They try to stop the work short of what God wants. Number five, they infiltrate the camp with liars. Anyone who laughs, ridicules, threatens, attempts compromise or infiltrates the camp are enemies who are trying to stop the work of God.

There are also three lessons to be learned from Nehemiah’s life. The number one lesson is from his life of faith. Nehemiah’s faith is what got the wall built. It was not the fact that he was second in the kingdom of Persia or even the fact that he was a good leader. It was the fact that he was a man of faith. He trusted God even more than he trusted his position or the king. He was clearly conscious of God’s presence and aid. He constantly prayed. There are seven recorded prayers in the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah preformed all the work that God had put in his hand, because he believed that God was able to do exceeding abundantly above anything that Nehemiah could ask or think. Paul challenged the Ephesians, as well as God’s people today, with these words, *“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, . . .”* (Ephesians 3:20).

The history of the Old Testament closes with an admonition to quit trusting in our position, our power and our possessions, and begin to trust only and completely in God. Trust in God and He will bring the victory.

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

Preview

Chapter 24 is the last lesson in the study of Old Testament history. There have been a lot of exciting things to study about what happened to the people of God. This chapter is about three of the great prophets of God: Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. These three books in the Bible contain the concluding Word of God to His people who are now back in the land, ready to build His temple, build His wall and establish themselves as His people again under His blessing and His control.

Haggai — the Temple Builder

Haggai was a simple, old man who had been there along with other old men to see the temple in its former glory. It is interesting that God did not send a young man full of energy, but He called Haggai who was an old man with powerful concern, powerful words, and an uncompromising character. God sent Haggai after the period of four years when the people did not work on building the temple. In Ezra it is recorded that the people laid the foundation of the temple, but when letters were sent to the king of Persia he decreed that the temple could not longer be built. So from 520 B. C. to 516 B. C. no work was done on building the temple of God. The people built their houses and put ceilings and paneling in their homes. The people did all the work in and around their houses rather than work on the temple because they were afraid of the king's wrath. Then the king made a decree that they could build again. So God raised up a faithful prophet who spoke His Word. That prophet was Haggai. Haggai was a single minded man with one single

purpose. God has sent him to see that the people built the temple again. Haggai, the temple builder, spoke for one year in the year 520 B. C. and encouraged the people to build.

The Outline of the Book of Haggai

Haggai Chapter 1 covers the completion of the present temple. Haggai said:

This is what the LORD Almighty says: “These people say, ‘The time has not yet come for the LORD’s house to be built.’ (The king had made the decree that they could build, and they were saying, “When the time is right we will do it but the time is not right, right now.”) Whenever there is a work to be done, that is the time to do it. The people of Israel did not believe this.) *Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: “Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?”* (It is never right to do our work and let the work of God go undone.) Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. (Look at what you are doing. Look at your life.) You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.’ (They are concerned about their work and not about the work of God.) *This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,’ says the LORD.* ‘You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?’ declares the LORD Almighty. ‘Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. Therefore, because of you (Because

they left His work undone and concentrated on their own.) *the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands’’* (Haggai 1:2–11).

The people of Israel were being cursed. They were being shortened because they were shortening God. They refused to do the assignment God had sent them back to the land to do. They were only concerned with their own pleasures and good rather than the pleasure and good of God. However, the Israelites had a faithful prophet to turn to. They also had a faithful governor and a faithful high priest. These three led the people back to building the temple. Haggai 1:12–15 says:

Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD. (What had not been done for sixteen years was now being done — The temple was being built.) *Then Haggai, the LORD’s messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: “I am with you,” declares the LORD.* (Haggai was the Lord’s messenger who spoke the Lord’s message saying, “Thus sayeth the Lord.” This was the secret of Haggai’s success. He spoke what God gave him to speak.) *So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of King Darius* (Haggai 1:12-15).

In 23 days, Haggai had turned Israel from going in one direction to going totally the other direction. They had turned from being a non-working people to a working people, and from a non-committed people to a committed people. They were no longer an unfaithful people, because they had turned to God as His faithful people. The rebuilding of the temple had begun. Maybe if all preachers were Jehovah's messengers with Jehovah's message saying "Thus says the Lord Almighty . . .," to the people, then they might be as successful as Haggai. Haggai 2:1–3 continues:

On the twenty-first day of the seventh month (this was one month and twenty-one days after Haggai began to preach), the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: "Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them, 'Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?'" (Haggai 2:1-3).

Haggai knew how they felt because he was "one of them." He knew that the younger generation was being discouraged by his generation when they said, "This is nothing compared to the temple we had before." Haggai told them that the solution was to be strong and work. He said, "Do not listen to us older men about how it used to be. You have a work to do right now, and if you will do that work, if you will be strong and work, then God will be with you and will finish this house."

They had silver and gold glory in the temple before, but God said, "*The silver is mine and the gold is mine, . . . The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house, . . .*" (Haggai 2:8-9). That was really not what their language said. The Hebrew language said that the latter glory, or the glory that would come to this house would be greater than

the former glory of this house. The old men were absolutely right, there was no present glory. What they were building would not be as glorious as Solomon's temple, but God said, in the days to come, (in the future) the latter glory of His house would be greater than the former. The former glory had been physical. The present glory was physical. The former glory had been silver and gold. The present glory was silver and gold, but in days to come the glory of God's house would be spiritual. So God promised that there would be a great blessing in days to come. They had the promised glory of another temple that would not be that physical one that they were building. It would be a spiritual temple.

Haggai talked about the present blessing of the people (cf. Haggai 2:10-23). He told them that at one time they had sown a lot and brought in a little, now they would sow little and bring in much. God would bless them presently because they were building the temple. But in that future day when they would have the more glorious temple, they would be blessed in greater measures than ever before. They would become the signet ring on the hand of the Lord God Almighty. That signet ring declared ownership, but more than that, it declared the power to seal things and make them sure and evident. They would become the authority figure of God.

Lessons From the Book

This chapter is just a short survey of Haggai, but there are lessons that must be understood to gain help from this book. Number one is the value of single mindedness that can be learned from Haggai himself. Paul says, “... *But one thing I do. . .*” (Philippians 3:13b). Paul was not a one talent man and neither was Haggai. Haggai was a one-minded man who looked in a single direction. He was focused on one thing in all that he did. He had a single message, “Build the temple.” He only preached for about six weeks. He got his job done and went back home to retire as the old faithful prophet of God. God raised up Zechariah, a younger man, to continue the work and to continue

the message that Haggai began. The people of Israel were like a car that was not running. Haggai jump-started the car, but Zechariah was to be the one to drive it. Zechariah took Israel on to glory, but Haggai did begin the task. He got the people of Israel on the move. It takes a powerful man of God with a single mind to get things going.

Another lesson from Haggai is that the basis of all successful preaching and teaching is, “Thus sayeth the Lord.” Twenty-six times in thirty-eight verses Haggai says, “Thus sayeth the Lord,” in some form. This moved people, stirred their spirits, and got results. It worked then for Haggai and it will work today. Preachers and teachers do not have any right to tell the people what to do. They do have the right to put their finger on the text and demand that the people do what the Lord God Almighty commands.

The book of Haggai contains lessons of these three moral truths: faithfulness is directly connected to one’s needs being met; God has the right to curse His people if they are not faithful to Him. Blessings come when His people are faithful. Jesus said it this way, *“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well”* (Matthew 6:33). .

One of the most important lessons to learn from Haggai is that discouragement is never an adequate reason to quit. These people were discouraged so they quit doing the work of God. It is okay to be discouraged and dismayed, but continue to work and stay strong. The most important lesson may be to realize that when there is a good work to be done, the time to do it is right now. Do not delay.

Zechariah — the Messianic Prophet

Outline of the Book

Zechariah follows Haggai not only in the Bible but also in time. Haggai started the people in the work, and Zechariah kept them working. Zechariah is called the “Messianic Prophet” because, percentage wise, verse-by-verse in the book of

Zechariah, there are more promises of Jesus in the Kingdom than any other book in the Bible. Zechariah is a good book to study in the minor prophet series. This chapter will give just a brief outline and some lessons from the book. The book has two parts. First is the chosen people and the temple. Second is the Messiah and His Kingdom.

There are two parts within the section that covers the chosen people and the temple. After Haggai got the people started, Zechariah was used by God to keep them building for the four years it took to get the temple built. “Visions and Victory” is a good title for Chapters 1–6 because Zechariah had visions that dealt with victory. He told the people about his visions and the messages from God. Some of those messages included: “If you continue to build this temple and do not listen to the adversary, I will bless you in every way.” and, “After the temple is built, there is a place for fasts and there is a place for feasts.” The fasts were to be in moments of sorrow or dedication. The feasts were for normal life in the children of God. From now on they were not going to be in a funeral mode, they were going to be in a celebration mode. Fasts were for funeral times and feasts were for celebration times. God came and built that temple to turn their fasts into feasts. When they were in Babylon, they had a fast nearly every month over that fact that they were not in Promised Land. Since they were back in the Promised Land and in covenant with God, the fast needed to become a feast.

The section about the Messiah and His kingdom talks about the fact that this would be a restoration of both Israel and Judah. The nation would be one again, and that would mean judgment to the wicked and redemption for the righteous. This was the same message covered in all the prophets. Every single prophet God raised up preached the same message: the people will be one again, their enemies will be judged, and the people will be redeemed.

Lessons From the Book

The book of Zechariah presents some beautiful pictures of Christ. He is depicted as the Messianic King (cf. Zechariah 9:9-10). This passage was quoted when Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem in triumph riding upon the foal of an ass. The passage says the Messianic King has salvation and He is lowly. He does not have salvation as the world has salvation, by waving a sword and calling attention to himself and by becoming the known political ruler and king of the world. He comes as a lowly servant of God riding on a colt, the foal of an ass, rather than upon a white charger or even on a full grown mule. This is the humble, lowly Messianic king.

Christ is the rejected Shepherd in Chapters 11 and 13. He is the Good Shepherd (cf. John 10:1-18), but He is also the rejected Shepherd. He is the Shepherd that Israel took to a hill and killed. He was rejected by the very sheep that He came to lead. Throughout the book of Zechariah the Messiah is seen as the Divine Sovereign. Jesus is called the “ruler of the kings of the earth” (cf. Revelation 1:5). He is the King, the Shepherd and the Sovereign.

Zechariah also presents pictures of Christ’s Kingdom. Christ would become the King over the whole earth and His kingdom would be set up on the earth (Zechariah 14:9-11). The Kingdom would be abundantly blessed materially (cf. Zechariah 10:1). The Kingdom is filled with a spirit of grace and supplication (cf. Zechariah 12:10). The kingdom would come to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles (cf. Zechariah 12:7). The main lesson Zechariah taught about the Kingdom is found in the last two verses of his book. Everything and everybody will be holy in the kingdom (cf. Zechariah 14:20-21). Every pot and pan will be holy in the temple of God. We sleep on holy beds. We eat holy food. We cook in holy pots. We drive holy cars. We wear holy clothes. Everything and everybody in that kingdom will be holy unto the Lord.

Malachi — God's Messenger

Outline of the Book of Malachi

The last prophet to speak was the prophet Malachi. The word “Malachi” means “God’s messenger.” Malachi wrote between 445 B. C. and 430 B. C. during the very time that Nehemiah and Ezra were trying to get the people to repent. Malachi also preached repentance. The six-fold outline of his book begins with “Jehovah” as the first word of every point:

Jehovah the Lord loves his people (cf. Malachi 1:1–5).

Jehovah the Lord condemns the priests’ faithlessness
(cf. Malachi 1:6–2:29).

Jehovah condemns illegal marriages (cf. Malachi
2:10–16).

Jehovah condemns the people’s indifference (cf.
Malachi 2:17–4:3).

Jehovah makes one last appeal to the Law (cf. Malachi
4:4).

Jehovah points to the Elijah to come (cf. Malachi
4:5–6)

The first four chapters of Malachi present God’s condemnation. Sometimes the people of God need to hear that they are going to be condemned if they continue in their ways rather than just living a life of indifference. That is a good message and it does tell the good news because it basically says, “If I am not walking in indifference and faithlessness and not living in an illegal marriage, then I will not be condemned.” So Malachi condemned the priests’ faithlessness, the people’s illegal marriages, and the people’s indifference.

Jehovah made one last appeal to the Law and asked the people to remember the Law of Moses. He wanted them to remember all that Moses had said and to keep it. As the last point, Jehovah referred to the Elijah who was to come. He told

them to follow that Law until He sent them the Elijah, who would turn the hearts of the children to the fathers and the hearts of the fathers to the children before He came and smote that entire nation with a curse and destroyed them root and branch. Jesus said in Luke 16: 16, "*The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.*"

Lessons From the Book

There are many lessons within the book of Malachi. This chapter of Bible History looks at seventeen different lessons divided into three parts. These are the last messages that God spoke to His people before John the Baptist appeared on the scene and told the people, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (cf. Matthew 3:1-2).

We are all true priests of God, we are a holy priesthood (cf. 1 Peter 2:5). Since we are priests we should know the nature of a true priest. True priests fear the Lord. (The NIV uses the word "*reverence*" or "*awe*" [cf. Malachi 2:5]). True priests speak truth and righteousness (cf. Malachi 2:6). True priests walk in righteousness and peace. (cf. Malachi 2:6). True priests fear the Lord, they speak truth and righteousness, and they walk righteously before God and in peace. They turn away from evil (cf. Malachi 2:6). They know the Lord and share Him (cf. Malachi 2:7). The priests lips should acknowledge that the people might seek the Law at his mouth. Today, are God's people His true priests in this way? Do they fear the Lord? Do they seek truth and righteousness? Do they walk righteously and in peace? Do they turn many away from sin? If God's Word is kept on the lips of His priests today, many will come to God. Other people will seek God's people. This is a positive lesson.

The book of Malachi also teaches a negative lesson in the nature of sin in the people. Something was very wrong at this time that caused God to spend ninety percent of this book condemning His people. Their five sins were:

They had spiritless routine worship (cf. Malachi 1:6–8).

They had evil associations (cf. Malachi 2:10–12).

They were questioning God's justice (cf. Malachi 2:17–3:6).

They were robbing God by not bringing His rightful gift as the tithe to Him (cf. Malachi 3:7–12).

They were impatient in waiting on God. They were not waiting for God to act, they were acting too quickly (cf. Malachi 3:17–4:3).

These same things are present in many religious organizations today: spiritless routine worship, mixing and mingling with wicked people, questioning God's justice, not giving and impatiently waiting on God.

One of the finest teachings in Malachi's book is the nature of divorce in the eyes of God. They had divorced their wives, left them behind in Judah, had mixed and mingled with all of the women in Babylon, and now mixed with all the women of the land. They were divorcing their wives for no other reason than to marry other women. When God speaks out against the nature of divorce, He is not talking about His covenant; He is talking about the sacred covenant that is made between a man and a woman when they marry. The nature of divorce:

It is profanity of the covenant made between a man and a woman (cf. Malachi 2:10).

It is a profanity against God's holiness because God is one; He wants his people to be one, and divorce destroys that holy union (cf. Malachi 2:10–16).

It is a betrayal of trust against one's companion. It is not an innocent action because it brings evil against the one you are divorcing (cf. Malachi 2:14).

It destroys the purpose of the home which is to produce godly seed (cf. Malachi 2:15).

It is something that God hates (cf. Malachi 2:16).

It is violence against the innocent because it leaves a spouse without the support of a mate (cf. Malachi 2:16).

It can become the cause of one to being separated from God (cf. Malachi 2:13).

Malachi had a mouthful to say as he ended the Word of God to the people. He said in essence, “If you are on God’s side, God will be on yours.” God did not speak again for four hundred years until He spoke through John and through His own Son. God did say, “Look back to the Law and keep it until Elijah tells you about the One you have long awaited. He will tell you about the Messiah, the King, the Shepherd, and the Servant. This will be the One who will bring you all of the promises that were made to the woman, to Abraham and to David” (cf. Malachi 4:4–6).

Richard Rogers



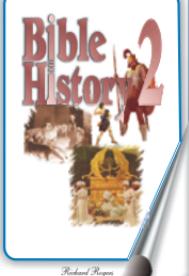
Richard Rogers was born in 1936 in Dallas, Texas. He was educated at Abilene Christian University, and Florida Christian College. He was an avid reader, a diligent student of the Bible, and authored some twenty teaching workbooks and published outlines.

Richard was well known and recognized as a gifted evangelist, teacher, and lectureship speaker. Until his death he was in great demand as a missionary encourager and world evangelist. He taught for more than three decades at Sunset International Bible Institute, assisting in the training of thousands of preachers and missionaries. Richard mentored church planting teams in California, Mexico, Thailand, and the Philippines.

Richard preached for local congregations at Blue Ridge, Azle, Midland, and the Sunset Church of Christ in Lubbock, Texas. Speaking appointments took him to forty states and thirty foreign countries and to many Christian university campuses as a teacher and lecturer. He was also a frequent speaker at workshops across the nation.

Richard can still be heard proclaiming the word of God via hundreds of audio and video sermons and lessons available through Sunset External Studies.

Richard and his wife, Barbara, were blessed with four children and eight grandchildren.



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