Old Testament Digest, Volume 2: Joshua–Esther

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Volume 2: Joshua - Esther

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Walterick Publishers, Kansas City, Kansas

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Joshua

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Exodus is the story of God leading His people out of Egypt. Joshua is the story of God leading His people into the Promised Land. He would complete the good work He began despite the unbelief of the nation. As we will see, the people hadn't changed; they were still faithless. Nevertheless, the Word of the Lord would be fulfilled and the seed of Abraham would be planted in the covenant land (Gen. 15:13-16) to take root and grow.

The events of this chapter follow those recorded in the last chapter of Deuteronomy. The people of Israel were encamped on the Plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River. Moses had died, and Joshua had become commander-in-chief. He was about to lead the people across the Jordan and into the Promised Land. Law, as represented by Moses, cannot lead God's people into their inheritance. Only Christ in resurrection, pictured by Joshua, can do that.

We should pause to review some important facts about Joshua. Moses had changed his name from Hoshea to Joshua (Num. 13:16). He was an Ephraimite (Num. 13:8) and Moses' personal servant (Joshua 1:1). He was early a man engaged in fighting the Lord's battles. He led the Israelites in their first combat against the Amalekites (Exod. 17) and was the only general they had known since Egypt. But what equipped Joshua to replace Moses at the head of the nation was not his military prowess

but his spiritual vitality and faith. As a young man he constantly attended the tent of the Lord (Exod. 33:11). He had been on Mount Sinai with Moses (Exod. 32:17). He and Caleb were the only ones who saw the Promised Land with believing eyes when the people had been at Kadesh Barnea 38 years earlier (Num. 14:6-10). Trained by Moses, he was now commissioned by Jehovah, although he was over 90 years of age.

Chapter 1

God first delivered a solemn charge to Joshua concerning the task ahead of him (vv. 1-9). The land had been promised to Israel, but they must possess it, from the Negev at the south to Lebanon in the north, and from the Mediterranean on the west to the Euphrates on the east (see vv. 3, 4). Joshua must be strong, courageous, and obedient. Now, as then, we are assured of success when we fill our hearts and minds with God's Word and obey it (v. 8).

Three times Joshua is told by the Lord to be strong and courageous (vv. 6, 7, 9). The size and duration of the task ahead, the pressures of leading such an obstinate people, and the absence of his spiritual mentor, Moses, were perhaps heavy on Joshua's mind at this time. But the Lord was not calling him without enabling him. There were good reasons for Joshua to be strong: God's promise (vv. 5, 6), a sure victory; God's word (vv. 7, 8), a safe guide; God's presence (v. 9), a sustaining power. T. Austin Sparks writes: "The real battle of faith is joined here. Not what we are, but what He is! Not what we feel, but His facts."

The people were to prepare food for their journey into the land of Canaan (vv. 10, 11). As for the 2 1/2 tribes

which were settling east of the Jordan, the men were reminded by Joshua that they must help in the conquest of the land; then they could return to their families (vv. 12-15). To this they readily agreed (vv. 16-18). Any who turned back would be put to death.

In some hymns, crossing the Jordan is likened to death and the land of Canaan pictures heaven. But there was conflict in Canaan, whereas there is no conflict in heaven. Actually the land of Canaan pictures our present spiritual inheritance. It is all ours, but we must possess it by obeying the Word, claiming the promises, and fighting the good fight of faith.

Chapter 2

In preparation for the invasion, Joshua sent two spies to Jericho (v. 1). This was not an indication of lack of faith on his part; rather, it was a matter of military strategy. They were not to spy out the whole land, as had been done years earlier, but only to look ahead one step at a time.

The spies found shelter in the home of Rahab the harlot. It is clear from the narrative that Rahab had heard of the marvelous victories which God had given to the Jewish people (vv. 8-11). She concluded that their God must be the true God, and so she trusted in Him, becoming a true convert. She proved the reality of her faith by protecting the spies, even though it meant betraying her country.

The spies promised to spare Rahab and her family if she hung a scarlet cord in the window of her home and if the household remained indoors during the attack against Jericho (vv. 6-21). The scarlet cord makes us think of a

house protected by the blood, as at the original Passover (Exod. 12).

When messengers from the King of Jericho asked Rahab where the spies were, she told them they had already left the city (v. 5). While the men of Jericho searched for them on the road to the Jordan, Rahab sent the spies westward to the mountains. After hiding there for three days, the spies escaped across the Jordan, carrying a confident report to Joshua (vv. 22-24).

Rahab's "works" and not her "words" justified her (Jas. 2:25). The Bible does not commend her deceit (vv. 4, 5) but it does commend her faith (Heb. 11:31). (Nor would it have been necessary for Rahab to tell a lie in order to protect the lives of the spies.) James also calls her deed a work of faith (Jas. 2:25). She risked her life to save the lives of the spies because she believed in the power and sovereignty of their God. So in our Lord's day some outside the commonwealth of Israel showed more faith than those who were eyewitnesses of His glory (Luke 7:2-9). Great faith, wherever it is found, is always rewarded (see ch. 6), for it is pleasing to God (Heb. 11:6).

Chapter 3

The time had come to cross the Jordan River, which was now in flood stage. The priests were instructed to go forth, carrying the ark of the covenant. (The Kohathites usually carried the ark, as in Numbers 4:1-15, but the priests were to carry it on this special occasion.) The people were ordered to follow the ark at a distance, but always keeping it in view. The ark speaks of Christ. We should maintain a respectful distance by not irreverently trying to solve mysteries concerning His Person that are

too deep for the human mind. Some of the worst heresies in Christian history have arisen because of brazen attempts to do this. But we should always keep Christ in view. This assures us of victory.

When the priests' feet touched the water of the Jordan, a miracle occurred. The river was stopped at the city of Adam, some miles to the north. The waters piled up there, and whatever water was left in the bed of the river below that point drained into the Dead Sea. Even if the Jordan's flow was stopped by a landslide, as some claim, it was still a miracle that the stoppage occurred when the priests came to the water. God (represented by the ark) led the people into the Jordan even as He would lead them into victory west of the Jordan. He was demonstrating that His presence, which caused the waters to flee before Israel, was their hope of triumph, and not anything in themselves.

The priests walked to the middle of the riverbed and stayed there while the people marched across on dry land.

Chapter 4

The Lord directed that 12 men (one from each tribe) should carry one stone apiece out of the bed of the Jordan and erect a memorial marker where Israel first camped west of the Jordan. Accordingly, the monument was set up at Gilgal as a permanent reminder to future generations of God's miraculous stopping of the Jordan so that the Israelites could cross over on dry land.

The tribes that received their inheritance east of Jordan —Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh—sent warriors over to help their brethren occupy the land of

Canaan. Although the combined strength of the 2½ tribes was over 100,000 men (see Num. 26), only 40,000 crossed the Jordan; the rest probably stayed behind to secure their land and protect their families.

After all the people had crossed over, including the men of the 2½ tribes, and after the 12 stones had been taken out of the Jordan, Joshua set up 12 stones in the middle of the Jordan, where the priests were standing. Then as soon as the priests marched to the west bank with the ark of the covenant, the waters of the river flowed down again in flood tide. The stones in the bed of the river speak of identification with Christ in death. Those on the west bank speak of identification with Christ in resurrection.

By cutting off the waters of the Jordan, the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of the people as He had earlier exalted Moses (v. 14). Up to now, Joshua had been a servant, humbly serving in Moses' shadow, learning the ways of God. Now was the time of his exaltation, for "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:11).

The people crossed the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, five days short of a full 40 years since the exodus from Egypt, and just in time to prepare for the Passover (see Exod. 12:2, 3).

Chapter 5

This chapter tells about the events that took place at Gilgal, the first encampment Israel made in Canaan. There the men were circumcised (vv. 2-9). There they kept the Passover, the first in Canaan (v. 10). There the manna ceased (vv. 11, 12), and there Joshua met the

commander-in-chief of the host of the Lord, Jesus Christ (vv. 13-15).

The heathen inhabitants of Canaan were seized with panic when they heard of the miraculous crossing of the Jordan by the Jewish army (v. 1).

God directed Joshua to renew the rite of circumcision at this time. All the men who came out of Egypt had been circumcised, but the men of war had all died in the meantime (Deut. 2:16). For 40 years there had been no circumcision. A new generation had arisen during the 40 years of wandering, and they now had to undergo this ceremony as a sign of their restoration to the full enjoyment of their covenant blessings. As long as they wandered in the desert, they were ridiculed by the Egyptians for not gaining the Promised Land. But now that they were in the land, the reproach was rolled away (v. 9). The “second time” (v. 2) means the second time that circumcision was practiced by the nation.

The Passover was kept four days after the Jordan was crossed (v. 10). Notice Joshua’s faith: Although he was in enemy territory, he obeyed God by circumcising his soldiers and by keeping the Passover. These have been called “most unmilitary acts.”

Through circumcision and the Passover the Lord was calling His people back to the basics of their relationship with Him. (Both of these rites had been neglected in the wilderness.) Circumcision was a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham, and God in His faithfulness was keeping His unconditional promise by giving them the land (Gen. 15:18-21). It was also a picture of self-judgment and putting away the filth of the flesh, vitally necessary to victory. The Passover was a reminder of

their redemption. Jehovah had bought them and freed them from slavery in Egypt. In observing the Passover the Jews were obeying the word of the Lord given through Moses at the time of the first Passover, 40 years earlier (Exod. 13:5). Grace was His motive in calling His people and bringing them out. Faithfulness was His guarantee that He would bring them in.

The manna speaks of Christ in His incarnation, the provision for wilderness needs. The old corn of the land speaks of Christ in resurrection. We feed on both. The manna ceased on the morning after they first ate the parched grain (vv. 11, 12). “What a wonderful Time-keeper and Supplier God is!”

The “man” in verse 13 was the angel of Jehovah, the Lord Jesus in one of His preincarnate appearances. He introduced Himself as the Captain of the host of the Lord. Christ does not come merely to help us, and certainly not to harm us; He comes to take full control (v. 14). The last verse is conclusive proof that Joshua was in the presence of God, and knew it.

Mere angels never accepted worship, but here the Angel of the Lord commands worship, thereby proving His divine nature. Joshua must learn firsthand what Moses had to learn at the beginning of his ministry (Exod. 3)—the holiness and supremacy of the Lord.

Chapter 6

The conquest of Canaan was accomplished by three military campaigns—central, southern, and northern. The central campaign, designed to divide and conquer, consisted of two major engagements, one at Jericho and the other at Ai.

Jericho was a fortified city, but her walls and gates served only to keep her inhabitants in for judgment; they certainly didn't keep Israel out. It was a low city topographically (over 800 feet below sea level) and morally. It was a doomed city because it stood on God's land and its rightful tenants had come to claim their property. Many things in our lives loom out as Jerichos, impeding our progress in possessing our possessions. Perhaps we've been discouraged with the sheer immensity of our trials. If we will only claim the victory the Lord gives and move ahead in faith, with eyes fixed upon God for success, we too will see miracles.

Fear of the Jews had caused Jericho to be barricaded before the invaders arrived. For six days the Israelites marched around the city once each day, returning at night to Gilgal. On the seventh day they marched around it seven times. When the priests blew the rams' horns, the Jews let out a great shout. The walls fell flat, and the people of God were able to enter the city. Some think that the walls descended into the ground like an elevator, allowing the Israelites to walk across the top of the walls into the city. However it happened, it resulted from the faith of God's people (Heb. 11:30). Notice that the ark is mentioned seven times between verses 6 and 12.

Everything in the city was "accursed"—that is, devoted to the Lord as the firstfruits of Canaan (v. 17). The inhabitants (except for Rahab and her family) and the livestock were to be destroyed, and the silver, gold, brass, and iron were to be put into the Lord's treasury. No one could take anything for himself.

When one realizes the moral perversity of the Canaanites, it is easy to see why God ordered the complete destruction of life within Jericho. Rather than criticize the Lord for administering deserved judgment to the wicked, we should marvel at His grace which preserved Rahab and her family from the same.

The faith that brought the walls down (Heb. 11:30) also brought Rahab and her family out (Heb. 11:31). The grace of God not only made provision for her safety but also elevated her to a place in the ancestry of David and ultimately of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:5, 6). Grace not only saves us from destruction but also guarantees our exaltation (Rom. 8:29, 30). Faith is the hand that takes hold of grace.

After Rahab and her family were escorted out safely, the city was burned (vv. 22-25). Joshua pronounced a curse on anyone who sought to rebuild Jericho as a fortress, prophesying that the man's oldest son would die when the foundation was laid and his youngest son would die when the gates were erected. See 1 Kings 16:34 for the fulfillment of this curse.

Chapter 7

This chapter deals with the sin question in Canaan. Even though the people had crossed the Jordan, they were still prone to sin. Here is the story of Israel's defeat at Ai and Israel's victory over sin at Achor.

When Joshua sent spies to Ai, they returned with the confident report that the city was poorly defended and that it would not be necessary to send more than two or three thousand soldiers against it. But when an army of

about three thousand men marched on Ai, they met defeat rather than victory.

Many times defeat comes after victory; that's when we least expect it. That's when we feel strongest in ourselves. The people didn't pray before going against Ai, nor did the Lord command them to go, as He had commanded them to take Jericho. Consequently, they learned painfully that all was not well; something had changed. The Canaanites were not any stronger, but Israel was weaker, and the reason was that sin had entered the camp. Although only one man was at fault, the whole nation was guilty (v. 11) and 36 men died. The Lord told Joshua that this wasn't a time for prayer but a time for action (v. 10).

Joshua learned that the defeat was caused by sin in the camp. Someone had disobeyed the Lord in the conquest of Jericho by looting. We are not told what method was used to find the culprit; perhaps it was by casting lots (NASB). At any rate, the field was narrowed first to the tribe, then to the family, then to the household, and then to the man—Achan. He confessed to stealing a Babylonian garment, 200 shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold, and to burying them in the floor of his tent.

"When I saw … I coveted … and took" (v. 21). The story of Achan provides a vivid illustration of James 1:14, 15: "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (NASB).

Achan, by taking something that was under the ban, became an accursed thing himself (Deut. 7:26). It may seem harsh that all of Achan's family shared in his fate,

but sin is a serious matter. Rahab's faith saved her entire household. Achan's sin condemned his. Besides, they must have been aware of his activities, since the stolen goods were buried under their tent. Perhaps his children even participated in his sin. The lesson God was teaching His people was clear: Sin defiles the whole camp, and it must be totally eradicated whenever it surfaces.

As punishment for his crime, Achan and his household were stoned to death and then burned. Also burned were all his possessions, as well as the stolen goods. "By Achan's death, the act of sacrilege was expiated, and the scene of the tragedy, the valley of Achor, became a door of hope as the people set their faces once more to the advance."

Chapter 8

On the second attempt, Joshua and his army captured Ai by the strategy of ambush. Although the details of the ambush are difficult to understand clearly, the general plan seems to have been as follows: A company of Jews went past Ai under cover of darkness and hid on the west side of the city. In the morning, the rest of the soldiers attacked the city from the north. When the men of Ai counterattacked, Joshua and his men purposely retreated, drawing the inhabitants away from the city. Then Joshua stretched out his spear; that was the signal for the men lying in ambush to enter the city and set it on fire. Seeing their city on fire, the men of Ai panicked. It was then easy for the Israelites to destroy them all.

Verse 3 says that 30,000 men were sent to ambush the city, while verse 12 speaks of 5000. There may have been two ambushes. But 30,000 seems an unnecessarily

large number for an ambush. Some believe that 30 thousand should read 30 captains, since the Hebrew word for thousand can also be translated chief. Others believe that 30,000 is a copyist's error for 5000. The 5000 men (v. 12) may have been sent to repel any possible attack by the men of Bethel, two miles west of Ai.

The Jews were allowed to keep the cattle and the spoil for themselves in this particular engagement. If Achan had only waited, he might have gotten his booty without losing his life over it!

Israel lost 36 men in the first battle; this time they lost none as far as the biblical record mentions. Having purged themselves of defilement, they were once again safe in the midst of war. Victory in the Christian life is not the absence of conflict but the presence and protection of God in the midst of conflict.

In obedience to the Word of God (Deut. 27:2-6), Joshua built an altar on Mount Ebal and inscribed upon stones a copy of the law of Moses. The tribes were assembled, half in front of Mount Ebal and half in front of Mount Gerizim. Joshua stood in the valley between them, and he either read the blessings and curses that are found in the law of Moses or else instructed the Levites to read them (Deut. 27:14). "Persons are often said in Scripture to do that which they only command to be done."

Chapter 9

News of the military successes of Israel caused all the kings in Canaan to unite against the Jews (vv. 1, 2). But the inhabitants of the city of Gibeon and three other cities (vv. 3, 17) decided that it was futile to oppose the

invaders. They knew that the Israelites had been ordered to destroy all the heathen inhabitants of the land. But they also knew that no such orders had been issued concerning nations outside Canaan (Deut. 20:10, 15). If they could persuade Joshua and his army that they had come on a long journey from a distant homeland, they would not be killed.

So they disguised themselves in tattered garments and worn-out shoes. Also, they brought with them moldy or crumbled (NASB) bread and torn wineskins. They told Joshua they had come from a very far country, and everything about them seemed to support the statement.

The Israelites did not inquire of the Lord about the matter, but made a treaty with the Gibeonites. Three days later the scheme was exposed, and there was agitation among the Jews to kill the tricksters. But the princes decided to honor the treaty by sparing the Gibeonites. However, they would henceforth serve God's people as woodcutters and water carriers in connection with the service of the altar of the Lord.

Joshua and the princes were wise in keeping their oath, even though they had been deceived in the matter. Later Saul tried to exterminate the Gibeonites and was punished for it (2 Sam. 21).

Chapter 10

This chapter records the southern campaign. When the kings of five Canaanite cities heard that the Gibeonites had defected to the Israelites, they realized that this made the central hilly district vulnerable, and so they decided to attack Gibeon. The Gibeonites sent an appeal for military assistance to Joshua.

Once again Joshua heard those comforting words from the mouth of the Lord, “Fear them not” (v. 8). He had heard them before the victory at Jericho and before the successful ambush of Ai. They guaranteed triumph despite the size of the opposition.

Assured of victory by the Lord, Joshua engaged the enemy’s forces at Gibeon, causing them to flee. Two miracles occurred in the destruction of the enemy. First there was a tremendous hailstorm, which killed more men than the Israelites had slain. But note that it was discriminating hail—it killed only the enemies. Then, at the request of Joshua, the sun and moon “stood still,” prolonging the hours that the Israelites could continue to pursue and destroy the foe before they could escape to the security of their walled cities. It is literarily descriptive language to say that the sun and the moon stood still. We use such language when we say that the sun rose or set. Various natural explanations have been given as to what actually happened at this time. But it is enough to know that it was a miracle which resulted in an extended day for fighting. “How He did it is no question for us… It is not ours to try and soften down miracles, but to glorify God in them.” The book of Jasher (v. 13) may mean “The Book of the Upright.” No book of that name can be identified today, and it certainly was not inspired. The five kings were trapped in a cave, then slain and hung on trees, and finally buried in the cave.

The battle was a tremendous undertaking for Israel. They had marched all night and then fought through the longest day in history. They exerted themselves beyond ordinary limits, but still the victory was the Lord’s (vv. 10,11). “But why did Joshua need to put himself and his men so much to the stretch? Had not God promised him

that without fail He would deliver the enemies into his hand? It is true He had; but God's promises are intended not to slacken and supersede, but to quicken and encourage our endeavors."

Following this, Joshua conquered the Canaanite cities of Makkedah (v. 28), Libnah (vv. 29, 30), Lachish (vv. 31, 32), Gezer (v. 33), Eglon (vv. 34, 35), Hebron (vv. 36, 37), and Debir (vv. 38, 39). Verses 40-43 summarize the southern campaign. The king of Hebron in verse 37 was a successor to the one slain in verse 26.

The destruction referred to in this chapter must be taken generally as noted by Haley. "… Joshua swept over this region in too rapid a manner to depopulate it entirely… All whom he pursued he destroyed; but he did not stop to search into every possible hiding place. This was left to be done by each tribe in its own inheritance."

Chapter 11

News of Israel's mounting triumphs caused the kings of the north to confederate. They gathered together at the waters of Merom, north of the Sea of Galilee. Joshua and his army attacked and defeated them. Then, in obedience to the Lord, Joshua hamstrung the horses and burned the chariots. To hamstring means to cut a tendon in the leg, disabling the horse.

The capital city of Hazor was burned; the other cities that stood on mounds (NASB) were destroyed but not burned. Perhaps Joshua felt that the cities standing on mounds would be of value to the Israelites who would settle there. The inhabitants of all the cities were killed, and the spoil was taken by the Israelites. Complete obedience brings complete victory (v. 15).

Verses 16-20 review Joshua's conquest of the land from Edom (Seir) in the south to Mount Hermon in the northeast and Sidon in the northwest. Gibeon escaped destruction. Jerusalem remained unconquered until the time of David. (The Goshen mentioned in verse 16 was not in Egypt but was an area to the south of Palestine.)

Special mention is made of the fact that the Anakim were destroyed in all the cities except Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod. "The land rested from war" (v. 23) in the sense that the major battles were fought, though there was still a great deal of "mopping up" to be done.

Chapter 12

The first six verses take us back to the victory that God gave Moses over Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan. These victories are considered as part of the total conquest, since the territory was occupied by the 2½ tribes east of the Jordan River.

God had made a promise earlier to Israel before they crossed the Jordan: "… He shall deliver their kings into thine hand, and thou shalt destroy their name from under heaven; there shall no man be able to stand before thee until thou have destroyed them" (Deut. 7:24). Here are 31 instances of God's faithfulness (vv. 7-24); Joshua defeated 31 kings on the west side of the Jordan.

Chapter 13

Joshua was now an old man, and the entire land promised to the Israelites had not as yet been occupied by them. Verses 2-6 describe portions in the southwest and in the northeast that were still inhabited by the heathen. We know also that the land eastward to the

Euphrates had been promised to the Jews, but it has never yet been occupied by them.

The Lord instructed Joshua to divide the land which had already been conquered among the 12 tribes of Israel. Two-and-one-half tribes had already been assigned land on the east side of the Jordan River as follows: the entire territory occupied by the 2½ tribes (vv. 8-13); Reuben (vv. 15-23); Gad (vv. 24-28); and the half-tribe of Manasseh (vv. 29-31).

Special mention is made of the fact that Balaam was among those slain in Transjordan (v. 22). The Lord had not forgotten the terrible calamity that this wicked prophet caused His people (see Num. 23—25). “Be sure your sin will find you out” (Num. 32:23).

An interesting problem arises in verse 25. The tribe of Gad possessed some of the land of the Ammonites, which was forbidden in Deuteronomy 2:19. But this land had earlier been taken from the Ammonites by Sihon, king of the Amorites, and made part of his kingdom. So when Israel took the land from Sihon, it no longer belonged to the Ammonites.

The Debir mentioned in verse 26 is not the same city mentioned in the previous chapter. This city was east of the Jordan, while the one Joshua conquered was west of the river.

Levi did not receive a tribal inheritance (v. 14), since that was the priestly tribe, and the Lord was its inheritance in a special way.

Dropping Levi from the tribes leaves only 11 tribes. But Joseph’s two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, are included in Joseph’s place, and that raises the number to 12

again. The reason Joseph's sons are included is that they were adopted by Jacob as his own sons before his death (Gen. 48:5).

Chapter 14

This chapter begins the distribution of the land on the west side of Jordan to the 9 1/2 tribes. The Lord had specified to Moses that the distribution be made by lot. This probably means that the general location of the tribal portion was determined by lot, but the size of the territory was according to the population of the tribe (Num. 26:53-56).

First in the list of tribes is Judah (14:6—15:63). The men of Judah led the armies of Israel (see Num. 10:14) and were the largest and most powerful tribe, boasting over 76,000 warriors. Before giving the territorial boundaries, the Spirit of God records the noble request of Caleb for the city of Hebron. Though he was then 85 years old, his faith, courage, and strength were unabated. He longed for more spiritual conquests and received Hebron for his inheritance.

Hebron meant not only the city but the country around it as well (v. 12). The city had been conquered earlier by Joshua (10:36, 37). It later was given to the priests, but Caleb kept the surrounding region for his inheritance.

Caleb had been spared from the plague that took the lives of the unbelieving spies 45 years earlier (Num. 14:36-38). He had been preserved during the wilderness wanderings. He had survived several years of war in Canaan. He knew that God would not have kept him alive, promising him a reward for his faith, only to give him over to the Anakim. So what if they were giants?

They were on his land, and he would drive them off by the strength of God. He still saw things through the eyes of faith and not as they appeared outwardly. This was the secret of his abiding strength and amazing success. He was not about to retire (although 85 years old) until he possessed his possessions.

Chapter 15

The boundaries of Judah are described in verses 1-12. It is almost impossible to trace them with exactness at the present time. This may cause some to wonder why all these details are included in the Bible. The answer is, of course, that these details are important in the sight of God. They are inspired and profitable, full of rich spiritual lessons.

Caleb's conquest of Hebron is recorded in verses 13 and 14. He offered his daughter, Achsah, to whomever would capture Kirjath-sepher (Debir) (v. 16). Caleb's nephew, Othniel, was the one who took the city and gained the bride (v. 17). He later became the first judge in Israel (Judg. 3:9). Achsah persuaded Othniel to ask her father for a field (v. 18). Verse 19 implies that he had done this and obtained the field. Then Achsah requested upper and lower springs to water the land.

Some cities, like Debir and Hebron, had to be taken more than once because of the guerrilla warfare of the Canaanites (see notes on chapter 10). It should also be noted that there was more than one city with the same name (e.g., Debir).

The cities of Judah's territory are listed in verses 21-63. Some of these cities should be familiar to us from our study of the patriarchs: Hebron (v. 13) (also called

Mamre) was familiar to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 13:18; 35:27), and they were all buried there (Gen. 23:17-20). Perhaps this is what made it so precious to the spiritually discerning Caleb. Beer-sheba (v. 28) means “the well of the oath”; the patriarchs spent much time there. It was a place of renewal, refreshment, and rest (Gen. 21:31; 26:33; 46:1). Jerusalem (v. 63) was held by the Jebusites. It was not until the time of David that they were finally driven out of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:6, 7).

These cities provided a rich heritage for Judah and a powerful stimulus to strengthen their faith. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was in the midst of their children to perform His ancient promise.

When we count the cities in verses 21-32, we find that there are 38, although verse 32 says there are only 29. Nine of these cities belonged to Simeon, whose inheritance was within the borders of Judah (19:1-9). That leaves 29 cities belonging to Judah. There is a similar problem in numbering in verses 33-36; 15 cities are enumerated, but perhaps Gederah and Gederothain are two names for the same city, leaving the total of 14 cities mentioned in verse 36.

Note the last verse especially. The upper part of the city, Mount Zion, was not taken until the time of David. The lower city, Jerusalem, was taken by Judah (Judg. 1:8), then later recaptured by the Jebusites (Judg. 1:21). Jerusalem is listed as belonging to Benjamin (18:28) as well as to Judah; it was located on the border between these two tribes.

Chapter 16

The tribe of Joseph is taken up next. To Joseph had been given the birthright (i.e., the double portion) which Reuben had forfeited (Gen. 49:4). The general boundaries of Joseph's territory are given in verses 1-4. This was, of course, divided between Ephraim and the half-tribe of Manasseh, which settled west of the Jordan.

Ephraim's boundaries are described in verses 5-10. Pay particular attention to verse 10. Failure to drive out the Canaanites brought grief to the Israelites in their later history.

Chapter 17

The inheritance of Manasseh was partly in Gilead and Bashan, on the east side of the Jordan (v. 1), and partly on the west side (vv. 7-11). The territory west of the Jordan was flanked on the north by five Canaanite fortresses—Bethshean, Ibleam, Dor, Taanach, and Megiddo (vv. 11, 12).

Some of the cities of Ephraim were in the territory of Manasseh, and some of Manasseh's cities were in the territory of Asher and Issachar (vv. 7-12).

The daughters of Zelophehad inherited with the sons of Manasseh, as God had directed Moses (vv. 3, 4) (Num. 27:1-7). This was done to insure that the house of Zelophehad would have a portion even though there were no male heirs. The daughters had to marry within their own tribe so that the land which belonged to Manasseh would not be absorbed by another tribe through intermarriage (Num. 36:1-13).

After Ephraim and Manasseh had received their adjoining allotments west of the Jordan, they complained

that they had only one lot (v. 14) and that they were hemmed in by fortresses on the north (v. 16). Joshua turned all their arguments against them. When they said they needed more land because they were numerous people (v. 14), he told them to use their manpower to clear out the forests in their territory and settle there (v. 15). When they complained that there were Canaanites within their borders who had chariots of iron (v. 16), he assured them that they had superior power to drive out the Canaanites (v. 18). The “one lot” of verse 14 means the combined territories of Ephraim and Manasseh west of the Jordan. When Joshua said, “Thou shalt not have one lot only” (v. 17b), he didn’t mean that they would get additional land but that they must occupy all the land that had been given to them.

Chapter 18

The encampment of Israel now changes from Gilgal to Shiloh. Here the tabernacle is set up, and here it remains until the days of Samuel. The division of the land continues here.

Judah and Joseph had received their inheritance by casting of lots, but there were still seven tribes west of the Jordan which had not been assigned to their land. Therefore, Joshua sent a group of men, three from each tribe, to measure the remaining seven tribes by lot.

Benjamin’s boundaries were given in verses 11-20, and the cities in verses 21-28. Benjamin’s portion was small, but it was choice. It occupied the heart of the land and possessed within its borders the firstfruits of Israel’s labors in Canaan.

Gilgal was in Benjamin's territory, the first campsite west of the Jordan. The memorial stones were there to bear witness to the miraculous crossing of the Jordan. There they kept the first Passover in Canaan, and began feeding on the parched grain of the land. There the nation was once again circumcised and the reproach of Egypt was rolled away. There was hardly a more significant spot in all of Canaan, for no other place taught so many spiritual lessons.

Jericho's ruins were still visible in Benjamin's land. Her walls, once thought invincible, were now laid low. The portion belonging to Rahab's house remained standing as a testimony to the grace of God, which always responds to faith. A Benjamite could always visit here whenever he needed a fresh reminder that the battle was the Lord's.

Bethel, "the house of God," caused the Benjamites to remember the faith of their fathers and the faithfulness of Israel's divine Deliverer (Gen. 28:18-22; 35:1-15).

Jerusalem was destined to be the capital city, but it was not until the son of Jesse came that the Jebusites would be driven from their mountain fortress.

Their land encompassed many evidences and signs of past, present, and future blessings. What a rich lot fell to Jacob's youngest son!

Chapter 19

Simeon's inheritance was in the midst of the tribe of the inheritance of Judah. It seems that Judah's land was so large that the tribe could not occupy its portion, so some was assigned to Simeon. This is a fulfillment of Jacob's

prophetic word concerning Simeon, “I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel” (Gen. 49:7).

The borders of the remaining six tribes are given next: Zebulun (vv. 10-16); Issachar (vv. 17-23); Asher (vv. 24-31); Naphtali (vv. 32-39); and Dan (vv. 40-48). Dan received some of Judah’s cities (cf. v. 41 with 15:33).

Beersheba and Sheba (v. 2) probably refer to the same place; hence a total of only 13 cities as mentioned in verse 6. Some cities were listed in detailing the borders of individual portions although they were not within the land, so sometimes the number of cities given doesn’t match the number stated in the text (e.g., vv. 15, 30, 38).

The original territory allotted to Dan was in the southwest, bordering on the Mediterranean Sea, and included the cities of Joppa and Ekron (vv. 40-46). Later, when this territory proved too small, some of the tribe migrated to Laish (Leshem) in the northeast and changed the name of the city to Dan (vv. 47, 48; cf. Judg. 18).

Verse 51 brings to a close the division of the land. The cities of refuge had to be set apart (ch. 20) and the Levitical cities had yet to be appointed (ch. 21), but Joshua’s work was almost done. He received Timnath-serah, according to the word of the Lord (v. 50).

Chapter 20

The next step was to set apart six cities of refuge, three on each side of the Jordan River, where a manslayer might flee from the avenger of blood. A manslayer was someone who accidentally killed another person. The avenger of blood was usually a close relative of the slain person who sought to avenge the dead. If the manslayer

could flee to a city of refuge, he found sanctuary there until the death of the high priest. Then he could return to his native city in safety. “Jewish commentators tell us how in later times, in order that the asylum offered to the involuntary homicide might be more secure—(a) the roads leading to the cities of refuge were always kept in thorough repair, and required to be about 32 cubits (about 48 feet) broad; (b) all obstructions were removed that might stay the flier’s foot or hinder his speed; (c) no hillock was left, no river was allowed over which there was not a bridge; (d) at every turning there were posts erected bearing the words ‘Refuge,’ to guide the unhappy man in his flight; (e) when once settled in such a city the manslayer had a convenient habitation assigned to him, and the citizens were to teach him some trade that he might support himself.”

This is a picture of the nation of Israel and its guilt in connection with the slaying of the Messiah. Christ is the city of refuge to whom penitent Israel may flee for sanctuary.

The cities of refuge and the meaning of the names are as follows:

West of Jordan

Kedesh—Holiness

Shechem—Strength

Kirjath-arba or Hebron—Fellowship

East of Jordan

Ramoth-Gilead—Uplifting

Golan—Happiness

Bezer—Safety

Christ, of course, provides every blessing suggested by the names of these cities. A glance at the map will show that the cities of refuge were strategically located so that no point in the land was more than 30 miles from one of them.

Notice the parallels between the temporal salvation offered the manslayer in the cities of refuge and the eternal salvation offered the sinner in Christ. The roads to the city were clear and well-marked, just like the way of salvation, so that none would make a mistake and lose his life. The cities were spread throughout the land and easily accessible to all, even as Christ is accessible to all men. Crisis drove men to the city of refuge, and many times a crisis is needed to drive men to the Lord Jesus for refuge. There was no neutral ground for the guilty person—he was either safe in the city or subject to the wrath of the blood avenger. All men are either safe in Christ or under the judgment of God (John 3:36).

Chapter 21

Forty-eight cities with pastureland, including the cities of refuge, were assigned to the Levites as the Lord had commanded (Num. 35:2-8).

Kohathites

a. The sons of Aaron (i.e., the priests)—13 cities out of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin.

b. The rest of the Kohathites—10 cities out of Ephraim, Dan, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

Gershonites—13 cities out of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

Merarites—12 cities out of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun.

Every tribe gave four cities except Judah and Simeon, which gave nine cities between them, and Naphtali, which gave three cities.

The cities of refuge were also cities of the Levites (vv. 13, 21, 27, 32, 36, 38). The Levites were scattered throughout Israel to fulfill the prophecy of Jacob (Gen. 49:5-7) and to better facilitate their teaching ministry to the nation.

Verse 43 of this chapter must be read in the light of other Scripture. It does not mean that Israel occupied all the land from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates; instead, it means that the land which Joshua divided was in fulfillment of God's promise that He would give them every place that the sole of their feet walked upon (Josh. 1:3).

Likewise, verse 44 must be interpreted carefully. There were still enemies within the land; not all the Canaanites had been destroyed. But that was not God's fault; He fulfilled His promise by defeating every foe against which the Israelites fought. If there were still undefeated foes and pockets of resistance, it was because the Jews did not claim God's promise.

Note verse 45. God had fulfilled every promise. Not one word failed. What a tribute to God's faithfulness! But Israel did not appropriate every promise.

Chapter 22

When the land west of the Jordan had been divided, Joshua permitted the men of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh to return to their territory east of the Jordan, as originally agreed. He also told them to take

with them their share of the spoil from the battles they had fought.

It was over seven years since they had left their loved ones to fight the Canaanites. They endured the hardships of combat until the land was secured. We too are called upon by our Commander to endure hardships and fight the good fight of faith to further the kingdom of God on earth (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:3). This kind of sacrifice is not easy, but it is an essential ingredient in the life that pleases God. Men with the fiery zeal expressed by Isaac Watts are needed on the battlefield today:

> *Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease,*
> *While others fought to win the prize, and sailed through bloody seas?*
> *Sure I must fight if I would reign; increase my courage, Lord;*
> *I'll bear the toil, endure the pain, supported by Thy Word.*

On the way home these men decided to erect an altar near the banks of the Jordan. When the other 9 1/2 tribes heard about it, they were highly incensed. They feared that it was a rival altar to the one at Shiloh. They feared too that it might become an idolatrous altar in time to come and that God would punish the entire nation because of it.

Before declaring war on the tribes east of the Jordan, they sent a delegation to interview them and offered them land west of the Jordan if they considered their own territory unclean (v. 19).

In dealing with the men who built the altar, Phinehas and the others recalled how Israel had suffered because

of the sin of Peor (v. 17; cf. Num. 25) and the sin of Achan (v. 20; cf. ch. 7). They saw this altar as another threat to their welfare; hence their strong reaction to it. As a people they had learned that sin defiled the whole camp, and that God held the nation responsible for the behavior of its individuals.

Then the men of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh explained that this was not an altar of sacrifice at all. It was simply a memorial altar, testifying to future generations that the tribes east of the Jordan were indeed a part of the nation of Israel (vv. 21-29). The other tribes were pleased by this explanation, and war was averted. The altar was called “Ed,” meaning a witness between the tribes on both sides of the Jordan that the Lord is the true God (vv. 30-34).

Chapter 23

This is the first of two farewell addresses by Joshua. Here he spoke to the leaders of Israel.

Joshua’s words in verse 6 echo the words of the Lord to him years earlier (1:7). He had since proven the veracity of them in the crucible of life and was now able to confidently pass them on to the following generation.

He reminded them of the faithfulness of God in fulfilling His promises concerning the land and concerning its heathen inhabitants. God would continue to drive out the enemy, but the people would have to be obedient to Him. Above all, they should keep themselves free from the idolatry of the nations or from intermarrying with the Canaanites. Otherwise these pagans would be a continual source of trouble to Israel.

None of God's words had failed (v. 14). This does not mean that all of the land was as yet in Jewish hands, for the Lord Himself had said that He would not drive out the inhabitants all at once but gradually (Deut. 7:22). The fact that not one promise of the Lord's had yet failed was the strong encouragement that Joshua was using to urge the leaders to finish the job he had started. To this exhortation he attached a warning (vv. 5, 16) that Jehovah would be just as faithful in destroying them from off the good land as He would be in destroying the Canaanites, if they forgot their covenant and turned to idols.

The New Testament parallel to this chapter is 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. Separation is vital for the man of God. We cannot cleave to the Lord and be bound to His enemies at the same time.

Chapter 24

The second farewell message, this one to the people, was delivered at Shechem.

Joshua reviewed the history of the people of God, beginning with Terah and continuing on through the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He reminded the people of the mighty deliverance from Egypt, the wilderness wandering, and the victory over the Moabites on the east side of Jordan. Then he recounted their entrance into the Promised Land, their victory at Jericho, and their destruction of kings in Canaan (vv. 2-13). In ancient times the Euphrates ran west of Ur (vv. 2, 3). Since then it has changed its course and now runs east of Ur. The darkness in verse 7 points back to Exodus 14:19, 20, where the cloud produced light for the Israelites and darkness for the Egyptians.

In this succinct summary of history from Genesis to Joshua, one outstanding fact is evident: the sovereignty of God. Notice how He tells the story: I took (v. 3), I gave (v. 4), I sent (v. 5), I brought (vv. 6-8), I would not hearken (v. 10), I delivered (v. 11), I sent (v. 12), I have given (v. 13). Jehovah works according to His eternal purposes, and who can stay His hand? Such a God is to be feared and obeyed (v. 14).

In verse 15 the choice was not between God and idols: Joshua assumed that the people had already decided against serving God. So he challenged them to choose between the gods which their ancestors had served in Mesopotamia and the gods of Canaan. Joshua's noble decision for himself and his house has been an inspiration to succeeding generations of believers.

When the people promised to serve Jehovah, Joshua said, "Ye cannot serve the Lord" (v. 19). This means that they could not serve Jehovah and worship idols too. Joshua doubtless realized that the people would drift into idolatry, because even then they had idols in their tents (v. 23). The people persisted in promising allegiance to the Lord, so Joshua erected a stone marker under the oak as a witness of the covenant made by Israel. (The "sanctuary of the Lord" mentioned in verse 26 does not refer to the tabernacle, which was at Shiloh, but simply to a holy place.)

"Idolatry seems to have been one of Israel's besetting sins. Their earliest ancestors served other gods, as we have seen (v. 2). When Jacob and his family left Laban, it was Rachel who carried off her father's gods (Gen. 31:30-34). But when they arrived in the land, Jacob ordered his household to put away these 'strange gods,'

and he hid them under an oak tree that was by Shechem (Gen. 35:2, 4). And in the same place Joshua urged his generation to put away the gods which their fathers served (v. 14).”

Joshua died at the age of 110 years and was buried in the city of his inheritance. The people of Israel remained true to the Lord as long as the men of Joshua’s generation lived. We do not know who penned the last verses of the book, nor is such knowledge necessary, or else it surely would have been included.

The bones of Joseph, which had been carried from Egypt by his request, were now buried in Shechem (Gen. 50:24; Exod. 13:19).

Finally, Eleazar, the son of Aaron, died and was buried in the hill country of Ephraim.

Three burials are mentioned in the last five verses of this book: Joshua’s (vv. 29-31), Joseph’s (v. 32), and Eleazar’s (v. 33). All three were buried in Joseph’s territory. All three had served their God and their country well. Joshua and Joseph were great deliverers during their lives, and Eleazar was a deliverer in his death, for he was the high priest and his death set free all who had fled to a city of refuge (20:6). Like the books of Genesis and Deuteronomy, Joshua closes with the toll of the death bell over great and godly men. “God buries His workmen but continues His work.”

1 T. Austin Sparks, What is Man? p. 104.

2 H. J. Blair, further documentation unavailable.

3 R. Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and D. Brown, Critical and Experimental Commentary, Vol. II, p. 23.

4 C. H. Spurgeon, Spurgeon’s Devotional Bible, p. 168.

5 Matthew Henry, The Matthew Henry Commentary, p. 226.

6 John Haley, Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible, p. 324.

7 MacLear, further documentation unavailable.

8 Carl Armerding, The Fight for Palestine, p. 149.

Judges

Outline Of Judges

I. Review and Preview (1:1—3:6)

A. Retrospective view (1:1—2:10)

B. Prospective view (2:11—3:6)

II. Times of the Judges (3:7—16:31)

A. Othniel (3:7-11)

B. Ehud (3:12-30)

C. Shamgar (3:31)

D. Deborah and Barak (4:1—5:31)

E. Gideon (6:1—8:32)

F. Usurpation of Abimelech (8:33—9:57)

G. Tola and Jair (10:1-5)

H. Jephthah (10:6—12:7)

I. Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon (12:8-15).

J. Samson (13:1—16:31)

III. Religious, Moral, and Political Decay (17—21)

A. Micah and the Danites (17:1—18:31)

B. The Levite and his concubine (19)

C. The war with Benjamin (20, 21)

The book of Judges takes up the history of the nation of Israel after Joshua’s generation had died. The people had failed to completely drive out the heathen inhabitants of Canaan. In fact, they had mingled with

the pagans and were practicing idolatry. As a result, God repeatedly delivered His people into the hands of Gentile oppressors. This servitude brought the Jews to the place of repentance and contrition. When they cried out to the Lord to deliver them, He raised up judges. It is from these leaders that the book gets its name.

Tradition says that Samuel was the author of Judges. The book was probably written around 1000 B.C. and spans about 325 years, from Othniel to Samson.

The judges were military leaders rather than simply jurists. By heroic deeds of faith they executed God's judgment or overthrew their oppressors, thereby restoring a measure of peace and freedom to the people. Twelve judges were raised up to deliver Israel. Some are given extensive coverage in the book while others are mentioned in only one or two verses. They came from nine different tribes and delivered their people from the Mesopotamians, Moabites, Philistines, Canaanites, Midianites, and Ammonites. No judge ruled over the entire nation until Samuel.

The book of Judges is not strictly chronological. The first two chapters contain introductory material, both historical and prophetical. The record of the judges themselves (chs. 3-16) is not necessarily chronological. Some of the judges may have been conquering their enemies at the same time but in different sections of the land. This is important to remember, since the number of years mentioned in the book, if added consecutively, totals over 400, which is more time than the Bible allots for this period (Acts 13:19,20; 1 Kgs. 6:1).

The closing chapters (17-21) record events that took place during the time of the judges, but they are placed

at the end of the book to give a picture of the religious, moral, and civil corruption in Israel during this period. The character of the times is well-described in the key verse (17:6): “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

Chapter 1

After the death of Joshua (2:8), the tribe of Judah took the leadership in warring against the Canaanites in the south. In spite of God’s promise of victory, Judah weakly sought the assistance of the tribe of Simeon (vv. 1-3).

Their first victory was over the inhabitants of Bezek (vv. 4-7). After slaying 10,000 men, they cut off the thumbs and big toes of the king, as he had done to his foes. He should have been put to death, as the Lord had commanded (Deut. 7:24), but instead he was only maimed. This foreshadowed Israel’s disobedience in dealing with the heathen in their land. Rather than completely crushing them, the Israelites only crippled them. Such partial obedience was disobedience and would cost the Jews dearly in the days ahead.

Judah had a measure of success against Jerusalem, putting the city to the torch (v. 8). But neither Judah nor Benjamin could drive the Jebusites out of their fortress (see notes on Joshua 15). This was not done until the time of David (2 Sam. 5:6, 7). (Verse 21 proves that Judges was written before the time of David, since Jerusalem had not been completely taken when this was written.)

The capture of Hebron is here credited to Judah; Joshua 14 and 15 tell us that Caleb was the one responsible for the conquest of this city. There is no discrepancy here,

since Caleb was from the tribe of Judah. These verses (9, 10) probably refer to Caleb's conquest of the city (cf. v. 20) and not to a subsequent expedition after Joshua's death, even as the capture of Kirjath-sepher by Othniel is repeated in verses 11-15, although it took place previously (Josh. 15:16-19).

The Kenites continued to dwell with the Israelites (v. 16), though they never were truly converted.

Other conquests of Judah include Hormah, Gaza, Askelon, and Ekron (vv. 17, 18), but the victories were not complete. The inhabitants of the valley had chariots of iron, and Judah did not have the faith to launch an attack against them (v. 19). They were unwilling to persevere in difficult circumstances.

Only the two tribes of Joseph are credited with other victories (vv. 22-26). (These verses perhaps refer to the conquest of Bethel while Joshua was still living [Josh. 12:16], just as the previous verses concerning Hebron and Kirjath-sepher hark back to the days of that great general.) They attacked the city of Bethel, formerly called Luz, and destroyed it. But their mistake was in promising safety to a collaborator. He promptly started another city by the name of Luz in the land of the Hittites. Unjudged sin survives and has to be met later.

In the rest of the chapter, seven central and northern tribes are named as having failed to drive the Canaanites from their territory: Benjamin (v. 21), Manasseh (vv. 27, 28), Ephraim (v. 29), Zebulun (v. 30), Asher (vv. 31, 32), Naphtali (v. 33), and Dan (vv. 34-36).

Chapter 2

The angel of the Lord (the Lord Jesus) rebuked the people at Bochim (weepers) for their disobedience. Verse 1 says that He came from Gilgal (the place of blessing) to Bochim (the place of weeping). Israel had gone from the place of victory to the place of mourning. They had failed to drive out the Canaanites and to destroy their idolatrous altars. Therefore the Lord would refuse to drive out the inhabitants of the land, but would instead allow them to harass the Israelites. Verses 1-5 thus give the underlying reason for the oppression which followed. No wonder the people wept and called the place Bochim! Verses 6-10 review the close of Joshua's life and the generation that outlived him. In Deuteronomy 6 the Lord gave some specific commands to His people. Failure to obey them led to the sad state of affairs described in verse 10. The previous generation had not taught their children to fear the Lord and to keep His commandments. The neglect of the fathers led to the apostasy of their sons.

The remaining verses, on the other hand, give a preview of the entire period of the judges. They trace the fourfold cycle which characterized that time:

Sin (vv. 11-13)

Servitude (14, 15)

Supplication (not stated here, but see 3:9; 3:15; 4:3; etc.)

Salvation (vv. 16-18)

This pattern of behavior has also been described as:

Rebellion

Retribution

Repentance

Rest

This synopsis of Judges (vv. 11-19) brings into focus the two divergent truths evident throughout the book: “1) the desperate wickedness of the human heart, revealing its ingratitude, stubbornness, rebellion, and folly; 2) God’s longsuffering, patience, love and mercy. No book in the Bible brings these two truths into sharper contrast—the utter failure of Israel and the persistent grace of Jehovah!”

In a sense, the book of Judges is a commentary on the verse, “God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God” (1 Cor. 1:27-29 NASB). Ehud was a left-handed Benjamite (3:12-30), the left hand signifying weakness. Shamgar used an ox-goad, a rather disreputable weapon, with which to slay 600 enemies (3:31). Deborah was a member of the “weaker sex” (though she herself was not so weak) (4:1—5:31). Barak’s 10,000 foot-soldiers were a poor match, humanly speaking, for Sisera’s 900 chariots of iron (4:10, 13). Jael, also a member of the weaker sex, killed Sisera by driving a tent-pin into his skull (4:21). She held the pin with her left hand (5:26, Septuagint).

Gideon marched against the enemy with an army which the Lord had reduced from 32,000 to 300 (7:1-8). Barley bread, the food of the poor, suggests poverty and

feebleness (7:13). The unconventional weapons of Gideon's army were earthenware pitchers, torches, and trumpets (7:16), and the pitchers had to be smashed (7:19). Abimelech was felled by a woman's hand hurling a piece of millstone (9:53). The name "Tola" means worm. When we meet Samson's mother, she is a nameless, barren woman (13:2). And Samson killed 1000 Philistines with the jawbone of an ass (15:15).

Note verse 10, where a lack of spiritual leadership is seen to result in a corresponding lack of obedience on the part of God's people.

Because Israel persisted in disobedience, God decided to allow the nations to remain in the land as chastisement upon His people (vv. 20-23). Punishment for disobedience was not the only reason the Lord didn't drive out all the Canaanites. He left them to test Israel (v. 22; 3:4) and to train succeeding generations for war (3:1, 2). We can gain insight from this as to why the Lord allows believers to go through problems and trials. He wants to know if "they will keep the way of the Lord … or not" (v. 22).

Chapter 3

The nations that were left as a trial to Israel are listed in verse 3.

Now the first cycle begins: sin (vv. 5-7); servitude (v. 8); supplication (v. 9a); salvation (vv. 9b-11).

If we believe that every word of God is pure and that all Scripture is profitable, then it follows that these Old Testament narratives contain important spiritual lessons for us. Some of these lessons are hidden in the names of the Gentile oppressors and the judges who delivered

Israel. The oppressors picture the powers of this world that seek to bring God's people into bondage. The judges symbolize the means by which we fight the spiritual warfare.

In these notes we have included some practical applications taken from the following books:

Judges and Ruth, by F. G. Jennings

Lectures on Judges, by Samuel Ridout

The Numerical Bible (Joshua to 2 Samuel), by F. W. Grant

There is always a danger of taking the study of types or figures to an extreme. We have tried to avoid any interpretations that are strained or fanciful. Also, it must be admitted that the meanings of some of the names are uncertain. We have given alternate meanings where such are possible.

Othniel (vv. 6-11)

The people sinned by marrying the heathen and then worshiping their idols. Impurity and immorality (v. 6) lead to idolatry (v. 7). God had warned them earlier of the grave consequences of mingling with the inhabitants of Canaan. They were a holy people and must remain separate from defilement if they would know the blessing of God (Deut. 7:3-6). God punished Israel by delivering the nation into the hands of Chushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia, for eight years. His name means Cush, man of double wickedness.

In response to the penitent cry of His people, the Lord then raised up Othniel, a nephew of Caleb, to deliver them from their enemy and to usher in 40 years of

peace. Othniel (lion of God) had previously taken Kirjath-sepher (city of the book), turning it into Debir (a living oracle). This is what faith does with God's Word.

Ehud (vv. 12-30)

In the second cycle, Israel was subjugated by Eglon, the king of Moab, for 18 years.

The military leader whom God gave to Israel at this time was Ehud, a left-handed man of the tribe of Benjamin. He was commissioned by the people to take a gift as tribute to King Eglon. He also hid a two-edged dagger under his outer coat. After the gift had been delivered, the king probably felt at ease concerning the attitude of his Jewish subjects. Then Ehud asked for a private audience to discuss a secret matter. When all the attendants had been sent away, Ehud assassinated the king and fled. By the time the deed was discovered, Ehud had assembled the men of Israel, marched against Moab, and slaughtered about 10,000 retreating soldiers. Israel then enjoyed rest for 80 years. When meditation (Gera, v. 15) gives birth to praise (Ehud), the world ruler, Eglon, is doomed by the sharp, two-edged sword (the Bible), even when the Word is used by a left-handed man.

Othniel was from Judah, the mightiest tribe in Israel. Ehud was from Benjamin, now the smallest tribe. God can use the great or the small to gain the victory, since the power is from Him anyway. Men are simply the agents of deliverance, not the originators of it.

Shamgar (v. 31)

Only one verse is devoted to this judge. He slew 600 Philistines with an ox-goad (a sharp, pointed instrument

used to prod oxen). This is another of the instances in Judges where God used a “weak thing” to accomplish a mighty victory. A pilgrim (Shamgar) wielding the Word of God (ox-goad—see Eccl. 12:11) can put to rout wanderers (Philistines) among God’s people.

Oppressor | Meaning or Type | Years of Oppression | Deliverer | Meaning | Years of Rest | Scripture Reference
Chushan-Rishathaim, King of Mesopotamia | Cush—man of double wickedness; Self-exaltation, pride | 8 | Othniel | Lion of God (The power of God) | 40 | 3:7-11
Eglon, King of Moab | Circle; Worldly profession | 18 | Ehud | Praise or confessor | 80 | 3:12-30
Philistines | Wanderers among God’s people or carnal religion | | Shamgar | Stranger or pilgrim | | 3:31
Jabin, King of Hazor in Canaan; Commander in Chief Sisera | Understanding or human intellect; Merchant; Battle array | 20 | Deborah; Barak | Bee, the word; Lightning | 40 | 4:1-5:31
Midianites | Contention, strife, the world | 7 | Gideon (Jerubbaal) | The cutter down. Let Baal plead for himself or Baal-fighter | 40 | 6:1-8:35
| | | Abimelech a Usurper | My father was king | 3 | 9:1-57
| | | Tola; Jair | A worm; Light-giver | 23; 22 | 10:1-2; 10:3-5
Ammonites | Rationalism or false doctrine | 18 | Jephthah | He will open | 6 | 10:6-12:7
| | | Ibzan; Elon; Abdon | Whiteness; Might; Service | 7; 10; 8 | 12:8-15
Philistines | Wanderers among God’s people or carnal religion | 40 | Samson | Little sun | 20 | 13:1-16:31

Chapter 4

The next oppressor was Jabin, king of the Canaanite stronghold of Hazor. The head of his military forces was Sisera. With his boasted 900 chariots of war he held the Israelites under his domination for 20 years (vv. 1-3).

God did not raise up a man this time. He raised up a member of the "weaker sex," a prophetess named Deborah. (It is not the norm for a woman to occupy such a place of spiritual authority, but this was a time of declension. She should not be used as an example of the woman's role in the church today, since she is the exception and not the rule.) Deborah commissioned Barak to go north and attack Sisera's forces, but he refused to go unless she accompanied him. Because of his unmanly lack of courage he was told that the victory over Sisera would be given to a woman rather than to him (vv. 4-9).

Deborah took the initiative in calling Barak and ordering him to engage Sisera in battle, as the Lord had commanded (vv. 6, 7). But Barak, not Deborah, is commended for his faith in Hebrews 11:32. Though somewhat hesitant at first, he obeyed the Lord by faith and delivered Israel.

"Barak openly showed his force of 10,000 on the southern slopes of Mount Tabor. Sisera rose to the bait. He and his chariots crossed the dry Kishon riverbed at the ford just south of Harosheth. They raced southeast along the ancient highway toward Taanach. Israelites from the south, from Ephraim, entered the valley at Jenin (5:14) and joined forces with Barak and his northern troops in the valley below Taanach, south of the Kishon. Deborah called for the attack (14). Footmen

against chariots! At the critical moment rain fell, turning the plain into mire, utterly confounding the chariots and horses (5:4). The advantage was now fully with the infantry… Barak pressed the attack. Sisera was separated from his men and fled. The leaderless troops, not used to fighting on foot, ran for their base. The rains continued and the Kishon rose to a torrent. Those who were not slain by the Israelites in pursuit were swept away by the Kishon as they tried to cross the ford to Harosheth …" (vv. 10-16; cf. 5:20, 21).

Seeking refuge in the tent of Jael, a Kenite, Sisera was given food and lodging. While he slept, Jael hammered a tent-pin into his temple (vv. 17-21). As Barak passed by in pursuit, Jael invited him in to see the corpse of his enemy. Thus was Deborah's prophecy of verse 9 fulfilled (vv. 22-24). God used His Word (Deborah) to cast down human reason (Jabin) when it exalted itself against the knowledge of God. The judgment came upon the foe like lightning (Barak). Jael (climber) used a tent-pin (the witness of her pilgrim life) to bring down the pretensions of the mighty. The hammer speaks of the Word (Jer. 23:29).

Chapter 5

The song of Deborah is a classic of inspired literature. After opening with praise to the Lord, Deborah recalled the Lord's triumphant march when the Israelites left the borders of Edom to move toward the Promised Land. All opposition melted before the majesty of Jehovah (vv. 1-5).

Then she described conditions in the days of Shamgar. The dangers were such that the highways were deserted. Travelers used less-direct routes in order to

avoid robber bands. The villagers dared not venture out of their homes—that is, until Deborah arose (vv. 6, 7).

Because the people had turned to idols, the land was given over to war and bloodshed, and Israel did not have weapons with which to fight (v. 8).

But when God raised up Deborah and Barak, some of the rulers of Israel and some of the people stepped forward gallantly to help. There were men from Ephraim, men from Benjamin, men from Machir (the tribe of Manasseh), and men from Zebulun and Issachar (vv. 9-15).

And then Deborah remembered those who did not come to help. Reuben had great resolve of heart but stayed by the sheep-fold. Gilead (Gad) did not cross the Jordan to join in the battle. Dan remained in ships, and Asher sat idly by the shore (vv. 16, 17).

Scripture notes carefully those who fought in the battle and those who stood passively by, unwilling to risk their safety in Jehovah's cause. And so it is today: The Lord knows who is actively confronting the world and the devil and who is sitting back and simply watching. There is a time of reward coming, but it is also a time of loss (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

Zebulun and Naphtali were outstanding, risking their lives for Jehovah without pay. They were in the thick of the battle against the kings of Canaan. The forces of nature were on their side because they were on the Lord's side (vv. 18-22).

Meroz, living in luxurious cedar homes, was singled out for a curse for failing to come to Jehovah's help. The men of this city remained neutral when help was needed

against the foe. But Jael, living in a tent, was blessed for her bravery and cunning in destroying Sisera (vv. 23-27). Our Lord's mother is the only other woman who is specifically called blessed among women (Luke 1:42).

Sisera's mother, in the meantime, was looking out the window, waiting for her son to return with the spoils of victory. She could not understand his delay. Her attendants assured her that he must be dividing the booty with his men. But Sisera would never return. And let his fate be the same for all enemies of Jehovah. On the other hand, may those who love the Lord be as the rising sun (vv. 28-31). The chapter closes with the statement that the land had rest for 40 years after Sisera's death.

Chapter 6

Gideon (6:1—8:35)

In the next cycle, the Israelites were oppressed by the Midianites. These were marauding bands of Bedouin who conducted raids on Israel's crops (stripping the land like locusts) and stealing the livestock. Israel's backsliding resulted in poverty, slavery, and fear. Those whom Israel had once conquered were now her masters (vv. 1-6). When we turn from the Lord as Christians, old habits enslave and impoverish us as well.

When the Jews cried to the Lord for help, a prophet was first sent to remind them of their idolatry (vv. 7-10). Then the angel of the Lord (Christ) appeared to a man of Manasseh named Gideon as he was secretly threshing wheat in a winepress to hide it from the Midianites. The angel told this "mighty man of valor" that God would use him to deliver Israel from Midian. Despite Gideon's

protests, the angel repeated his call to this important task (vv. 11-16).

Sensing that he was talking to the Lord, Gideon asked for a sign. Then he prepared an offering of a kid and of unleavened cakes. When the angel touched the offering with his staff and it was consumed by fire, Gideon knew he was in the Lord's presence and feared he would die. But the Lord assured him with the words "Peace unto thee," and Gideon thereupon built an altar and named the place Jehovah-shalom (the Lord is peace) (vv. 17-24).

That night, in obedience to the Lord, Gideon destroyed an altar which his father had erected to Baal, and instead erected another altar to Jehovah. In the morning the men of the city were ready to kill him for this bold act. But his father, Joash, intervened, saying that if Baal were truly a god, he should be able to defend himself. Joash decreed that anyone who espoused Baal's cause would be executed. Gideon was nicknamed Jerubbaal, meaning "Let Baal plead for himself" (vv. 25-32).

Some people might fault Gideon for tearing down the altar at night because of fear (v. 27). But we must not lose sight of the fact that he did obey the Lord. His fear did not stop him from being obedient. All of us have fear, and fear in and of itself is not necessarily wrong. But when it keeps us from obeying the Lord, it has become an obstacle to faith and is sin.

At this time the Midianites, the Amalekites, and other Arab bands gathered together to make war on Israel as they crossed the Jordan and camped in the valley of Jezreel (v. 33). The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and he assembled an army from the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali (vv. 34, 35). Abiezer (v. 34)

was an ancestor of Gideon. His name is used here as a family name for his living descendants (see also 8:2).

Before Gideon went into battle, he desired a pledge of victory from the Lord. The first pledge came when dew fell on his fleece of wool but not on the ground around it. The second came the following night, when the dew fell on the ground but not on the fleece (vv. 36-40).

Gideon's fleece is often misunderstood by Christians. There are two things about this incident that we should keep in mind: Gideon was not looking to the fleece for guidance but for confirmation. God had already told him what he was to do. Gideon was just seeking assurance of success. People who talk about putting out a fleece to find the will of the Lord in a certain matter are misapplying the passage. Secondly, Gideon had asked for a supernatural sign, not a natural one. Naturally speaking, what Gideon asked for would never have happened without the direct intervention of God. Today people use things as a "fleece" that could happen naturally, without divine intervention. This too is a wrong way to use the story. What we see here is God condescending to a man of weak faith to assure him of victory. God can, and does, give such assurances today in answer to prayer.

Chapter 7

In order that victory against Midian might be clearly divine, the Lord first reduced Gideon's army from 32,000 to 10,000 by sending the fearful and fainthearted home, as the law commanded (Deut. 20:8) (vv. 1-3).

In order to reduce the army still further, God tested the soldiers at the river. Those who took time for a relaxed

drink of water were eliminated. Those, on the other hand, who hurriedly scooped up a mouthful of water and quickly moved on were kept in the army. These numbered 300 (vv. 4-8).

The Lord then directed Gideon to visit the outskirts of the camp of the Midianites by night. Accompanied by his servant Phurah, Gideon went to the outermost part of the enemy's encampment. There he heard a Midianite telling his friend of a dream he had in which a cake of barley bread rolled over a Midianite tent, crushing it. The friend understood the dream as meaning that the Israelites would defeat Midian. Barley bread was the food of the common farming people and represented Israel. The tent typified the armies of the Midianites (vv. 9-14). Perhaps the thought of his diminishing army rekindled Gideon's fears, and justifiably so. God was asking him to face an army of 135,000 with a force of 300 (8:10). But this word from the mouth of his enemies strengthened his faith. In response, he first worshiped (v. 15), then warred.

Thus assured of victory, Gideon returned to the camp of Israel and summoned his men to war. After dividing the army into three companies of 100 each, he armed each man with a trumpet and an earthenware pitcher with a lamp or torch inside. They marched to the fringe of the camp of the Midianites, and then at the appointed signal they all blew their trumpets, broke the earthenware pitchers so that the light of the lamps would be visible, and cried, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon" (vv. 15-20).

The divine interpretation of this incident is given in 2 Corinthians 4:7. Our bodies are the earthen vessels. It is

only as we are constantly delivered unto death for Jesus' sake that the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ shines forth to others.

In confusion and panic, the Midianites began attacking one another, then fled. At first they were chased by men from the tribes of Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh (vv. 21-23). Since God had earlier dismissed these men (vv. 2-8), was Gideon right in summoning them once again (v. 23)? But then the men of Ephraim were summoned to join in by taking the fords of Jordan and destroying the foe as they sought to escape across the river. The Ephraimites succeeded in capturing and killing two of the princes of Midian: Oreb (raven) and Zeeb (wolf) (vv. 24, 25).

There are lessons we can learn about leadership in Gideon's actions. The leader must be thoroughly convinced about what he is doing before he can lead others. He must be a worshiper first of all, giving God His rightful place (v. 15). He must lead by example (v. 17). He must be careful that the credit goes where it belongs—to God first, then to the instruments of His choosing (v. 18).

Chapter 8

At first the men of Ephraim were angry with Gideon that they had not been invited to help sooner. But when Gideon reminded them that their capture of the two princes was more illustrious than anything he had done, they were pacified (vv. 1-3). As explained previously, Abiezer (v. 2) refers to Gideon and his men.

The Jews of Succoth and Penuel refused to give food to Gideon's hungry men because they feared reprisal from

the Midianites if he were defeated. Therefore, when Gideon returned from the battle victorious, he punished these cities for their failure to cooperate (vv. 4-17).

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15:1 NASB). The first truth is illustrated in verses 1-3 by Gideon’s answer to the Ephraimites. The second truth is illustrated in verses 4-17 by the words of the men of Succoth and Penuel.

Zebah and Zalmunna had killed some of Gideon’s brothers at Tabor, so he ordered his son, Jether, to slay them. He was afraid to because “he was yet a youth,” so Gideon finished the job himself (vv. 18-21).

The men of Israel asked Gideon to be their king, so impressed were they by his military exploits. They gave the glory to man instead of to God (cf. 7:2). But Gideon nobly refused for himself and his sons, pointing out that the Lord alone had the right to rule over them (vv. 22, 23).

But, after resisting one temptation, Gideon fell into another. He asked for the golden earrings which the Israelites had taken from the Midianites (also known as Ishmaelites; cf. Exod. 32:1-6). With these Gideon made an ephod, the apron of the priest. When this was set up in Ophrah, it became an object of idolatrous worship and thus a snare to Israel, drawing them away from Shiloh and the tabernacle. “He refused the kingship but wanted the priesthood” (vv. 24-27).

After the conquest of the Midianites, Israel enjoyed rest for 40 years. But no sooner had Gideon died than the Jews turned to Baal worship (vv. 28-35).

Special mention is made of the fact that Gideon had many wives, and these bore him 70 sons. Also, he had a concubine in Shechem who bore him a son by the name of Abimelech (vv. 30, 31).

Two more characteristics of Gideon's multifaceted personality show themselves in this chapter. His relentless pursuit of the Midianites displayed a thoroughness and completeness in carrying out his orders. Even though he was tired, even though he had already done a great deal, and even though no one would help him, he pressed on until the Ishmaelites were destroyed and their kings were dead at his feet. The Apostle Paul had the same kind of drive (Phil. 3:12-14). The second characteristic is a negative one: He accepted earthly reward for what he had done (v. 24), and it became a snare to him, his family, and his country. (Contrast this with Abraham's behavior in Genesis 14:21-24.) We should strive under God to emulate Gideon's virtues and avoid his vices.

Chapter 9

Abimelech (my father was king), a son of Gideon, was not a judge of Israel but a usurper—one who sought to rule Israel without proper authority. Working through relatives in Shechem, he persuaded the people of that area to recognize him as ruler. To eliminate any threats to his rule, he murdered all his brothers except Jotham, the youngest (vv. 1-6). Since Gideon had 70 sons (v. 2), and not all were slain, the 70 of verse 5 must be a round number.

"When Jotham heard of Abimelech's coronation, he hurried to the top of Mount Gerizim at a time when the people were gathered in the valley below. From that

vantage point his voice could be heard across the valley, and the people listened intently to the strange parable he related. Using the figure of a republic of trees electing a king, he pictured Israel's conduct. He spoke of Gideon and his sons as the olive tree, the fig tree, and the vine, who wisely refused to leave their God-appointed places of usefulness in order to go and reign over the trees. But he likened Abimelech to a bramble, who not only eagerly accepted the invitation but warned that he would destroy the cedars of Lebanon if the trees did not elect him king" (vv. 7-15).

Jotham then announced boldly to the people that if they had done right in destroying his brothers, then they could rejoice in their new ruler. But if not, the men of Shechem and Abimelech would become embroiled in civil war and destroy each other (vv. 16-20). This is exactly what happened. Three years later God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem (v. 23). God is not the author of evil, but He does allow evil, and even uses it to accomplish His purposes with evil men (cf. 1 Sam. 16:14; 1 Kgs. 22:19-23). The men of Shechem robbed those who traveled the trade routes near Shechem, thus depriving Abimelech of the taxes he would ordinarily collect (v. 25). Gaal, the son of Ebed, used the harvest festival as the occasion to call for a rebellion against Abimelech, saying, "Who is Abimelech, and who are we of Shechem, that we should serve him?" (v. 28 RSV). Zebul, Abimelech's puppet-governor of Shechem, secretly notified Abimelech of the conspiracy and advised him to march against the city in the morning (vv. 24-33).

When Gaal went to the city gate in the morning, he thought he saw people moving down from the top of the

mountains. At first Zebul pretended that it was just a shadow, hoping to gain time for Abimelech. Finally Gaal realized that it was actually people, with one company coming from a different direction. Then Zebul challenged him to go out and fight the one whose rule he had despised. When Gaal and his band of outlaws engaged the foe, many of his men fell and he was soon chased back into the city (vv. 34-40).

With Abimelech camped at nearby Arumah, Zebul expelled Gaal and his men from Shechem. The next day people from Shechem went out into the fields to work, or perhaps to take spoil from the fallen men. When Abimelech heard of this, he divided his men into three companies and set an ambush. Two companies were to rush upon them and another was to cut off any retreat back into the city. The ambush was successful (vv. 41-44).

After a day of fighting, the city fell. The people were all slain and their city was razed and sown with salt (v. 45). (Sowing with salt makes the ground sterile. Here it was a symbolic action on the part of Abimelech, expressing his determination that the place be forever a barren salt waste.)

Nearby was the tower of Shechem, where there was a temple of the god Berith. The people of the tower hid in a large room of the temple. Abimelech and his men took boughs from the forest of nearby Mount Zalmon and made a huge fire over the “refuge.” One thousand men and women perished in the inferno (vv. 46-49).

In capturing Thebez, Abimelech met his downfall. As he attacked a tower where many of the people had sought refuge, a woman dropped an upper millstone on top of

him. Seriously injured, he asked one of his own men to slay him rather than have it said he was slain by a woman. Thus the bramble was devoured, as Jotham had predicted (vv. 50-57).

Justice has its own way of suiting the punishment to the crime. Abimelech had slain his brothers on a stone (v. 5), and a stone crushed his own proud head. Those who live by violence will die by the same.

Chapter 10

Tola (vv. 1, 2)

Tola, of the tribe of Issachar, judged Israel for 23 years. He lived in the hill country of Ephraim.

Jair (vv. 3-5)

The next judge was Jair, a Gileadite, who ruled for 22 years over Israel. Mention is made in passing of his 30 sons, who ruled over 30 cities.

Again we read the dreary account of how the children of Israel forsook the Lord and turned to idolatry. The Philistines and Ammonites fought against the Jews who were on the east side of the Jordan, and the Ammonites also crossed over the Jordan to war against Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim (vv. 6-9).

Israel was powerless before the Philistines and the Ammonites because they abandoned the worship of Jehovah and served the gods of these heathen (v. 6). Service to idols brought Israel into slavery to idolaters.

When the Israelites cried to the Lord, He refused their pleas at first. He cited several instances of past deliverances (vv. 11, 12) and reminded them that after

each deliverance they had turned away from Him (v. 13). But when they continued to pray and after they put away their idols, God listened to their cry (vv. 10-16). Verse 16 gives us some insight into the Lord's great heart of tenderness. Like a father, He was moved by the plight of His wayward children. Their misery called forth His mercy.

As the chapter closes, the armies of Ammon were camped in Gilead, and Israel had assembled in Mizpeh. The men of Gilead were seeking a military leader (vv. 17, 18).

Chapter 11

Jephthah (11:1—12:7)

The man of the hour was Jephthah. He is described as a Gileadite, a mighty man of valor, and the son of a harlot. Having been rejected by his own countrymen, he had wandered off to the land of Tob (probably in Syria), where he became the leader of a band of desperadoes or outlaws (vv. 1-3). The men of Gilead now asked Jephthah to lead the armies of Israel against the Ammonites, promising to recognize him as their head if he defeated the foe. In some ways Jephthah reminds us of the Lord Jesus: There was a shadow over his birth and he was rejected by his brethren, but when they got into bondage they remembered him and called upon him as their savior; he agreed to be their savior but insisted on being their lord as well (vv. 4-11).

Jephthah's first action was to send messengers to the king of Ammon, giving him an opportunity to explain his aggression. The king complained that Israel had stolen his land from him when the nation marched from Egypt

to Canaan. Jephthah explained clearly that this was not so. The Lord had instructed His people not to meddle with the Edomites, Moabites, or Ammonites—all distant relatives of the Jews (Deut. 2:19). Therefore, the Israelites detoured around the country of the Edomites and Moabites. However, when they came to the territory of the Ammonites, it had already been captured by the Amorites, whose king was Sihon. Israel took possession of this land by defeating the Amorites (vv. 12-27).

When the king of Ammon refused to withdraw his claim to the land, Jephthah prepared for war. Before going into battle, he made a rash vow that he would devote to the Lord whatever first came out of his door to meet him if he returned home victorious. The Lord gave him victory over the Ammonites, and as he returned to his house his daughter came out to meet him. Jephthah therefore offered her to the Lord (vv. 28-40). There is considerable disagreement as to what Jephthah actually did to his daughter. One view is that he killed her and offered her as a burnt offering to the Lord. This is perhaps the most obvious meaning of the text, even though the idea of human sacrifice is repulsive and was never approved by God (Deut. 18:9-14). Only animals were sacrificed; human beings were dedicated, then redeemed by money (Exod. 13:12,13; Lev. 27:1-8). The other common view is that Jephthah gave his daughter to be a perpetual virgin in the service of Jehovah. Those holding this viewpoint state that Jephthah’s vow was that whatever came forth from the door of his house “shall surely be the Lords, or I will offer it up for a burnt offering” (v. 31). The idea of perpetual virginity is strongly supported by verses 37, 38, and 39. In any case, the lesson is that we should not make rash promises.

The Ammonites may represent rationalism and false doctrine. God's people are delivered from this peril by Jephthah (the opener). He opens the Word of God and enlightens the people.

Chapter 12

The men of Ephraim were jealous of Jephthah's victory, complaining that they had not been allowed to share in it. Jephthah reminded them that he had appealed to them in vain for help. The Ephraimites mocked Jephthah's people, the Gileadites, saying that they were nothing but fugitives from Ephraim. (The Ephraimites seemed to be troublemakers. They took issue with Gideon when he defeated the Midianites [ch. 8] and now they quarreled with Jephthah without just cause.) Jephthah and his men attacked the Ephraimites and cut off their way of escape at the ford of the Jordan. Before anyone was allowed to cross the Jordan, he was forced to say the password, "Shibboleth." The Ephraimites could not pronounce this word correctly; they betrayed their identity by saving "Sib-boleth." Jephthah slew 42,000 men of Ephraim at the Jordan—a frightful slaughter of his own countrymen (vv. 1-6). This type of infighting among the people of God is a distressing thing to see. The blood of the Ephraimites was now mingled with the blood of the Ammonites. Even the bright spots in Judges are smudged with calamity. "Is it not a fact that … those who have met and overthrown heresy are those who have then crossed swords with their brethren, and fought over things that were not a vital question of truth?"

Jephthah's service as a judge lasted for six years; then he died and was buried in Gilead (v. 7). Jephthah is cited

in Hebrews 11:32 along with Gideon, Barak, and Samson. All these men had their faults, but they all, at one time or another, demonstrated great faith.

Ibzan (vv. 8-10)

Ibzan judged Israel for seven years. All we know of him is that he was a native of Bethlehem who had 30 sons, all of whom obtained wives from abroad (that is, outside his clan).

Elon (vv. 11, 12)

Elon was of the tribe of Zebulun. His work as judge lasted for ten years.

Abdon (vv. 13-15)

Abdon came from the city of Pirathon in the hill country of Ephraim. He judged Israel for eight years. Special mention is made of his 40 sons and 30 grandsons (NIV).

Chapter 13

Samson (13:1—16:31)

For the seventh time in Judges we read that “Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord” (v. 1). The cycle begins again; this time the Philistines enslaved Israel for 40 years. This was the longest oppression the nation had yet undergone. While the Israelites were being oppressed by the Philistines, the Angel of the Lord (Christ) appeared to the wife of Manoah, of the tribe of Dan, and announced that, though she had been barren, she would become the mother of a son. The barren womb is often a starting place in the purposes of God. He calls life out of death and uses the things that “are

not" to confound the things that are. This son was to be a Nazarite from his birth—he was not to drink wine or eat grapes or raisins, nor was his hair to be cut. The mother herself was to abstain from wine and strong drink and from anything unclean (vv. 1-5).

For the scriptural background of the Nazarite vow, see Numbers 6:2. Ordinarily, Nazariteship was a vow which a person made of his own will. But in Samson's case Nazariteship was to extend from his birth to his death.

Manoah prayed for another visit from the Angel of the Lord and for further instructions. The Angel appeared to the wife again, and she hurriedly brought her husband out to meet this heavenly Visitor. No further instructions were given by the Angel at this time, however (vv. 6-14).

Manoah then offered to prepare a meal for the Angel, thinking that he was a mere man. The Angel refused to eat with Manoah merely as one of equal rank. He proposed instead that a kid be offered as a burnt offering to the Lord. When Manoah asked the Angel's name, he was told it was Wonderful (ERV)—one of the names given to the Lord Jesus in Isaiah 9:6. Then Manoah offered the kid to the Lord. The Angel ascended to heaven in the flame of the altar, showing clearly that this was an appearance of the Lord Himself. Manoah and his wife then worshiped by falling on their faces—an act that would have been improper if the angel were less than God. They had seen the Lord, but they would not die as a result, since God had received a burnt offering and a meal offering from them (vv. 15-23).

After this the son was born and named Samson (little sun). It soon became obvious that the Spirit of God was working powerfully in his life (vv. 24, 25).

Few men in the Bible exhibit such a contrast of strength and weakness. When we think of Samson, we ordinarily think of his strengths. He killed a lion with his bare hands (Judg. 14:6). He killed 30 Philistines single-handedly (14:19). He broke the cords with which the men of Judah had bound him, and slew 1000 Philistines with the jawbone of an ass (15:14-16). In escaping from a trap which the Philistines had laid for him, he walked away with the gates of Gaza (16:3). Three times he escaped the treachery of Delilah—once by breaking the seven green cords that bound him, once by snapping the new ropes as if they were a thread, and once by pulling out the pin that fastened the seven locks of his hair to a loom (16:6-14 NASB). Finally, he pulled down the pillars of the house in which the Philistines were being amused by him, slaying more in his death than he did in his life (16:30).

But his weaknesses were even more apparent. He had a weakness for women, and was willing to disobey God in order to get a woman that pleased him (14:1-7). He also disobeyed his parents (14:3). He practiced deceit (14:9; 16:7, 11, 13b). He fraternized with 30 Philistines, the enemies of God's people (14:11-18). He spoke in riddles instead of being open and aboveboard (14:13, 14). He gave way to temper and vindictiveness (14:19b; 15:4, 5). He had a cruel streak in his nature (15:4, 5). He consorted with a harlot (16:1, 2). He dallied with evil (16:6-14). He revealed the secret of his strength to the enemy (16:17, 18). He was too self-confident (16:20b). He broke his Nazarite vow (14:9). And only two prayers of his are recorded, both when he was in deep trouble (15:18; 16:28, 30a).

Chapter 14

Samson's willfulness soon appeared in his determination to marry a Philistine woman—one of the enemies of Israel. His mother and father sought to dissuade him, but he insisted. Verse 4 does not mean that the Lord approved of Samson's disobedience, but that He permitted it and planned to overrule it for Israel's welfare and for the punishment of the enemy (vv. 1-4).

En route to Timnath (a Philistine city) with his parents, Samson was threatened by a young lion. The Spirit of God came upon him and enabled him to kill the lion unaided. Presumably arrangements for the marriage were made at this time (vv. 5-7).

When Samson was returning to Timnath to claim his bride, he found honey in the carcass of the lion he had slain and shared it with his father and mother. He didn't tell them that the honey was defiled by contact with a dead body (As a Nazarite he broke part of his vow by touching the dead beast.) (vv. 8, 9).

At Timnath, a great wedding feast was arranged, and Samson gave a riddle, offering each of his 30 companions a complete outfit if they could explain it. If not, they would have to give him 30 complete outfits. The riddle was: "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." It referred, of course, to his killing of the lion and to his finding the honey in its carcass (vv. 10-14).

When the men failed to guess the answer, they persuaded Samson's bride to obtain the answer from him. She did this and revealed it to the 30 young men (vv. 15-17). They came to Samson with the answer (v. 18)

and demanded the clothing. Samson then realized that they had collaborated with his wife (v. 18b).

In order to get the clothing to pay the men, Samson angrily slew 30 Philistines of Ashkelon and took their garments. On the seventh day, when the marriage should have been consummated, he returned home. His bride was given to his friend, perhaps his “best man” (vv. 19, 20).

Chapter 15

When his father-in-law refused to let Samson have his bride, Samson took personal revenge by tying the tails of 300 foxes in pairs, putting a lighted torch between every two tails, and releasing the animals in the grain fields, vineyards, and groves. The Philistines learned the cause of this cruel and wasteful act and retaliated by burning to death Samson’s wife and her father (vv. 1-6).

Samson’s answer was to slay a great multitude of Philistines; then he retired to the cleft of the rock Etam in the territory of Judah. But violence triggers more violence. When the Philistines marched after him, the men of Judah slavishly reminded him that the Philistines were their rulers. To save their own skin they agreed to bind Samson and turn him over to the enemy. Samson agreed to this as long as his own countrymen did not attempt to slay him. They had sunk to a vassal mentality, and chose to betray their own countryman and remain loyal to their oppressors rather than to befriend Samson and rid themselves of their chains (vv. 7-13).

Then follows one of the glorious moments of Samson’s career. When he was brought out bound, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. With the jawbone of an ass he

proceeded to slay 1000 Philistines. He named the place Ramath-lehi, the hill of the jawbone (vv. 14-17). There is a play on words in verse 16, as if to say, “With the jawbone of an ass I have ass-ass-inated them,” or “With the jawbone of an ass I have piled them in a mass! With the jawbone of an ass I have assailed assailants” (Moffatt).

One wonders why the Lord gave such a great victory through such an unlikely weapon. Samson was forbidden to touch anything that was unclean, and the jawbone was certainly that, being part of a dead animal. But this unusual weapon made it all the more evident that the victory was a supernatural one, given by God through base means. This is an example of the Lord allowing irregularities during a time of extreme crisis which ordinarily would not be permitted.

In response to Samson’s prayer for water, the Lord miraculously provided a spring out of the “hill of the jawbone.” This place was named Enhakkore, the spring of him who called (vv. 18, 19).

It is at this illustrious period in Samson’s career that the Spirit of God records his judging of Israel for 20 years (v. 20).

Chapter 16

Toward the end of his rule, Samson’s unbridled lust led him to the house of a harlot in the Philistine city of Gaza. The men of the city thought that at last they had trapped their enemy. But Samson arose at midnight and carried off the doors of the city gate, as well as the posts, to the top of the mountain opposite Hebron, a distance of almost 40 miles (vv. 1-3).

Next Samson fell in love with a Philistine woman named Delilah. When this became known, the lords of the Philistines offered her great reward if she would lure Samson into revealing the secret of his strength. On her first attempt, Samson said that if he were bound with seven green cords, he would be powerless. She thereupon tied him with seven tough cords and suggested that the Philistines were about to pounce on him. But Samson broke the cords as if they were string. On the second attempt, Delilah followed Samson's suggestion by binding him with new ropes and pretending that the Philistines were closing in for the kill. But again Samson broke his bonds as if they were thread. Still playing with fire, Samson told Delilah that he would be helpless if she wove the seven locks of his hair and then fastened them to a loom (NASB). When she awoke him with the warning that the Philistines were about to seize him, he left with the pin and the web (vv. 4-14).

Finally Samson broke down and revealed to Delilah the secret of his strength. His long hair was the symbol of his Nazariteship—his separation to God. It was his relationship to the Lord that made him strong, not his hair. But if his hair were cut off, he would be powerless. Delilah knew now that she had his secret. When he was asleep in her arms, she called in the Philistines. One of them shaved his head, and his strength was gone. "The lap of Delilah proved too strong for the heart of Samson, and what a thousand Philistines could not do was done by the ensnaring influence of a single woman." When Samson awoke, he tried to summon his strength, not knowing that the Lord had departed from him (vv. 15-20).

The Philistines put out Samson's eyes and imprisoned him in Gaza, where he was forced to grind grain. "One has described this threefold degradation as the binding, blinding, grinding bondage of sin." But slowly his hair began to grow again. When the Philistines held a great celebration for their god, Dagon, they brought Samson forth as an exhibit of what their god had done for them. Also, they compelled him to entertain them with his feats. During the feast, Samson took hold of two of the pillars supporting the building, cried to the Lord for strength, and then pulled down the pillars and demolished the building. All the occupants were slain. The melancholy record is that Samson slew more in his death than he did in his life (v. 30). Because he consorted with them so often in his life, finding their women irresistible, Samson is found with the Philistines in his death, a corpse among corpses in the rubble of Dagon's temple. Separation would have earned for him a nobler death. Here we are taught a sober lesson, one we should not take lightly. Loss of separation (sanctification) leads to loss of power and eventual ruin. To yield our members to sin is to pursue self-destruction. Samson's body was removed to the territory of Dan by his relatives and was buried there (vv. 21-31).

Chapter 17

The remaining chapters of Judges form an appendix to the book. They do not advance the narrative as far as time is concerned but rather give illustrations of the low condition to which Israel had descended during the time of the judges—religiously, morally, and politically.

The first narrative is one of religious corruption. Micah, a man of Ephraim, had stolen 1100 pieces of silver from

his mother. She in turn had cursed the thief, not knowing that it was her own son. Apparently he feared the results of the curse, so he returned the money to her. She then lifted the curse and blessed her son for returning the money. Now she could use it for its intended purpose. She took 200 pieces of silver and ordered two idols to be made from them. One was a graven image carved from wood and overlaid with silver. The molten image was made entirely of silver (vv. 1-4).

Micah put the idols in a shrine with his household gods (teraphim). He also decided to set up a priesthood for his family, so he made an ephod (priestly garment) and appointed one of his sons to be a priest (v. 5). This, of course, was contrary to God's law, which forbade an Ephraimite from being a priest. In fact, the whole procedure was contrary to the Mosaic law.

Sometime later a Levite who dwelt in Bethlehem, among the people of Judah, went into the hill country of Ephraim looking for employment. (He should have been employed in the service of Jehovah and supported by the tithes of the nation. But since the law was not obeyed he was forced to seek out a livelihood.) Micah offered him a position as priest in his family. Though this man was a Levite, he was not of the family of Aaron and therefore not eligible to serve as a priest. However, Micah offered him a salary, food, and clothing, and the Levite agreed to serve (vv. 7-13). The Levite should have confronted Micah with the fact that all these arrangements were contrary to God's order. Instead, he gave tacit assent by accepting the salary and other fringe benefits, thereby effectively sealing his lips from declaring the full counsels of God.

The word to describe the state of affairs in this chapter is “confusion”: Stolen money is used for idols, and the Lord is invoked to bless the thief (v. 2); individual shrines replace worship at the tabernacle; Levites and common people are consecrated as priests; idols are used in the worship of Jehovah. And Micah supposed the Lord would bless him in all of this (v. 13)! This confusion stemmed from the heart of man (v. 6). If the law of God had been observed at this time in Israel, none of these things would have happened. “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12), as we shall see in the next chapter.

Chapter 18

At about this same time, the people of the tribe of Dan decided to look for additional territory in which to dwell. (When it says in verse 1 that Dan didn’t have an inheritance, it does not mean that they weren’t given any land when Canaan was originally divided [Josh. 19:40-48], but rather that their portion, the smallest of the 12, was too small for them.) When some of their scouts came to the house of Micah in the hill country of Ephraim, they recognized the voice of the Levite and asked him for assurance of the divine blessing on their plans (vv. 1-6).

Later, when the men of Dan were marching north to capture Laish, they entered the house of Micah and seized all the idols. After a mild protest, the Levite gladly obeyed their order to serve the tribe of Dan as a priest (vv. 19, 20) rather than to serve just the house of Micah. When Micah and some of his townsmen went out

to the Danites to protest this theft of his idols, he was told to keep quiet and was sent home empty-handed.

The Danites then captured Laish and changed the name of the city to Dan. They set up their idols there and appointed Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Moses (NASB margin) and his sons as priests. “It is generally admitted that, in Judges, for ‘Manasseh’ (KJV, NASB) we should read ‘Moses’—the name having been disguised by Jewish copyists to prevent supposed disgrace to Moses resulting from the idolatry of his grandson.” Presumably, Jonathan is the name of the Levite previously mentioned. The city of Dan became an idolatrous city from this time onward. It was here that Jeroboam later set up one of the golden calves. It is not known whether the captivity mentioned in verse 30 refers to a Philistine captivity of that area (e.g., 1 Sam. 4:11) or the Assyrian captivity (2 Kgs. 15:29).

Not all the Danites went to Laish (v. 11) or sank into idolatry. Some stayed in their land, between Judah and Ephraim. Samson, the most famous member of this tribe, was from this latter group of Danites.

Chapter 19

We now come to a story of incredible moral corruption—the account of the Levite and his concubine. This particular Levite had a concubine who had come from Bethlehem-judah. She forsook him to return to her home and live as a harlot. He went to her father’s house to get her and was entertained there day after day. Each time he tried to leave with his concubine, her father prevailed on him to stay a little longer. Finally he left, on the evening of the fifth day, with his concubine, his servants, and his animals. It was late afternoon when they came

to Jebus (Jerusalem), but they did not stop because that city was still inhabited by the heathen Jebusites. “It would have been better for the Levite to have spent the night with the heathen than with the professed children of God (vv. 10-15), for the latter had already become viler than the former.”

At nightfall they came to Gibeah, in the territory of Benjamin. No one offered to provide lodging for the caravan, so the Levite relaxed temporarily in the street. Then an Ephraimite who was living in Gibeah offered to take the party to his home, and the offer was accepted. That evening a band of sexual perverts surrounded the house and demanded that the visiting Levite be brought out to them. The only other time we read of such debauched behavior is in the days of Lot (Gen. 19). Both incidents brought severe consequences on the offenders. The Lord abhors homosexuality. Human depravity can hardly sink lower. The owner sought to satisfy these wicked Benjamites by offering his daughter and the Levite’s concubine. Finally the concubine was handed over to them. As a result of their vile treatment of her, she died during the night. Without excusing the Benjamites, we might point out that if she hadn’t given herself to harlotry beforehand (v. 2) she would not have suffered a harlot’s death. Sin mercilessly rewards its followers. The Levite found her body at the doorstep in the morning. He was so enraged that such immorality should be practiced in Israel that he cut her body into 12 parts and sent one part to each of the 12 tribes with an account of what had happened.

The nation of Israel was stunned!

Chapter 20

Chosen warriors from the tribes of Israel (except Benjamin) gathered together at Mizpeh and heard the Levite tell what had happened. They decided to fight against Gibeah (vv. 1-11), but first they gave the Benjamites an opportunity to turn over the guilty men to them for punishment. When the Benjamites refused, civil war broke out (vv. 12-14). The tribe of Benjamin had only 26,700 soldiers, against 400,000 from the other tribes (vv. 15-17). Yet in the first battle, Benjamin killed 22,000 men (vv. 18-21). In the second encounter, 18,000 men of Israel were slain (vv. 22-25). The reason Israel had such a hard time of it, even though their cause was just, was because they themselves were not walking close to the Lord. In verses 18, 23, and 26-28 we can see the nation being forced to humble themselves before the Lord until finally success was promised. In the third engagement, the Israelites used the strategy of ambush. They drew the men of Benjamin away from the city of Gibeah, set the city on fire, and then slew a total of 25,100 Benjamites as they fled to the wilderness. Then they burned all of Benjamin's cities and killed the women and children (vv. 29-48).

In three battles Benjamin lost 26,100 men (cf. vv. 15, 47). (We must conclude that they lost 1000 in the first two days.) The slain in verses 35 and 44-46 refer to the casualties in the last battle only. Six hundred survivors took refuge in the rock of Rimmon for four months (v. 47). Were it not for this remnant, the tribe would have been completely wiped out.

This incident took place not long after the death of Joshua and his generation, for Phinehas was the high priest at the time (v. 28).

Chapter 21

Now the 11 tribes of Israel were seized with regret that the tribe of Benjamin was almost annihilated. They did not want this tribe to die out. Yet they had made a rash vow in Mizpeh that they would not give their daughters as wives to the men of Benjamin. Their first solution was to fight against Jabesh-gilead, east of Jordan, because its inhabitants had not helped in the war against Benjamin. All the people were killed except 400 virgins. These were then taken and given to the men of Benjamin. But it was evident that further provision must be made if the tribe was to prosper. The men of Israel vowed that they would not give their daughters to Benjamin, and they would not go back on the vow. So they hit on a scheme to allow the men of Benjamin to take wives for themselves from the young women who danced at an annual feast (perhaps the Feast of Tabernacles) in Shiloh. When the men of Shiloh complained, the other tribes explained to them that this was necessary to prevent the loss of one of the tribes of Israel. So Benjamin went back to his land to rebuild for the future.

These last few chapters have given us an intimate look at two tribes in Israel during the early period of the judges. One can imagine what went on unrecorded in the other tribes! And we know that things got worse as time went on! These gruesome stories show how far a people can wander from the Lord. Here we see enough of the fruit of apostasy to revolt us. Better still if what

we have read would turn our hearts to seek the Lord our God and to serve Him faithfully all our days.

The book closes with the sad theme ringing in our ears: “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

There is one wholesome episode from this dark period, but it is set off by itself so as not to be defiled by too close association with the depravity of Judges. We now turn our attention to the chaste story of Ruth.

1 Irving L. Jensen, Judges/Ruth, p. 12.

2 Daily Notes of the Scripture Union, further documentation unavailable.

3 Irving L. Jensen, op. cit., p. 49.

4 Samuel Ridout, Lectures on the Books of Judges and Ruth, p. 177.

5 C. H. Mackintosh, further documentation unavailable.

6 Samuel Ridout, op. cit., p. 254.

7 John Haley, Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible, p. 338.

8 George Williams, The Student’s Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, p. 132.

Ruth

Outline Of Ruth

I. Sojourn in Moab (1:1-5)

II. Return to Bethlehem (1:6-22)

III. Ruth's association with Boaz (2:1—3:18)

IV. Redemption by Boaz (4:1-12)

V. Birth of Obed and genealogy to David (4:13-22)

The events in the book of Ruth took place during the time of Judges (1:1). While most of the nation of Israel was wandering away from the Lord, there was a Gentile maiden named Ruth whose faith shone out with brilliance.

Concerning the date and authorship of this book, Irving Jensen writes, "The book may have been written sometime during the reign of King David (1011-970 BC). It could not have been written before then, because David's name appears in 4:17, 22. It was probably written before Solomon, David's successor on the throne, or the writer probably would have included Solomon's name in the genealogy. So the author was a contemporary of David."

The book supplies an important genealogical link in the messianic line, the ancestry of David. We are told in Matthew 1:5 that Boaz was a descendant of the Gentile Rahab, almost certainly the Rahab of Jericho. Now Ruth, another Gentile, enters the lineage of Christ as Boaz's wife. Both Rahab and Ruth picture God's grace, since

both would have been excluded from the commonwealth of Israel because of their nationalities.

The key word of the book is redeem. Another key word is kinsman, occurring 12 times. Boaz is a kinsman-redeemer, redeeming the land which belonged to Elimelech and raising up posterity to continue the family name. He is a type of Christ, the true Kinsman-Redeemer. Ruth, the Moabitess, pictures the church as the bride of Christ, redeemed by His wonderful grace.

Chapter 1

As the book opens we meet a Jewish family which left Bethlehem-judah (house of bread and of praise) because of famine, and settled in the land of Moab, southeast of the Dead Sea. The parents were Elimelech (my mighty God is King) and Naomi (my pleasant one). The sons were Mahlon (sick) and Chilion (pining) (vv. 1, 2). It would have been better to stay in the land and trust God than to emigrate to Moab. Ephrata, the ancient name of Bethlehem, means fruitfulness (see v. 2).

As we have observed, the time of the judges was characterized by moral decline. So it is not surprising to find the land undergoing famine, God's promised chastisement for disobedience. Elimelech should not have left the Promised Land, least of all to settle in Moab. Had he never read Deuteronomy 23:3-6? Why not settle with his Jewish brethren east of the Jordan River? He led his family from the land of the living to the place of death (vv. 3, 4) and barrenness (neither Mahlon nor Chilion fathered children).

After Elimelech died, his sons married Moabite wives. Mahlon married Ruth (4:10) and Chilion married Orpah

(vv. 3, 4). Although Moabites were not specifically named in Deuteronomy 7:1-3 as people whom Israelites should not marry, it is clear from later references that they were included by the law (Ezra 9:1, 2; Neh. 13:23-25). The law also specified that Moabites were not allowed to be received into the congregation of the Lord to the tenth generation (Deut. 23:3). Grace overruled in Ruth's case, as we shall see, permitting her great-grandson to become the king of Israel.

After ten years, Mahlon and Chilion died, leaving Naomi with two foreign daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth.

Naomi decided to move back to Judah because she had heard that there was now plenty of food there. Her two daughters-in-law started to accompany her. But when she urged them to return to their homes in Moab, reminding them that she had no more sons to offer to them as husbands, Orpah kissed her and went back (vv. 5-14). Ruth, however, would not leave Naomi. In one of the noblest utterances by a Gentile in the Old Testament (vv. 16, 17), she showed that she was making a total commitment to Naomi. She chose her destination, her dwelling, her people, her God, and even her burial place.

In verses 13-15 we see the different attitudes of the three widows. Naomi was a grieving widow, stripped of the earthly joys of husband and family by divine judgment. Orpah, having soberly considered the words of her mother-in-law, proved to be a leaving widow, choosing the easiest and most convenient course. But Ruth was a cleaving widow, clinging to Naomi in spite of the latter's discouragements. When Ruth chose a new life with Naomi, she knew that it wouldn't be easy. There was hard work and poverty ahead since they were

without a male provider. There was separation from home and loved ones, too. But she would not return to Moab, not even in death. Her commitment was complete, and her reward would be great.

By divine coincidence, it was the beginning of the barley harvest, the season of Firstfruits (typifying Christ's resurrection), when Naomi and Ruth arrived back in Bethlehem. The people were glad to see Naomi once again and greeted her cordially by name. She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi (pleasant); call me Mara (bitter), for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me." She had gone out full (i.e., with her husband and sons), but the Lord had brought her back empty (i.e., a widow and childless) (vv. 18-22). So it is with us—we can go out by ourselves into paths of backsliding, but the Lord will bring us back empty, and usually through bitter chastening.

Chapter 2

Under the law, Israelites were not allowed to strip the fields clean when harvesting. Instead, they were to leave some of the grain as gleanings for the needy, for strangers, for the fatherless, and for widows (Lev. 19:9; 23:22; Deut. 24:19).

Ruth decided to take advantage of this law by going out to the barley fields to gather up some of these gleanings. It was not good luck but divine arrangement that led her to a field owned by Boaz (in him is strength), a wealthy relative of her dead father-in-law (vv. 1-3).

When Boaz arrived, he asked the identity of the young woman. Learning that she was Naomi's daughter-in-law, he cordially invited her to continue gleaning in his fields

and to share the water provided for his workers. She marveled that he, a Jew, should show such undeserved favor to a Gentile. But there was a reason! Boaz had, of course, heard of the kindness which Ruth had shown to Naomi, and how she had become a convert to the Jewish faith. He was so impressed with her that he invited her to eat with his workers, and instructed the reapers to leave extra grain for her on purpose. At the end of the day, she had gathered an ephah of barley, which was a very generous amount. Then she beat out what she had gleaned (vv. 4-17). We must do this in our study of the Word; that is, we must appropriate the precious truths for ourselves and put them into practice.

In Boaz we see illustrated many of the excellencies of Christ. Boaz was a man of great wealth (v. 1). He was compassionate to the stranger, who had no claim on his favors (vv. 8, 9). He knew all about Ruth, even before she met him (v. 11), even as the Lord knows all about us even before we come to know Him. He served Ruth graciously, and all her needs were satisfied (v. 14). He granted her protection and prosperity for the future (vv. 15, 16). In these acts of grace we see a foreshadowing of our blessed Kinsman-Redeemer's mercies to us.

When Ruth brought the grain home and told Naomi all that had happened, the wise old Jewess knew that the Lord's program was unfolding satisfactorily. She knew that Boaz was a close relative of her dead husband and sensed that the Lord was going to work wonderfully for Ruth and for herself. Therefore she encouraged Ruth to continue to glean in the fields of Boaz (vv. 18-23).

Naomi's counsel to stay in the fields of Boaz was prudent. Since he had shown himself gracious, why

should Ruth insult him or spurn his protection by going into another's field? We too should not wander from the Lord's promised provision and protection into the fields of worldly pleasures.

Chapter 3

Naomi was anxious that Ruth should find rest— that is, a husband and a home. She therefore relinquished her own prior claim to marriage and property, and instead advised Ruth to go to the threshing floor one night when Boaz was winnowing barley (vv. 1-5). "Ruth, being a stranger to Israelite customs, had to be told in detail how she was to make the customary appeal to her kinsman for protection and levirate marriage."

So after Boaz had finished his work, eaten his meal, and retired, Ruth lay at his feet under the cover of his blanket (vv. 6, 7). This may seem very irregular to us in our culture, but actually it was the accepted practice in that day (see Ezek. 16:8), and there was nothing evil or suggestive about it.

Awakened at midnight, Boaz found Ruth at his feet. Far from rebuking her, he blessed her after she had asked him to act as her kinsman-redeemer (vv. 8-10). The word "wings" in 2:12 is the same word here translated "skirt" (v. 9). Boaz had commended Ruth for seeking refuge in Jehovah; how could he refuse her the refuge she sought from him according to Jehovah's laws? Besides, she was "a virtuous woman" (v. 11), one of those whose worth is far above jewels (Prov. 31:10).

The law of Moses required that when a man died, a near relative should marry the widow (Deut. 25:5-10), thus perpetuating the family name and keeping the land in

the family. It was especially important that when a man died without a son, someone should marry the widow so that a son would be born and the name carried on.

Now Ruth, of course, had been left childless. Since Boaz was a relative of Elimelech, he was eligible to serve as kinsman-redeemer by marrying her. And not only was he eligible; he was willing (v. 11).

He commended her for her loyalty, saying that her latter kindness (her personal devotion to him) was better than her first (her leaving home and family to be with Naomi) (v. 10). But there was a legal complication: There was a nearer kinsman than he, and this man had prior claim. If this nearer kinsman did not wish to serve as kinsman-redeemer, then Boaz would. The matter would be settled in the morning (vv. 12, 13).

Ruth stayed at his feet till just before dawn. Boaz filled her cloak with six measures of barley. This assured Ruth of his deep love and gave evidence to Naomi that he would follow through on the matter without delay (vv. 14-18).

Ruth was a noble woman, intrinsically worthy of Boaz's kindnesses. But we were unworthy sinners. Yet the Lord spread His covering over us and took us as we were. He has loaded us with gifts and encouraged us with His promised return to consummate the marriage. Our salvation is settled, a finished work. But entrance into the full bliss of our union awaits the bridegroom's return.

When Naomi heard all that had taken place, she told Ruth to sit still and wait for the outcome of this complex sequence of events (v. 18). "This is often the most difficult part of faith— when no more action can be

taken and nothing remains but to wait patiently for God to work out His will. It is at this moment that doubts arise and anxiety creeps in."

Chapter 4

In the morning Boaz went to the gate of the city, where the elders sat and where legal matters were settled. It so "happened"—another designed coincidence—that the nearer-kinsman walked by at that very moment. Calling to him to stop for a while, Boaz stood before the ten elders and told the story of Naomi and Ruth. Then he gave the nearer-kinsman the chance to buy back the land belonging to Elimelech, which had probably been mortgaged when Elimelech went to Moab. The unnamed kinsman was willing, up to this point, but when Boaz told him that whoever bought the land must also marry Ruth, he backed away, explaining that this would mar his inheritance. "He would have to devote time and energy to looking after Ruth's property, thus possibly having to neglect his own. Ultimately, the land would go to Ruth's heirs, not his own" (vv. 1-6).

Commenting on the omission of the nearer relative's name, Matthew Poole writes, "Doubtless Boaz knew his name, and called him by it; but it is omitted by the holy writer, partly because it was unnecessary to know it; and principally in way of contempt, as is usual, and as a just punishment upon him, that he who would not preserve his brother's name might lose his own."

The nearer-kinsman is generally taken to typify the law. Ten witnesses (the Ten Commandments) confirm its inability to redeem the sinner. "The law can't redeem those whom it condemns. It would be against its own

purpose." The law could not redeem because it was weak through the flesh (Rom. 8:3).

The refusal of the nearer-kinsman freed Boaz, who was next in line, to marry Ruth.

In those days, all transactions concerning redemption and exchange were confirmed by one of the parties taking off his sandal and handing it to the other. The law actually specified that the widow should take off the sandal of the refusing kinsman and spit in his face (Deut. 25:9). In this case the nearest kinsman simply took off his sandal and handed it to Boaz (vv. 7, 8).

As soon as Boaz received the sandal, he announced that he would purchase Elimelech's property and marry Ruth. The crowd blessed Boaz, wishing him a numerous posterity (vv. 9-12). The mention of Perez, the offspring of Tamar by Judah (v. 12), overlooks the sordid aspects of that story and concentrates on the fact that it was another case of levirate marriage involving an Israelite and a foreigner.

Boaz married Ruth, and she bore him a son named Obed (servant) (vv. 13-17). Naomi adopted the baby as her own (v. 16). Obed later became the father of Jesse and the grandfather of David. Thus the book closes with a short genealogy of David (beloved) which was to become part of a greater genealogy—that of David's great Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 1). This genealogy (vv. 18-22) is not intended to be complete. Salmon lived at the beginning of the period of the judges, and David was not born until the beginning of the period of the kings, a span of almost 400 years. Names are often deliberately omitted in biblical genealogies.

1 Irving L. Jensen, Judges/Ruth, p. 80.

2 Daily Notes of the Scripture Union, further documentation unavailable.

3 Ibid.

4 Matthew Poole, Matthew Poole’s Commentary on the Holy Bible, p. 511.

1 Samuel

Outline Of 1 Samuel

I. Samuel’s Ministry (Until the Anointing of Saul) (1—9)

A. Birth and call of Samuel (1—3)

B. Loss and recovery of the ark (4—7)

C. King demanded and chosen (8, 9)

II. Saul’s Reign (Until His Rejection) (10—15)

A. Anointing and confirmation (10, 11)

B. Rebuke and charge to the people (12)

C. Disobedience and rejection (13—15)

III. David’s Life (Until the Death of Saul) (16—30)

A. Anointing by Samuel (16:1-13)

B. Ministering to Saul (16:14-23)

C. Defeating Goliath (17)

D. Marrying Michal (18)

E. Fleeing from Saul (19—26)

Jonathan’s loyalty (19, 20)

Ahimelech’s kindness and death (21, 22)

Keilah’s betrayal (23)

Saul spared (24)

Nabal’s folly (25)

Saul spared a second time (26)

F. Living in Philistia (27—30)

Ziklag acquired (27)

Saul's doom foretold (28)

David discharged by Achish (29)

Amalekites defeated (30)

IV. Saul's Death (31)

First and Second Samuel were originally one book. They bear Samuel's name even though they were probably put in their present form in the days of David. Samuel (the prophet-judge), Saul (the rejected king), and David (the shepherd-king) are the main characters.

Samuel was raised up by God to close the period of the judges and to inaugurate the era of the kings. He lived in a day that saw the failure of the priesthood (represented by Eli and his sons) and the introduction of the prophetic ministry. Samuel himself was the last of the judges, the first of the prophets (of this period, not the first prophet in Scripture—Gen. 20:7), and the man to anoint the first kings of Israel. Although a Levite, he was not of the family of Aaron, yet he served as a priest, apparently with God's approval. His heart was pure and devoted; Eli's was polluted and disobedient.

Chapter 1

The book opens by introducing us to Elkanah and his two wives, Hannah (Grace) and Peninnah (Pearl). He was a Levite from Ramah in Ephraim; hence the designation Ephraimite in verse 1 (cf. 1 Chrn. 6:22-28). As a faithful historical record, the Bible notes the practice of polygamy but never approves it. As was the case with Leah and Rachel, one wife was fruitful while the other was barren. This caused rivalry in the home

because, although Hannah was childless, she was more loved by her husband. When the family traveled to Shiloh yearly to celebrate one of the feasts, Hannah would receive a double portion of the peace offering (vv. 3-5). But this drew forth stinging taunts from Peninnah. Year after year her barbs cut deeper and deeper, until finally, in desperation, Hannah took the matter before the Lord in the temple (vv. 6-11). Here the word "temple" refers to the tabernacle or tent of meeting.

Hannah vowed that if God would give her a son, she would give him back to God. He would be a Nazarite from birth. "The way to obtain any benefit is to devote it in our hearts to the glory of that God of whom we ask it; by this means shall God both please his servant and honor Himself."1 The old priest, Eli, saw Hannah's lips moving and supposed her to be drunk. But as soon as she had explained her actions, he perceived her seriousness, blessed her, and sent her on her way in peace (vv. 12-18). Hannah was concerned about her physical barrenness. We should mourn our spiritual barrenness.

When Hannah's prayer was answered, she named her baby Samuel, meaning "heard of God" or "asked of God." When Samuel was weaned, she took him to the temple and gave him to the Lord in a once-for-all act of dedication (vv. 19-28). From the outset the boy assisted the priests and ministered before the Lord. The last phrase in verse 28 refers to Samuel: He was a worshiper, although very young, because his life was devoted to the service of Jehovah.

Chapter 2

The devotedness of Elkanah's wife and son stands out against the depravity of Eli's family. After Hannah gave her son to the Lord, she poured out her heart in thanksgiving. Her words reveal an in-depth knowledge of God, His character, and His deeds. The prayer seems to rebuke Peninnah for the many spiteful things she said to Hannah, but it prophetically goes beyond this domestic squabble to the triumph of Israel over her foes and to the eventual reign of Christ (vv. 1-10).

The narrative now turns to Eli's wicked sons. They did not know the Lord (v. 12) in the sense that they had not been saved by faith. Two sins are charged to them in verses 12-17: They robbed the people of their share of the peace offering, not being satisfied with just the breast and thigh (vv. 13,14; cf. Lev. 7:28-34), and they demanded meat before the fat had been offered to God, thus shirking the law. If anyone tried to protest, they took the meat by force (v. 16). Their sin was very great because "they were treating the Lord's offering with contempt" (v. 17 NIV).

In contrast to their wickedness was the devotedness of the child Samuel, and the faithfulness of Samuel's parents to the yearly feasts (vv. 18-20). Since the firstfruits of Hannah's womb had been dedicated to the Lord, she was blessed with three more sons and two daughters (v. 21). "Give, and it shall be given unto you."

It wasn't until Eli heard reports of immorality that he finally reproved his sons. But it was far too late for his mild verbal reproof to have any effect. They hardened their hearts and so were judicially hardened, like Pharaoh of old, for God had determined to destroy them

(vv. 22-25). During this time Samuel was quietly growing, his purity and goodness pleasing both God and man (v. 26).

If we remember that these events took place during the time of the judges, it is not surprising that the priesthood did not escape the moral decadence of the period.

Jehovah's rebuke of Eli was as harsh as Eli's rebuke of his sons had been soft. An unnamed man of God appeared and announced the doom of Eli's priestly house. The prophet began by rehearsing God's call to Aaron's family to be His priests, and His generous allowance of sacrificial meats for their sustenance. He then rebuked Eli for allowing his sons' appetites to have priority over the claims of God (v. 29). The Lord's previous promise of the perpetuity of the priesthood assumed that the priests would be men of good character. But because of the wickedness of Eli and his house, they would no longer be allowed to function in the priestly service; no member of his family would reach old age; the sanctuary at Shiloh would fall into decay; and Eli's posterity would be a grief and a shame. Furthermore, both Hophni and Phinehas would die on the same day as a sign that all these judgments would come to pass (vv. 27-34).

The doom of Eli's house was fulfilled in: the murder of Ahimelech and all his sons (except Abiathar) by Saul (v. 31; 22:16-20); the expulsion of Abiathar from the priesthood by Solomon (vv. 32,33; 1 Kgs. 2:27); and the death of Hophni and Phinehas (v. 34; 4:11). Eli was from the house of Ithamar, and when Abiathar was later removed by Solomon, the priesthood was restored to the

house of Eleazar, where it should have been all along. Phinehas the son of Eli is not to be confused with Phinehas the grandson of Aaron (Num. 25:7,8).

The faithful priest promised in verse 35 is Zadok, of the house of Eleazar, who ministered in the days of David and Solomon. His priesthood will endure, even during the millennial reign of Christ (Ezek. 44:15). But the descendants of Eli would desire the priest's office not in order to serve the Lord, but simply to get something to eat (v. 36). Some see a messianic allusion in the faithful priest of verse 35.

Chapter 3

At the time when Samuel was serving the Lord in the tabernacle at Shiloh, the word of the Lord was scarce; that is, the Lord very seldom spoke in visions to men. Williams sees in the first three verses a picture of Israel's moral condition. "Night reigned; the lamp of God was going out in the Temple; the High Priest's eyes were grown dim so that he could not clearly see; and both he and Samuel were asleep."2 The lamp of God refers to the lampstand, whose light was extinguished at sunrise. The temple (v. 3) means the tabernacle.

One night, shortly before morning, Samuel heard a voice calling him. He thought it was Eli, but the priest had not called. After Samuel heard the voice two more times, Eli realized that the Lord was calling Samuel. The old priest told the boy to say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth," if he heard the voice again (vv. 4-9).

When the Lord called the fourth time, Samuel replied, "Speak, for thy servant heareth," leaving out the word "Lord." He did not yet know the Lord in the sense that

he had never previously received a direct, personal revelation from Him (v. 7). The Lord's message confirmed the judgment spoken earlier against Eli and his house, and may have included the defeat of Israel and the capture of the ark (vv. 11-14). The father was as much to blame as the sons, for he did not rebuke them or turn them from their sins. They should have been put to death for their sacrilege instead of just being scolded. Sacrifice could not atone for their evil; their doom was sealed and was confirmed to Eli in the mouth of two witnesses: the man of God (ch. 2) and the boy prophet, Samuel (v. 14).

At first Samuel was reluctant to tell Eli what the Lord had said, but under a solemn oath he revealed to the priest the impending judgment. Eli took the news submissively (vv. 15-18). Surely he realized the justice of God in the sentence. Could God have struck down the sons of Aaron for their impiety (Lev. 10) but leave Hophni and Phinehas unjudged?

It soon became known that the Lord was with Samuel, and all Israel recognized in the young lad a true prophet of Jehovah (vv. 19-21).

Chapter 4

The next three chapters follow the ark of the Lord on a journey into and back out of enemy territory. God would defend His honor in the midst of the Philistines (ch. 5), but He would not defend the Israelites when He was in their midst because they had ceased to honor Him. When they went to battle against the Philistines at Ebenezer, they lost 4000 men. In an effort to turn the tide, the elders had the ark of God brought from Shiloh into the camp. The Israelites rejoiced greatly when they

saw the ark, and the Philistines feared greatly because they knew the reputation of Jehovah. But they encouraged themselves and drew near to the battle once more. To their amazement, Israel fled, 30,000 Jews were slain, the priests were killed, and the ark itself was captured (vv. 1-11).

When a runner went back to Shiloh and informed Eli that the ark had been taken, the old priest fell backward off his magistrate's seat, broke his neck, and died (vv. 12-18). The bad news caused Phinehas' wife to go into labor, and she died in childbirth. Hearing of the death of her father-in-law and of her husband didn't seem to affect her as much as the news that the ark had fallen into the hands of the Philistines. As she died, she named her son Ichabod, which means "the glory has departed" (vv. 19-22).

Chapter 5

The Philistines brought the ark of God from Ebenezer to Ashdod and set it in the temple of the grain god, Dagon, the national god of the Philistines. Dagon was supposed to be the father of Baal, another idol we meet often in Scripture. The Philistines set the ark beside the image of Dagon, thinking them equal, but when they returned to the temple in the morning they found that Jehovah had caused Dagon to topple to the foot of the ark. Not perceiving the significance of this event, they once again set up Dagon by the ark. But the next morning there was no doubt as to who was the stronger, for Dagon's head and hands had been cut off. If Dagon were a real god, he could have defended himself. His followers should have faced the facts. Instead, they made a superstitious rule about walking on the threshold (vv. 1-5). Dagon did not

fare well in confrontation with the God of Israel. Samson had destroyed his temple in Gaza, God giving him the strength to pull the entire building down on the noblemen of Philistia (Judg. 16). Now Jehovah Himself maimed the image of Dagon, demonstrating that there is no wisdom (head) or power (hands) to be found in idols.

Not only their idol but the people themselves began to feel the displeasure of God, suffering confusion, hemorrhoids (boils or tumors), and death. In desperation the Philistines decided to move the ark to Gath, another of their great cities. Here again the men were smitten with hemorrhoids.

When the ark was sent to Ekron, the people were extremely frightened, their fears being justified by a great destruction that killed many of the people. The men who didn't die broke out with hemorrhoids. They begged that the ark be sent back to Israel (vv. 10-12).

Chapter 6

In seven short months the Philistines had gained a proper fear of the ark. They wanted to return it to Israel, but in the proper way so as to avoid further judgment. The heathen priests and diviners were consulted. They suggested returning the ark with a guilt- or trespass-offering of five golden hemorrhoids and five golden mice. It was common among these people to appease their gods with an offering of whatever had caused destruction among them. The reference to mice makes most Bible students think that the plague that afflicted the cities was the bubonic plague carried by fleas on rats. The priests further reminded them of Egypt's fate at the hands of Jehovah, and urged them not to harden

their hearts, but to make every effort to return the ark to its proper place (vv. 1-6).

To make sure that the things which had befallen them were judgments of Jehovah, and not mere chance, the priests arranged the details of the return trip in a way that would evidence divine intervention. The cows used to pull the cart had young calves and would violate all natural instincts by leaving their calves behind. The cows had never been broken, yet they pulled well in a yoke together. Without being guided, the cows headed straight toward Beth-shemesh, in the territory of Judah (vv. 7-12).

The men of Beth-shemesh were reaping when the ark drew near. What a sight—two unattended cows bringing the ark back to Israel! Great rejoicing broke out. The cart was used to make a fire, and the cows were sacrificed as burnt-offerings to the Lord. The ark and the box containing the guilt-offering were placed on top of a great stone (vv. 13-18).

But the men of Beth-shemesh did not treat the ark of God as holy; they looked into the ark. As a result, God smote 50,070 of them. Fearful of having the ark remain in their midst, the people sent to the men of Kiriath-jearim, and asked them to take the ark. (It is doubtful that there were 50,070 men at Beth-shemesh. Josephus, 3 Keil & Delitzsch,4 and many others say that the text should read 70 men, since the 50,000 is not in many Hebrew manuscripts.)

There is a spiritual parallel in the story of the cows of Beth-shemesh. Christian missionaries leave home and family and carry the message of the Lord to wherever the Lord guides them, turning neither to the right nor to

the left. They cause people to rejoice when they see the Lord by faith. They are prepared for service or for sacrifice.

Chapter 7

The ark was brought to the house of Abinadab in Kiriath-jearim, where it remained for 20 years. Then Samuel came forward and urged the people to repent so that God could free them from their Philistine oppressors. Idols were thrown away and the nation gathered to Samuel at Mizpeh (vv. 1-4). There they fasted and repented before Jehovah. Their repentance was symbolized by pouring out water on the ground (vv. 5,6).

Hearing that the Israelites were at Mizpeh, and supposing that a revolt was in the making, the Philistines attacked. The Jews, unprepared for war, were terrified. When they pleaded with Samuel to intercede for them, he offered a burnt-offering (which it seems Levites could do—1 Chrn. 23:26-31), and prayed. God subsequently routed the enemy miraculously with great thunder, and the Jews won the day. In gratitude Samuel set up a stone as a monument and named it "Ebenezer" (the stone of help) (vv. 7-12). Verse 13 refers only to a temporary victory, as is clear from the last part of the verse and from 9:16. Some land was also recovered at this time, and Israel enjoyed peace with her neighbors for a while (v. 14).

After this Samuel became a circuit judge, traveling through the cities of Israel and administering justice according to the law of the Lord. He lived in Ramah, his father's home, and built an altar there. We aren't told why he did not return to the altar of the Lord, now at Nob, nor why he allowed the ark to remain in

Abinadab's house. But these were days of irregularities, many things being practiced which God allowed even though they weren't according to His original design.

This chapter is a study in revival. God first raised up a man, Samuel, who called the people to repentance, confession, and cleansing. Intercession was made through the blood of a lamb (a type of Calvary's Lamb), and then there was victory. These are the steps to individual as well as national revival.

Chapter 8

In his old age, Samuel tried to have his two sons succeed him as judges. But they were wicked men who accepted bribes and perverted justice. Like Eli before him, Samuel did not turn his sons from their evil ways, and so his house was rejected also. The elders of Israel refused to accept Joel and Abijah; they wanted a king instead, like the other nations (vv. 1-5).

It was God's intention, of course, that He Himself should be the King of Israel. His people were to be holy (different), and not like any other nation on earth. But they didn't want to be different; they wanted to conform to the world. Samuel was grieved by such a request, but the Lord told him to do as they said. After all, they had not rejected the prophet, but the Lord. In agreeing to their wishes, Samuel was to protest solemnly and to warn them as to the type of king they would get. In brief, the king would enrich himself by impoverishing the people, would draft their young men and women for military and domestic duties, and would make virtual slaves of them (vv. 6-18). It was true that God had made provisions for the rule of kings in the law (Deut. 17:14-20), not because it was His perfect will, but

because He knew it would happen. These laws in Deuteronomy were meant to curb the evil that was sure to ensue.

When the people persisted in their demand, despite the warning, the Lord again told Samuel to do as they asked. The prophet then sent the people home. Soon they would have their king (vv. 19-22).

Chapter 9

Now Saul, the son of Kish (a Benjamite), enters the picture. While searching for his father's donkeys, he and his servant decided to inquire as to the animals' whereabouts from a man of God in a nearby city. With a small gift in hand, they approached the city and found out from some women that the man they were looking for would make an appearance that very day at a religious festival. As they hurried along, they met the man they sought. Little did Saul realize that the prophet was also looking for him (vv. 1-14)!

On the preceding day the Lord had promised to direct Samuel to the man who was to be king. Now it was revealed to him that Saul was the man. But the prophet did not tell Saul immediately. First he invited him to the feast. The high place (i.e., a place set apart for worship) was usually connected with the worship of idols, but in this case it was for the worship of Jehovah. Samuel then told the tall Benjamite that he would have some important news for him in the morning. Apparently without being told of Saul's mission, Samuel told him that the donkeys had been found, and that he was not to worry. What were a few donkeys, anyway? He was soon to possess "all that is desirable in Israel." Saul took this statement with apparent modesty (vv. 15-21 NASB).

Benjamin was certainly the smallest tribe in Israel. In the past their numbers had been reduced to 600 because of their wickedness (Judg. 20).

At the banquet Saul was given the place of honor and was served with the choicest cut of meat. In the evening Samuel had a long talk with him. The next day Samuel detained Saul as he was leaving the city and revealed the word of God to him (vv. 22-27).

Chapter 10

Privately Samuel anointed Saul as ruler of Israel by pouring oil on his head. The priesthood had been inaugurated with anointing (Lev. 8:12), and now the first king was anointed in the same manner. A public ceremony would follow later. Three signs were then given to confirm the word of the Lord to Saul: 1) Two men would meet him at the tomb of Rachel and tell him that his father's donkeys had been found (v. 2); 2) three men would meet him at the oak of Tabor, en route to Bethel, and would give him two loaves of bread (vv. 3,4); 3) when he would come to "the hill of God" and would meet a group of prophets, the Spirit of the Lord would come upon him and he would prophesy (vv. 5,6).

It must not be concluded from verse 9 that Saul was genuinely converted. Actually, he was a man after the flesh, as his later history so evidently demonstrates. He was equipped for his official position as ruler of God's people by the Spirit even though he did not know God in a personal, saving way. In other words, he was God's man officially even though he was not a true believer.

The prophets were dedicated and zealous men, and it surprised the people to see Saul prophesying among

them. This gave rise to the proverb, “Is Saul also among the prophets?” (v. 12). It became a common saying expressing surprise that Saul should engage in an activity that was so out-of-character for him. Saul’s uncle (not his father, as we would expect) quizzed him about his delay. Saul mentioned his visit with Samuel but did not disclose that he had been privately anointed as king (vv. 10-16).

Meanwhile, Samuel assembled the people at Mizpeh to announce the appointment of a king. Before making the actual announcement, he once again reminded them that their demand for a king was a rejection of the God who brought them out of Egypt and into the Promised Land (vv. 17-19). When Saul was selected he was hiding because of either modesty or fear. Matthew Henry gives four reasons why Saul might have been afraid: “1. Because he was conscious to himself of unfitness for so great a trust; 2. Because it would expose him to the envy of his neighbors; 3. Because he understood, by what Samuel had said, that the people sinned in asking for a king; 4. Because the affairs of Israel were at this time in a bad posture, the Philistines were strong, the Ammonites threatening, and he must be bold indeed that will set sail in a storm.”5

Saul was brought forth and presented to the people as their king. A better physical specimen could scarcely be found in all Israel. Several loyal men attached themselves to Saul and accompanied him to his home in Gibeah, but not everyone was solidly behind the new monarch (vv. 20-27).

Chapter 11

Jabesh-gilead was a city on the east side of the Jordan River in the territory belonging to Gad. When the Ammonites, the neighbors to the southeast, besieged the city, the inhabitants asked for terms of surrender. But Nahash wanted to maim them and make them a reproach in Israel by gouging out their right eyes (vv. 1,2). Surprisingly, the Ammonites allowed the elders to send for help (v. 3). Perhaps Nahash was not fully prepared, or was not afraid that the rest of Israel would help Jabesh. Messengers were sent to Gibeah, where Saul was still working in the fields. It was now time to assert himself as Israel's new king.

With a vivid object lesson, Saul summoned the nation to arms. The fear of the Lord came upon the people. Israel gathered, 330,000 strong, at Bezek and marched all night to Jabesh, where they thoroughly routed the Ammonites (vv. 6-11).

Flushed with victory, the people wanted to kill those who formerly had not accepted Saul's rule. But Saul wisely stopped them. The fact that God had given the victory was enough for him (vv. 12,13). Samuel then called a solemn assembly at Gilgal, and Saul's kingship was renewed on a nationwide scale. There was no opposition this time (vv. 14,15). Gilgal speaks of spiritual renewal (Josh. 5:9).

Chapter 12

After the ceremony to renew the kingdom at Gilgal, Samuel spoke to the people. He first of all reminded them of his righteous rule as judge. No one could charge him with injustice. But in asking for a king, Israel had

rejected this rule and God's sway over them. The Lord had been gracious in the past, raising up deliverers when they were needed. ("Bedan" in verse 11 probably refers to Barak—see NASB margin.) Samuel placed himself in the line of deliverers that began with Moses. But Israel was ungrateful for these past mercies and cried for a king. The Lord working through His judges wasn't enough for them, so He gave them Saul (vv. 1-13).

In demanding a king, they committed a great sin. But if they would obey the Lord, even now He would bless them. If not, they would experience His wrath. As solemn proof, Samuel prayed down a great thunderstorm, an obvious sign from God because such a storm was unseasonal and too well-timed to be a fluke of nature (vv. 14-18). Stark fear gripped the people and they implored Samuel to pray for them. His prayer had brought down judgment; it could also bring down mercy. To this he replied with another appeal to follow the Lord; that was the way to avoid judgment. As for him, he couldn't stop praying for them; to do so would have been sin. This statement shows that prayerlessness is sin and not just carelessness.

Chapter 13

There are obvious difficulties with verse 1, as can readily be seen by reading the verse in different versions. The KJV has: "Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel." English Revised Version: "Saul was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years over Israel." RSV: "Saul was … years old when he began to reign, and he reigned … two years over Israel." NASB: "Saul was forty years

old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-two years over Israel." The Septuagint omits the verse altogether. The most likely explanation for this confusion is that some letters were dropped out of the Hebrew text by careless copyists in later centuries. We do know that Saul was a mature man when he came to power, because his son Jonathan was old enough to go to war.

Saul had established a standing army of 3000 men. Jonathan took his detachment and successfully attacked the Philistine garrison in Geba, north of Jerusalem. This incited the Philistines to prepare a large army for all-out war (vv. 2-5). (Some translations read 3000 chariots in verse 5.) The Hebrews responded to the challenge with great cowardice; some even fled across the Jordan. They had been under the yoke for so long that breaking free almost seemed impossible; the Philistines possessed every advantage. As Saul waited for Samuel at Gilgal (see 10:8), more and more men were missing at each roll call. The seventh day began, but still Samuel failed to appear. With his forces diminishing and with war impending, Saul was moved by expediency to offer the burnt-offering himself, even though he had no authority to do so, not being a Levite (vv. 6-9). Even if Samuel was late, that did not justify Saul's intruding into the priestly office.

Arriving immediately afterward, Samuel realized what Saul had done. What appeared to be valid excuses did not change the fact that Saul had disobeyed God. For this he would lose the kingdom. God had already found another man, one after His own heart (vv. 10-14). This was the first of several sins in Saul's life which resulted in his losing the throne of Israel. The others were: his rash vow (ch. 14); sparing Agag and the best of the spoil

in the battle with the Amalekites (ch. 15); the murder of Ahimelech and 84 other priests (ch. 22); his repeated attempts on David's life (chs. 18-26); and consulting the witch at En-dor (ch. 28).

Saul took his 600 men and joined Jonathan at Geba. The Philistines, camped a short distance away at Michmash, began sending out raiders to the north, west, and east, and Israel seemed helpless to halt them. The Philistines had been in such complete control for so long that they had removed all the blacksmiths from Israel. The Hebrews had to come to them to get their farm implements sharpened. Only a few men had swords. Things looked grim indeed (vv. 15-23).

Chapter 14

Seeing his father's inactivity, Jonathan slipped away with his armor-bearer to attack the Philistines. This wasn't a brash stunt or a foolish suicide mission. Jonathan was looking to God to provide a great victory. It didn't matter that there were only two of them. "For there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few." Jonathan's faith would be rewarded. God showed him that he would have success when the Philistines would invite him up, perhaps thinking he was a deserter. As soon as the Philistines said "Come," Jonathan climbed up to their garrison, and soon laid 20 of their number in the dust. As the survivors fled, God sent an earthquake which caused great confusion in the Philistine camp. The faith evidenced by Jonathan (v. 6) and his armor-bearer (v. 7) was all God needed to deal with the Philistines (vv. 1-15). Too bad that Saul's foolishness lessened the fruits of victory! Saul's watchmen noticed the confusion and reported it to him. When a muster was

taken, Jonathan was missing. Saul promptly called for Ahijah the priest to bring the ark so that he could inquire of the Lord. (The ERV margin, following the Septuagint, reads, “Bring hither the Ephod; for he wore the Ephod at that time before Israel.” The ark was probably still at Kirjath-jearim.) But Saul quickly changed his mind when the tumult among the enemy increased;

he told the priest to withdraw his hand—i.e., to stop seeking the Lord’s will (v. 19). He rallied his forces, convinced that he did not need divine guidance to know that the Lord was delivering the Philistines into his hands. Others also noticed that God was fighting for Israel. Those Hebrews who had previously defected turned on their Philistine masters, and even the men who had been hiding found new courage to join the battle (vv. 16-23). Everyone wants to fight when victory is almost won, but where are the Jonathans to make the initial confrontation?

To insure speedy success, Saul had rashly forbidden his soldiers to eat anything until the battle was over. He sealed his order with a curse. Hunger caused his men to become fatigued and thus put them at a disadvantage. Not knowing of his father’s edict, Jonathan ate some honey to regain his strength. When he was told about the curse, he mourned that Israel’s triumph was to be hindered by such a stupid order (vv. 24-30).

It not only angered Jonathan, but it endangered the people as well. For when the fighting was over, they rushed upon the spoil, slew the livestock, and ate it without draining the blood (in violation of Lev. 17:10-14 and Deut. 12:23-25). When Saul heard this, he rebuked

them and set up a stone where animals were to be brought and slain properly. He also built an altar, his first. In his zeal, Saul wanted to pursue the Philistines into the night, so he again talked to the priest about consulting God. But God wouldn't answer him. This led Saul to believe that there was sin in the camp. As was done in such cases, the lot was brought out, and to Saul's surprise, Jonathan was taken (vv. 31-42). Jonathan explained what had happened, and Saul, to save face, ordered him put to death. But the people showed more sense than did their king. Hadn't Jonathan worked with God to bring this great victory? How could God be displeased with him for breaking Saul's curse, when He had used him so mightily in battle? No, Jonathan would not die. Thus the hero was spared an undeserved death. But while Saul was engaged in such unnecessary nonsense, the Philistines fled. For the second time his lack of wisdom had diminished his victory (vv. 43-46).

Verses 47 and 48 summarize some of Saul's military victories. The next three verses give details concerning his family. The last verse is a fulfillment of Samuel's prediction that the king would draft Israel's valiant sons into military service (1 Sam. 8:11).

Chapter 15

Saul was on a downward slide and accelerating as he neared the bottom. No matter what he was given to do, he came short of complete obedience. In this chapter he was commanded by God to destroy the Amalekites—the nation that had mercilessly slaughtered the Hebrew stragglers when they had left Egypt on the way to Canaan (Num. 24:20; Deut. 25:17-19). The order was very clear; everything that breathed was to be

destroyed; it was devoted to God. God's long-suffering had put up with these people for years, but His word against them had not changed (Exod. 17:14-16). They were to be blotted out as punishment for their sin (vv. 1-3).

Saul gathered an army and marched south to the city of Amalek. Before attacking, he warned the Kenites to escape because these nomadic Midianites had shown kindness to Israel during the Exodus. This action showed that Saul was not just interested in carnage; rather, he was executing the vengeance of the Lord on a wicked people. He thoroughly defeated the Amalekites and put everything to the sword except the king and the best of the spoil. (A remnant, probably living elsewhere, also survived—see 30:1-6; 2 Sam. 8:12; 1 Chrn. 4:43.) Miles away, the Lord informed Samuel of Saul's disobedience. This greatly disturbed Samuel and drove him to spend the night in prayer. By morning it was clear what he must do (vv. 3-12).

On the way to Gilgal, Saul stopped and built a monument, celebrating his victory. But Samuel saw things differently and challenged Saul for disobeying. Saul was never short of excuses, but the noise of his failure reached the prophet's ears and left Saul's excuses hanging in midair. Rejected! Saul had heard that before (13:14). It came again with stunning force. Saul was constantly redefining the Lord's commands, doing what seemed best to him rather than what God said was best. He made a show of repentance and pleaded with Samuel not to abandon him. He even tore the prophet's robe when he tried to leave. This too was a sign that the kingdom would be torn from Saul and given to another man. After accompanying Saul to

worship the Lord, Samuel called for Agag to be brought forth. Thinking that he might be spared, Agag came cheerfully, saying, “Surely the bitterness of death is past” (v. 32 NASB). Samuel then killed him with the sword. The aged judge carried a burden the rest of his life because of Saul’s failure. In one sense even God was sorry that He had made Saul king (vv. 13-35).

We should memorize verse 22. It is one of the classics in the Word of God. Obedience first, last, and always. It is the watchword of those who would serve and please the Lord.

Verses 29 and 35 seem to be contradictory. The first says that God does not change His mind, while the second says that He regretted making Saul king. Verse 29 describes God in His essential character. He is unchanging and unchangeable, the immutable One. Verse 35 means that a change in Saul’s conduct required a corresponding change in God’s plans and purposes for him. To be consistent with His attributes, God must bless obedience and punish disobedience.

Chapter 16

While Samuel was still grieving over Saul, the Lord told him bluntly to face the fact that Saul was rejected; God had chosen another man to rule His people. Samuel was to go to Bethlehem and anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be king. Secrecy is not the same as deceit. God was not telling Samuel to lie about his intentions in Bethlehem; he really did offer a sacrifice there. But the anointing of the new king was a secret affair, not to be made public for many years (vv. 1-3).

When Samuel came to Bethlehem, the elders trembled (v. 4). After inviting Jesse and his sons to the sacrificial feast, he looked over the men one by one, confident that the next king was before him. But none was the Lord's choice. Samuel should have learned from his experience with Saul that the outer man is not nearly as important as the inner man (13:14). God judges the heart (v. 7). David had to be brought to the feast. He was so insignificant in his father's eyes that Jesse was sure the prophet wouldn't be interested in him. But the Lord was very interested in the shepherd boy, and Samuel, obeying God's voice, anointed David (vv. 4-12). From that point onward the Spirit came powerfully on David (v. 13) and left Saul (v. 14). The expression "an evil spirit from the Lord" (v. 14b) is explained by the fact that what God permits He is often said to do. It would be years before David wore Saul's crown, but from this day forward the kingdom was secure for David.

About this time Saul became afflicted with a form of mental disorder caused by an evil spirit. "King Saul would now be diagnosed as a typical example of manic-depressive insanity. The periods of intense gloom with occasional outbreaks of homicidal violence for no particular reason, the delusion that people were plotting against him … are unmistakable."6 Saul's counselors suggested that the king find someone gifted in music to calm him. David's name was suggested, and Saul sent for him. Verse 18 shows that David had already made quite a name for himself, even before he faced Goliath. Now his music seemed to lift the king out of his depression. Saul liked him so well that he made David his personal armor-bearer (vv. 14-23).

Chapter 17

The Philistines gathered their armies for battle near the valley of Elah, southwest of Jerusalem and not far from Gath. Saul and his army assembled nearby, with the valley between them. A champion by the name of Goliath came out of the Philistine camp daily for 40 days, defying the armies of Israel to send him a worthy opponent. There were no volunteers. This giant was over nine feet tall and wore over 100 pounds of armor. The head of his spear alone weighed over 15 pounds (vv. 1-11).

On one occasion, when David was bringing supplies to his brothers at the battlefront, he heard the taunts of the giant and saw the fear on the faces of the Hebrew soldiers. He asked what would be done for the man who silenced this swaggering brute. His brothers rebuked him (to mask their own cowardice), but David persisted in checking into the prizes that awaited the man who would kill the giant. Saul soon got word that a young man had been found to fight for Israel, and David was brought before him. When Saul saw David, he had doubts about the lad's ability. But David had known the power of God working through him when he defended his flock against the lion and the bear. He had proved God in private; now he could rely on God in public. Seeing his courage and determination, Saul gave him his own armor, but David discarded it because it was a hindrance to him. Instead, he went forth armed with five stones, a sling, a stick, and the power of the almighty God (vv. 12-40)!

When Goliath saw David, who was probably around 20 at this time, he was incensed that Israel should insult

him by sending out a mere youth to fight him. But David had no trace of fear as he responded to the giant's curses. He had complete faith that the Lord would give him the victory. As Goliath moved toward him, David slung the first stone, hitting him on the forehead.

The giant fell forward. David then used the Philistine's own sword to kill him and cut off his head. When the Philistines saw this, they fled, with Israel in hot pursuit (vv. 41-54).

Verses 55-58 seem to present a problem: It is strange that Saul did not recognize David when he had already appointed him as his armor-bearer (16:21). (The Septuagint omits these verses.) However, it should be noted that it does not say that Saul didn't know who this young hero was; it simply says that he asked, "Whose son is this?" Saul could have easily forgotten this. Williams comments: "Saul, having promised exemption of taxation to the family of the victor, and the hand of his daughter in marriage with a handsome dowry, naturally asks Abner for information respecting David's father and his position in society… ."7 This seems to be confirmed by the fact that David later expressed his unworthiness to be the king's son-in-law (18:18).

"Both Jonathan (ch. 14) and David initiated action on a small front just where they were, but what they did led to great victories. There is a need for us alike to take the field locally. We cannot hope to take on the whole of the enemy force, but we do not have to do so. There is a work for Jesus ready at your 'front.' We are called to be bold and to take the initiative where we are. God will take care of the rest when, as a result of our action, the battle spreads along the whole front."8

Chapter 18

A lasting friendship sprang up between Jonathan and David. They were kindred souls, each possessing that rare quality of true courage. Jonathan was the successor to his father's throne, but in giving his robe to David he indicated that he was willing to forgo his right in order to see David crow7ned instead (vv. 1-5). As David continued to win battle after battle, Saul became extremely jealous. When he heard the songs of the women ascribing to David greater exploits than to himself, he became livid with rage. God sometimes uses evil to chastise evil; that is why he allowed Saul to be tormented by an evil spirit (v. 10). Twice the king sought to kill David, but both times David escaped. Then Saul made him commander over 1000 soldiers, perhaps hoping that David would be killed while fighting the Philistines. (It appears that he had formerly held a larger command.) But the Lord was with David, and his exploits attracted the attention of all Israel (vv. 6-16).

The king's daughter had been promised to the man who would kill the Philistine giant, so Merab, Saul's oldest daughter, was offered to David. However, more victories would have to be won first. Saul hoped David would be killed in the process. When David expressed his social unworthiness to be the son-in-law of the king, Merab was given to another man, which was perhaps Saul's way of trying to humiliate David. But Saul's younger daughter loved David, and Saul agreed to give her to him, provided he produced a dowry of 100 Philistine foreskins. Again Saul hoped to kill David by the hands of his enemies. But David was not to be eliminated so easily. He returned with the bizarre dowry in double measure and won Michal as his bride. As continual

military success made it clear that God was with David, Saul's hatred and fear of him continued to grow (vv. 17-30).

Chapter 19

When Jonathan realized that his father intended to murder David, he advised David to hide in the field while he sought to pacify the king. In reasoning with Saul about David, Jonathan reminded him of David's bravery, loyalty, and success against Israel's enemy. He had done nothing worthy of death. Saul was temporarily conciliated and David was restored to his position in the royal court (vv. 1-7). But when war broke out again, David once more distinguished himself, and Saul's jealousy was kindled afresh. The evil spirit returned and struck out. David barely escaped with his life (vv. 8-10).

That same night the king sent men to seize David at his home. Michal knew of the plot and helped him escape by putting the household idol in his bed. (The idol probably belonged to her, since David was never an idolater.) When Saul sent the men to seize David, her subterfuge was discovered. But by then David had escaped. He fled to Ramah to see Samuel. Men of God go to other men of God in time of trouble. Three times Saul's messengers failed to apprehend David because, when they came near the prophets who were with Samuel, they themselves began to prophesy under the control of the Spirit of the Lord. Later, when Saul himself went after David, he too was gripped by the power of God. This divine overpowering, however, was not the same thing as conversion. Once again the people repeated the proverb about Saul being among the prophets (10:11,12). His fluctuating behavior must have been

puzzling to them (vv. 11-24). The word “naked” in verse 24 does not mean nude. It simply means that Saul took off his outer garments, the symbol of his royalty. While God held Saul prostrate on the ground for a day and a night, David escaped (20:1).

Verse 24 does not contradict 15:34,35, which says, “Samuel came no more to see Saul.” Here it was Saul who came to the prophet, and that unintentionally and quite unexpectedly.

Chapter 20

After leaving Naioth, David came to Jonathan and tried to find out why Saul was so intent on his destruction. Apparently Jonathan knew nothing of his father’s continued attempts on David’s life. David explained that the king would not share his plans with Jonathan because of the friendship that existed between him and David (vv. 1-3). A test was proposed that would make it plain whether David was in danger. Instead of taking his place at the royal table for the monthly feast, David would remain absent. If Saul inquired as to his absence, Jonathan would explain that he had gone to the yearly sacrifice at Bethlehem. (This might have been true, even though the trip is not recorded in Scripture. If it was a lie, it is simply recorded as a fact that is not approved by God.) If Saul didn’t object, this would show that David was safe; but if the king became angry because David had once again slipped out of his hands, then Jonathan would know that David was in grave peril (vv. 4-9).

Jonathan promised to go into the field on the third day and let David know how things had gone by means of a prearranged sign. Perhaps sensing what the outcome would be, Jonathan asked David to show the loyal love of

the Lord to him and to his house when he rose to power. It is clear from verses 14-17 that Jonathan believed that David would yet be king; but he reaffirmed his love to David even though he realized the throne rights, vested in him, would be David's. What unselfish devotion! Verses 18-23 detail the sign by which David would be notified as to the king's attitude. Jonathan would come to the field and shoot some arrows near a rock where David would be hiding. The directions he called to the lad who would fetch the arrows would tell David to flee for his life or to return to the court in safety. We might wonder why Jonathan arranged all this play-acting to communicate with David when he later went and talked with David directly anyway. At this time, however, he might not have known that he would be able to contact David without being seen.

On the first night of the feast, Saul said nothing about David's absence, reasoning to himself that David was probably ceremonially unclean. But on the second day, when he quizzed Jonathan about David's whereabouts and found that he had gone to Bethlehem, he flew into a rage, accusing Jonathan of befriending the man who would rob him and his mother of honor. His language was rough and his manner even rougher as he tried to pin his own son to the wall, transferring his hatred for David momentarily to Jonathan (vv. 24-34). On the morning of the third day, the appropriate sign was given and David's fears were confirmed. The men wept in each other's arms; they must now travel separate paths, no longer to enjoy each other's companionship. David went into hiding, a necessary part of God's plan to prepare him for the throne. Jonathan went back to the royal court, remaining loyal to his father, yet knowing deep

inside that he would not be Israel's next king (vv. 35-42). Should he have gone with David? Was he right in remaining loyal to his father, even though the Lord had rejected Saul from being king?

Chapter 21

Even great men have feet of clay. David is no exception. This sad chapter records his lies before the tabernacle, now situated in Nob (vv. 1-9), and his pretended lunacy before the Philistines (vv. 10-15).

David had gone to Samuel (ch. 19) and to Jonathan (ch. 20), and now he comes to the high priest in his flight from Saul. Ahimelech was afraid of David, and wondered why he was traveling alone. (He did have a few companions with him who were waiting elsewhere—v. 2; Matt. 12:3.) David lied by saying that he was on a secret mission for the king. Then David asked for some bread. But all that was available was the showbread used in the tabernacle for worship. The priest offered it to David, provided that his men were not ceremonially unclean through having sexual relations within the past few days. David said that his men were not only clean, but that they were holy (set apart) by virtue of their special mission. "Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive" (Shakespeare). The bread that had just been taken from the holy place was given to David (vv. 3-6). In Matthew 12:3,4 the Lord Jesus approved this unlawful use of the showbread, presumably because there was sin in Israel and David represented the cause of righteousness. If David had had his rightful place on the throne, there would have been no need for him to be begging bread. The law7,

which forbade the profane use of the bread, was not intended to forbid a work of mercy such as this.

Doeg, a servant of Saul, was detained before the Lord in Nob at the time. Though an Edomite, he had converted to the Hebrew religion, and was detained by a vow, by uncleanness, or by some other ceremonial requirement. He naturally observed Ahimelech's collaboration with David and carried the report back to Saul. Meanwhile, David made a second request, this time for weapons. Again he lied, saying that he was on an urgent mission for the king. Goliath's sword was produced and David eagerly took it, exclaiming that there was none other like it. He had trusted in the Lord to slay the giant, only to lapse into confidence in the sword of his slain enemy (vv. 7-9). Now David left Israel and fled to the city of Gath, Goliath's hometown. Here he, the anointed king of Israel, sought refuge among the enemies of God's people. When the Philistines became suspicious of him, he was forced to act the madman to save his life, "well knowing that the insane were held inviolable, as smitten but protected by the Deity."9 And so the psalmist of Israel stood drooling in his beard as he scribbled on the doors of the gate. Because of the callousness of God's people and David's own lapse of faith, he was reduced to this disgraceful behavior (vv. 10-15).

But David learned some valuable lessons through this ordeal. Before going on to the next chapter, read Psalm 34, which was written about this time. In this psalm we gain new insight into David's character. He possessed a remarkable resilience which enabled him to grow in his knowledge of God despite his failures.

Chapter 22

When David returned to Israel, he found shelter in the cave of Adullam, in the territory of Judah, southwest of Bethlehem. This became a place for all who were distressed, discontented, and in debt. David here is a type of Christ in His present rejection, calling the downhearted to Himself for salvation. In a short time, a small army of 400 men had gathered at Adullam; later it would expand to 600 men. In the world these men were misfits, but under David they became mighty men of valor (2 Sam. 23). David's parents had joined him too. Because of concern for their welfare, he traveled to Moab to make arrangements for them to stay there while he was in hiding. Though David was a descendant of Ruth, a Moabitess (Ruth 4:17), he was wrong in putting confidence in the Lord's enemies. (Tradition says that the Moabites eventually killed David's parents.) Soon after David returned, the prophet Gad told him to leave Adullam, so he went to the forest of Hareth, also in Judah (vv. 1-5).

In Gibeah, in the land of Benjamin, Saul was ranting to the Benjamites and to his servants against David. He asked them if David would reward them as generously as he had done. David, after all, was not from their tribe. Saul accused them of concealing from him plots against his life. By now he was completely paranoid and irrational. He saw everyone as being against him, even his own son. Doeg the Edomite, wanting to make the most of his opportunity to impress the king, told Saul how Ahimelech the priest had helped David by giving him provisions and inquiring of the Lord for him. The priest and his family were promptly summoned to the king and charged with treason. In reply, Ahimelech cited

David's loyalty to the king and his own innocence in helping a man whom he believed to be faithful to Saul. He pointed out that this was not the first time he had inquired of the Lord for David. As for Saul's accusation that David was rebelling against him and lying in wait for him, Ahimelech said he knew nothing at all about it. Saul's actions prove that he was quite insane by now. When his guards refused to kill the priests of Jehovah, Doeg, a Gentile dog in the true sense of the word, fell on them swiftly, little caring that they were priests, and slew 85 of them. As if that were not enough, he also attacked Nob, Ahimelech's city, and killed all the inhabitants and livestock. Only Abiathar survived; he fled to David and told him what had taken place (vv. 6-23). Then he stayed with David and served as high priest until he was justly removed from office by Solomon (1 Kgs. 2:27). In one sense the death of the priests was the result of David's lying and scheming (v. 22). In another sense it was the judgment of God upon the house of Eli (2:31-36; 3:11-14). But Saul himself must bear the major share of the blame. Prophet (Gad), priest (Abiathar), and King (David), all in exile together, picture Christ today as He waits until His enemies are made His footstool and His throne is set up on earth.

Chapter 23

News came to David that the city of Keilah, south of Adullam, was under attack by the Philistines. Guided by the Lord, he- fought against the enemy, saved the town, and captured a large amount of livestock (vv. 1-5). When Saul heard that David was in Keilah, he decided to trap him there. But David found out about the plot and asked the Lord for guidance as to his next move. Would he be

safe in Keilah? Would the inhabitants turn him over to Saul despite the favor he had shown them? Through the ephod which Abiathar had brought, and more particularly through the Urim and Thummim, God revealed that when Saul would come, the ungrateful people would betray David. So David and his men fled to the wilderness of Ziph, southeast of Hebron. But even there they were relentlessly pursued. It was there that Jonathan found David and encouraged him in the Lord. What a needed ministry today! The church would greatly benefit if there were more encouragers around. Only those who have experienced the power of a strengthening word spoken in season know the blessing it brings to the soul. Jonathan's love for David was self-abasing. He reassured David that God would fulfill His purpose for him, despite Saul. A man who has a friend like Jonathan is fortunate. Why he failed to stay with David, and always returned home, is an enigma (vv. 6-18).

The people of Ziph also betrayed David, sending news to Saul as to his whereabouts and promising to deliver the fugitive into the king's hands. W'hen David heard that Saul was coming, he fled to the wilderness of Maon with Saul in hot pursuit. Just when it seemed that he would be surrounded, the Philistines attacked Israel and Saul was forced to abandon the chase. Unwittingly, Israel's enemy served as an ally to Israel's rejected king. The son of Jesse then traveled to En-gedi, on the western shore of the Dead Sea (vv. 19-28).

Chapter 24

After the Philistine threat had been dealt with, Saul returned to hunt for David. He traced him to the rocky

cliffs at En-gedi. While there, the king entered one of the caves for a rest stop. The cave he chose was not empty. Farther in, the man he ruthlessly hunted was restraining his men from taking the monarch's life. They thought God had delivered Saul over to them. But David knew of no command from God to take the kingdom by force. He was content to await God's time and method. Even when he cut off a portion of the king's robe, his conscience bothered him. He did not take lightly the fact that Saul had been anointed as Israel's king. God must remove this king; David was to respect him until the Lord removed him (vv. 1-7).

After Saul left the cave, David went out and called after him. Bowing to the king, David told him that the slanderous reports which he had listened to were untrue. That very day David could have taken his life, but he didn't because Saul was the Lord's anointed. The portion of the robe in David's hand was evidence of his kindness. A wicked man might want to avenge himself, but David had no such desire (v. 13). He asked Saul why he should conduct such a relentless campaign against one who was as harmless and insignificant as a dead dog and a flea (vv. 8-15).

Temporarily moved to tears by David's words, Saul acknowledged the righteousness of David's behavior and his own wickedness. Surprisingly, he admitted that David would one day be king in Israel, and he made David take a solemn oath that he would deal kindly with his family. Then Saul left peaceably (vv. 16-22). But the respite David enjoyed was short. Saul soon forgot his kindness.

In David's words to Saul, he twice called on the Lord to act as Judge. He was content to leave his case in the hands of God rather than do what might seem right to the natural man. One of the things Peter remembered about our Lord was that "while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23 NASB). May God enable us to be as trustingly calm in the face of adversity!

Chapter 25

The death of Samuel brought to a close the period of the judges. The nation had now become a monarchy.

David's descendants would occupy Israel's throne forever, Christ being the fulfillment of the promise. The deep respect in which Samuel was held is indicated by the grief that swept across the nation when he died.

After the prophet's death, David went down to the wilderness of Paran, in the southern part of Judah, perhaps to get further away from Saul and his murderous schemes. The Carmel mentioned in verse 2 was not the mountain, which was in the north, but a town near Maon. Nabal was shearing his sheep here, and David, according to custom, sent some men to ask for a gift in return for the protection he had provided for Nabal's flocks. But Nabal replied in such a selfish and rude manner that David became enraged and started toward Carmel with 400 men to punish Nabal and his household (vv. 1-13).

Nabal's wife, Abigail, learned of the danger that her husband's ill-advised behavior had brought upon them. She quickly gathered a large supply of foodstuffs and

went out to meet David. As he approached Carmel, he was rehearsing to himself the goodness he had shown Nabal and the contempt Nabal had shown him (vv. 14-22). When Abigail met David, she prostrated herself at his feet and delivered a masterful and successful plea. She first admitted that her husband was true to his name (Nabal means “fool”). When David’s men had come earlier, she had not known about it. As she asked for forgiveness, she reminded him that the Lord had restrained him from bloodguilt and that God would punish his enemies—even Nabal. She had real spiritual insight into who David was, the anointed of the Lord, and praised him sincerely for fighting the Lord’s battles. How much better it would be when he became king if he did not have to look back on a time when he had stretched out his own hand and taken vengeance instead of leaving his enemies to the vengeance of the Lord (vv. 23-31)!

David was deeply impressed by these words of diplomacy and thanked her for preventing him from destroying Nabal. The Lord knows how to bring the right people into our lives to direct us and warn us. We should be thankful that He does. Abigail’s reasoning had been effective; her generous gift had been accepted. David left Nabal with the Lord (vv. 32-35). God wasn’t long in acting. It may be argued that Abigail violated God’s order by not consulting her husband and by usurping authority over him. Yet the Bible does not suggest that she acted wrongly. On the contrary, she probably saved Nabal and his household from destruction by her emergency action.

When Abigail returned home, Nabal was drunk. She waited until the next day to tell him what had happened.

When he heard the news, he was either seized with paralysis, a stroke, or a heart attack. Ten days later he died, leaving behind all the possessions he had selfishly hoarded to himself. Hearing of Nabal's death, David soon sent a proposal of marriage to Abigail, which with great humility she accepted. David had also acquired another wife, Ahinoam, since he had gone into hiding. Meanwhile, Michal, his first wife, had been given to another man (vv. 36-44).

In this story we see afresh that "whosoever exalteth himself (Nabal) shall be abased (he was killed by God), and he that humbleth himself (Abigail) shall be exalted (she became the wife of the king)" (Luke 14:11).

Chapter 26

Once again the men of Ziph reported David's whereabouts to Saul (cf. 23:19). Saul promptly gathered a force five times larger than David's meager band and came to the wilderness of Ziph. We are not told what happened to incite Saul anew. When the two men had last parted, they seemed somewhat reconciled (ch. 24). Maybe evil men had stirred up the king's hatred afresh (see v. 19). David spied out Saul's camp, and in the evening he and his nephew, Abishai, penetrated the camp and came to where Saul was sleeping. An unnatural slumber from the Lord made this possible. Abishai wanted to slay the king with a quick blow, but David forbade any such action because, although Saul was a wicked man, he was the Lord's anointed. It was the Lord's responsibility to deal with him. David took Saul's spear and water jug and left (vv. 1-12).

When David was safely outside the camp, he raised his voice and taunted Abner for his carelessness in guarding

the king. Such negligence was worthy of death. The jug and spear nearby told of Saul's second deliverance from death at David's hand. What still puzzled David was why Saul pursued him so untiringly when he had proven that he meant the king no harm. If the Lord had stirred up Saul against David, then David could satisfy Him by presenting a sacrifice. But if men had incited Saul's hostility, then they should be cursed because they were driving David away from the only sanctuary where he could worship God. The expression "Go, serve other gods" (v. 19b) was what these evil men were saying by their actions if not by their words. David asked that he might not die "away from the presence of the Lord" (v. 20 NASB) (i.e., in a foreign land). Saul was hunting a flea as one would hunt a partridge (vv. 13-20).

Saul apparently repented when he realized that David had spared his life again. He acknowledged that David was more righteous than he, for he sought David's life without cause, whereas David spared his life, though he could have killed the king in self-defense. With a final appeal to the Lord to take note of his righteousness, David went his way and Saul returned to his city (vv. 21-25).

Chapter 27

The pressure of constantly running from place to place one step ahead of death finally took its toll on David. In spite of the Lord's miraculous care for him, David's faith wavered. He lost sight of the fact that he was the anointed king of Israel. Would God appoint him king and then allow him to be killed before he could reign? Would God deliver him from the hand of Goliath only to deliver him into the hand of Saul? No, but circumstances have a

way of distorting one's outlook. Present danger often obscures the promises of God. David fled to the land of the Philistines again and contacted Achish, king of Gath. It had been a long time since he was here last, and Achish was probably aware that he was a fugitive. This heathen king welcomed him warmly, seeing in him a valiant warrior and an ally against Israel. This is not necessarily the same Achish that David met in 21:10, since Achish was a royal name among the Philistines. When Saul heard that David had fled the country, he stopped hunting for him (vv. 1-4).

The last time David had been in Gath (ch. 21), the servants of Achish had been suspicious of him and had sought to have him killed. David had not forgotten this. With a show of modesty, he now refused to dwell in the capital city and asked for a city of his own. He was given Ziklag, a city close to Israel's border that originally belonged to Judah (Josh. 15:31). During his 16-month stay with the Philistines, David made raids against the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites (vv. 5-9). These people were heathen inhabitants of Canaan whose destruction had been ordered by God (Exod. 17:14; Josh. 13:13; 1 Sam. 15:2,3)-Even in exile, David was fighting the Lord's battles. This presents quite a paradox: He could trust the Lord to preserve him for victory over Israel's enemies, but he could not trust Him for protection from Saul!

Chapter 28

Now David's position became extremely difficult. The Philistines were going to war against Israel, and David was ordered by the king to join them. To this he seemed to agree, although his words in verse 2 are capable of

two meanings—"You will know what your servant can do to assist you" or "You will know what your servant can do to double-cross you." Achish chose the first meaning and made David his personal bodyguard (vv. 1,2). The rival armies gathered in the northwest of Israel at the plain of Esdraelon (the valley of Armageddon). The Philistines camped at Shunem, and Israel at Gilboa. When Saul failed to get any response from the Lord from either dreams or the Urim or the prophets, he sought out a spirit medium. Earlier he had ordered all the mediums in Israel killed or exiled, according to the law. Now when a medium was located in the nearby town of En-dor, Saul disguised himself and went to her to seek counsel from the dead (vv. 3-8).

The medium's first concern was for her own safety. She reminded her visitor of the king's edict against spiritists. How Saul could promise protection in the name of the Lord, who had decreed the death of such persons, or how the medium could be assured of safety by an oath sworn to that God, is an enigma.

Commentators are disagreed as to what actually happened next. Some feel that an evil spirit impersonated Samuel, while others believe that God interrupted the seance unexpectedly by allowing the real Samuel to appear. The latter is preferred for the following reasons: The medium was startled by the appearance of Samuel instead of the familiar spirits she was used to dealing with; the text says clearly it was Samuel; the spirit prophesied accurately what would happen the following day.

Saul told Samuel why he had summoned him from the realm of the dead. Samuel's rebuke in verse 16 must

have cut the king deeply. Did he think Samuel could help him when the God whom Samuel served remained silent? Instead, Samuel confirmed Saul's deepest fears. The kingdom would be taken from him and given to David, as he had been told before. The Philistines would defeat Israel on the morrow, and Saul and his sons would join Samuel in death (vv. 11-19). This does not mean that they shared the same eternal destiny. If we judge them by their fruits, we have to conclude that Saul was an unbeliever whereas Jonathan was a man of faith.

All Saul's sins would be visited on him before another nightfall. With difficulty he was prevailed upon to eat something before he left. The fatted calf was killed, but not for the purpose of celebrating. Shrouded in gloomy silence, the condemned man ate his final meal before disappearing into the night (vv. 20-25).

Chapter 29

As the Philistines were assembling for battle, David and his men joined them, marching with Achish at the rear of the column. Some of the princes of the Philistines wisely objected to David's presence. They realized that he might turn on them during the battle. How could he better reconcile himself to king Saul than by producing a row of Philistine heads? Was he not the one who had been praised as the killer of more Philistines than Saul himself (vv. 1-5)?

Their arguments were reasonable, so Achish ordered David to return to Ziklag. David's answer was unworthy of a man of God. He protested that he should be allowed to enter the fight against "the enemies of my lord the king"—even though these enemies were his own people. David had lied to Achish before (ch. 27), and this was

probably another attempt to deceive the Philistines. If, as seems unlikely, he actually intended to fight against Israel, God prevented it and saved him from the shame of killing his fellow Israelites and strengthening the arm of the Philistines against them. David would not be allowed to use Goliath's sword against Israel (vv. 6-11).

Chapter 30

While David had been marching north with the armies of Achish, the Amalekites had raided Ziklag and taken the women and children captive. Thus when David returned he found only the smoldering remains of his city. Was this a judgment of God upon him for joining the Philistines? If so, David showed his great insight into the character of God, for he went to Him for comfort when everything and everyone was against him (vv. 1-6). He knew there was no one to turn to for strength in such an overwhelming crisis except to the God of whom it is said, "He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us" (Hos. 6:1 NASB).

After inquiring of the Lord, David set out after the Amalekites, assured of success. One-third of his men could travel no farther than the brook Besor because they were emotionally drained from their recent loss and physically exhausted from their three-day march to Ziklag. David left them there and went south with the remaining 400 men, tired yet pursuing. In a short while they came upon a sick Egyptian who had been left behind by his Amalekite master to die. He was given food and water and he soon regained a measure of strength. In return for promised safety, he led David to the Amalekite camp (vv. 7-15).

The last thing the drunken Amalekites expected was a surprise guest at their victory celebration. David sprang like a leopard on the revelers and completely overpowered the much larger force. Only 400 men escaped the sword. The Hebrew captives were freed unharmed and an immense amount of spoil was taken, all in less than 24 hours. David was given the sheep and cattle captured from the Amalekites as his portion; but some of his men didn't want to share the rest of the spoil with their comrades who had stayed behind at Besor. David made an ordinance that those who "stayed by the stuff would share equally with those who went to battle (see also Num. 31:27) (vv. 16-25). David divided his spoil into gifts for various friends back in Judah. These presents were sent to the places where he used to hide. They evidenced that God had prospered him against his enemies (vv. 26-31). He might also have been trying to cement his friendships to gain support in his struggle against Saul, not realizing that Saul was now dead.

Chapter 31

Whereas David enjoyed success in battle, Saul met defeat. The Israelites were pushed back and the king's three sons were slain. Saul himself was severely wounded by the archers. As he lay dying on Mount Gilboa, he begged his armor-bearer to kill him, lest the Philistines find him alive and torture him. But the man was afraid to strike the king, so Saul took his own life. Shortly thereafter the armor-bearer did the same (vv. 1-6). Israel now became totally demoralized, and they retreated before the invading army. When the Philistines came to strip the dead and found Saul and his sons among the fallen, they cut off Saul's head and sent it

throughout their land. His body and the bodies of his sons were taken to Beth-shan and hung on a wall. When the men of Jabesh-gilead heard of this, they marched the ten miles to recover the bodies. The remains were given a proper burial at Jabesh. These men had not forgotten how Saul had saved them from the Ammonites in his first major battle as king (ch. 11) (vv. 7-13). Cremation was not generally practiced in Israel. Perhaps it was used here because the bodies had been so mutilated. Also, it would prevent the Philistines from the possibility of ever dishonoring the bodies still further.

God's judgment on Saul was now complete (see notes on 1 Chrn. 10). Many times Saul had tried to arrange for David to be killed by the Philistines, but he himself was the one to eventually fall before them. David received the throne as appointed by God. Saul received the just recompense of his deeds, according to the justice of the Lord to which David often committed him.

1 Bishop Hall, quoted in Spurgeon's Devotional Bible, p. 222.

2 George Williams, The Student's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, p. 140.

3 Flavius Josephus, The Works of Flavius Josephus (Ant. vi 1:4), p. 178.

4 C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, The Books of Samuel, p. 68.

5 Matthew Henry, The Matthew Henry Commentary, p. 269.

6 Dr. Rendle Short, further documentation unavailable.

7 George Williams, op. cit., p. 152.

8 Michael Griffiths, Take My Life, p. 128.

9 DeRothschild, further documentation unavailable.

2 Samuel

Outline Of 2 Samuel

I. David’s Rise to Power (1—10)

A. Lament over Saul and Jonathan (1)

B. Coronation as king of Judah (2:1-7)

C. Conflict with Saul’s house (2:8—4:12)

D. Coronation as king of all Israel (5)

E. The ark brought to Jerusalem (6)

F. God’s covenant with David (7)

G. Defeat of Israel’s enemies (8)

H. Compassion shown to Mephibosheth (9)

I. Further conquests (10)

II. David’s Fall (11, 12)

A. Crimes against Bathsheba and Uriah (11)

B. Confession to the Lord (12)

III. David’s Troubles (13—20)

A. Rape of Tamar by Amnon (13:1-19)

B. Revenge by Absalom on Amnon, and flight of Absalom (13:20-39)

C. Return of Absalom to Jerusalem (14)

D. Revolt of Absalom and David’s flight (15—18)

E. David’s return from exile (19)

F. Rebellion of Sheba and his death (20)

IV. Appendices (21—24)

A. The famine and its termination (21)

B. Song of thanksgiving (22)

C. David's mighty men (23)

D. Sinful numbering of the people (24)

Second Samuel is the story of David's 40 years as king over God's people. His rise to power, his sins, and his subsequent problems are all part of the story.

Chapter 1

First Samuel records how the Lord kept David out of the battle in which Saul and Jonathan lost their lives (1 Sam. 29). Instead, he was busy fighting the Amalekites, who had raided Ziklag (1 Sam. 30). After he had returned to Ziklag, a messenger came to him from the north with news of Saul's death. The messenger wore torn clothes and had dirt on his head—symbols of mourning. He told how he had found Saul leaning wounded on his spear as the enemy's forces drew near. He said that Saul asked him, an Amalekite, to administer the death blow and that he complied with the king's request. This account of Saul's death is obviously in conflict with the one in 1 Samuel 31, where Saul is said to have committed suicide. The most reasonable explanation is that the Amalekite's account was a lie. He thought that David would be pleased to meet Saul's slayer and would reward him handsomely. Instead, David mourned deeply all that day, and then at evening he ordered the execution of the Amalekite because he had slain the Lord's anointed (vv. 1-16).

The Amalekites were the inveterate enemies of Israel (Exod. 17). One reason Saul lost the kingdom was because he had failed to thoroughly execute the Lord's wrath on them (1 Sam. 15).

Some Amalekites had recently been killed by David and his men for their plunder of Ziklag. So when this Amalekite arrived in camp and announced that he had killed Saul, it is little wonder that he received the sword and not a reward.

It was surely a mark of greatness on David's part that instead of rejoicing over Saul's death, he wept bitterly. Also, he composed a moving lament entitled "The Bow." (Verse 18 should read, as in the NASB, "and he told them to teach the sons of Judah the song of the bow; behold, it is written in the book of Jashar." It does not mean that he inaugurated lessons in archery, as the KJV seems to say.) The book of Jashar, or the book of the Upright, was probably a collection of poems concerning great men of the nation of Israel (see also Joshua 10:13). As far as is known, it is no longer in existence and certainly is not part of inspired Scripture.

The ode in verses 19-27 laments the death of Saul and Jonathan—the beauty of Israel. In poetic style, it cautions against letting the cities of the Philistines know of the death of the king and his sons lest they rejoice. The mountains of Gilboa, where Saul died, are called upon to suffer drought and barrenness. There the shield of Saul was cast down unanointed with oil (v. 21 NASB); that is, it was discarded and no longer oiled for battle. Tribute is paid to the bravery of Saul and Jonathan (v. 22) and their personal virtues. They were together in death as they had been in life (v. 23), but this should not

be pressed to include their eternal destiny. Those who benefited from Saul's reign are called on to weep (v. 24). The poem closes with a loving eulogy of Jonathan, David's close friend.

Chapter 2

With Saul dead and Israel without a king, David sought guidance from the Lord and was directed to go to Hebron, one of the cities of Judah. There the men of Judah anointed him as their king. When they informed him how the men of Jabesh-gilead had kindly buried Saul, David immediately sent a message of thanks to them and rather indirectly invited them to recognize him as king, as the men of Judah had done (vv. 1-7).

But not all the tribes of Israel wanted to recognize David as their monarch. Abner, the commander-in-chief of the late Saul and also his uncle, took Saul's only surviving son, Ishbosheth, and proclaimed him king. For 7½ years David reigned over the lone tribe of Judah, with Hebron as his capital. However, it was for only two of these years that Ishbosheth reigned over the other 11 tribes (vv. 8-11). It may have taken Abner five years to push the Philistines back out of Israel and establish Ishbosheth on his father's throne.

David had never asserted his right to the throne. Neither did he do so now. Rather, he chose to leave the matter in the hands of the Lord. If Jehovah had anointed him as king, Jehovah would subdue his enemies and bring him into the possession of his kingdom. The Lord Jesus similarly awaits the Father's timing to reign over the entire globe. His dominion is not recognized by all men now, but there is an appointed day in which every

knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:10,11).

In the course of time, Abner, the captain of the army of Israel (the 11 tribes) met Joab, the military leader of David's soldiers at Gibeon. Seated at opposite sides of a pool, they decided to let some of their men engage in a contest to determine who was militarily superior. When Abner suggested that the young men should arise and hold a contest, he did not expect that they would play (v. 14). It was a military engagement. The 12 Benjamites fought the 12 men of Judah, and they destroyed each other. Since the result was inconclusive, a general battle broke out between the rest of the men, with the result that Abner's men were beaten and fled in disarray (vv. 12-17).

One of Joab's brothers, the swift-footed Asahel, chased Abner with the desire to kill him. Abner at first tried to persuade Asahel to be satisfied with capturing a younger man. It seems that Abner realized that he could easily kill Asahel, but he did not want to do it because it would further antagonize Joab. When Asahel would not listen to Abner's second plea to stop pursuing him, Abner turned on him in self-defense and killed him with the pointed butt end of his spear (vv. 18-23).

Joab and his other brother, Abishai, continued to chase until they came to the hill of Ammah. There Abner pled with Joab to stop this needless civil war. Joab's reply (v. 27) may be understood in two ways. First, it may mean that if Abner had not issued the challenge (in verse 14), then the young men would have gone home peaceably. Or it may mean, as in the NIV, that if Abner had not called for a truce, then the young men would have

continued chasing their brothers until morning. In any case, Joab agreed to stop fighting. Abner and his men crossed over to Mahanaim, on the east side of the Jordan River where Ishbosheth had his capital. He had lost 360 men. Joab and his soldiers returned to Hebron, with only 20 men missing (vv. 24-32).

Chapter 3

During David's 7½ years at Hebron, his kingdom grew stronger and Saul's house, ruled by Ishbosheth, grew weaker. David's family also grew larger. When he first came to Hebron, he had two wives, Ahinoam and Abigail. Contrary to God's will, he married four more—Maacah, Haggith, Abital, and Eglah. By these six wives he had six sons, three of whom were to be a grief to him —Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah (vv. 1-5). (He had other sons later.)

While professedly serving Ishbosheth, Abner was actually strengthening his own political position because he saw the balance of power shifting to David. Ishbosheth accused Abner of having relations with Rizpah, a concubine of Saul, and probably interpreted this as an indication that Abner wanted to seize control of the 11 tribes. Whether Abner was guilty of this we do not know; he denied it vigorously and disrespectfully, and announced that he would shift his allegiance and that of the tribes of Israel to David. Ishbosheth was powerless to resist (vv. 6-11). "Am I a dog's head that belongs to Judah?" (v. 8 NASB) means "Am I a worthless, contemptible traitor who has been loyal to Judah in the past?" Abner now sent messengers to David, offering to turn over Israel to him.

Before David would agree to Abner's proposal, he demanded that Michal, Saul's daughter, be returned to him, hoping thereby to strengthen his claim to Saul's kingdom. Ishbosheth meekly assented and Michal was brought to David—to the great grief of her husband, Phaltiel. David's personal life thus became further entangled, and another dark chapter was written in his biography (vv. 12-16).

Abner then went to the tribe of Benjamin and to the other tribes that had followed Ishbosheth and told them that David was God's promised means of saving them from the oppression of the Philistines. Since their response was apparently favorable, he visited David and expressed his readiness to gather all Israel together in a great expression of allegiance (vv. 17-21).

While Abner was leaving David to carry out this plan, Joab returned to the royal house and heard of the day's events. After rebuking the king for so foolishly entertaining a spy, he secretly sent out soldiers to bring Abner back. As soon as Abner returned to Hebron, Joab pretended he wanted a private interview near the gate, but his real purpose was to kill Abner, which he did by smiting him in the abdomen, thus avenging his brother Asahel's death and eliminating a potential rival as commander in chief (vv. 22-30). Joab seemed unconcerned that Hebron was a city of refuge, where Abner was at least entitled to a trial (Num. 35:22-25). The expression "One that leaneth on a staff (v. 29 KJV) may mean a cripple. In the NASB it is rendered "one who takes hold of a distaff (that is, an effeminate man). The RSV similarly translates "one who holds a spindle," meaning unfit for war or heavy work.

David proclaimed a great time of mourning for Abner but took no action against Joab for murdering him. It grieved the king that Abner should have died so ingloriously, since his courage and power deserved a more honored death. The thought in verse 33 may be, “Did Abner die like an inexperienced fool, who knew not how to defend himself?” And the intended answer is “No, he fell victim to a deceitful, wicked plot.”1 The people knew by the king’s sorrow that Joab had acted independently. In fact, David publicly expressed his displeasure at the cruelty of the sons of Zeruiah (Joab and Abishai) and called on the Lord to punish them (vv. 31-39). In this chapter we have seen God using the sin and intrigue of men to give the united kingdom to David. He makes even the wrath of men to praise Him (Psa. 76:10).

Chapter 4

Abner’s death weakened the kingdom of Ishbosheth still further. As soon as the army had lost its powerful leader, two rebels rose up—Baanah and Rechab—and assassinated the king. They were able to do this by entering the house while Ishbosheth was taking his noontime nap. They pretended that they had come to pick up some wheat (vv. 1-7). The RSV of verse 6, following the Septuagint, reads, “And behold, the doorkeeper of the house had been cleaning wheat, but she grew drowsy and slept; so Rechab and Baanah his brother slipped in.”

This left only one male heir to the throne of Saul, a crippled lad by the name of Mephibosheth.

Baanah and Rechab brought Ishbosheth’s head to David in hope of winning his favor. These evil men tried to

suggest that the Lord had prompted their action (v. 8), but David knew better than that. God would not lead men to break His law in order to enthrone His king. God was well able to fulfill His promises to David without enlisting the aid of murderers. David told them that they were more guilty than the one who claimed to have murdered Saul, and ordered them to be slain immediately. Their bodies were exposed to the shame of public display, while the head of Ishbosheth was honorably buried in Abner's tomb (vv. 8-12).

Chapter 5

With words of loyalty and allegiance, the 11 tribes of Israel now joined Judah in acknowledging David as rightful king. Those who came are enumerated in 1 Chronicles 12:23-40. Thus began a reign over the united nation that was to last 33 years. In all, David's reign lasted 40 years (vv. 1-5).

Verse 3 records David's third anointing. He was first anointed by the prophet Samuel (1 Sam. 16:13). Then he was anointed as king over the house of Judah in Hebron (2:4). Now he was finally owned as rightful king by the entire nation.

One of David's first military acts was to capture the fortress on Mount Zion from the Jebusites. These heathen warriors considered their city so invincible that it could be defended by the lame and the blind'. David detected a weakness in the city's water system; he ordered his men to climb up through an underground watercourse which the Jebusites used to bring water to the city from a fountain below. The strategy was successful, and Jebus became Jerusalem, the capital of the nation of Israel (vv. 6-10 NASB). The latter part of

verse 8 looks back to the Jebusite taunt in verse 6, which later became a common saying. Millo (v. 9) was a part of the fortification of the ancient city. (The parallel account in 1 Chronicles 11 reveals that Joab led the successful attack on the city and thus secured his place as commander of David's forces.)

The Gentile king of Tyre, Hiram, sent materials and workmen to build a palace for David in Jerusalem. David took more wives and concubines while at Jerusalem, in violation of Deuteronomy 17:17, and additional sons and daughters were born to him (vv. 11-16). The royal line of the Messiah is traced through Solomon (v. 14). There are two other lists of the sons born to David in Jerusalem (1 Chrn. 3:5-8; 14:3-7), with minor variations (mostly in spelling) among the three lists.

Disturbed by news of Israel's unity and strong central government, the Philistines decided to attack. They gathered their forces at the valley of Rephaim, on the south of Jerusalem. Assured of victory by the Lord, David attacked the foe and defeated them. He called the place Baal-perazim, meaning "the master of breakthrough" (NASB marg.). The Lord had made breaches in the ranks of the enemy there (vv. 17-21). The idols which the Philistines abandoned were seized by David (v. 21) and burned (1 Chrn. 14:12) so as not to become stumbling blocks to future generations.

Sometime later, the Philistines returned to the same valley and threatened Israel. This time the Lord told David to go around to the rear of the enemy forces, opposite some balsam (not "mulberry" as in the KJV) trees. When he heard the sound of marching in the tops of the trees, he would know that the Lord was marching

against the Philistines. The result was that David destroyed the foe from Geba to Gezer (vv. 22-25). (Geba may refer to Gibeon—1 Chrn. 14:16.) Note that David did not assume that God's guidance for one battle (v. 19) would be the same for the next (v. 23). We must constantly seek God's will in everything.

Chapter 6

The events in chapter 6 did not take place immediately after those recorded in chapter 5. Second Samuel does not always follow a strict chronological order.

The last time we read about the ark of God was in 1 Samuel 7:1,2; it had been sent back by the Philistines and was placed in the house of Abinadab in Kirjath-jearim. Many years passed. Then David decided to bring it to Jerusalem, in order that the city might be the religious as well as the political capital. So he took 30,000 men of Israel to Baale-judah (the same as Kirjath-jearim) to get it. God had instructed that the ark was to be carried on staves, supported on the shoulders of the Kohathites (Num. 7:9). Instead, David made a new cart and with great jubilation brought the ark to the threshing floor of Nachon (called Chidon in 1 Chrn. 13:9). There the oxen stumbled, and the ark was in danger of falling off the cart. So Uzzah, a son of Abinadab, steadied the ark with his hand. Since it was forbidden for even the priests to touch the ark (Num. 4:15), Uzzah was instantly killed by the Lord (vv. 1-7). David protested to the Lord against this solemn judgment and temporarily abandoned his plan to bring the ark into the city. Rather, he had it placed in the house of Obed-edom, probably near Jerusalem (vv. 8-11).

It has frequently been asked why God smote Uzzah for touching the ark when the Philistines often touched it without being destroyed. The answer seems to be that "the nearer a man is to God, the more solemnly and speedily will he be judged for any evil." "Judgment must begin at the house of God."

"Was God's action too severe? We feel free to judge God because we lack a sense of His awesome holiness and majesty. The Ark was as close to a visible representation of God Himself as men would see until Jesus. Uzzah disregarded this. His death was a lasting lesson to the Israelites to take seriously the glory of their God. Do our language and our actions demonstrate that we mean it when we pray 'Hallowed be Thy Name'?"2

The Lord greatly blessed the house of Obed-edom during the three months the ark was in his house. Hearing of this, David decided to bring the ark to Jerusalem. The account in 1 Chronicles 15:13-15 tells us that during these three months David investigated the Scriptures to see how the ark was to be transported. The new cart was abandoned and the Levites carried the ark on their shoulders. After the bearers moved forward cautiously for six paces to make sure the Lord wasn't still displeased, David sacrificed an ox and a fading. Then, with dancing in the streets, the ark was brought to a temporary tent in the city of David. (It is likely that Psalm 68 was written at this time.) The king himself was so elated that he danced with joy. His wife, Michal, looked out a window and saw him clad in an ephod, acting in a manner which she considered unworthy of a king. When he returned home, she falsely accused him of indecently dancing in public. ("Uncovered" in verse 20 must be understood in the light of verse 14; David

was wearing a linen ephod instead of his customary royal clothes.) He answered that his dancing was an expression of his joy in the Lord and intimated that he did not intend to stifle his enthusiasm for the things of God. He would let himself be even more despised by men, and be humbled in his own eyes, but he would be honored by the “slave girls” Michal had spoken of (v. 22 NIV). Because of her critical attitude, Michal suffered the reproach of bearing no children to the day of her death (vv. 12-23). This is a needed reminder that a critical spirit produces barrenness.

Chapter 7

David felt that it was unfitting for him to dwell in a fine home while the ark of God was kept in a tent. So he notified the prophet Nathan of his intention to build a temple for the ark. Nathan at first approved, apparently because he acted without consulting the Lord (vv. 1-5). Then the word of the Lord came to him, informing him that David would not be allowed to build a temple for Jehovah.

The Lord reminded Nathan that He had dwelt in a tabernacle (tent) from the time of the Exodus from Egypt. The tent was suitable for the people of Israel as long as they were on the move. The time had not yet come for a settled temple (vv. 6-11). Then the Lord revealed to Nathan an unconditional covenant which He would make with David. This covenant promised that David would have a son (Solomon) who would build the temple; that this son’s throne would be established forever; that when he would sin, God would correct him, but His loving-kindness would not cease (vv. 12-15). It further promised that David’s throne would endure

forever, and that his own descendants would sit upon the throne (v. 16). David's dynasty has been interrupted since the Babylonian captivity, but it will be restored when Christ, the seed of David, returns to reign over all the earth.

"David wanted to build a temple for God, but Solomon was given the privilege. Undoubtedly the character of David's life work for God was fighting, not building. But even by this fighting he was clearing the way for another to lay the foundation of that house of worship which his heart had so fondly desired to build. After the warring was over, Solomon erected the temple from materials which David had prepared. David represents Christ in His suffering and victory over the great enemy. Solomon represents Christ in His glory after the suffering and the conflicts are finished. The church, which is the true temple of God, having Christ for its chief cornerstone, will be manifested in the last day. Now in the church's days of suffering and conflict the materials are being prepared for this glorious building for God."3

Deeply moved by God's covenant of grace, David entered the temporary tent and offered the prayer of thanksgiving recorded in verses 18-29. In it, "he expresses wonder at the past, at God's selecting one obscure in family and obscure in person; he wonders at the present: How is it Thou hast brought me thus far? and still more he wonders at the future, the provision made for the stability of his house in all time coming."4 "And this is the custom ('law' in margin) of man, O Lord God" (v. 19b NASB) means that God had treated David with the same love and condescension that He commanded men to show to one another.

Chapter 8

David's policy as king was to purge out of the kingdom the heathen inhabitants who rebelled against his rule. This policy resulted in the enlargement of the territory of Israel.

For example, he defeated the Philistines and seized "the chief city" (Metheg-ammah, KJV)—i.e., Gath (1 Chrn. 18:1). He had once played the part of a madman in Gath (1 Sam. 21:10-15); now he would serve as king. Also, he conquered the Moabites and used a measuring line to select two-thirds to be put to death. Moab must have shown treachery to Israel.

David's next victory was in the area of Syria. He defeated Hadadezer, king of a country named Zobah, between Hamath and Damascus, capturing 1700 horsemen and 20,000 infantrymen, and hamstringing most of the chariot horses. This means that a tendon in the leg was cut, making the animals unfit for warfare. When the Syrians of Damascus came to help Hadadezer, David destroyed 22,000 of them and made the Syrians his vassals. Then David returned to Jerusalem with much gold and bronze which he had captured from Hadadezer (vv. 3-8).

The neighboring king of Hamath congratulated David for his military triumph over Hadadezer and sent gifts of gold, silver, and bronze. These precious metals, together with all the other silver and gold David had won in his wars, were dedicated to the Lord and later used in the temple (vv. 9-12).

There is some confusion when we compare this chapter with 1 Chronicles 18. Verse 4 says that 1700 horsemen were captured while 1 Chronicles 18:4 says that 7000

horsemen were taken. The number in 2 Samuel may be from one battle, while the number in 1 Chronicles may be the total taken throughout the conflict. Or this may simply be a copyist's error. Another apparent difficulty is found in verse 13. It says that David killed 18,000 Syrians in the Valley of Salt. But 1 Chronicles 18:12 says that Abishai killed 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. In some Hebrew manuscripts "Edomites" is found in 2 Samuel 8:13.

Thus David's kingdom and power were greatly enlarged, and he ruled with justice and equity. Some of his chief officers are listed in verses 16-18: Joab—commander in chief of the army; Jehoshaphat—recorder; Zadok and Ahimelech (actually, Abiathar—see below)—priests; Seraiah—scribe or secretary (NASB); Benaiah—in charge of David's bodyguards; David's sons—chief rulers or royal advisers (NIV).

There is a textual problem in verse 17. There and in 1 Chronicles 18:16 and 24:6 Ahimelech is listed as the son of Abiathar, but in 1 Samuel 22:20 Abiathar is said to be the son of Ahimelech. The simplest solution is that in the verses listing Ahimelech as the son of Abiathar, a copyist may have transposed the names. It was Abiathar and not Ahimelech who was contemporary with Zadok (e.g., 20:25).

When Saul killed Ahimelech and his sons at Nob, Abiathar was the only survivor. He served David as priest while Saul named Zadok as his high priest. When David became king, he appointed Abiathar as high priest but did not depose Zadok.

Chapter 9

David remembered his covenant with Jonathan (1 Sam. 20:14-17) and wanted some opportunity to fulfill it. Ziba, a servant of the late king Saul, reported that a crippled son of Jonathan was living in Lo-debar, on the east side of the Jordan River. David had him brought to Jerusalem, ordered that the family property be returned to him, and arranged for him to eat at the royal table. Ziba and his sons were appointed to serve Mephibosheth (vv. 1-13).

Mephibosheth is a picture of an unconverted soul living in a barren land (Lo-debar means "no pasture") and sold under sin (Machir means "sold") (v. 4). He was an outcast from the fallen house of Saul. He was unable to come to the king to beg for mercy, being lame in both feet. But the gracious sovereign sought him out in order to bless him. Once found, Mephibosheth was given great riches and a place of fellowship at the king's table. The parallels to salvation are obvious. Like Mephibosheth, we were helpless (unable to come to God); our condition was hopeless (being part of a fallen race). But by grace we became objects of divine favor. We have been elevated to a place in the family of God and made joint-heirs with Christ.

Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my heart, my life, my all!
—Isaac Watts

Chapter 10

Apparently Nahash, the king of the Ammonites, had done David a favor at one time. This was the same Nahash whom Saul defeated early in his reign (1 Sam. 11). Nahash might have helped David when he was a

fugitive, since Saul was their mutual enemy for a time. Now David desired to repay that loyalty, so he sent messengers to Hanun, the son of Nahash, who was crowned king when his father died. The princes of Ammon suspected David's men of being spies, and so Hanun ordered them to be subjected to personal insults and indignities. David was angered when he saw his humiliated messengers (vv. 1-5). As soon as the Ammonites learned of this, they prepared for war against Israel by hiring the Syrians from the north (see 1 Chrn. 19). Thus David's men, under Joab, faced two armies— the Syrians and the Ammonites (vv. 6-8).

John Haley gives the following explanation of the apparent inconsistencies between verse 6 and 1 Chronicles 19:6,7: "Bethrehob was one of the little kingdoms of Mesopotamia, as also were Maacah, Zobah, and Tob petty monarchies of Syria. Thus the names and numbers agree as follows:5

2 Samuel | 1 Chronicles
Syrians of Beth-rehob and Zobah 20,000 | Syrians from Zobah, etc. 32,000
Syrians of Tob 12,000 | Syrians of Maacah (number not given) 1,000
Syrians of Maacah 1,000 |
33,000 | 33,000

Joab divided his men into two groups. He himself commanded the choicest soldiers of Israel in a drive against the Syrians. His brother Abishai led the remaining Israelites against Ammon. Both generals agreed to send help should the other be threatened. The Syrians fled as Joab and his men attacked in the open

field. Then the frightened Ammonites retreated into their city (probably Rabbah) (vv. 9-14).

Shortly thereafter the Syrians reorganized their forces and solicited aid from other Syrian states. They marched as far as Helam, east of the Jordan (exact location unknown), where David's army met and defeated them. The Israelites destroyed 700 charioteers (NASB) and 40,000 horsemen. (In 1 Chronicles 19:18 the losses are stated as 7000 charioteers [NASB] and 40,000 footmen. Williams suggests that there was a cavalry brigade of 40,000 men with 700 light chariots, and an infantry brigade of 40,000 with 7000 heavy chariots.)6 This battle convinced the Syrians of David's power, so they made peace with Israel and refused to help the Ammonites anymore (vv. 15-19).

Chapter 11

Instead of going to war against the Ammonites in the spring of the year, David sent Joab against them while he himself remained idly at home. Times of idleness are often times of greatest temptation. One evening he looked out from the roof of his palace and saw a beautiful woman bathing. Inquiry revealed that she was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of David's mighty warriors. David sent for her and committed adultery with her. She purified herself from her ceremonial uncleanness, then returned to her own home. When she knew she was pregnant, she sent the news to David (vv. 1-5).

The king then plotted to hide his sin. First he called Uriah back from the war, pretending that he wanted to hear of the progress of Joab and the army. After Uriah had answered his questions, David instructed him to

return home, hoping that he would have intercourse with Bathsheba. Then when the baby was born, Uriah would think that it was his own child. But Uriah upset David's plans. Instead of returning home, he slept at the door of the king's house; he did not feel he could enjoy the comforts of home as long as his nation was at war. Uriah's loyalty and faithfulness stand in marked contrast to the king's treachery (vv. 6-13).

Then David stooped to his lowest act of infamy. He ordered Uriah to carry a letter to Joab—a letter which contained Uriah's death sentence. The king ordered Joab to put Uriah in the forefront of the battle, where death would be inevitable. Then Uriah would not be alive to disown the baby that would be born. Joab directed the battle so that Uriah would be sure to be killed. He ordered his men to go right up to the walls of the city, where they would be easy targets for the Ammonites on the wall. Militarily it was ridiculous, but it succeeded in eliminating Uriah as well as many other loyal Israelites.

When Joab sent news back to David, he knew the king would be angered by the military defeat. David would say, "Why did you go so near the city? Didn't you remember how Abimelech, the son of Gideon (Jerubbesheth) was killed when he did this very thing?" (see Judg. 9:50-55.) So Joab instructed the messenger to forestall the king's wrath by adding, "Uriah is dead also." This would make David forget about the military reverse of the day (vv. 14-21).

The messenger reported to David as instructed. Then he was told to carry back a message to Joab, saying that military reverses are inevitable and that Uriah's death

should not cause grief because in warfare the sword kills indiscriminately. Thus David hypocritically tried to hide his deep guilt “with a fatalistic comment about the inevitability and capriciousness of death” (vv. 22-25).

After the customary time of mourning, David sent for Bath-sheba to become his wife. Sometime later, the baby was born (vv. 26,27). “That the Scriptures report this incident from the life of David is an indicator of their faithfulness. They give us an honest and uncut view of God’s people the way they really were, warts and all.”7

Chapter 12

It is generally believed that about a year elapsed between chapters 11 and 12. During that time the hand of the Lord was heavy upon David; his spiritual struggle is described in Psalms 32 and 51. The prophet Nathan came to him with this parable, asking David’s judgment on the matter: A rich man with many sheep was unwilling to use any of his own animals as food when a visitor called on him. Instead, he took the one little ewe lamb belonging to a poor man and slaughtered it. David could judge sin in others more easily than in himself. He angrily declared that the man should restore fourfold and deserved to die for his sin (NASB). Nathan fearlessly pointed the accusing finger at David, saying, in effect, “You are the man who did it. God dealt graciously with you, making you king, enriching you, giving you everything that your heart could desire. But you took Bathsheba from her husband and then killed him to cover your crime” (vv. 1-9).

The king’s solemn sentence was then pronounced. His children would be a grief to him. His family would be torn by bloody conflict. His wives would be stolen from

him and violated publicly (see 2 Sam. 16:22). His sin would become a matter of general knowledge. David then came to the place of repentance and confessed his sin as being against the Lord. “Note the ‘also’ in verse 13. A man puts away his own sin when in sincerity he confesses it. That makes it possible for God also to put it away. “8 Nathan immediately assured him that the penalty of his sin was remitted—he would not die. But the consequences of his sin would follow him (vv. 10-14). Actually, he would have to restore fourfold (Exod. 22:1), as he himself had decreed concerning the rich man in the parable: The baby would die; Amnon would be murdered (ch. 13); Absalom would be slain (ch. 18); Adonijah would be executed (1 Kgs. 2).

When the baby became sick, David prostrated himself in prayer. He was deeply grieved. But when he learned that the baby had died, he arose and ate, explaining that the baby could not return, but that he, David, would join the baby in death (vv. 15-23). Verse 23 has been a source of great comfort to believing parents who have lost infants and young children. We can be confident that children who die before they reach the age of accountability go to heaven because Jesus said, “Of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14). That David possessed a deep understanding of God’s character is evident by the way he responded to God’s judgment. Before the blow fell he prayed, knowing that Jehovah was a God of mercy. After the blow fell he worshiped, knowing that Jehovah was a God of righteousness. He forgot the things that were behind, accepted the divine discipline, and looked ahead to the future. He did not despair because he knew that God would yet bless him. He was right. Bathsheba gave birth to another son, Solomon, who was destined to

succeed his father as king. Through the prophet Nathan, God gave the child the additional name of Jedidiah (meaning “beloved of the Lord”) (vv. 24,25).

The narrative in verse 26 returns to the attack against Rabbah interrupted at 11:1 by David’s sin. It seems that Joab had captured all but one portion of the city, perhaps the fortress on the top. (Josephus says that Joab captured the city’s water supply, making surrender imminent.)9 Then he called for David to come and finish the job, thus giving him complete credit for the victory. It was a striking act of selflessness on Joab’s part. Joab was at best an unpredictable person. At times he seemed to show a real strength of character. But his overall behavior was that of a clever, ruthless, wicked schemer. David succeeded in capturing Rabbah and was rewarded with a crown of gold weighing a talent, plus much other booty (vv. 26-30).

Commentators are disagreed as to whether the last verse describes cruel punishment to which David subjected the Ammonites or whether it simply describes menial agricultural work or industrial servitude. The RSV reads: “And he brought forth the people who were in it, and set them to labor with saws and iron picks and iron axes, and made them toil at the brick kilns; and thus he did to all the cities of the Ammonites.”

Chapter 13

Absalom was David’s son by Maacah, whereas Amnon was a son by Ahinoam; thus they were half-brothers. Amnon lusted after Tamar, a full sister of Absalom, and therefore his own half-sister. He did not see how he could get near her because of her secluded life. Then Jonadab suggested a solution. By pretending sickness,

Amnon lured her into his bedroom to nurse him and then forcibly raped her. After the crime was committed, he hated her more than he had ever loved her, as is so often the case. Lust and hatred are closely related. He tried to get rid of her, but she would not leave. So he finally had her expelled by force, hoping that "out of sight" would be "out of mind." She wore the symbol of mourning, and this alerted Absalom to what had happened. He comforted her as if he did not think it was very serious, but actually he was already plotting revenge against Amnon (vv. 1-20).

Disgraced and unwanted for marriage, through no fault of her own, Tamar remained desolate in her brother's house. This probably means that she lived and died unwed. Lust hurts the innocent as well as the guilty.

Though David was angry, he did not punish Amnon as he should have done—probably because his own sin was so fresh in everyone's mind. "He knew his duty, but his hands were tied. This is what willful sin does in robbing us of moral freedom, liberty of speech and testimony."10 The fact that Amnon was his firstborn (1 Chrn. 3:1) and the natural successor to the throne might also have influenced David.

Absalom waited his time for vengeance. It came after two years. A great celebration was planned, as always, at the time of sheep-shearing near Bethel. Absalom's urgent invitation failed to attract his father, probably because David wanted to spare his son heavy expense. But it did succeed in bringing all the king's sons, and most important of all, Amnon, who as the eldest son represented his absent father. At a predetermined signal, Absalom's servants killed Amnon. The rest of the

princes fled back toward Jerusalem in panic. In the meantime, a report reached David that all of his sons were slain, and again he was plunged into mourning. Jonadab corrected this with the information that only Amnon had been killed and that Absalom had plotted his death since the day that Tamar was violated. Shortly thereafter David's sons returned to Jerusalem with great lamentation, confirming Jonadab's report that they were still alive (vv. 21-36).

Absalom fled for his life to Geshur (in Syria), where his mother had lived. (In fact, Talmai, the king of Geshur, was his maternal grandfather.) Absalom lived in Geshur for three years. Amnon was older than Absalom and until his death was next in line to the throne. With Amnon dead, Absalom had visions of himself on the throne (vv. 37-39). Verse 39 means that David longed to see Absalom again, after his grief over Amnon's death had subsided with the passing of time.

Chapter 14

Joab realized that the king longed to have Absalom back in Jerusalem. But the people knew that Absalom was guilty of murder and should be executed. Thus the fear of public disapproval kept David from bringing Absalom back.

So Joab sent a woman of Tekoa (near Bethlehem) to David with a family situation similar to David's. Pretending to be in deep mourning, she told how one of her sons had killed the other. Now her family was demanding the death of her only heir. This would completely wipe out the family name from the earth (vv. 2-7).

At first the king told her to return home and await an answer, hoping perhaps to avoid guilt in exonerating the murderer. But she wanted an answer immediately so she could trap David by his own decision. She offered to assume any guilt which his decision might involve (v. 9). King David made another general statement, promising her security. Then she asked him point-blank for assurance that her son would not be killed. As soon as he gave this, she had him trapped. If he would grant this pardon to her son, why would he not restore his own son, Absalom (v. 13)?

“The woman’s pretended situation is roughly analogous to David’s. One son is dead, and his relatives are calling for the death of the guilty one, as retributive revenge (v. 7). David’s decision showed mercy and suspended the usual blood-vengeance that often, in the Middle East, continued through many generations. But the woman presses on to apply the story to David and Absalom, and again, as with Nathan, David is caught in the web of his own moral wisdom. He is bound to restore, with protection, the banished and fearful Absalom.”11

With regard to the first two clauses of verse 14, she apparently meant to suggest that, like water spilt on the ground, that which was past (i.e., the death of Amnon) could not be recalled, so why dwell on that. Possibly also, that life is too short to be wasted in a prolonged quarrel.12 The last part of verse 14 seems to mean that God does not immediately destroy an offender (as David should well know) but devises means by which the sinner might be forgiven and restored. If God acts in this manner, why should not the king do so too? The woman said that she came to the king expecting such Godlike clemency. She had obtained it for her own son, and now

she was pleading for his son. The king suspected that Joab had engineered the plot, and the woman freely admitted it. King David weakly ordered Joab to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem in spite of the fact that Absalom was unrepentant. It was most unrighteous for David to do this, and he was to pay for it dearly (vv. 15-23).

For two years Absalom dwelt in Jerusalem without being permitted into his father's presence. (His natural beauty and luxurious growth of hair are mentioned as factors that would aid him in stealing the hearts of the people of Israel.) After two years Absalom tried to contact Joab for permission to see the king. Joab refused to come to him twice, so Absalom ordered his field of barley to be burned. This brought Joab to his door quickly. Absalom's request for an audience with his father was granted, and the two were reunited (vv. 24-33).

It had been seven years since Tamar had been raped and five years since the murder of Amnon. For five years Absalom had not seen his father. Though David had forgiven him and brought him back to Jerusalem instead of executing him, he had refused to forget what had happened. But when the two men finally met, Absalom received a complete pardon. He then took the favor his father had shown him and used it as a platform from which to launch a revolution (chs. 15-18). David spared his son's life, but in response Absalom schemed his father's death.

Joab's actions in all this seemed designed to obtain David's favor and also the favor of Absalom, who was next in line as king.

Chapter 15

Up to now Absalom had concealed his desire to be king. But now he traveled with an impressive entourage. Also he went boldly up to the gate of the city (where legal matters were settled) and acted as if he were the only one in Israel who was genuinely interested in the welfare of the people. He practically accused his father of failure to provide adequate legal aid and said that if he were king, the people would receive the justice they deserved. He courted the favor of people from the various cities of Israel (vv. 1-6).

After four years (see v. 7 RSV), Absalom received permission to go to Hebron, ostensibly to fulfill a vow he made while in exile. Hebron was probably disaffected because David had moved his capital from there to Jerusalem. Also, Hebron was the place of Absalom's birth. The 200 men who accompanied Absalom did not know that his real purpose was to announce the formation of a new government, with himself as king. Ahithophel, one of David's counselors and the grandfather of Bathsheba (cf. 11:3 with 23:34), deserted to Absalom, and many of the people joined Absalom in his conspiracy to usurp the throne. Perhaps Ahithophel wanted to get even with David for the latter's sin with Bathsheba (vv. 7-12).

On hearing the news, David decided that the situation was serious and that he should abandon Jerusalem, so he gathered his household together immediately and fled to the last house (v.

17), leaving only ten concubines behind. The last house was probably in the suburbs of Jerusalem.

Among those who went with David was a group of Philistines who had left Gath with him. One of these was Ittai, the Gittite. When he started out to follow, the king urged him to return. After all, he was not a Jew; he was an exile; he had only recently joined the ranks; and David's cause was at best uncertain. But Ittai would not be dissuaded. He resolutely determined to accompany the king, no matter what the cost might be. David rewarded the loyalty of this Gentile by permitting him and his followers to accompany him into exile (vv. 13-22). "… surely wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be" (v. 21 NASB). Believers should have the same devotion to the King of kings during His rejection as Ittai had to David.

They crossed the brook Kidron (v. 23), east of Jerusalem, and headed for the Jordan Valley. Hundreds of years later David's Greater Son would retrace his steps, Himself a rejected King (John 18:1). David crossed the Kidron and fled to save his life. Jesus crossed the valley and prayed in Gethsemane, en route to giving His life a ransom for many.

Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, came out of the city with the ark, intending to follow David into exile. But he sent them back with the hope that the Lord would allow him to return. Also, he told the priests that they could be more help to him right in Jerusalem (as a sort of fifth-column among Absalom's men). He would go as far as the west bank of the Jordan and await word from them as to the progress of Absalom's rebellion (vv. 24-29).

David ascended the Mount of Olives with his faithful followers in deep mourning, praying that God would

defeat whatever counsel Ahithophel might give to Absalom. At the summit of the Mount of Olives, the king was met by Hushai, the Archite. David asked him to return to Jerusalem and pretend loyalty to Absalom. In this way he might be able to counteract whatever advice Ahithophel might offer. He could relay any important news to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, who in turn would send their sons with reports to David. Hushai reached Jerusalem just as Absalom was arriving to take over the government (vv. 30-37).

Rather than becoming bitter at his enforced exile, David submitted meekly to what God had allowed (vv. 25,26). According to its title, Psalm 3 was composed at this time. In this psalm we find that David's trust in the Lord was unshaken as the storm broke over him.

Chapter 16

After David passed the summit of Olivet, Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, met him with a large supply of food and wine, plus two donkeys. When David asked about Mephibosheth, Ziba falsely reported (see 19:27) that the son of Jonathan had stayed in Jerusalem in hopes that the kingdom would return to the house of Saul and thus to him as the next in line. David believed this lie and ordered that Mephibosheth's property should become Ziba's (vv. 1-4).

At Bahurim, on the road to Jericho, a descendant of Saul named Shimei came out and cursed David fiercely, charging him with the blood of Saul's house. Abishai, one of David's officers, wanted to kill Shimei on the spot, but the king would not allow it. He suggested that the Lord may have told him to curse. He pointed out that, after all, a member of Saul's house had more cause to

seek his life than his own son, Absalom. Also, perhaps David remembered the death of Uriah and realized that Shimei's accusations were not entirely without foundation. And David hoped that Shimei's excessive hostility might move God to have mercy (v. 12). As David and his men headed for the Jordan, Shimei followed them, cursing and throwing dust and stones. Finally the exiled king reached the river, where he and his party refreshed themselves (vv. 5-14).

The scene now switches back to Jerusalem, where Absalom had just arrived. Hushai made a loud and vigorous display of loyalty to Absalom. At first he was suspected but finally accepted by the usurper (vv. 15-19).

Ahithophel's first counsel to Absalom was that he should go in to the ten concubines David had left in Jerusalem. Such an act, disgraceful in itself, would be an unspeakable insult to David, would make reconciliation out of the question, and would constitute a direct claim to the throne. Absalom accepted the advice by going in to the royal harem, thus fulfilling Nathan's prophecy in 12:11,12.

Ahithophel's counsel was highly respected in those days. Absalom followed it unquestioningly, as his father had done. But when we remember that Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather, we can see how the desire for revenge would determine this particular counsel (vv. 20-23).

Chapter 17

Having been successful in his first counsel, Ahithophel next advised that he would muster 12,000 men, overtake

David, kill him unexpectedly, and bring his followers back to Absalom (vv. 1-4).

Absalom was pleased but decided to call Hushai for his advice. This was the opportunity Hushai had been waiting for. He said that this second bit of counsel by Ahithophel was not good. After all, David and his men were enraged by the insurrection, and they would fight fiercely. And David was too wise to spend the night with his troops; he would be hiding in a cave somewhere. If Ahithophel's first attack was not successful, then panic would spread throughout the nation, and Absalom's cause would be lost. Hushai had an alternate plan, which seemed to indicate his loyalty to Absalom but which in reality was designed to provide additional time for David to escape and to include the possibility of Absalom's death. He suggested a general mobilization of all the armies of Israel, led by Absalom. Such an army would be invincible. David would be attacked, and escape would be impossible. Absalom decided that Hushai's advice was best, so he rejected Ahithophel's plan, as David had prayed (15:31) (vv. 5-14).

Hushai immediately sent word to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, and instructed them to notify David to cross the Jordan and escape to safety. The priests sent the message by a maidservant to their sons who were waiting at En-rogel, at the outskirts of the city. However, a lad saw this secret meeting and reported the spies to Absalom. Accordingly, the two sons of the priests, Jonathan and Ahimaaz, hid in a well (dry cistern) at Bahurim until the search parties had passed. Then they escaped and carried the news to David. David crossed the Jordan, putting this natural barrier between his

forces and those of Absalom. He marched to Mahanaim, a city in the land of Gilead.

Ahithophel became despondent because his counsel had been rejected, and because he perceived that David would be victorious. He returned to his home, set his house in order, and hanged himself (v. 23). He was a "type" of Judas Iscariot, in life and in death. Absalom pursued his father across the Jordan to Gilead, having appointed Amasa as commander of his forces (vv. 25,26). Amasa's father was an Ishmaelite by birth (1 Chrn. 2:17) but an Israelite by religion (v. 25). He was David's nephew and a first cousin of Joab.

While David was encamped at Mahanaim, three men came to him with necessary, nonperishable provisions for him and his people; they were Shobi, Machir, and Barzillai. Shobi was a son of Nahash, the deceased king of the Ammonites. His brother Hanun had rejected David's goodwill and suffered for it (ch. 10). But Shobi, although by birth an alien, cared more for Israel's king than most of the Jews did. Likewise, many Gentiles have received Him who was rejected by "His own" (John 1:11). Machir had cared for Mephibosheth for many years, until David brought the latter to Jerusalem (9:3-5). He ministered to those in need, whether a lame prince or a dethroned king. Those who give of their substance to aid the cause of Christ through hospitality will have their kindnesses returned a hundredfold when He returns in glory. Barzillai helped sustain David the entire time he stayed in Mahanaim. He was a very wealthy man and his support meant a lot to the king (19:31-39). On his deathbed, David told Solomon to elevate the sons of Barzillai to places in the royal court (1 Kgs. 2:7). Christ won't forget those who have

ministered to Him; they will be given positions of honor in His kingdom.

Chapter 18

David divided his army into three companies, with Joab, Abishai, and Ittai as the three generals. The king wanted to participate in the coming battle, but the people persuaded him to remain in the city and send help if needed. As the soldiers marched out of the city, David gave public orders to his generals to deal gently with Absalom. The battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim, east of the Jordan and near Mahanaim. There were 20,000 fatalities that day among Absalom's troops, largely the result of the dense forest which trapped the soldiers. David's army was victorious. As Absalom was fleeing through the forest, he was caught by his head in a great oak tree, and the mule went on without him. It is a sort of poetic justice that that part of his body of which he was so proud became the means of his downfall (vv. 1-9).

The messenger who reported Absalom's helpless position to Joab was rebuked for not killing the rebel. He carefully explained that no amount of money would induce him to violate the king's instructions. Besides, if he killed Absalom, the news would get back to the king, and Joab would not come to his defense. Joab considered all this talk a waste of time. He plunged three darts into Absalom's heart, then let his ten armor-bearers administer the coup de grace. All this was against the king's command, but it was best for the kingdom. David had consistently refused to punish his sons for their crimes, so the task fell to someone else.

As soon as the deed was done, Joab wisely called a halt to the fighting, since his major objective had been accomplished. Absalom's body was thrown into a pit and covered with a heap of stones. This was in marked contrast to the monument which he had erected for himself, probably near Jerusalem. Absalom had three sons (14:27), but they must have died young and left him without an heir (v. 18). Consequently, he had built the monument to preserve his name for posterity (vv. 10-18).

Ahimaaz wanted to carry the news to David, but Joab did not want him to. It seems that Ahimaaz had a reputation for being a bearer of good news (v. 27b), and it would have been out of character for him to bring the news of Absalom's death. So Joab sent a Cushite (Cushi, KJV) as the official messenger. But after he left, Ahimaaz persuaded Joab to let him go also, even if he would receive no reward for the errand (v. 22b). He succeeded in overtaking the Cushite by taking a quicker route (vv. 19-23).

David was on the lookout for news from the battle. The watchman reported one runner approaching, then another. When David heard that the first resembled Ahimaaz, he prepared himself for good news because Ahimaaz had always brought welcome messages in the past. Drawing near, Ahimaaz ceremoniously announced that the Lord had smitten the rebel army. But when David asked about Absalom, Ahimaaz's courage failed, and he gave a vague answer about seeing a tumult but not knowing the details (vv. 24-30).

By then the Cushite had arrived. He announced that David's enemies had been defeated. The inevitable question from the king about Absalom brought the blunt

reply that all David's enemies should be like that young man—in other words, dead. This news plunged David into very deep mourning. His pathetic lament is recorded in verse 33. This was one of the greatest griefs of his life, and it is doubtful that he ever forgave Joab for it (vv. 31-33).

Chapter 19

So great was the king's sorrow that the people felt ashamed and guilty. They acted as if they were victims rather than victors. Joab was impatient with all this and delivered a stern rebuke to the king. He complained that David seemed more interested in his enemies than in his faithful followers, and that he was ungrateful to those who had saved his life. He warned that if David did not immediately show a kindly interest in his people, they would forsake him that night. David complied by taking a position by the gate of the city and talking to the people (vv. 1-8).

In the meantime confusion reigned in the land of Israel. The people were quarreling among themselves. King David, who had saved them from the Philistines, was in exile, they reasoned, and Absalom, their self-appointed ruler, was dead. A movement thus began to restore David to his throne (vv. 8-10). "Why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back?" (v. 10) is an appropriate question for a sleeping church today.

When David heard that the ten tribes of Israel were talking about restoring him to the throne, he sent two priests to the leaders of Judah, asking why they, his blood relatives, were the last to bring him back as king. Judah had supported Absalom heavily in the rebellion, and doubtless some resentment or fear lingered.

David decided to remove Joab as commander in chief (probably because Joab had killed Absalom) and to appoint Amasa to take his place. Amasa, a nephew of David, had only recently been Absalom's general. "To outside observers it will appear that the king punishes loyalty and rewards rebellion, a practice which hardly produces political stability."13 But these moves won the people of Judah over to David's side, and they sent a unanimous "welcome home" message to him (vv. 11-15).

Shimei, who had cursed David previously, and Ziba, who had slandered Mephibosheth, came rushing down to the Jordan River to meet the returning monarch. Shimei's profuse apology was probably insincere; his great desire was to escape punishment now that David was in power again. In the enthusiasm of the moment, the king overruled Abishai's desire to kill Shimei, and instead promised him amnesty (vv. 16-23). But David did not forget Shimei's curses. He later ordered Solomon to deal ruthlessly with the foul-mouthed Benjamite (1 Kgs. 2:8,9).

Mephibosheth also came to meet the king. It was obvious from his appearance that he had mourned David's exile from the day it began. He had been truly loyal to the king, in spite of Ziba's false charges against him. The king spoke rather roughly to him for not accompanying him into exile. Mephibosheth explained that he had asked Ziba to saddle an ass, and when Ziba had failed to do it, Mephibosheth was helpless, being a cripple. He stated frankly that Ziba had slandered him but that injustice did not matter as long as the king had returned. When David rather unfairly ruled that Ziba and Mephibosheth should divide the land between them, the crippled son of Jonathan revealed the true loyalty of

his heart: “Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house” (vv. 24-30).

Barzillai, the 80-year-old Gileadite, was another true friend to David. He had provided the king with food at Mahanaim. Now he accompanied him to the Jordan. David invited him to go with him to Jerusalem, promising him that he would be well cared for. But Barzillai refused to go on the grounds of his short life expectancy, his inability to discern between what was pleasant and unpleasant (good and bad), his loss of taste, and his deafness. He would only be a burden to the king if he went. So he agreed to accompany David a little way past the Jordan and then return to his own city. His suggestion that Chimham (perhaps his son) should go with David was readily accepted (vv. 31-39).

By now a great procession had formed—all the men of Judah and half the men of the other tribes—to bring the king back to Jerusalem.

Internal strife broke out because Judah had taken such a prominent place in the restoration of the king (i.e., bringing him over the Jordan) without inviting the ten tribes to participate. Judah explained that David was their relative and that they had not profited in any way above the others by taking the lead. The ten tribes argued that they had ten times as much right to participate as Judah. The fierceness of Judah’s words was an indication of the serious trouble that lay ahead (vv. 40-43).

Chapter 20

A wicked man named Sheba, of the tribe of Benjamin (and possibly related to Saul), took the words of Judah (19:42) and turned them into the basis for a rebellion. The men of Judah had claimed David as their own. Sheba now defiantly announced that the ten tribes had no part in David and were seceding. Only the tribe of Judah was left to David. Later events indicate that Sheba had a relatively small following. The expression “every man of Israel” (v. 2) must be understood in a restricted sense, involving only the dissident men of the ten tribes.

On reaching Jerusalem, the king found the ten concubines he left there, who had been dishonorably treated by Absalom. David arranged for them to be kept in a house by themselves for the rest of their lives, as if in widowhood (v. 3).

By now Joab had been demoted, and Amasa, Absalom’s rebel commander, was in charge of David’s army. The king ordered him to assemble the soldiers of Judah in three days to pursue and capture the rebel leader, Sheba. For some unexplained reason, Amasa did not complete the job within the time given, so David ordered Abishai to take command and set out with chosen men to prevent Sheba from getting established in fortified cities. Joab was among those who went with Abishai (vv. 4-7).

As they reached a great stone marker in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Joab, dressed in a soldier’s uniform, advanced to meet Amasa, and as he did so his sword dropped to the ground. It seems that he did this purposefully. He then picked up his sword and moved toward his unsuspecting cousin. With a great show of

friendliness, Joab grabbed Amasa's beard as if to kiss him, then killed him with one thrust of the sword (vv. 8-10a).

When Joab and Abishai began to pursue Sheba, their followers were immobilized by the sight of Amasa wallowing in his blood on the highway. Not until his body was removed did Joab's men follow him (vv. 10b-13). The hunt for Sheba led to the far north, to the city of Abel of Beth-maachah. This was located north of the waters of Merom. It was a city famous for its wise people. As Joab laid siege to the city, a wise woman called down to him and asked him why he was going to destroy a mother city in Israel (i.e., an important city) that had always been proverbial for its wisdom. (According to Deuteronomy 20:10ff., there should be negotiations before a city was destroyed.) When Joab explained that he was simply after the rebel leader, Sheba, who was hiding inside, she agreed to have him killed and his head thrown out as proof that he was dead. As soon as this was done, Joab blew the trumpet and returned to Jerusalem, his mission accomplished. Sheba's revolt probably did not last more than a week (vv. 14-22).

David had demoted Joab, appointing first Amasa (19:13) and then Abishai (20:6) in his place. But Joab had regained his position as commander in chief.

The list of the king's important officials in verses 23-26 is largely the same as that in 8:15-18. Joab headed the army; Benaiah was in charge of David's bodyguard; Jehoshaphat was the recorder; Sheva (same as Seraiah) was the scribe or stenographer; Zadok and Abiathar were priests. (Zadok and Ahimelech were the priests in

the earlier list.) The only other differences were that Adoram was in charge of the forced labor (tribute) and Ira the Jairite was David's priest (or chief minister), whereas David's sons had been mentioned in chapter 8.

Chapter 21

The remainder of 2 Samuel is really an appendix listing various incidents in the reign of David, though not in chronological order. (The chronological order continues again in 1 Kings 1.)

The first event was the famine, which lasted for three years. When David inquired of the Lord as to the cause, he was told that it was because Saul had broken the covenant with the Gibeonites. These heathen inhabitants of the land had tricked Joshua into making a treaty with them. Saul, for some reason, had broken the treaty by trying to destroy the Gibeonites (v. 1), a fact not mentioned previously in the Old Testament. It may seem harsh that the nation should suffer for the crime of a man now dead, but centuries earlier Israel had sworn a solemn oath to the Gibeonites (Josh. 9:19, 20), and the famine came because that oath had been broken. Time does not dull God's memory or His sense of justice.

David approached the Gibeonites to find out what they would accept as satisfaction for Saul's offense. They explained that they didn't want any of Saul's wealth, and that they had no right to put anyone to death in Israel (v. 4 NASB). Nothing would do but the execution of seven of Saul's male descendants, and David consented to this (vv. 2-9). (The term "bloody house" in verse 1 may imply that Saul's descendants had an active part in the slaughter of the Gibeonites, in which case their punishment was just.) The seven sons were: the two

sons of Rizpah—Armoni and Mephibosheth (not Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan)— and the five sons of Saul's daughter Merab (NASB) (Michal in the KJV). Two reasons for rejecting "Michal" as the proper reading here are that Michal was married to Phaltiel, not Adriel (see 1 Sam. 25:44), and she was childless (2 Sam. 6:23). The Barzillai mentioned here is not the same man who later helped David when he fled from Absalom (17:27).

Rizpah, the concubine of Saul, set up a watch by the bodies, day and night, so that neither vultures nor wild beasts could touch them. She kept this vigil from the beginning of harvest until God sent rain and thus ended the famine which had led to these deaths (v. 10).

When David heard of her devotion, he took steps to give decent burial to these seven bodies and also to the bodies of Saul and Jonathan, which had been buried in Jabesh-gilead. The bones of Saul and Jonathan were buried in the sepulcher of Kish in Benjamin (vv. 11-14).

Verses 15-22 describe various battles against Philistine giants. In the first one, David was almost slain by Ishbi-benob, but Abishai rescued him and killed the Philistine. From then on the people would not let David go into battle personally. In the second battle, at Gob (or Gezer), another son of a giant was slain by Sibbechai. In the third battle, Elhanan killed "Goliath the Gittite" and his brother—cf. 1 Chrn. 20:5. The fourth battle resulted in the death of a giant who had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot.

Chapter 22

This is a psalm in which David praises God for the deliverance from his enemies and for the innumerable

blessings which had been showered upon him. It was probably penned after David had firmly established himself on the throne. Saul was dead, the kingdom was united under his leadership, and Israel's foes were beaten back. The words are found, with some variations, in Psalm 18 and are quoted in the New Testament as applying to the Messiah (v. 3, "in him will I trust," cf. Heb. 2:13; v. 50, cf. Rom. 15:9).

Looking at it as a Messianic psalm, we may outline it as follows:

Praise to God for hearing and answering prayer (vv. 2-4)

Death closing in on the Savior (vv. 5-7a).

God warring against the hosts of hell as they seek unsuccessfully to prevent the resurrection (vv. 7b-20).

Reasons why God raised Messiah from the dead (vv. 21-30).

The Messiah's second advent, in which He destroys His enemies (vv. 31-43).

The glorious kingdom of the Messiah (vv. 44-51).

Chapter 23

The first seven verses give the last words of David—that is, his last inspired utterance in song. He describes the ideal ruler, the Messiah (vv. 3,4), whose reign shall be a glorious dawn after a long night of darkness. David realized that he did not fit the description, but he took comfort in the fact that God's covenant assured him that the Messiah would be descended from him. Verses 6 and 7 describe Christ's judgment on His enemies when He returns to set up His kingdom.

A catalog of David's mighty men is given in verses 8-39. It is significant that Joab is not honored in this list, probably because he killed Absalom. This register is near the end of David's reign, while the parallel list in 1 Chronicles 11:11-47 is placed at the beginning. Although not identical, there are great similarities between the two rosters. More information about these men and their exploits can be found in the notes on 1 Chronicles 11. The first three mighty men were:

Josheb-basshebeth, also called Adino the Eznite—he slew 800 at one time. (First Chronicles says 300, but this number is probably a copyist's error.)

Eleazar—he fought off the Philistines when his fellow soldiers had retreated. They returned only to strip the slain. When the battle was over, he was so weary that he could not unclasp his fingers from the sword.

Shammah—he stood alone against the Philistines when the men of Israel had fled. Standing in a field of lentils, he fought off the enemy and gained a great victory.

The three unnamed mighty men referred to in verses 13-17 came to David when he was in the cave of Adullam, and when Bethlehem was in the hands of the Philistines. David expressed a longing for a drink of water from the well of Bethlehem. At the risk of their lives, these men broke through the lines of the Philistines and brought some water back to David. He was so overcome by this sacrifice that he poured out the water as an offering to the Lord; he did not feel that he could drink it. Williams comments, "Those who live close to Jesus hear the longings of His heart for draughts of love from Africa and India and China; and, like these mighty men, they turn their backs on home and wealth,

and risk or lay down their lives to win for Christ the affection and service of nations held as hopelessly in the power of Satan as the well of Bethlehem was in the hand of the Philistine."14

Two more of David's illustrious heroes were:

Abishai—he slew 300 men and was commander of the three mentioned in verse 16, though not one of them.

Benaiah—he smote two sons of Ariel of Moab (the KJV says "lion-like men"). He also slew a lion in a pit on a snowy day, and an Egyptian who was better-armed than he.

The final mighty men of David are given in verses 24-39. The last one in the list is Uriah the Hittite, Bathsheba's husband. The Lord Jesus has His mighty men too. He takes note of them just as surely as David took note of those who valiantly served him Whatever our rank, let us fight the good fight of faith.

Soldiers of Christ, arise,
And put your armor on,
Strong in the strength which God supplies,
Through His eternal Son.
Stand, then, in His great might,
With all His strength endued;
But take, to arm you for the fight,
The panoply of God.
—Charles Wesley

Some numbers in this chapter need to be reconciled, such as the 30 chiefs (v. 13), the 37 (v. 39), etc. The 30 may have been an elite military group, but counting all those who had served in it at one time or another, the total was 37. There were three in the first group:

Jashobeam (or Adino), Eleazar, and Shammah (vv. 8-12). Two were in the second group: Abishai and Benaiah (vv. 18-23). Possibly there were 32 in the third group (vv. 24-39), since verse 34 could read, “Eliphelet the son of Ur; Hepher the Maacathite; Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite.”

Chapter 24

William Crockett suggests that the events recorded here took place sometime after David captured Jerusalem (ch. 5) but before he brought the ark into the holy city (ch. 6).15

It would appear from verse 1 that God in His anger told David to take a census of Israel and Judah. But we learn from 1 Chronicles 21:1 that it was Satan who moved David to do this. Satan precipitated it, David performed it (because of the pride of his heart), and God permitted it. The Septuagint translates verse 1 “and Satan moved David” rather than “and he moved David.” When David ordered Joab to begin the numbering, Joab demonstrated better judgment than David. He realized that the purpose of the census was to cater to David’s pride, and he urged the king to desist, but in vain. Obedient to David, Joab and his men went throughout the land, numbering the people; they found that there were 800,000 soldiers in Israel and 500,000 in Judah (vv. 2-9).

Exodus 30:12,13 commanded that a half-shekel ransom be collected when a census was taken. There is no record of David’s doing so. Pride motivated him to number the people. The census might cause him to depend on the size of his army and not on the arm of the Lord.

After the census was finished, the king was convicted of his sin, and cried out to the Lord for forgiveness. God sent Gad the prophet to him, offering any one of three punishments: 1) seven years of famine in the land; 2) three months of pursuit by his enemies; 3) three days of pestilence or plague. David chose to fall into the Lord's hands and not into man's (vv. 10-14). Therefore God sent three days of pestilence, killing 70,000 men. The destroying angel was about to demolish the city of Jerusalem when God stopped him at the threshing floor of Araunah (Ornan). David asked the Lord why He was destroying the people of Israel when it was David and his house who were guilty.

God's reply, by Gad, was for David to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah. So the king immediately began to arrange with Araunah the Jebusite for the purchase of the site. Although he was a Gentile, Araunah offered not only the threshing floor without charge but also oxen for sacrifices and the threshing instruments for firewood. The king's noble answer was, "neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing" (vv. 15-24).

Finally David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for 50 shekels of silver. (1 Chronicles 21:25 says that David paid 600 shekels of gold for the place, but this undoubtedly included the property surrounding the threshing floor.) The plague stopped when sacrifices were offered on the altar (v. 25).

The threshing floor of Araunah, on Mount Moriah, was probably the same spot where Abraham offered Isaac. It later became the site of Solomon's temple and then of Herod's temple in the time of Christ. Today it is

occupied by a Moslem shrine, the Dome of the Rock. Probably it will be the location of the temple in the tribulation and finally of the temple in the millennium.

The Scriptures are honest in their treatment of the heroes of the faith. David had his faults and they are mentioned alongside his faith. We have followed David from the flock through exile into exaltation. Few men walked closer to God. Few men fell deeper in sin. But through it all he was sustained by the Lord. We have all benefited from the experiences that David passed through, because he recorded them in his psalms. The words of Psalm 40 fitly summarize David's life: "I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay; and He set my feet upon a rock, making my footsteps firm. And He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; many will see and fear, and will trust in the Lord" (vv. 1-3 NASB).

1 William Rodgers, further documentation unavailable.

2 Daily Notes of the Scripture Union, further documentation unavailable.

3 Irving L. Jensen, I & II Samuel, p. 92.

4 Blaikie, further documentation unavailable.

5 John Haley, Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible, p. 321.

6 George Williams, The Student's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, p. 166.

7 Daily Notes of the Scripture Union, further documentation unavailable.

8 G. Campbell Morgan, Searchlights from the Word, p. 91.

9 Flavius Josephus, further documentation unavailable.

10 Daily Notes of the Scripture Union, further documentation unavailable.

11 Ibid.

12 William Rodgers, further documentation unavailable.

13 Daily Notes of the Scripture Union, further documentation unavailable.

14 George Williams, op. cit., p. 309.

15 William D. Crockett, A Harmony of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles, pp. 138-40.

1 Kings

Outline Of 1 Kings

I. The Last Days of David (1:1—2:11)

A. Adonijah’s attempt to seize the throne (1:1-38)

B. Solomon’s anointing at Gihon (1:39-53)

C. David’s charge to Solomon (2:1-9)

D. David’s death (2:10,11)

II. The Golden Days of Solomon (2:12—11:43)

A. Opposition destroyed (2:12-46)

B. Wisdom granted (3)

C. Officers mentioned (4:1-19)

D. Kingdom expanded (4:20-34)

E. Temple constructed (5:1—7:51)

F. Temple dedicated (8)

G. Wealth and glory increased (9, 10)

H. Solomon’s apostasy and death (11)

III. The Divided Kingdom (12—22)

A. Rehoboam (12:1-24; 14:21-31)

B. Jeroboam (12:25—14:20)

C. Abijam (15:1-8)

D. Asa (15:9-24)

E. Nadab (15:25-27)

F. Baasha (15:28—16:7)

G. Elah (16:8-10)

H. Zimri (16:11-20)

I. Tibni (16:21,22)

J. Omri (16:21-28)

K. Ahab (and Elijah) (16:29—22:40)

L. Jehoshaphat (22:41-50)

M. Ahaziah (22:51-53)

The books of Kings give the story of Israel from the reign of Solomon to the Babylonian captivity (a span of over 400 years). Some believe that Jeremiah, drawing on earlier sources, put the book in its present form. The two prominent groups mentioned in Kings are the kings and the prophets. The judgment passed on a king stemmed directly from his obedience or disobedience to the Lord. The prophet's ministry was always one of calling the wandering nation back to Jehovah.

"Two chronological lines of kings are interwoven in the account. Israel, with ten tribes, is sometimes called the northern kingdom because its land was to the north of Jerusalem. From its first ruler, Jeroboam, to its destruction and captivity by Assyria, it was continuously in disobedience and idolatry before God. The so-called southern kingdom of Judah, centering in Jerusalem, was far from faithful to God, but yet maintained a semblance of obedience among a faithful minority. The most glorious period of the time was that of Solomon's reign. The building of the Temple and its dedication receive more attention than any other period, indicating its importance in God's eyes. Solomon's reign, ending with departure and judgment, is a solemn warning of what will happen when divine privileges and honor are

abused and His Word flouted. Only when every appeal of grace had been exhausted by persistent disobedience did God, not heathendom, destroy first the northern and then the southern kingdom."1

Chapter 1

David was now 70 years old and in declining health. He was about to pass off the stage of history. The proposal of the servants in verse 2 seems at first glance both puzzling and shocking. However, this practice was accepted at that time as being of value in the case of an illness like David's. It was not an act of doubtful morality and would not create a public scandal. One thing we can be sure of is that David did not "know" Abishag in the sense of having sexual intercourse with her (v. 4b). And it seems probable from chapter 2 that she was considered a legal wife of David because Solomon interpreted Adonijah's later request for her as a claim for the crown (2:21,22).

Adonijah was apparently the oldest surviving son of David (2:22) and thus considered himself next in line for the throne. Amnon and Absalom were both dead. Chileab was probably dead as well (2 Sam. 3:2-4). Before his father died, Adonijah proclaimed himself as king, prepared a great entourage (v. 5), and enlisted the support of Joab and Abiathar. Being a very handsome man, he won a great following. Verse 6a indicates that David was an indulgent father and Adonijah a spoiled son. When Adonijah sacrificed a great many animals near En-rogel, he invited to the feast all except those whom he knew to be loyal to his father—Nathan the prophet, Benaiah, the mighty men of David, and Solomon.

God had told David, before Solomon was born, that Solomon would be Israel's next king (1 Chrn. 22:9). Nathan had a desire to see the word of the Lord fulfilled. Being concerned about the threat of Adonijah, he skillfully brought the issue to David's attention. Coached by Nathan, Bathsheba appeared before the ailing king and notified him of the plot. She also reminded him of a promise he had previously made (though unrecorded) that Solomon, her son, would be the next king. Just as she finished requesting that he publicly announce Solomon as his successor, Nathan arrived and Bathsheba withdrew. Nathan repeated the news concerning Adonijah's plot to seize the kingdom and asked if this was the king's desire. When David called for Bathsheba, Nathan withdrew. David reassured Bathsheba that Solomon would indeed be his successor. Then he instructed Nathan the prophet, Zadok the priest, and Benaiah to take Solomon to Gihon on the king's own mule and to anoint him as king (Gihon was a spring located outside the city) (vv. 5-37). (Solomon was anointed a second time shortly after this; see 1 Chronicles 29:22.)

This public anointing by Zadok the priest caused great rejoicing among the followers of David, but consternation among Adonijah and those who were feasting with him. When the latter heard that Solomon now sat upon the royal throne and that David was grateful to the Lord for this, they realized that Adonijah's plot was a failure. Adonijah fled to the tabernacle and caught hold of the horns of the altar, an act which was supposed to grant him safety from punishment. Solomon decreed that Adonijah would be spared if found worthy, but punished if caught in any

future wickedness. Then he sent Adonijah home (vv. 38-53).

Chapter 2

If David in exile typifies Christ in His rejection during this age of grace, Solomon typifies Him as the King reigning in millennial glory. When He returns to set up His kingdom, His first act will be to destroy His foes and to purge out of His kingdom all things that offend. We see this pictured in chapter 2.

Just before his death, David delivered a solemn charge to Solomon, urging him to be obedient to the Lord and instructing him to take appropriate action concerning certain men: Joab should be slain for murdering Abner and Amasa; the sons of Barzillai should be treated kindly because of their father's kindness to David when he was fleeing from Absalom; Shimei should be slain eventually because he cursed David, but Solomon could work out the details. The expression "… shed the blood of war in peace" (v. 5b) reads in the NIV, "shedding their blood in peacetime as if in battle."

After a reign of 40 years, David died and was buried in Jerusalem. Solomon sat upon the throne, and his kingdom was firmly established (vv. 1-12).

Adonijah was grieved that he had been deprived of the throne, although he had to admit that it was Solomon's by the will of God (v. 15b). Whether innocently or insidiously, he made a request of Solomon through Bathsheba that Abishag, David's nurse, might be given to him for a wife. Solomon looked upon this as being the next thing to asking for the kingdom itself, so he ordered Benaiah to slay Adonijah (vv. 13-25).

The king also expelled Abiathar from the priesthood, doubtless because he had supported Adonijah in his abortive plot. This was in partial fulfillment of God's judgment on the house of Eli (see 1 Sam. 2:31-35). When Joab heard of Abiathar's dismissal, he fled to the horns of the altar for refuge. Benaiah ordered him to leave the altar, but Joab refused, expressing the determination to die there. Benaiah executed him quickly and had him buried in his own house in the wilderness (vv. 26-34). The deaths of Abner and Amasa were finally avenged. The altar of God gave no protection to anyone who broke the law of God.

Benaiah was appointed commander of the army, and Zadok succeeded Abiathar as priest (v. 35). Benaiah had served David since the days of Saul. He was a man of great valor and the captain of David's personal bodyguard (2 Sam. 20:23). His unfailing courage was surpassed only by his undying loyalty to the house of David. Courage and loyalty should characterize those who serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

Solomon did not order Shimei's execution immediately. Rather, he put him under a sort of house arrest, forbidding him to leave the city. After three years Shimei left Jerusalem to seek two escaped slaves in Gath. In so doing he broke the oath that Solomon had made him swear earlier, and he demonstrated that he was no more faithful to Solomon than he had been to David. When he returned, Solomon ordered Benaiah to slay him (vv. 36-46). Thus Solomon made his kingdom secure by aggressively removing all whose hearts were not with him. Thereafter his reign was one of peace. The Christian will know the peace of God as he puts out of

his life the things which oppose the reign of Christ within.

Chapter 3

Solomon married the daughter of the pharaoh who was then in power in Egypt (v. 1). Perhaps this shows that his trust was in political alliances. The marriage, although politically expedient, was spiritually disastrous and was forbidden by the law. From this point onward, Solomon's harem grew until it contained hundreds of foreign women. Solomon thus linked himself with many foreign powers but alienated himself from the Lord (11:1-8).

High places were here used for the worship of Jehovah. This was not strictly in accordance with the law; God was supposed to be worshiped only in the place which He designated. But it is here excused on the ground that there was no official house, since Shiloh had been destroyed by the Philistines about 1050 B.C., when the ark was carried away (1 Sam. 4). After the temple was built, high places continued to be used, but for idolatrous worship. Although the ark was in Jerusalem at this time, the tabernacle was in Gibeon (1 Chrn. 21:29), about six miles away. It was there that the king held a great sacrifice, probably at the outset of his reign (vv. 2-4).

God appeared to Solomon at Gibeon and asked him what he would like most of all. The king requested an understanding mind for the great task of judging and ruling the people of Israel. The request pleased the Lord, and it was granted— together with riches and honor, and also long life, if Solomon would walk in obedience to God (vv. 5-15). Today God offers to every man the greatest gift for which one could possibly ask—

the Lord Jesus Christ, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3).

The remainder of the chapter (vv. 16-28) gives an example of the king’s great wisdom. Two harlots were quarreling over which one was the mother of a baby. When Solomon threatened to divide the baby into two equal parts, the true mother was revealed by her desire to spare the baby even if she didn’t get the baby for herself. Such wisdom caused Solomon to be greatly feared and respected in all Israel.

Chapter 4

Verses 1-6 list Solomon’s high officials, or cabinet: Azariah, a grandson of Zadok, who seems to have succeeded him as high priest; Elihoreph and Ahijah, secretaries (i.e., of state); Jehoshaphat, recorder or chronicler; Benaiah, commander of the army; Zadok and Abiathar, priests; Azariah—over the officers; Zabud—the friend of Solomon; Ahishar, in charge of the palace; Adoniram, in charge of the forced labor (tribute). The name “Abiathar” in verse 4 presents a difficulty because he was dismissed by Solomon in 2:27. Perhaps he was dismissed after this period. Or perhaps he still retained the title of priest though no longer exercising priestly functions. “Some say that here is mention made of all Solomon’s chief officers, both such as now were, and such as had been, and such as were afterwards, as they gather from verses 11 and 15, where two persons are named who married two of Solomon’s daughters, which could not be till many years after this time.”2

Solomon divided the land of Israel into 12 sections and put an officer in charge of each area to collect the taxes from the people. The divisions of the land, and the

officer in charge of each, are described in verses 7-19. Each section was responsible for supplying the royal board one month out of the year. Judah is not mentioned. Perhaps the last part of verse 19 should read, as in the RSV: “and there was one officer in the land of Judah.”

The kingdom under Solomon reached out to the Euphrates, to the land of the Philistines, and to the border of Egypt (vv. 21,24). Much of this territory consisted of kingdoms that paid tribute to Solomon but were not considered part of Israel. Therefore Solomon’s kingdom was not the complete fulfillment of the Palestinian covenant (Gen. 15:18-21).

The magnificence of Solomon’s reign is described in verses 22-28—his vast food supply, his thousands of horses, etc. But we must remember that in order to support such lavishness, it was necessary to tax the people very heavily. Also, we need to remember that Solomon’s accumulation of horses was a violation of God’s order (Deut. 17:16). (On the apparent contradiction between verse 26 and 2 Chronicles 9:25, see the notes on that chapter.)

The king’s wisdom is again referred to. He was wiser than any other. The sages mentioned in verse 31 were the sons of Zerah (1 Chrn. 2:6), Mahol (Dancer) being simply an appellation. Ethan was the author of Psalm 89; Heman wrote Psalm 88. We know nothing about the other men. Solomon spoke 3000 proverbs, only a portion of which are preserved in the book of Proverbs. His songs numbered 1005. Verse 33 means that his wide knowledge of many sciences enabled him to use object lessons from nature in expounding his wisdom. People traveled from afar to hear him (vv. 29-34).

Chapter 5

Hiram was a Gentile king of Tyre, and as such he controlled vast timber supplies in Lebanon. He had been very friendly to David and now wished to show that same friendliness to Solomon. It was therefore arranged that he should provide lumber with which Solomon could build a temple for Jehovah.

Solomon would send workers north to Lebanon to assist in the cutting operation. The logs would then be taken to the Mediterranean Sea, floated down to a point near Joppa, and then transported inland to Jerusalem. As payment for the timber, Solomon provided Hiram's household with food supplies year by year (vv. 1-12).

In order to obtain the manpower for this gigantic task of cutting lumber, Solomon drafted 30,000 men of Israel, requiring them to go to Lebanon in shifts of 10,000 each month. In addition to these men, the king had Canaanite slaves working in the quarries of Israel, preparing stones for the temple (cf. v. 15; 2 Chrn. 2:17,18) (vv. 13-18).

(See the notes on problems in 2 Chronicles 2 for an explanation of the numerical discrepancies between these two chapters.)

"Solomon's massive building operations involved a great force of slave labor (cf. 9:15-22). But even this proved inadequate, and he was compelled to draft native Israelites (probably excluding Judah), not as slave laborers but as forced laborers. The Israelites, with their tradition for sturdy independence, bitterly resented this, and it became a major cause of the division of the kingdom (12:4). How necessary it is to have divine

wisdom in all matters, and not to ride roughshod over the sensitivities and welfare of others!”3

Chapter 6

In verse 1, the work of building the temple is said to have been started 480 years after the exodus from Egypt. If Solomon began the construction in 967 B.C., this would date the exodus at 1447/46 B.C. It is not possible, however, to fix these dates with absolute certainty. There is much dispute among scholars on this subject.

Details concerning the plan of the temple are given in this chapter. They are at times technical and involved, making it difficult to get the exact picture. However, we do know that the temple was built somewhat as follows. It was 90 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 45 feet high (v. 2). It was divided into two rooms. The first room was the holy place, measuring 60 feet long by 30 feet wide by 45 feet high (vv. 2,17). Latticed windows, probably near the top, provided light and an escape for smoke (v. 4). The second room was the Most Holy Place, 30 feet long by 30 feet wide by 30 feet high. The porch added 30 more feet to the length at the east or front end and was elevated 15 feet above ground level. On the north, west, and south sides of the temple were three stories of chambers, or rooms, for the priests. These were next to the temple but were not an integral part of it (vv. 5,6).

All the lumber and stone for the temple was prepared elsewhere to exact specifications so that when brought to Jerusalem, the pieces could be fitted together without iron tools (v. 7). Thus the temple was erected silently, just as the living temple of God is being built today. Verses 8 and 10 describe the entrance to the side

chambers and the height of each story (7½ feet). Verse 9 describes the roof of the whole temple. The word of the Lord graciously came to Solomon during the construction, promising to confirm the Davidic Covenant and to dwell in the temple if the king would be obedient (vv. 11-13). The interior of the building was lined with cedar, all of which was overlaid with gold; no stone was seen (vv. 15-22). These stones, so skillfully and precisely quarried, were not even visible. “Even the foundation stones were not rugged and rough, but hewn and costly. God would have everything which is done for him done well. He careth not so much for that which meets the eye of man; he delights himself with the beauty of those living stones of his spiritual temple which are hidden away from observation.”4

Standing on either side of the ark, in the Most Holy Place, were two carved cherubim, overlaid with gold. Their outstretched wings reached from one wall to the other (vv. 23-28). These are not the same as the cherubim on the mercy seat (Exod. 25:18; 37:9).

Nothing but gold was visible inside the temple.

The folding or sliding doors leading to the Most Holy Place are described in verses 31 and 32. (The rooms were also separated by a veil which hung inside the doors of the Most Holy Place—2 Chrn. 3:14.) The main doors leading to the holy place are described in verses 33-35.

In front of the temple was the inner court of the priests. There was a low wall (v. 36) between it and the outer court. This wall consisted of three layers of stone and one layer of cedar beams.

In the inner court were a huge brazen altar for sacrifices, a huge laver used by the priests for cleansing, and ten smaller lavers (ch. 7). The outer court was for the people of Israel.

The temple was begun in the fourth year of Solomon's reign and was finished seven years later (vv. 37,38).

Chapter 7

The narrative now turns to the construction of Solomon's own house and other royal buildings included in the great court.

Solomon's house, or the royal palace, took 13 years to finish. It was located slightly southeast of the temple and just outside the wall of the inner court. Some think that the fact that it took six years longer to build the palace than the temple indicates a greater concern for Solomon's ego than for God's glory.

The House of the Forest of Lebanon (vv. 2-5) was at the southern portion of the great court. Its outstanding feature was the large number of cedar pillars in it (perhaps this accounted for its name). We do not know definitely the function of this building, but we surmise from 1 Kings 10:17 that it was an armory. Immediately north of the House of the Forest of Lebanon was the Hall (or Porch) of Pillars (v. 6). It was probably the entrance to the Hall of Judgment and the throne room (v. 7). Adjoining the royal palace was the House of Pharaoh's Daughter, where the royal harem lived (v. 8). All the buildings were made of great stone blocks cut to exact measurements. Also, the wall around the great court was made of three rows of stone blocks covered by cedar beams (vv. 9-12).

Another perspective of these verses sees the House of the Forest of Lebanon, the Hall of Pillars, and the Hall of the Throne (the Hall of Judgment) as all part of the palace. The hall made for Pharaoh's daughter adjoined the royal residence.

The Hiram mentioned in verses 13 and 14 was not the same as the king of Tyre. This Hiram was a master workman of Jewish lineage who lived in Tyre.

Verses 15-22 describe two huge bronze pillars which stood at the entrance of the temple. One was named Jachin ("He shall establish") and the other Boaz ("In Him is strength"). At the top of each pillar was a bowl-like arrangement, highly ornamental. Although the physical details of these pillars are given, we are not told the spiritual significance behind them. Someone has well observed that the pillars of God's living temple today are men of holy character (Gal. 2:9). Revelation 3:12 is God's promise that those who overcome will be made pillars in His heavenly temple for all eternity.

The molten sea (vv. 23-26) was the huge laver which stood in the inner court. It was a large bronze basin, supported by 12 bronze oxen and placed between the temple and the altar, but to the south (2 Chrn. 4:10). It supplied water for the priests to wash their hands and their feet. In addition to the large laver, there were ten smaller lavers resting on four-wheeled bases or stands (vv. 27-39). (No mention is made of the brazen altar until 8:64, although it too was in the inner court.)

Hiram supervised the construction of all the bronze work in connection with the temple area, including the vessels of the temple itself (vv. 40-47). The bronze utensils were cast in clay, in much the same manner as

is done today (v. 46). The furniture of the holy place included the golden altar of incense, ten golden tables of showbread (2 Chrn. 4:8), ten golden lampstands, and the golden utensils (vv. 48-50).

David had made elaborate preparations for the temple that he was not allowed to build. Solomon brought these treasures into the temple for use and safekeeping (v. 51).

Differences between this chapter and 2 Chronicles 2-4 are discussed in the notes on 2 Chronicles.

Chapter 8

With the temple completed, the next step was to bring the ark from the section of Jerusalem known as the city of David, or Zion, to the temple on Mount Moriah. This probably took place almost a year after the building was completed (cf. v. 2 with 1 Kgs. 6:37,38).

Just before the Feast of Tabernacles a great national holiday took place, and the ark, the tabernacle, and the holy vessels were brought to the temple by the priests and Levites. This was accompanied by the sacrifice of a great number of sheep and oxen (vv. 1-5).

The ark was put in the Most Holy Place. In some way that we do not understand, the staves were visible from the holy place, but they could not be seen from outside, on the porch. The staves were not removed (NASB), as stated in the KJV (v. 8). At this time the only items in the ark were the two tables of stone, containing the Ten Commandments (v. 9). We are not told what happened to the pot of manna or to Aaron’s rod that budded (Heb. 9:4). As soon as the ark (typical of Christ) was given its proper place, the glory cloud, signifying the divine

Presence, filled the temple. The priests were not able to carry on their duties because the glory of the Lord filled the house (vv. 10,11).

When all was finished, Solomon addressed the Lord (vv. 12,13). God had said that He would dwell in thick darkness. Now Solomon had built Him a house with a Most Holy Place that had no illumination except the glory of God Himself.

Next the king turned to the people in blessing (vv. 14-21). He traced the fulfillment of God's promise to David concerning the temple and expressed his satisfaction that the ark of the covenant now had a settled abode.

The prayer of dedication is recorded in verses 22-53. After extolling God for keeping His covenant with David concerning the temple, he asked Him to fulfill another covenant that He had made with David—the promise that there would never fail to be a descendant of David to sit upon the throne (vv. 22-26). Although Solomon realized that no temple on earth was adequate to contain the great God, yet he asked that the Lord might recognize this temple and that when he or any of the people of Israel addressed God there, He might hear and forgive (vv. 27-30). Then the king listed various specific cases in which the Lord's answer was especially desired. 1. In lawsuits where oaths were taken (presumably because no definite evidence was available), God was asked to punish the guilty and reward the innocent (vv. 31,32). 2. When defeat came to Israel's army because of sin, God was asked to forgive and restore them to their land when they confessed their sin (vv. 33,34). 3. In times of drought, God was asked to send rain when the

people humbled themselves before Him in repentance (vv. 35,36). 4. If famine, or pestilence, or blight, or mildew, or insect plagues, or enemy siege, or any other calamity should befall them, God was requested to honor any prayers that were made to Him in the temple and to forgive the land (vv. 37-40). 5. If a Gentile should be converted to Judaism and pray to God, then He was asked to answer the prayer of such a proselyte (vv. 41-43). 6. Prayers for victory in battle were anticipated by Solomon, and he asked the Lord to be mindful of all such (vv. 44,45). 7. Speaking prophetically, Solomon next envisioned the time when Israel might be carried into captivity because of sin. He asked the Lord to hearken to their prayer of repentance and cause their captors to be merciful to them; after all, the Israelites were His people, whom He had delivered out of Egypt (vv. 46-53). These verses found fulfillment in the Babylonian captivity and in the subsequent return under the decree of Cyrus.

After praying to God, Solomon blessed the people by pouring out an eloquent request for God's presence, and for power to be obedient to Him and to be a witness for Him among the nations of the earth (vv. 54-61). "Solomon's benediction, like the rest of his prayer, shows an immense appreciation of great spiritual truths: 1. God is utterly reliable. 'Not one word has failed' (56) — what a testimony! 2. The past guarantees the future (57). Since God is unchanging (cf. Heb. 13:8), we can build upon the fact that what He has shown Himself to be in times past He will be to us (cf. Josh. 1:5). 3. Man needs God's help in the life of discipleship (58), a truth which Jeremiah knew and for which he gave the reason (see Jer. 10:23; 17:9). Even the impulse of man's free

will comes from God—a paradox indeed! Compare the activity of the Holy Spirit in John 16:8-11. 4. We stand in daily need of the assistance of God (‘as each day requires,’ 59). But then, He neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psa. 121:4)! 5. God’s care for His children is never for their selfish enjoyment, but that others might come to know Him (60). 6. In view of all this, can we give less than our absolute loyalty and obedience to Him (61)?”5

This prayer is also recorded in 2 Chronicles 6 (see notes), with the only differences being: In 2 Chronicles Solomon ended his prayer with three requests (2 Chrn. 6:40-42), omitted in 1 Kings; in 1 Kings Solomon blessed the people (vv. 54-61). This is omitted in 2 Chronicles.

The great number of animals that were sacrificed is recorded in verses 62-65. Some of these, of course, were used as food for the huge throng that had assembled. Since the brazen altar was not large enough to receive all the burnt offerings, etc., Solomon consecrated a place in the middle of the court where the rest could be offered to the Lord. This great celebration was characterized by joy and worship and thanksgiving. Of the thousands of animals slain, not one was offered as a sin- or trespass-offering (vv. 63,64).

At this same time, Solomon held the Feast of Tabernacles (v. 65) with Israelites who had come from as far as the entrance of Hamath, near Dan, in the north and from the brook of Egypt in the south. The Feast of Dedication and the Feast of Tabernacles together lasted for 14 days. Then the people returned to their homes with great gladness (v. 66). 2 Chronicles 7:9 says that a solemn assembly was held on the “eighth day,” while verse 66 says that the people were sent away on the

“eighth day.” John Haley harmonizes these two accounts as follows: “The feast of tabernacles began on the fifteenth and ended on the twenty-second of the month, closing with a ‘holy convocation’ on the ‘eighth day’ (Lev. 23:33-39), at the end of which Solomon dismissed the people; the dismissal taking effect the next morning, the twenty-third (2 Chrn. 7:10).”6

Chapter 9

God’s answer to Solomon’s prayer was that He would accept the temple as His house and would put His Name there forever (vv. 1-5). Although Solomon’s temple has long since ceased to exist, God will yet dwell in a temple in Jerusalem when the Lord Jesus returns to set up His worldwide kingdom. In the meantime, God dwells in the temple of the believer’s body and of the church.

As for Solomon’s family, God promised that Solomon and his sons would always have descendants to sit upon the throne if they would be obedient. But if they departed from the living God and turned to idolatry, then He would send the people into exile, destroy the temple, and make Israel a proverb and a byword among the Gentiles. The temple would become a heap of ruins, and visitors would be astonished at its desolation (vv. 8,9).

With regard to verses 10-14, some commentators suggest that Solomon had borrowed 120 talents of gold from Hiram (v. 14) in order to finance his elaborate building program, and had given 20 cities of Galilee to Hiram as security. It was because of Hiram’s previous help (v. 11a) that Solomon felt free to request the loan. When Hiram saw the cities, he was dissatisfied and called them Cabul (meaning “displeasing” or “dirty or “rubbish”). It appears from 2 Chronicles 8:2 that

Solomon may have redeemed the cities by paying off the loan.

Verses 15-22 give the account (not “reason,” as in KJV) of the forced labor which Solomon used in his construction program. Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer were three cities which Solomon fortified for defense purposes. Hazor was in the north and protected the northern door to Palestine. Megiddo was “an important city of north-central Palestine, overlooking the Plain of Esdraelon. It dominated the intersection of important trade routes and served as the key to the defense of the Jordan Valley (from the south) and the Central Plain (from the north).”7 Gezer was situated west of Jerusalem on a main trade route from the interior to the coastal land of Philistia. All the Gentile captives listed in verse 20 were slaves. The people of Israel were not reduced to bondage (vv. 22,23). The “Millo” which Solomon built (v. 24) was some type of fortification for Jerusalem. It was undertaken when the palace for Pharaoh’s daughter was completed.

Solomon sacrificed to the Lord three times a year at the three major feasts: Unleavened Bread, Weeks (Pentecost), and Tabernacles (2 Chrn. 8:13).

Solomon had a fleet of ships at Ezion-geber, on the Gulf of Aqaba, near Elath. Hiram sent some of his servants with the fleet to Ophir (exact location unknown—some say southern Arabia, some India, and others Africa). They brought 420 talents of gold to Solomon (vv. 26-28).

Chapter 10

The purpose of this chapter is to emphasize Solomon’s glory. From drinking vessels to sailing vessels, from an

ivory throne to hand-crafted chariots, he possessed everything the human heart could desire in quantities that stagger the imagination. The Queen of Sheba, that daughter of opulence, was completely overwhelmed by Solomon's wisdom and by the splendor of his kingdom. This was in fulfillment of the Lord's promise, to which Solomon owed everything (3:11-13).

The Queen of Sheba may have come from northern Arabia; the exact location of Sheba is disputed. She came to test Solomon's wisdom by plying him with hard questions, but he was able to answer them all (v. 3a). When she saw the magnificence of his kingdom, she had to acknowledge that the glowing reports she had heard were only partial. She presented him with gifts of gold and spices in great abundance and then received gifts from him in return before going back to her own land (vv. 1-13).

Hiram's help brought not only gold from Ophir for Solomon but also great amounts of almug wood and precious stones. Solomon was a genius in trade relationships (vv. 14,15). Gold was so plentiful that Solomon even used it for making shields to hang in the House of the Forest of Lebanon. His ivory throne was overlaid with gold. At each side of the throne was a large carved lion. Also at each end of the six steps leading to the throne was a lion. Silver was considered as of relatively minor value in Solomon's day (vv. 16-22). Solomon's wealth and wisdom brought him worldwide fame, and gifts poured in to him from admirers who came to visit him (vv. 23-25).

Mention is made of the fact that Solomon invested heavily in horses and chariots (vv. 26-29). (The KJV

mentions linen yarn in verse 28, but the NASB correctly omits this.) Kue (Cilicia) was famous for its horses. Solomon not only acquired chariots and horses for national defense but also exported them to other countries.

Although not mentioned here, the luxury of Solomon's reign required heavy taxation to support it. This was to lead to the disruption of the kingdom (12:3-15). "The taxation must have been crushing, and with all this oriental splendor and luxury, there was rottenness within. Solomon was the Jewish Louis XIV."8 This multiplication of riches and horses violated God's Word (Deut. 17:16,17).

Chapter 11

Deuteronomy 17:17 forbade the king of Israel to marry heathen wives. The extent to which Solomon disobeyed this important command is indicated in verses 1-3. The result was exactly as predicted: His wives turned him to idolatry. He built idolatrous shrines on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem. Verse 4 means that King David's heart was wholly true to the Lord his God as far as keeping himself from idolatry was concerned, but Solomon did not follow his father in this matter (vv. 4-8).

God had appeared to Solomon twice—in Gibeon (3:5) and in Jerusalem at the dedication of the temple (9:2). Now He announced that, because of Solomon's idolatry, the kingdom would be torn from him and given to one of his servants. However, it would not happen during Solomon's lifetime, and not all 12 tribes would be taken from the house of David. One tribe (Benjamin, with Judah understood) would be given to Solomon's son (vv. 9-13).

Three of Solomon's adversaries are now described. The first was Hadad (vv. 14-22), an Edomite prince who had escaped to Egypt as a child when Joab was killing all the males in Edom. He was treated well by the Pharaoh and was even given the sister of the queen as his wife. When Hadad heard that David and Joab were dead, he obtained the Pharaoh's reluctant permission to return to Edom. From there he began military operations against Solomon from the south.

The second adversary was Rezon (vv. 23-25), who had escaped when David attacked Zobah and had become the leader of a band of marauders. Later he set up an independent kingdom at Damascus, and became a military peril to Solomon from the north. Damascus had worn the yoke of Israel ever since David had captured the city and stationed troops there (2 Sam. 8:5,6). "The loss of Damascus, the capital of Syria, was especially significant, since this kingdom was to be Israel's thorn in the flesh for centuries afterwards."9

The third adversary was the servant of Solomon whom God had mentioned in verse 11. He was Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, of the tribe of Ephraim. Solomon had given him a position of responsibility in the building of the Millo. Perhaps this power gave Jeroboam the desire to reign over all Israel (vv. 26-28). One day he met a prophet named Ahijah. When they were alone in the open country, Ahijah took his own new garment and tore it into 12 pieces. He gave ten pieces to Jeroboam as a sign that God would give him command over ten tribes of Israel. He also explained to Jeroboam that one tribe (Benjamin) would be left for Solomon's son (Judah is taken for granted) (12:23) and that the kingdom would not be divided until after Solomon's death. If Jeroboam

would obey the Lord, he would be assured of the Lord's blessing and help (vv. 29-39). Notice the limitations which God placed upon Jeroboam: He was to have ten tribes, not the whole nation (vv. 31-33); he was to come to power only after Solomon's death (vv. 34-37); God would make him an enduring house only if he would obey the Lord and wholly follow Him (v. 38).

Apparently Jeroboam rebelled while Solomon was still alive (v. 26), and he had to flee to Egypt to escape the king's wrath. He remained there until Solomon's death (v. 40). Instead of facing his sin and repenting, Solomon tried to thwart the word of God by doing away with Jeroboam. It was foolish to fight against Jeroboam, though, since he was now the divinely appointed heir of the northern tribes. Saul had been unsuccessful in his attempts to kill his successor, David. Solomon was also unsuccessful in his attempts to murder Jeroboam.

The tribes over which Jeroboam would rule would be: Reuben, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Ephraim, Manasseh, and portions of Levi and Simeon. The tribes over which Solomon's son would reign would be: Judah, Benjamin, and portions of Levi and Simeon. Levi (2 Chrn. 11:13-16) and Simeon were loyal for the most part to Judah.

The Book of the Acts of Solomon was probably the official chronicle of his reign, but certainly not an inspired part of Scripture (v. 41).

After reigning for 40 years, Solomon died and was buried in Jerusalem. His son Rehoboam succeeded him (vv. 42,43). Solomon's beginning was better than his ending. A good start does not guarantee a good finish. He had been raised to the pinnacle of greatness, but he

plunged off into the abyss of moral degradation and idolatry. If only the king had practiced what he preached in Ecclesiastes 12:13,14 NASB: “The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. Because God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.”

Chapter 12

Rehoboam went to Shechem to be acknowledged as king. Having heard of the death of Solomon, Jeroboam returned from Egypt and also went to Shechem, along with the men of Israel. The Israelites delivered an ultimatum to Rehoboam—”Lower the taxes with which your father oppressed us, and we will serve you. Otherwise we will revolt.” Rehoboam asked for three days to think it over. During that time he first consulted his older counselors. They advised him to treat the people kindly and be a servant to them. His younger advisers, however, suggested the very opposite—they told him to threaten the people with heavier taxes. In that sense, Rehoboam’s little finger would be thicker than Solomon’s loins. If Solomon chastised them with whips, then Rehoboam would use scorpions (probably meaning scourges with sharp points) (vv. 1-11).

When Jeroboam and the congregation of Israel returned for the decision on the third day, they were answered according to the advice of the young men. Verse 15 points out that this was a turn of events brought about by the Lord to fulfill His word spoken through Ahijah the Shilonite (11:30-39). At this point the people of Israel revolted from Rehoboam, although some of them were still living in the territory of Judah. Rehoboam sent

Adoram, his unpopular taskmaster over forced labor, to bring these latter Israelites under subjection, but they stoned Adoram to death. Then the people of Israel made Jeroboam their king. Rehoboam planned to thwart this by declaring war on Israel, but he canceled his plan as a result of a divine command. Having earlier ignored the counsel of his elders, Rehoboam now heeded the counsel of the Lord and spared the lives of many Israelites. The word of the Lord decreed the split, and the word of the Lord ensured that the division was without bloodshed (vv. 12-24). Although it says in verse 20 that only the tribe of Judah followed Rehoboam, we must remember that Benjamin (v. 21), Simeon (Josh. 19:1b), and most of Levi belonged to Judah.

The history of the divided kingdom begins here and continues through 2 Kings. Jeroboam reigned over the northern ten tribes, usually known as Israel and sometimes referred to in the prophets as Ephraim. This kingdom had a succession of nine dynasties, and all the kings were wicked.

Rehoboam reigned over the southern kingdom, known as Judah. This kingdom had only one dynasty. Every king was a descendant of David. It was through this kingdom that Christ's legal title to the throne of David is traced (see genealogy in Matt. 1). A few of these kings were outstanding reformers, though most of them were wicked.

The kings of Israel and Judah were as follows:

Israel (dynasty) | Judah
1 Jeroboam | Rehoboam
Nadab | Abijam (Abijah)
2 Baasha | Asa (good)

Elah | Jehoshaphat (good)
3 Zimri | Jehoram (Joram)
4 Omri-Tibni | Ahaziah
Ahab | Athaliah—usurper
Ahaziah | Jehoash (Joash) (good)
Joram (Jehoram) | Amaziah (good)
5 Jehu | Uzziah (Azariah) (good)
Jehoahaz | Jotham (good)
Joash (Jehoash) | Ahaz
Jeroboam II | Hezekiah (good)
Zachariah (Zechariah) | Manasseh
6 Shallum | Amon
7 Menahem | Josiah (good)
Pekahiah | Jehoahaz (Shallum)
8 Pekah | Jehoiakim (Eliakim)
9 Hoshea | Jehoiachin (Jeconiah, Coniah)
| Zedekiah (Mattaniah)

The history of the divided kingdom can be divided into four phases. First there was a time of open conflict, extending from Jeroboam (1 Kgs. 12:1) to Omri (1 Kgs. 16:28). Then the two kingdoms settled down to a period of detente, from Omri (1 Kgs. 16:29) to Jehu (2 Kgs. 8). The third phase, from Jehu to the captivity of Israel by Assyria (722 B.C.), was one of relative independence (2 Kgs. 9—17). Finally Judah was left as the surviving kingdom, until it was taken into captivity by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. (2 Kgs. 18—25).

The kingdom of Israel never returned to the land as a nation. Judah remained in captivity for 70 years, and then groups returned to Jerusalem in significant numbers, as recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah. The southern tribes thus came back to the land, under

Gentile rule, approximately 500 years before the birth of Christ.

At the close of Old Testament history, the Jews in the land were subject to the king of Persia. Later, Persia was conquered by Greece, and the Jews were ruled by this world power. Finally, the Greeks were subjugated by the Roman Empire; it was this empire that was in power when the Lord Jesus appeared.

In studying the divided kingdom, the student frequently comes across seeming contradictions in the dates given. Most of these chronological difficulties can be accounted for by the fact that different methods were used in calculating the length of reigns in Israel and in Judah. Another important factor is that oftentimes two kings served as coregents for a while. The whole subject of the chronology of the kings has been treated capably and in great detail in The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings, by Edwin R. Thiele.

We shall study the divided kingdom in the order in which the kings are listed, giving the important events in the reign of each. The dates are taken from Thiele's book mentioned above.

JEROBOAM, Son of Nebat, Tribe of Ephraim, King of Israel, 22 years, 931/30-910/09 (1 Kgs. 12:25—14:20).

Israel's first king made Shechem his capital at the outset, then built Penuel, across the Jordan River (v. 25). Fearing that the people of Israel would return to Jerusalem to worship on the feast days and then transfer their loyalty back to the kingdom of Judah, he set up his own system of religion: He established Dan and Bethel as new centers of worship, setting up a golden calf in each place and declaring these to be the gods which

delivered Israel from Egypt (vv. 26-30). He made a house of high places (v. 31a)—that is, idolatrous shrines. He established a new priesthood from among all the people (v. 31b) and not necessarily from the tribe of Levi, as God had ordained. He set up a new religious calendar, with a great feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month (vv. 32,33), replacing the Feast of Tabernacles, which was in the seventh month. He himself usurped the office of the priest by offering on the altar at Bethel (v. 33).

That many of the people of Israel accepted these changes reveals that their hearts were far from the Lord. Their fathers had worshiped a calf before and were punished for it (Exod. 32). Solomon had erected high places and lost most of his kingdom for it (ch. 11). Korah and his followers had tried to usurp the priesthood and lost their lives for it (Num. 16). These innovations by w7hich Jeroboam sought to secure his kingdom only ensured its eventual downfall. Those who had a heart for God fled to Judah (2 Chrn. 11:14-16), leaving their brethren to the conveniences—and consequences—of man-made religion. It has been well said that “Jeroboam did not deserve so good a post [as king], but Israel deserved so bad a prince.”

Chapter 13

JEROBOAM (continued)

While Jeroboam was offering incense at the altar in Bethel, a prophet of God was sent from Judah to denounce the idolatrous altar. He predicted that a king named Josiah would arise in Judah and would burn the idolatrous priests on the altar. (The fulfillment of the prophecy in verse 2 is found in 2 Kings 23:15,16. Over

300 years elapsed between the prophecy and its fulfillment.) As a token of the certainty of the prophecy, he said that the altar would be split and the ashes poured out (vv. 1-3).

As Jeroboam pointed to the prophet and ordered him to be apprehended, the king's hand became withered. Also, the altar was torn apart and the ashes spilled out—an omen of doom for Jeroboam's religion (vv. 4,5). In answer to the prophet's gracious prayer, the withered hand was restored to normal (v. 6).

If the king could not silence the prophet by threats, he would try by gaining his fellowship. God had issued strict instructions to the prophet that he was to do nothing to indicate the slightest tolerance of Jeroboam's evil reign. Thus, in accordance with the instructions of the Lord, the prophet refused to eat or drink with Jeroboam (vv. 7-10). Also, he took a different route home from Bethel.

On the way he was intercepted by one of the old prophets of Bethel. At first the man of God refused the hospitality of the old prophet lest he show the slightest sympathy with what was going on in Bethel. But then the old man said that an angel had told him to entertain the man of God, and this lie succeeded in persuading the latter to accept the proffered hospitality (vv. 11-19). While they were eating together, the Lord spoke to the old prophet of Bethel, and he in turn delivered the message to the man of God. Because of his disobedience, the man of God would die and would not be buried with his family. If this seems harsh or severe, we should remember that God deals more sternly with those He loves, with those who are His spokesmen, and

with those who are greatly privileged. On his way home, the man of God was killed by a lion. Contrary to all the laws of nature, a lion and the prophet's donkey stood watch together over his carcass in the highway (vv. 20-25). When the old prophet heard the news, he immediately realized that it was the Lord's judgment against disobedience (v. 26). He went to the scene of the tragedy, brought the body back to Bethel, and buried it in his own sepulchre. He then instructed his sons that he desired to be buried beside the man of God; he realized that the idolatrous system of which he was a part was doomed to destruction by God (vv. 27-32).

King Jeroboam persisted in his evil, making priests from among all the people and serving as a priest himself. Such sin was the eventual cause of destruction to the dynasty of Jeroboam (vv. 33,34).

Irving Jensen notes: "King Jeroboam ought to have seen a picture of himself and his own fate if he did not repent, by the fate of the prophet from Judah. Jeroboam, like the prophet, had been chosen by God for a high position. Also like the prophet, he knew perfectly well what God would have him do. But like the prophet, he had disobeyed the word of God."10

Chapter 14

JEROBOAM (continued)

When Abijah, the son of Jeroboam, became sick, the king sent his wife to the prophet Ahijah—the man of God who had previously told Jeroboam that he would be king over the ten northern tribes.

The queen disguised herself, perhaps for several reasons: First, to visit the man of God openly would

betray a lack of faith in the idols at Dan and Bethel; second, Jeroboam realized that Ahijah was opposed to idolatry and would not speak favorable things to her if he knew her identity; third, perhaps the king thought that by fooling the prophet he might fool the Lord (vv. 1-4).

The Lord forewarned the blind prophet of the queen's approach. As soon as she arrived, the prophet exposed her disguise and then sent her back to Jeroboam with a message of doom. Because of the king's disobedience and idolatry, the Lord would cut off from him every male, both bond and free, in Israel and would utterly consume his house (vv. 5-10). None of his family would have a decent burial, except the ailing son, Abijah—who would die as soon as the queen entered the city (vv. 11-13). God would raise up another king (Baasha), who would destroy his family (v. 14). Eventually the nation of Israel would be led into captivity because Jeroboam had inaugurated the worship of Asherim (v. 15). (The Asherim were carved wooden images symbolizing fertility. The word "groves" in the KJV should be translated "Asherim.")

It appears from verse 17 that Tirzah was now the capital of Israel. As soon as the queen returned there, her son died. Israel buried him and mourned, as predicted by the prophet.

After reigning for 22 years, Jeroboam died and was succeeded by his son Nadab. The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel (v. 19) does not refer to the Book of Chronicles in the Bible but to the official record of the kings which was kept as a public national history.

The scene now switches to the kingdom of Judah.

REHOBOAM, Son of Solomon, King of Judah, 17 years, 931/ 30-913 (1 Kgs. 12:20-24; 14:21-31; 2 Chrn. 11 and 12).

We have already studied the first part of Rehoboam's reign in chapter 12. This section summarizes the significant features of his reign: The queen mother was an Ammonitess (vv. 21,31). The fact that this is mentioned twice is designed to call the reader's attention to an underlying reason for the failure of Rehoboam's rule—his father, Solomon, had married foreign wives, who led him and his family into idolatry. Idolatry was prevalent in Judah (vv. 22,23), and male cult prostitutes (sodomites) carried on their abominable practices at the shrines (v. 24). Jerusalem was attacked and plundered by Shishak, king of Egypt. Treasures were stolen from the temple and the royal palace. Rehoboam ordered brass shields to be made in place of the gold ones that were taken (vv. 25-28). Isn't it ironic that Solomon sought to protect himself from Egypt by marrying Pharaoh's daughter, but within a short time after his death Egypt walked off with most of the glitter of Solomon's golden city! This was a period of warfare between Judah and Israel (v. 30). It continued for 57 years, through the reign of Asa in Judah and Omri in Israel. (The Lord prevented an all-out war between Judah and Israel [12:24], but the sister kingdoms were constantly skirmishing with each other.) Rehoboam died at the age of 57, and his son Abijam became king in his place (v. 31).

Chapter 15

ABIJAM, Son of Rehoboam, King of Judah, 3 years, 913-911/10 (1 Kgs. 15:1-8; 2 Chrn. 13—14:1a).

Verse 1 contains a formula that is frequently repeated in the books of Kings. This formula describes the beginning of one reign by naming the king who was reigning in the other kingdom and telling how long he had been reigning. Thus this verse explains that Abijam began to reign over Judah during the eighteenth year of Jeroboam's reign over Israel. He is also called Abia (1 Chrn. 3:10) and Abijah (2 Chrn. 12:16).

Here Abijam's mother is listed as Maachah the daughter of Abishalom; in 2 Chronicles 11:21 it is Maachah the daughter of Absalom; in 2 Chronicles 13:2 it is Michaiah the daughter of Uriel. It is possible that his mother had two names, and that she was the daughter of Uriel and the granddaughter of Absalom (same as Abishalom). ("Son" or "daughter" often simply designates a descendant in biblical usage.)

Abijam followed his father as an idolater and thus failed to follow David, who was "perfect" in the sense that he refrained from the worship of graven images. Verses 4 and 5 imply that God would have destroyed the house of Abijam had it not been for His covenant with David. Notice at the end of verse 5 how an otherwise-exemplary life can be marred by a moment of passion! The war with Israel that began in Rehoboam's reign (v. 6) continued through Abijam's reign (v. 7). In verse 6 Rehoboam and Jeroboam stand for Judah and Israel. There was war between these two kingdoms throughout Abijam's life. He tried to bring Israel back both by persuasion and by force of arms, killing 500,000 Israelites in the attempt (2 Chrn. 13:1-20).

ASA, Son of Abijam, King of Judah, 41 years, 911/10-870/69 (1 Kgs. 15:9-24; 2 Chrn. 14:1b—16:14).

Asa's mother (v. 10) probably means "grandmother." Asa was one of the few good kings of Judah. He removed the sodomites (idolatrous homosexuals) from the land and destroyed the idols that his father had made (v. 12; cf. 2 Chrn. 14:3-5). He deposed his grandmother and destroyed her idol (v. 13), though not the high places associated with this idol (v. 14a). He enriched the temple with gifts from his father and from himself (v. 15).

When Baasha, king of Israel, began to fortify Ramah, a few miles north of Jerusalem, Asa realized that his capital was in peril. However, instead of turning to the Lord, he sought the assistance of Ben-hadad, king of Syria. By making a liberal payment to this foreign monarch, he persuaded him to attack Israel from the north in the region of Galilee. This drew Baasha's forces to the north and enabled Asa to destroy Ramah and to build the fortified cities of Geba and Mizpeh along his northern border (vv. 16-22).

The silver and gold that Asa brought to the temple were given to the Lord (v. 15). But when Baasha threatened his kingdom, Asa took the treasures and gave them to a heathen king, defrauding God and enriching Syria. Christians need to be careful not to take what belongs to God (i.e., their time, wealth, etc.) and give it to someone else.

The fact that he was smitten with a disease of the feet may be mentioned to indicate God's displeasure that Asa had trusted in the king of Syria to deliver him. During his last three or four years, Asa's son Jehoshaphat probably reigned with him (vv. 23,24).

NADAB, Son of Jeroboam, Tribe of Ephraim, King of Israel, 2 years, 910/09-909/08 (1 Kgs. 15:25-31).

Nadab followed his father in the practice of idolatry. One of his subjects, Baasha, rose against him and killed him. At the same time Baasha slew all the remaining members of the house of Jeroboam, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Ahijah (14:10,14).

BAASHA, Son of Ahijah, Tribe of Issachar, King of Israel, 24 years, 909/08-886/85 (1 Kgs. 15:32—16:7).

Baasha's reign marks the beginning of the second dynasty in the kingdom of Israel. Conflict between Israel and Judah continued throughout Baasha's reign. With Tirzah as his capital, he continued the idolatrous worship that Jeroboam had instituted.

Chapter 16

BAASHA (continued)

A prophet named Jehu announced to Baasha that because he followed Jeroboam's idolatry, his posterity would suffer a similar fate. They would not be given the customary burial but would be eaten by dogs or vultures. Another reason for Baasha's doom is given at the end of verse 7—he killed the house of Jeroboam. Either he was not the one whom God intended to do this or he did it in a cruel and vengeful manner, contrary to God's will (vv. 1-7).

ELAH, Son of Baasha, Tribe of Issachar, King of Israel, 2 years, 886/85-885/84 (1 Kgs. 16:8-14).

Elah was a wicked king, given over to idolatry and drunkenness. After he had reigned two years, he was assassinated by the commander of half his chariots, Zimri. Also slain were all the rest of Baasha's family, in fulfillment of Jehu's prophecy (16:3). Elah's death ended

the second dynasty in Israel. ZIMRI, King of Israel, 7 days, 885/84 (1 Kgs. 16:15-20).

Zimri's wicked reign was the shortest of all the kings, lasting only seven days. When he usurped the throne, the army of Israel was trying to capture the city of Gibbethon from the Philistines. The army proclaimed its commander, Omri, to be king. He promptly marched against Tirzah, the capital, to seize the reins of government. Zimri retreated into the royal palace, set it on fire, and perished in the flames.

TIBNI, King of Israel, 4 years, 885/84-881/80 (1 Kgs. 16:21,22).

OMRI, King of Israel, 12 years, 885/84-874/73 (1 Kgs. 16:21-28).

Omri's reign began the fourth dynasty in the northern kingdom. His right to rule was at first challenged by Tibni, resulting in civil war for about four years (cf. vv. 15,23). Tibni was defeated in 880 B.C., and Omri became the undisputed king. For the first six years he reigned in Tirzah. Then he purchased the hill of Samaria for two talents of silver and moved his capital there. The evil character of his reign is emphasized in verses 25 and 26.

Omri's chronology is somewhat complex. He was proclaimed king in the 27th year of Asa, after the death of Zimri (v. 15). After four years of civil war he became undisputed king over the northern kingdom in Asa's 31st year (v. 23). He died in the 38th year of Asa (v. 29). Thus he had about four years of internal strife and about eight years of relative peace.

Omri was a progressive king and brought a measure of peace and prosperity to Israel. Archaeologists have found what they believe was Omri's palace in Samaria.

AHAB, Son of Omri, King of Israel, 22 years, 874/73-853 (1 Kgs. 16:29—22:40).

Ahab was an exceedingly wicked king, not only because he followed Jeroboam in idolatry, but also because he married Jezebel, a daughter of the king of the Zidonians. This sinister woman was a Baal-worshiper who succeeded in influencing Ahab to promote Baal-worship in Israel by building a temple, an altar, and Asherim. The godlessness of the times is witnessed by the brazen attempt of Hiel the Bethelite to rebuild Jericho in defiance of God's curse (Josh. 6:26). When he laid the foundation, his oldest son, Abiram, died. As the gates were erected, his youngest son, Segub, died (v. 34).

Chapter 17

AHAB (continued)

In this chapter we are introduced to the prophet Elijah. His ministry extends through 2 Kings 2:11. God spoke to His people through prophets during times of sin and declension. These prophets were really mouthpieces for Jehovah. They fearlessly cried out against idolatry, immorality, and all other forms of iniquity. They urged the people to repent and return to the Lord, and then warned of dire consequences if they failed to do so. Some prophets ministered primarily to Israel, some to Judah, and some to both. Since Israel was the more wicked of the two kingdoms, God accompanied the prophet's messages to Israel with miracles and wonders. This left Israel without excuse.

Elijah (Elias) is mentioned in the Gospels in connection with the ministry of John the Baptist. John came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17).

Elijah came from Tishbe (RSV) in Gilead, east of the Jordan River, and was thus called a Tishbite. The history of Elijah is recorded only in Kings. We are told nothing about his background, family, or call to the prophetic ministry. But that he was a man sent from God no one could deny. He was God's chosen instrument to bring adulterous and haughty Israel to her knees. His prayers could bring down blessing (rain) or wrath (drought and fire). He served his generation as a fearless, embodied conscience. His first recorded act was to announce to King Ahab that the land would suffer a drought (v. 1). This was obviously a divine judgment against idolatry. God chose to use a severe drought to get the people's attention. They did not care that idolatry had brought a spiritual drought upon the land, but they could not ignore the physical drought that typified it.

In obedience to the Lord, Elijah went from Samaria to the brook Cherith, east of the Jordan. There he was sustained by water from the brook and by food which was miraculously brought to him morning and evening by ravens (vv. 2-7). When the brook dried up because of the drought, Elijah journeyed to Zarephath, on the Mediterranean coast between Tyre and Sidon. There God had arranged that a Gentile widow would feed him. At first she hesitated because she had only enough meal for her son and herself. However, the prophet ordered her to make a cake for him first (by doing this she was, in effect, giving God the first place). When she obeyed, she learned the precious lesson that those who put God first never lack the necessities of life. Her barrel of meal

and cruse of oil never failed (vv. 8-16). Jesus made note of the fact that Elijah was sent to a Gentile widow and not to any of the numerous Israelite widows (Luke 4:26).

During the drought Jehovah provided for His prophet in most humbling ways—first through unclean birds and then through a Gentile woman, and a poor widow at that. The king in his palace was hard-pressed, but Elijah had all he needed. God's man, obeying God's voice, will always have his needs met, despite the conditions that prevail around him.

Later the son of the widow was smitten with a serious illness and died. Immediately the mother suspected that Elijah had ordered death because of some sin she had committed. The prophet took the lad up to his bedroom, stretched out on the child three times, and cried to the Lord. The boy revived and was taken down to his mother in normal health. This convinced the widow that Elijah was a man of God and that the Lord's word was truth. As a Gentile, she showed faith in the God of Israel (vv. 17-24).

Chapter 18

AHAB (continued)

Three years after Elijah left Israel, and 3½ years after the drought had begun (Luke 4:25), the prophet was instructed to appear before Ahab—an action that, humanly speaking, was extremely dangerous. So severe was the famine that Ahab and his steward, Obadiah (not the prophet who wrote the book of Obadiah) had searched the land for grass to feed the animals. (It was this Obadiah who had saved 100 prophets of the Lord when Jezebel had murdered some and was seeking to

exterminate others.) While on his search, Obadiah met Elijah and was ordered by him to notify Ahab of Elijah's whereabouts. Obadiah feared that this would result in his death, since Ahab had been searching relentlessly for Elijah. If Obadiah revealed Elijah's presence, the king would undoubtedly respond. But by then the Spirit of the Lord might have carried Elijah away. Then Ahab would kill Obadiah for his false report. And besides all this, Obadiah's position in the royal court was already precarious because he had protected the prophets of Jehovah. Elijah promised that he would not leave the place, and a meeting was then arranged (vv. 1-15).

King Ahab went to meet Elijah and accused him of troubling Israel, not realizing that the man of God was one of the best friends Israel ever had. Not fearing for his own life, Elijah answered Ahab fearlessly and accusingly. He blamed the king for mixing the worship of Jehovah with Baal worship and challenged him to assemble his idolatrous prophets for a contest on Mount Carmel to determine who was the true God (vv. 16-19). (The 450 prophets of Baal went to Carmel, but the 400 prophets of the Asherah did not; cf. vv. 19,22).

Addressing the assembled representatives of Israel, Elijah accused them of wavering between two opinions; they should choose either the Lord or Baal. Then the contest began. Two oxen were to be killed and laid on kindling wood. Elijah would represent the Lord, whereas 450 of Ahab's prophets would represent Baal. The god who answered by fire would be acknowledged as the true God. The prophets of Baal cried out to their god and hopped around the altar from morning to noon. Elijah mocked them with "helpful" excuses for Baal's failure to answer. "Perhaps he was such a small, weak

god that he could not do two things at once." In desperation, they cut themselves with swords and lances and raved on until the time of the evening oblation, but "there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded" (vv. 20-29).

Elijah then made an altar of 12 stones, representing the 12 tribes of Israel. Then, to eliminate any possibility that the altar might be ignited in any way other than by a miracle, he saturated the oxen and the wood with 12 barrels of water (four barrels emptied three times) (vv. 30-35).

Some wonder how Elijah obtained so much water during a time of drought. But this is not a real difficulty. Twelve barrels of water is not an impossible amount during drought time. The drought had affected farmlands, but drinking water must have been obtainable or else all would have died. Another explanation is that this water could have come from the Mediterranean Sea, a few miles away. Williams says, "The Kishon (v. 40), the sea (v. 43), and a well which still exists could severally or collectively supply the water needed to fill the trench (v. 35)."11

At the time of the evening sacrifice, Elijah prayed that God would reveal himself by sending fire from heaven. Immediately the fire of the Lord fell from heaven, consuming not only the sacrifice but also the wood, the stones, the dust, and the water in the trench around the altar. The people were thus compelled to acknowledge the Lord as the real God. Then they obeyed Elijah's order to slay the wicked prophets of Baal (vv. 36-40). Only after the people acknowledged that Jehovah was God and executed the prophets of Baal could the rain

come. Confession of sin and obedience to the Word of God are the steps to blessing.

The prophet advised Ahab to eat a meal because he would soon have to leave Mount Carmel to escape the oncoming rain. While Ahab sat down to eat, Elijah rose up to pray. He ascended to the summit of Mount Carmel, bowed on the earth with his face between his knees, and fervently asked the Lord to fulfill His word by sending rain. He continued in prayer until his servant reported a tiny cloud on the horizon. That was enough for Elijah. He immediately sent word to Ahab to make haste for Jezreel, a city in Issachar where the royal family lived at times (21:1). As a loyal subject and faithful servant, the prophet ran before Ahab's chariot in a drenching rain 20 miles to Jezreel (vv. 41-46).

Chapter 19

AHAB (continued)

When Ahab told Jezebel of the defeat and death of the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, she swore that she would slay Elijah within a day. Then the prophet whose faith had gained such a mighty victory the previous day lost courage and fled from Jezreel, south across the land to Beersheba, about 100 miles away, at the southern boundary of Judah. Leaving his servant at Beersheba, Elijah continued south a day's journey into the wilderness. At length he rested under a juniper (broom) tree, despondent, defeated, and depressed (vv. 1-4). It is interesting to notice God's treatment for this severe depression: rest (v. 5a); food and drink (vv. 5,6); more rest (v. 6b); more food and drink (vv. 7,8). Thus fortified, the prophet traveled 200 miles in 40 days and nights to Mount Horeb (Sinai), where God had given the law to

Moses. There in a cave the Lord dealt with him. In a self-righteous spirit, Elijah protested his own faithfulness and denounced the people of Israel. He said in effect that he was the only one who had remained true to Jehovah. God then commanded him to stand on the mount of the law, but Elijah did not obey. In rapid succession the mount was visited by a great wind, an earthquake, and a fire. These violent storms must have reminded Elijah of his harsh, censorious spirit. None of them brought him out of the cave. Finally the prophet heard a still, small voice (gentle blowing, NASB). It was this gracious voice of the Lord which brought him to the mouth of the cave. There he again exalted himself as God's sole remaining witness (vv. 9-14). "Had his heart not been occupied with self, he would have learned that tempests, earthquakes and fires cannot accomplish what the gentle voice of love can. He should have recognized that there was no difference between his heart and that of the nation; and, that as coercion failed to make him leave his cave, so it failed, and must fail, to compel men to leave their sins."12

It seems that Elijah's usefulness as a servant of God suffered when he adopted this attitude of self-importance. God told him to return north to the wilderness of Damascus, where he would conduct three anointings: 1. He would anoint Hazael to be king of Syria. The disobedient nation of Israel would be punished by this king. 2. He would anoint Jehu to be king of Israel. Jehu would execute God's judgment on the house of Ahab. 3. He would anoint Elisha as his own successor. This would teach him that he was not indispensable. These three men would execute God's judgment on idolaters in Israel (v. 17), but the Lord

would leave 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal or kissed him (vv. 15-18).

Elijah must have directed his successor, Elisha, to fulfill the Lord's command to anoint Hazael and Jehu, since these anointings took place after Elijah's homecall (2 Kgs. 8:7ff; 9: 1ff). Elisha was the only one of the three whom Elijah would personally anoint. The fact that Elisha had 12 yoke of oxen (v. 19) indicates that he was not poverty-stricken. He was probably plowing with one yoke and his servants with the other 11.

Elijah then traveled north to Abel-meholah, in the Jordan Valley near Beth-shean. There he found Elisha, a farmer, in the field. Elijah cast his mantel on Elisha, a sign that Elisha was to be his successor. Elisha asked permission to return home and make a farewell feast for his family. Elijah gave consent but warned him not to forget what had just happened to him—i.e., how Elijah had anointed him. After a sumptuous feast, Elisha followed Elijah and became his personal servant (vv. 19-21).

Chapter 20

AHAB (continued)

Ben-hadad, the king of Syria (v. 1), was formerly thought to be the son of the Ben-hadad mentioned in 15:18,20. But later research has raised the possibility that he was the same person. He formed an alliance of 32 Aramean kings and marched against Samaria. When the city was in a state of siege, he sent surrender terms to Ahab —"Your silver … your gold … your fairest wives and children" (RSV). Ahab meekly and weakly agreed. Not satisfied with Ahab's capitulation to his first terms, Ben-hadad next demanded right of entry for his servants and

the right to seize anything they wanted. The elders of Israel were indignant at this second demand and urged noncompliance. When Ben-hadad was notified of Israel's refusal, he flew into a rage, boasting that he would strip Samaria so bare that there wouldn't be a handful of dust for each of his soldiers. To this, Ahab replied that a soldier putting on his armor should not boast as if the victory were already won. This taunt stirred the carousing Syrian and his confederates to action (vv. 1-12).

At this point a prophet of the Lord appeared to Ahab, assuring him of victory. God used a small force of 232 servants of the governors of the districts, followed by 7000 of the people of Israel, to defeat the assembled armies from the north. "… all the children of Israel" (v. 15b) means all the soldiers in Samaria. A small number of young servants was chosen to begin the battle, to make it all the more apparent that victory was from the Lord and not from the arm of the flesh. Ahab attacked at noon, when Ben-hadad and his allies were getting drunk. When Ben-hadad heard that the 232 men of Israel were advancing, he ordered that they be taken alive. This, of course, gave a military advantage to the Israelites and resulted in a great slaughter of the Syrians. The survivors retreated to their homeland. The prophet of the Lord warned Ahab that the Syrian army would return in the spring (vv. 13-22).

Ben-hadad's servants attributed their shameful defeat to two factors: 1. The Israelites had won the battle in hill country. Doubtless their gods were gods of the hills. But they would be impotent on the plains. So the Syrians should engage them the next time on the plains. 2. The 32 kings who fought against Ahab had apparently

proved themselves unskilled in warfare. Ben-hadad's servants advised that they be replaced by professional commanders (vv. 23-25).

In the spring, Ben-hadad marched against Israel again. The army of Israel looked like two little flocks of goats compared to the host of Syria. A man of God told Ahab that the Lord would show Ben-hadad that He was the God of the valleys as well as of the hills. In the battle, Israel killed 100,000 foot soldiers. The Syrians who escaped tried to take up positions on the walls of the city of Aphek, but the walls collapsed, killing 27,000 of them (vv. 26-30).

The king hid in an inner chamber of Aphek. His servants persuaded him to let them go to Ahab, clothed with symbols of surrender and mourning, and to plead for mercy. In the interview, Ahab stupidly referred to the king as his "brother." The men of Syria quickly caught that word and said, "Yes, your brother Ben-hadad!" Ahab ordered that the king of Syria be brought to him. Ben-hadad promised to return the cities which had been taken from Ahab's predecessor (15:20) and to allow Israel to establish trade in Damascus (v. 34). Ahab made a covenant on these terms and let Ben-hadad escape instead of killing him, as he should have done (vv. 31-34). Ahab wanted a strong Syria as a buffer between Israel and the growing menace of Assyria. The incident that follows was an object lesson, acted out by the prophet, to illustrate the folly of Ahab's action.

One of the sons of the prophets ordered his fellow at the command of the Lord to strike him. The man disobeyed him and therefore disobeyed the Lord. For his failure to obey the Lord's voice, he was destroyed by a lion. "If a

good prophet were thus punished for sparing his friend and God's, when God said Smite, of much sorer punishment should a wicked king be thought worthy who spared his enemy and God's when God said Smite."13 The prophet found another man who obeyed him by smiting and wounding him. Then the prophet disguised himself with a bandage over his eyes and waited for King Ahab. When the king was passing by, the prophet told of being in the battle and of being charged with the custody of an enemy prisoner. He had been warned that if the prisoner escaped, he would have to pay either with his own life or with the exorbitant figure of one talent of silver. The disguised prophet told how he had become preoccupied with other things and how the prisoner had escaped. The king showed no leniency; he insisted that the original terms of punishment be carried out. Then the prophet sprang the trap. Ahab had had an enemy prisoner, Ben-hadad, in his grasp. Obedience to the Lord required that the Syrian king be killed. For his disobedience Ahab would be slain (vv. 35-43).

"This was the meaning of the parable: Ahab had one thing to do by the command of God, and while he did a hundred things, he neglected the one. What a revelation of a perpetual reason and method of failure! We are given some one responsibility by God, some central, definite thing to do. We start to do it with all good intentions, and then other things, not necessarily wrong in themselves, come in our way. We get 'busy here and there' doing many things and we neglect the one central thing."14

Like King David before him, Ahab condemned himself by his own words. But unlike David, who repented, Ahab became upset and stormed off to his palace to pout.

Instead of asking the Lord for mercy, he continued to incite the Lord to wrath, as we read in the remaining chapters of 1 Kings.

Chapter 21

AHAB (continued)

This chapter traces the events leading up to the death of Ahab. The scene is in Jezreel, where Ahab and Jezebel had a palace. Adjoining the palace was a vineyard owned by Naboth the Jezreelite. Ahab desired to annex the vineyard so he could plant a vegetable garden there. Naboth refused to sell or exchange his land, since the law of Israel decreed that property should remain in the family to which it was originally assigned (Lev. 25:23-28; Num. 36:7; Ezek. 46:18) (vv. 1-4). When Jezebel found her husband vexed and sullen and learned of Naboth's refusal to sell his vineyard, she assured Ahab that the vineyard would soon be his. She ordered a fast and a court of inquiry. Two evil men were appointed to charge Naboth with blasphemy against God and the king. Accordingly, Naboth was taken outside the city and stoned to death (vv. 5-16). The treacherous Jezebel thus framed him so that it would appear he was being executed for breaking the law of Jehovah. Since the property would pass on to Naboth's sons after his death, Jezebel had them murdered as well (2 Kgs. 9:26). The iniquitous queen was as thorough as she was wicked.

When Ahab was on his way to take possession of the vineyard, Elijah met him and condemned him for murder and theft. Elijah predicted that Ahab himself would be slain (v. 19), that his male descendants would be slain, ending his dynasty (vv. 21,22), that the body of Jezebel would be eaten by dogs in Jezreel (v. 23), and that

Ahab's descendants would not be given a decent burial (v. 24). The severity of Ahab's punishment is explained by the extremes to which he went in idolatry (vv. 25,26). When Ahab heard his doom, he humbled himself before the Lord. For this, the Lord decreed that the judgments on his wife and family would not take place until after Ahab's death (vv. 27-29).

If we learn anything from verses 27-29, it is that God is a God of grace and mercy. " 'As I live!' declares the Lord God, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his ways and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die? …' " (Ezek. 33:11 NASB). Even Ahab's superficial repentance brought a respite. But the next chapter proves that his heart was unchanged. Grace was met by pride, so the Lord handed Ahab over to the angel of death, and Jehu was appointed to carry out the bloody decree against the rest of his house according to the prophecy of Elijah (2 Kgs. 9, 10).

Chapter 22

AHAB (continued)

After three years of peace between Israel and Syria, Ahab conceived the idea of recapturing Ramoth-gilead, on the east of the Jordan, from the Syrians. (Ben-hadad had promised to return Israel's cities when he received amnesty from Ahab [20:34], but he apparently failed to do so.) Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, happened to be visiting Ahab at the time and expressed willingness to cooperate in the military venture. But first Jehoshaphat suggested that they inquire of the Lord through the prophets. Four hundred prophets in Ahab's court advised in favor of the plan and promised victory (vv.

1-6). (These may have been the 400 prophets who did not go to Mount Carmel for the showdown with Elijah—18:19,22.)

Jehoshaphat must have felt uneasy because he asked if there were a prophet of the Lord who could be consulted. This brought to the fore Micaiah, a fearless prophet who was hated by Ahab because of his uncompromising messages. At the time Micaiah was summoned, the 400 prophets were unanimously urging the kings of Israel and Judah to march against Syria. One of them, Zedekiah, made horns of iron to depict the irresistible power of Ahab and Jehoshaphat against the Syrians (vv. 7-12). Micaiah was informed that his message should agree with that of the other prophets, but the advice was wasted on him. When Ahab asked if the campaign against Ramoth-gilead should be undertaken, Micaiah first said the same thing as the prophets: “Go and prosper, for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king.” But it is probable that he said it in a mocking manner. The tone of his voice must have revealed irony and sarcasm.

Ahab sensed this and put Micaiah under oath to tell the truth (Lev. 5:1). The prophet then related a vision in which Israel was scattered because they had no shepherd, intimating that Ahab would be killed and his army dispersed (vv. 13-17).

King Ahab presented this to Jehoshaphat as evidence that Micaiah could speak nothing but evil against him. Then the brave prophet spoke up again. He related a vision in which a lying spirit, appearing before the Lord, agreed to trick Ahab into going against Ramoth-gilead and be slain. The lying spirit would put this advice into

the mouths of all the king's prophets (vv. 18-23). This is an example of how God, while not the author of evil, uses it to achieve His ultimate ends. He sent the lying spirit (v. 23) only in the sense that He permitted it.

The point of this parable was not lost upon Zedekiah. Realizing that he and the other prophets were being accused of lying, he struck Micaiah and asked, "Which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me to speak unto thee?" In other words, Zedekiah was saying, "I spoke by the Spirit of God when I advised Ahab to go against Ramoth-gilead. Now you profess to speak by the Spirit, yet you advise the very opposite. How did the Spirit go from me to you?" Micaiah answered calmly that Zedekiah would know the truth when he would hide in terror in a secret place— evidently when Ahab's death would expose Zedekiah to the fate of a false prophet (vv. 24,25).

The infuriated Ahab ordered that Micaiah be put in prison and fed with bread and water until he (Ahab) returned in peace from Ramoth-gilead. Micaiah's parting salute was, "If you indeed return safely, the Lord has not spoken by me." Ahab decided to disguise himself before going into battle, hoping in this way to avoid the disaster predicted by Micaiah. Jehoshaphat, on the other hand, would wear his kingly robes, exposing himself to the very danger that Ahab was trying to escape. Ahab thus attempted to fool the Lord and the king of Syria, but "God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap" (Gal. 6:7 NASB). Ahab was slain, but Jehoshaphat was saved.

The Syrians had been ordered to kill the king of Israel; this was their prime military objective. At first they

mistook Jehoshaphat for Ahab. The king of Judah cried out in terror, perhaps revealing his true identity in this way. Then Ahab was struck by a random arrow and was removed from the active fighting. He was propped up in his chariot so that his army could not lose heart. When he died at sunset, the fact became known, and his soldiers retreated to their homes (vv. 26-36).

Ahab's body was taken back to Samaria and buried. His bloodstained chariot was washed beside a pool in Samaria where the harlots washed themselves (v. 38 NASB). This was only a partial fulfillment of Elijah's prophecy (21:19); it took place in Samaria rather than in Jezreel. Because Ahab had humbled himself (21:29), God compassionately deferred the complete fulfillment to the king's son, Joram (2 Kgs. 9:25,26) (vv. 37-40).

Ahab received three separate prophetic warnings of his death. One was pronounced by an unnamed prophet when Ahab spared Ben-hadad (20:42); one was given by Elijah when Ahab took the vineyard of Naboth (21:19); and the third prophecy was uttered by Micaiah on the eve of the eventful battle (vv. 17-23).

JEHOSHAPHAT, Son of Asa, King of Judah, 25 years, 873/ 72-848 (1 Kgs. 22:41-50; 2 Chrn. 17—21:3).

For the first three or four years, Jehoshaphat coreigned with Asa. We have already been introduced to Jehoshaphat in verses 2-4, where he made a shameful alliance with the wicked king of Israel and nearly lost his life as a result. In general, however, his reign was good. The following are significant features of Asa's administration.

1. He followed his father's example in combating idolatry, though he was not successful in eradicating it

completely (v. 43). 2. He reigned jointly with his father. 3. He made peace with Ahab, king of Israel (v. 44). 4. He expelled the male cult prostitutes from the land (v. 46). 5. His kingdom included the land of Edom (2 Sam. 8:14), where he was represented by a deputy (v. 47). His son Jehoram later lost Edom through a revolution (2 Kgs. 8:20). 6. He allied himself with Ahaziah, Ahab's son, in a shipbuilding project at Ezion-geber (2 Chrn. 20:35,36). Their plan was to send the ships to Ophir for gold. But the ships were destroyed before they ever left port (v. 48), no doubt by a windstorm. The prophet Eliezer told Jehoshaphat that this was because the Lord disapproved of the unholy alliance with Ahaziah (2 Chrn. 20:37). When Ahaziah suggested renewing the project, Jehoshaphat declined (v. 49).

AHAZIAH, Son of Ahab, King of Israel, 2 years, 853-852 (1 Kgs. 22:51-53; 2 Kgs. 1:1-18).

The reign of Ahaziah was one of gross idolatry and wickedness. His mother, Jezebel, no doubt urged him on in ungodliness even as she had pushed his father. He worshiped Baal and provoked Jehovah—like father, like son. There is no formal close to 1 Kings, since 1 and 2 Kings were originally one book. Second Kings continues the narrative from this point.

1 O.J. Gibson, unpublished notes.

2 Matthew Poole, Matthew Poole's Commentary on the Holy Bible, p. 657.

3 Daily Notes of the Scripture Union, further documentation unavailable.

4 C. H. Spurgeon, Spurgeon's Devotional Bible, p. 305.

5 Daily Notes of the Scripture Union, further documentation unavailable.

6 John Haley, Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible, p. 223.

7 Baker's Bible Atlas, p. 309.

8 J. R. Lumly, further documentation unavailable.

9 Matthew Henry, The Matthew Henry Commentary, p. 378.

10 Irving L. Jensen, I Kings with Chronicles, pp. 80-81.

11 George Williams, The Student's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, p. 195.

12 Ibid., p. 196.

13 Matthew Henry, op. cit., p. 394.

14 G. Campbell Morgan, Searchlights from the Word, p. 100.

2 Kings

Outline Of 2 Kings

I. The Divided Kingdom (Cont'd, from 1 Kings) (1—17)

A. Ahaziah and the ministry of Elijah (1)

B. Elijah's translation and the beginning of Elisha's ministry (2)

C. Jehoram's (Joram's) reign and the ministry of Elisha (3:1—8:15)

D. Jehoram (Joram) (8:16-24)

E. Ahaziah (8:25-29)

F. Jehu's reign and Elisha's ministry (9, 10)

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I. Jehoahaz (13:1-9)

J. Jehoash (Joash) (13:10-13) and the close of Elisha's ministry (13:14-25)

K. Amaziah (14:1-20)

L. Azariah (Uzziah) (14:21,22; 15:1-7)

M. Jeroboam II (14:23-29)

N. Zechariah (15:8-12)

O. Shallum (15:13-15)

P. Menahem (15:16-22)

Q. Pekahiah (15:23-26)

R. Pekah (15:27-31)

S. Jotham (15:32-38)

T. Ahaz (16:1-20)

U. Hoshea and the fall of the kingdom of Israel (17)

II. The Kingdom of Judah to the Captivity (18—25)

A. Hezekiah (18—20)

B. Manasseh (21:1-18)

C. Amon (21:19-26)

D. Josiah (22:1—23:30)

E. Jehoahaz (23:31-33)

F. Jehoiakim (23:34—24:7)

G. Jehoiachin (24:8-16; 25:27-30)

H. Zedekiah and the fall of Jerusalem (24:17—25:21)

I. Governorship of Gedaliah (25:22-26)

The two books of the Kings were originally one book. This accounts for the interruption in the record of the reign of Ahaziah.

Chapter 1

AHAZIAH (continued)

Moab had been subjugated by David (2 Sam. 8:2). When Solomon's kingdom was divided into Israel and Judah, Moab came under Israel's sway. After Ahab's death, the Moabites revolted and won their independence (v. 1).

King Ahaziah fell through the latticework on the roof of his palace in Samaria and was seriously injured. Instead of appealing to the Lord for healing, he sent messengers to Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, to see if he would recover. "The real name of this Syrian deity was Baal-

zebul (‘Lord of life’), but the Jews called him Baal-zebub (‘Lord of flies’) in derision. By the time of Christ, this deity had become a symbol of Satan.”1 It is pathetic that a king named “whom Jehovah sustains” should turn to Baal for healing!

Clad in haircloth and wearing a leather girdle, Elijah met the messengers and sent them back to Ahaziah with a stern rebuke for inquiring of Baal-zebub and with the announcement that his illness would be fatal (vv. 2-4). Ahaziah responded by sending a captain with 50 men to order Elijah to appear before him immediately. When the captain delivered the insolent demand, God vindicated Elijah by causing fire from heaven to destroy the captain and his men. A second captain with 50 men ordered Elijah to come quickly, but they met the same fate. With fire from heaven God had previously discredited Baal and his priests (1 Kgs. 18). Now that same heavenly flame destroyed the soldiers of Baal who sought to lay unholy hands on Elijah. The prophet took his orders from Israel’s true King, not from an idolatrous usurper. We are not told specifically why the two captains and their men were killed; perhaps they shared Ahaziah’s determination to destroy Elijah. Only when the third captain humbly acknowledged Elijah’s power and pleaded for mercy was the prophet instructed by the angel of the Lord (Christ in preincarnate appearance) to go and speak with Ahaziah. Elijah fearlessly told the king that he would not recover because he had treated the Lord with contempt by consulting Baal-zebub (vv. 5-16).

When Ahaziah died, he was succeeded by his brother, Jehoram, since he had no son to wear the crown (vv. 17,18). Judah at this time had a coregency composed of

Jehoshaphat (3:1) and his son, who was also named Jehoram.

Chapter 2

This chapter opens with the saintly Elijah being “taken up” (vv. 1-11) and closes with the hooligans of Bethel being “torn up” (vv. 23-25).

The time had now come for Elijah to finish his ministry and for Elisha to succeed him. But first Elijah must visit Bethel, Jericho, and Jordan. Elisha faithfully insisted on going with him to these places. In Bethel and Jericho, the sons of the prophets told Elisha that the Lord was going to take Elijah “away from his head” that day. This refers to the practice of a disciple sitting at his master’s feet; in such an arrangement, the master was at the disciple’s head, of course. Elisha already knew this and told the prophets to hold their peace. The matter was too sad and sacred to discuss (vv. 1-6). From Jericho, Elijah and Elisha went down to the Jordan River, followed at a distance by 50 of the prophets. When Elijah smote the Jordan with his mantle, the waters parted and the two men passed over on dry land. Elijah had come from Gilead, east of the Jordan, during the reign of Ahab, to begin his prophetic work (1 Kgs. 17:1). Now at the close of his ministry he crossed back over Jordan to be taken up into heaven. Encouraged by the departing prophet to make a request, Elisha asked for a double portion of his spirit. The double portion is the right of the firstborn son and may simply mean here that Elisha wanted to be his worthy successor. Williams says that the fulfillment of the request is seen in the fact that, whereas Elijah performed eight recorded miracles, Elisha performed 16.2 Elijah said that it was not in his

power to grant the request, then added a condition that was also beyond his control: If Elisha would see him depart, then his request would be granted. As they walked on, they were separated by chariots and horses of fire. Then a whirlwind caught Elijah up to heaven in full view of Elisha. Elisha cried out, “My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof!” This meant that Elijah was the strongest weapon of God’s power and the best defense of Israel (vv. 7-12).

After tearing apart his clothes in grief, Elisha returned to the east bank of the Jordan, struck the water with Elijah’s mantle, and cried, “Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?” This question did not express doubt or unbelief but merely afforded opportunity for God to show that He was with Elisha as He had been with Elijah. The waters parted, permitting the prophet to return to the west bank of the river, where the 50 sons of the prophets had been waiting and watching. After seeing the parting of the Jordan, they acknowledged that Elisha was truly the successor of Elijah. Against Elisha’s better judgment they insisted on sending out a party to search for Elijah, but the trip was in vain, of course, as Elisha had warned. Either they had not witnessed Elijah’s translation, or, if they had, they thought his absence was temporary (vv. 13-18).

The ministry of Elisha from this point to 13:20 consists of a series of miracles designed to turn the nation of Israel away from idolatry to the true and living God. The incidents are not necessarily in chronological order. The first of these miracles occurred when Elisha threw salt into the brackish water in the fountain at Jericho; never again did it cause death or barrenness (vv. 21,22). En route from Jericho to Bethel, one of the seats of calf

worship, Elisha was met by some rowdy teenagers who called him a baldhead and mockingly challenged him to ascend to heaven as Elijah had done. After he cursed them in the name of the Lord, two female bears came out of the woods and injured 42 of them (vv. 23-25). An insult to God's messenger is an insult to God Himself.

Elisha retraced Elijah's steps, going to the schools of the prophets in Jericho and Bethel before traveling to Mount Carmel and Samaria. At Jericho the people treated him respectfully and received a blessing. At Bethel the young people treated him shamefully because of their irreverence for Jehovah, and received a curse.

Chapter 3

JEHORAM, Son of Ahab, King of Israel, 12 years, 852-841 (2 Kgs. 3:1—9:29).

When Jehoram, son of Ahab, began to reign as king of Israel, there was a coregency in Judah (Jehoshaphat and his son Jehoram). That explains how Jehoram, king of Israel, began to reign in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat (verse 1) and in the second year of Jehoram, king of Judah (2 Kgs. 1:17).

Jehoram (same name as Joram) was not as evil as his parents; he put away the pillar of Baal which Ahab had erected. However, he clung to the golden-calf-worship instituted by Jeroboam (vv. 1-3).

Under Ahab's reign, the king of Moab had been required to pay annual tribute to Israel. When Ahab died, Mesha decided that it was a strategic time to rebel. The famous Moabite Stone, discovered by a German missionary in 1868, mentions Israel's subjugation of Moab and Mesha's successful rebellion.

Ahaziah had done nothing about Moab's rebellion, but when Jehoram came to power he immediately sought to bring Moab back under his control, not wanting to lose her sizable tribute. Jehoram asked Jehoshaphat to join with him in the battle, and once again Jehoshaphat foolishly agreed. (See 1 Kings 22, where Jehoshaphat almost lost his life by allying himself with Israel.) They decided to march down the west side of the Dead Sea, east through Edom, and north to Moab. Since the king of Edom was a vassal of Jehoshaphat at this time, his help was enlisted in the war (vv. 4-9). As they approached Moab, the armies ran out of water. The insolence of Jehoram in blaming God was answered by Jehoshaphat's suggestion that a prophet of the Lord be consulted. When it became known that Elisha, the servant of Elijah, was nearby, the three kings went to him (vv. 10-12). At first Elisha protested that he had nothing in common with the idolatrous king of Israel and suggested that he go to the idolatrous prophets of his fathers. Jehoram's reply may have suggested that it wasn't the idols but the Lord who was causing the problem. In deference to Jehoshaphat, Elisha agreed to seek the mind of the Lord. As a minstrel played, the power of God came upon Elisha and he predicted that the valley would be full of pools not caused by rain (vv. 16,17 RSV) and that Moab would be defeated. The next morning water flowed in the valley, coming from the direction of Edom. In the light of the sunrise, the water looked like blood to the Moabites, and they decided that the kings of Israel, Judah, and Edom had fought among themselves. As they hurried to the camp of Israel for the spoil, they met a devastating attack. The Israelites filled the arable land with stones, stopped the wells, and cut down the good trees (vv. 13-25).

The king of Moab, embittered at his former allies, the Edomites, and suspecting that their king would not fight as wholeheartedly as Israel and Judah, sought to break through the lines of Edom. When this strategem failed, he offered his oldest son as a sacrifice on the wall of the city to appease his gods, to incite his men to fiercer battle, and to frighten the enemy. Israel was stunned by this human sacrifice, which was, of course, an abomination. Smitten directly by God or by their own consciences, they withdrew without bringing Moab back into subjection (vv. 26,27). “The author seems to be asking: If Israel was so deeply moved in this case, why was she not shocked enough to forsake her own idolatry? But idolatry continued in Israel and in Judah.”3

Chapter 4

This chapter catalogs five miracles performed by Elisha.

Miraculous provision of oil (vv. 1-7). An impoverished widow of one of the godly prophets was in danger of losing her sons to slavery because of unpaid debts. She was supplied with oil, the only limit being the number of vessels she had to receive it. By selling the oil she was able to pay her creditors and support her family. Here we see grace for the debtor, enough to meet present needs and to provide for future sustenance. God’s grace to needy sinners sets us free from debt and slavery and provides all we need for a new life.

Miraculous birth (vv. 8-17). A wealthy Gentile woman of Shunem had shown unusual hospitality to Elisha, even fitting out a room for him in her home. When given her request by the man of God, she humbly expressed her satisfaction at dwelling simply among her own people. Gehazi, the servant of the prophet, suggested that she

might like a son, and this suggestion became a reality at the word of the prophet. The following spring she bore a son. Out of death (the barren womb) the Lord brought life, a picture of the spiritual birth of every child of God (Eph. 2:1-10).

Raising the Shunammite's son to life (vv. 18-37). Years later the lad suffered a stroke of some kind while in the field. He was carried back to his mother and died in her arms at noon. She put his body in the prophet's chamber; then, without revealing the reason, she told her husband that she wanted to visit the man of God on Mount Carmel. He thought it strange to visit the prophet when it was not a religious holiday, but he made the necessary arrangements for transportation. With great speed she rode from Shunem, in the plain of Esdraelon, to Mount Carmel. Seeing her approach, Elisha sent Gehazi to meet her and to inquire as to her welfare. She did not tell Gehazi the purpose of her visit. In fact, she deceived him by saying that all was well with herself, her husband, and her son. She preferred to present her case directly to the prophet. The woman met Elisha with an emotional outburst and would have been dismissed by Gehazi if the prophet had not sensed her deep concern and permitted her to speak. The Lord had not revealed to Elisha the purpose of her visit, and neither did she. But she gave a hint when she said, "Did I desire a son of my lord? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me'?" (v. 28). In other words, "I do not want to be deceived by being given a son and then having him taken away from me." Perhaps Elisha surmised from this that the son was seriously ill.

At first the prophet sent Gehazi to lay his staff on the dead child, telling him to avoid the usual prolonged

Eastern greetings en route. The woman sensed that this would not do and insisted that Elisha himself return with her. As they approached Shunem, Gehazi met them with the news that the lad had not awakened. Elisha then went to the room where the body lay, closed the door, prayed, and stretched himself on the lad—mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, and hands to hands. The prophet got up, walked back and forth, and then stretched himself on the boy again. This time the lad sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. The thankful mother received her son back to life again. In raising the child, Elisha fully identified with the dead youth: mouth to mouth, eye to eye, hand to hand. His staff had effected no change, but when he put himself on the boy and breathed his own life into him, the lad came alive.

Detoxifying the poisonous stew (vv. 38-41). The next recorded miracle took place at Gilgal. During a time of famine (perhaps the seven-year famine mentioned in chapter 8), Elisha ordered his servant to cook some pottage for the sons of the prophets. By mistake some poisonous gourds were put into the pot. When the mistake was detected, Elisha threw some meal into the pot and in this way made it safe to eat.

Miraculous provision of bread (vv. 42-44). At another time Elisha fed 100 men with 20 small, round, flat loaves of barley bread and some fresh ears of grain. There was enough and to spare, as the Lord had promised there would be. Elisha unselfishly gave to others what rightfully belonged to him. When we share with others and leave the consequences with God, He is able to meet our needs and the needs of others, and to even leave a surplus (Prov. 11:24,25).

Chapter 5

Elisha's miracle-working power extended even to the army of the Syrians. A captive Jewish maid was a servant in the home of Naaman, the captain of the Syrian army. Knowing that he was a leper, she suggested that the prophet Elisha in Samaria could cure him.

Naaman obtained a letter of introduction from Ben-hadad, king of Syria, to Joram, king of Israel, and also took gifts of money and clothing with him. Apparently the letter did not mention Elisha but simply requested healing for Naaman. The king of Israel was infuriated by such an unreasonable request and suspected that the Syrian king was looking for an excuse to attack Israel (vv. 1-7).

Elisha received word of the king's predicament and asked for Naaman to be sent to him. There was no power in the palace, for they were all idolaters there; but there was a prophet of God in Israel who had power to cleanse a man and make him whole.

Elisha didn't talk to Naaman personally; his word was enough if acted upon by faith. Elisha sent word to Naaman to wash in the Jordan River seven times. Naaman had expected some more dramatic and colorful mode of healing than this, and he protested that the waters of his native Damascus were superior to the Jordan. "Naaman had two diseases—pride and leprosy. The first needed curing as much as the second. Naaman had to get down from his chariot of pride; afterwards, to wash according to the prescribed way."4 Finally a servant persuaded him to obey the prophet in such a simple matter, and he was thoroughly healed. As has

been well said, “He swallowed his pride and lost his leprosy” (vv. 8-14).

Naaman became a convert to the God of Israel and sought to reward Elisha, but the prophet would accept nothing from him. The Syrian general then obtained permission to take two mule-loads of earth back home with him so he could worship the true God on the displaced soil of Israel. He explained that his official duties might require him to go to the idol shrine of Rimmon with his master and even bow down, but he hoped that the Lord would pardon him for this. Elisha neither approved nor disapproved this, but simply sent him on his way (vv. 15-19).

In the story of Naaman we find a classic illustration of the gospel of grace. He was an enemy of God, being the captain of the Syrian army. Humanly speaking, his condition was helpless and hopeless, being a leper (cf. Rom. 5:6-10). He was a stranger to the promises and covenants of God and had no claim on His blessing, being a Gentile (Eph. 2:11,12). But God’s grace reached out to touch human need. All Naaman had to do was to humble himself and obey the word of the Lord. He eventually washed himself in obedience to God’s word and came up a new man, with new skin and a new heart.

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt,
Yonder on Calvary’s mount outpoured,
There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.
—Julia H. Johnston

Gehazi coveted the gifts from Naaman which Elisha had refused. He told the Syrian that Elisha had sent him to

collect the gifts for two young prophets who had just come from Ephraim.

Then he took the money and the garments to his own home. As a prophet, Elisha often received special revelations from the Lord. Now he was informed as to what his servant had done, and when Gehazi arrived, Elisha exposed him. He reminded the covetous servant that it was no time to receive money and garments or other things that could be bought with money. Gehazi was smitten with the leprosy of Naaman. He had sinned greatly in giving the Syrians occasion to think that God's free gift of grace was not free at all (vv. 20-27).

Chapter 6

Some of the sons of the prophets were dissatisfied with the cramped quarters where they lived with Elisha, probably in Jericho or Gilgal. Therefore they gained the prophet's permission to move near the Jordan and build a place there. In the process of building, one of the men lost a borrowed axhead in the Jordan. Elisha responded to his distressed plea by casting a stick into the river. The axhead floated and was retrieved by the grateful builder (vv. 1-7).

Another evidence of Elisha's miraculous powers concerned his knowledge of highly confidential military moves in the camp of the enemy. The Syrian king was nonplussed because all his secret plans repeatedly became known to the king of Israel; he suspected that one of his men was a spy for Israel. When he learned that the prophet Elisha was revealing his plans to the king of Israel, he determined to capture Elisha at all costs. Hearing that the prophet was in Dothan, a city not far north of Samaria, he sent a band of marauders to

surround the city by night. In the morning Elisha's servant was terrified when he saw the enemy host surrounding the city. But in answer to the prophet's prayer, the servant was given miraculous power to see a protective host of chariots and horses sent by God to guard His people.

Elisha asked the Lord to smite the Syrians with blindness. The prophet was then able to lead them from Dothan to Samaria without a struggle. When the king of Israel suggested killing them, Elisha reminded him that he would not kill the captives whom he had taken with sword and bow, so why kill these who were delivered into his hands without any effort on his part? Instead, the king was ordered to feed them and send them home. By this humane treatment, he overcame evil with good.

Such marauding bands conducted no more raids on Israel (vv. 8-23). Verse 16 reminds us of 1 John 4:4—"… greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." In our spiritual battle with the forces of evil we have protection and power given us by our omnipotent Ally. Through the prayer of faith the Lord can open the eyes of our hearts to the reassuring fact that He is defending us and frustrating Satan's destructive intentions.

The incident beginning in verse 24 is not necessarily in chronological order. Ben-hadad, king of Syria, besieged Samaria so successfully that famine conditions prevailed in the city. (If this siege took place after the seven-year famine mentioned in 8:1,2, as some suggest, we can understand how serious the situation really was.) People had to pay exorbitant prices for ceremonially unclean foods (ass's head) and for herbs or grain. (Dove's dung was the name of a plant with an edible bulb. The plant

bears the name “Star of Bethlehem” today.) The king of Israel acknowledged that no one but Jehovah could help, and he mourned greatly when he found cannibalism being practiced by the people. Blaming Elisha for the terrible conditions and for failing to do anything to relieve the situation, he vowed to kill him before the day was over. Elisha received divine information about the king’s intentions and told the elders that a messenger from the king was on the way, followed by the king himself. He ordered them to refuse entrance to the messenger until the king himself arrived. Almost immediately the messenger arrived, and then the king. He felt there was nothing to do but surrender to Syria. He said, “Behold, this evil is from the Lord; why should I wait for the Lord any longer?” (vv. 24-33 NASB). The incident reminds us that “The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes” (Prov. 21:1 NASB). The meaning of verse 33 is as follows: While Elisha was still talking with the elders, the messenger arrived, followed immediately by the king (see v. 32b). The king said in despair that there was no use holding out against the Syrians any longer.

The king of Israel is not mentioned by name here; in fact, the name of the king is not given in any of the incidents recorded in chapters 4—8. Many commentators hold that Jehoram (Joram) was king during the siege, but it is impossible to be certain since Elisha’s ministry, which stretched over half a century under four different kings, is not recorded in chronological order.

Chapter 7

Elisha then made a remarkable prediction to the king. He promised that the next day fine meal and barley would be sold at very low prices at the gate of Samaria. When the king's skeptical aide questioned the likelihood of such incredible plenty, Elisha added that he would see it with his eyes but would not enjoy it (vv. 1,2).

That evening four lepers who sat at the gate of Samaria decided in desperation to desert to the camp of the Syrians in hope of getting food. When they arrived, the camp was abandoned— the Lord had caused the enemy forces to hear the sound of a mighty onrushing army. Supposing it to be Hittite and Egyptian soldiers hired by the king of Israel, they retreated in pandemonium. "The Syrians that besieged Dothan had their sight imposed upon, 6:18. These had their hearing imposed upon. Whether the noise was really made in the air by the ministry of angels, or whether it was only a sound in their ears, is not certain; whichsoever it was, it was from God."D At first the lepers helped themselves liberally to food, money, and clothing. But realizing that the people would soon find out that the Syrians were gone and would punish them for their silence, they decided to notify the king. He immediately suspected the Syrians of laying an ambush for the Israelites. But a servant suggested sending a few men as scouts, reasoning that if they weren't killed by the Syrians, they would die of starvation anyway like the rest of Israel. The scouts found that the Syrians had actually fled, leaving a trail of abandoned spoil. So the people of Israel plundered the camp of the Syrians, and the famine was ended (vv. 3-16).

In accordance with the prophecy of Elisha, fine meal and barley sold at very low prices that day. The king's aide who had doubted the prediction saw this, but he did not enjoy it because he was trampled to death by the jubilant throng at the city gate. Verses 18-20 reemphasize that the man died according to the word of the Lord because of his unbelief. Unbelief robs its victims of blessing and rewards them with death.

The memorable words of the lepers, "We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace" (v. 9), are a constant challenge to those of us who are entrusted with the gospel of redeeming grace.

Chapter 8

Before a seven-year famine came to the land (perhaps the famine of 4:38), Elisha warned the Shunammite woman (ch. 4) to leave with her family, including the son whom he had restored to life. She went to the land of the Philistines and then returned when the famine had ended. At this time Gehazi was in the court of the king of Israel, a place that would ordinarily have been forbidden to a leper. Just as he was relating to the king how Elisha had restored a lad to life, the woman arrived to petition that her property be restored to her. The king ordered not only the property, but also the produce which had grown on it during the seven years of her absence, to be restored to her (vv. 1-6).

When the ailing Ben-hadad, king of Syria, heard that Elisha had come to Damascus, he sent an officer, Hazael, with a large gift to inquire if he would recover. Since Naaman was captain of the Syrian army under Ben-hadad, the king would have been aware of Elisha's healing power (ch. 5). Perhaps the prophet would heal

him as well. The prophet's vague answer to Hazael was, "Go say to him, 'You shall surely recover,' but the Lord has shown me that he will certainly die." This meant that the illness itself was not necessarily fatal, but that Ben-hadad would not recover from it because Hazael was going to murder him. Elisha gazed so intently on Hazael that the latter became ashamed. Elisha also foresaw that Hazael would inflict terrible loss and suffering on the children of Israel—so terrible that the thought of it caused him to weep. Hazael answered that he was but a dog; how could he be expected to do such a great thing? Williams paraphrases it: "Can it be that I, who am only a dog, should mount the throne of Syria and accomplish such great deeds!"6 But Elisha had been told by the Lord that Hazael would be king of Syria. Following this announcement, Hazael returned to Ben-hadad, told him that he would recover, and then treacherously smothered him with a thick cloth soaked in water (vv. 7-15).

The following quote, taken from The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, succinctly tells how accurate Elisha's prophecy was. "Soon after [the murder of Ben-hadad], Hazael fought against the combined forces of Jehoram and Ahaziah at Ramoth-gilead (8:28,29; 9:14,15). He frequently defeated Jehu in battle, devastating all his country east of the Jordan from the Arnon in the south to Bashan in the north (10:32,33). During the reign of Jehoahaz, Jehu's successor, he repeatedly encroached upon the territory of Israel, which was kept from complete destruction only by God's mercy (13:3,22,23). Hazael also moved into southwest Palestine, taking Gath; he compelled the king of Judah to pay a heavy bribe for sparing Jerusalem (12:17,18; 2

Chrn. 24:23,24). It was not until the death of Hazael that Israel was able successfully to check the aggression of Syria under Ben-hadad III, the son of Hazael (2 Kgs. 13:24,25).”7

JEHORAM (JORAM), Son of Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, 8 years, 853-841 B.C. (2 Kgs. 8:16-24; 2 Chrn. 21:4-20)

The prophet Obadiah may have spoken his oracle against Edom during the reign of Jehoram.

The chronology in verse 16 needs to be reconciled with that in 1 Kings 22:42,51; 2 Kings 3:1; and 2 Kings 8:25. One explanation is that Jehoram was coregent with his father, Jehoshaphat, for five years. Another is that Jehoshaphat shared part of his reign with Asa, and that the reigns of Ahaziah and Jehoram are dated from the beginning of Jehoshaphat’s sole regency.

Joram had married Athaliah, a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. This marriage had doubtless been engineered by his father, Jehoshaphat, as part of his policy of conciliation with Israel. The result of it, however, was to lead the kingdom of Judah farther into the idolatrous ways of the northern kingdom. Because of this apostasy, God would have destroyed Judah had it not been for his promise to David (2 Sam. 7:12-16).

During Joram’s reign, Edom revolted against him. To quell the rebellion, he marched with his army to Zair (Edom), south of the Dead Sea. The Edomites surrounded him, forcing him to break through their lines to safety. His army fled home. From that time, Edom was not in complete subjection to Judah. Mention is made that Libnah, near Philistia, also revolted, thus calling attention to the inherent weakness of the kingdom of Judah during the evil reign of Joram. Libnah was a

Levitical city. The reason for her revolt is given in 2 Chronicles 21:10,11. Judah evidently regained control of the city at a later time (19:8).

AHAZIAH, Son of Jehoram, King of Judah, 1 year, 841 (2 Kgs. 8:25-29; 2 Chrn. 22:1-9).

Ahaziah is spoken of in verse 26 as the son of Athaliah, Omri's daughter. "Daughter" here means granddaughter, as in the NASB.

Ahaziah is the same as Jehoahaz in 2 Chronicles 21 and is called Azariah in 2 Chronicles 22:6. Ahaziah was a nephew of Joram, king of Israel. His mother, Athaliah, was the daughter of Ahab and the sister of Joram. The names get a bit confusing at this particular point in history. Ahab, king of Israel, had two sons who came to the throne successively, Ahaziah and Jehoram (Joram). Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, had a son named Jehoram who reigned after him. This Jehoram was followed on the throne by his son Ahaziah. Thus Ahaziah and Jehoram ruled in Israel while Jehoram and Ahaziah ruled in Judah.

ISRAEL | JUDAH
Ahaziah | Jehoram
Jehoram | Ahaziah

Here Ahaziah, king of Judah, is said to have been 22 years old when he began to reign; in 2 Chronicles 22:2 his age is given as 42 years. Most evidence points to 22 as the correct age. The other figure might be the result of a copyist's error. Ahaziah joined his uncle Joram, king of Israel, in a war against Syria at Ramoth-gilead. Joram was wounded in battle and taken to Jezreel to recover. Ahaziah visited him there while he was recovering. Joram's father, Ahab, lost his life at Ramoth-gilead (1

Kgs. 22). Ahaziah's grandfather Jehoshaphat had unwisely joined Ahab there and was almost killed as a result. But Ahaziah did not heed history's warning (about allying himself with Israel) and was slain as a result (ch. 9).

Chapter 9

Elisha directed one of the sons of the prophets to go to Ramoth-gilead and secretly anoint Jehu as king of Israel to succeed Joram. Jehu was the son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi (v. 2), not the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. Jehu was captain of Joram's army and had been stationed at Ramoth-gilead to hold back the Syrians. In anointing him, the prophet commissioned him to destroy the house of Ahab, in accordance with the prophecy of Elijah (1 Kgs. 21:21-24). Elijah had been told to anoint Jehu (1 Kgs. 19:16), but it appears that he passed this responsibility on to his successor, Elisha, who in turn sent an unknown prophet to Ramoth-gilead that the anointing might be carried out in secret. This secrecy gave Jehu the element of surprise, which he skillfully used in seizing the throne. When Jehu emerged, his fellow officers wanted to know what the "mad prophet" had said to him. Jehu first tried to evade the question by suggesting that they already knew. Perhaps he suspected that they had sent the prophet to anoint him in order to overthrow Joram. But at their insistence, he revealed that he had just been anointed king. In haste, his men covered the steps with their garments and publicly proclaimed him as king of Israel (vv. 1-13).

JEHU, Son of Jehoshaphat, King of Israel, 28 years, 841-814/13 (2 Kgs. 9:14—10:36).

Jehu's reign began the fifth dynasty of the northern kingdom. Before news of his anointing could get to Jezreel, Jehu hurried there to kill Joram. A watchman saw the approach of Jehu's company and notified Joram. Messengers were sent out twice to learn the identity of the approaching company, but Jehu prevented them from returning. By then the watchmen notified the king that the furious driving resembled that of Jehu, the "son" (grandson) of Nimshi. Joram then went forth in his royal chariot, accompanied by his nephew Ahaziah, king of Judah, supposing that there was important news about Ramoth-gilead. He greeted Jehu with "Shalom" (peace) but received warlike words in reply (v. 22). Sensing treachery, Joram tried to flee but was killed by Jehu's arrow. In literal fulfillment of Elijah's prophecy (1 Kgs. 21:19), his body was cast to the ground in Naboth's vineyard (vv. 14-26).

Ahaziah also tried to escape, but he too was hit by an arrow and died at Megiddo. By fraternizing with the house of Ahab, he fell under the divine curse that Jehu had been commissioned to carry out. His body was then returned to Jerusalem for burial. Second Chronicles 22:9 says that he died in Samaria, but this could refer to either the kingdom of Samaria or the region (vv. 27-29). Verse 29 is not in chronological order, being a repetition of 8:25. The discrepancy between the years mentioned (eleventh and twelfth) is probably due to different methods of reckoning.

When Jehu reached the city of Jezreel itself, Jezebel mocked him, shouting, "Is it peace, you Zimri, murderer of your master?" (v. 31 RSV). (Zimri too had become king of Israel by murdering his master, but he enjoyed anything but peace. His abortive coup d'etat lasted only

seven days [1 Kgs. 16:9-19]. Jezebel was intimating to Jehu that he would not prosper in his rebellion.) Two officials in the palace proved their loyalty to Jehu by throwing Jezebel out the window. Her blood spattered on the street, and her body was eaten by the dogs of Jezreel in fulfillment of 1 Kings 21:23—all except the skull, the feet, and the palms of her hands. “The very dogs turned from the skull and hands and feet that had designed and executed such abominations; and no tomb but infamy perpetuates her memory”8 (vv. 30-37).

Chapter 10

Jehu’s next step was to slay 70 descendants (“sons”) of Ahab who were living in Samaria. He first gave their guardians an ultimatum—name the ablest of Ahab’s descendants as kings and fight against Jehu and his men. But they remembered how two kings (Joram and Ahaziah) had been powerless against Jehu at Jezreel, so they sent back word that they would be obedient subjects. He wrote back that they could demonstrate their loyalty to him by delivering the heads of Ahab’s 70 male descendants to Jezreel the next day. They agreed to this. In the morning Jehu went out to see the heads, laid in two heaps at the entrance of the gate. Perhaps the assembled people expected him to be angry at this wholesale destruction, not knowing that he had ordered it. Quickly he set their minds at ease, saying in effect, “You are innocent of this deed. I too am innocent. It is true that I killed my master, Joram, but who killed these? It must have been God, fulfilling what He predicted to His servant Elijah.” In further fulfillment of Elijah’s prophecy, Jehu proceeded to kill all of Ahab’s relatives,

great men, familiar friends, and priests in Jezreel (vv. 1-11).

On his way to the capital, Samaria, Jehu met 42 of Ahaziah's relatives. "Brethren" (v. 13) means cousins, nephews, etc., since Ahaziah's brothers had been slain (2 Chrn. 21:17). These people had come from Judah to visit the royal family of Israel. Realizing that they had ties with the house of Ahab, Jehu ordered them to be slain at the pit of Beth-eked (vv. 12-14 NASB).

Jehu also met Jehonadab (also called Jonadab), a Rechabite. On the assurance that Jehonadab was loyal to him, Jehu invited him to drive to Samaria and witness his zeal for the Lord. Jeremiah 35 tells us a little more about Jehonadab. He ordered his descendants to return to the early lifestyle that Israel had known under Moses and Joshua, in an attempt to keep them from following the kingdom into apostasy, the national sin of Israel. Upon hearing of Jehu's purge, he went with the new king, who immediately welcomed him as a great ally in the fight against Baalism. In Samaria, Jehu slew all the remaining relatives of Ahab (vv. 15-17). "He [Jehu] was proud of his own zeal. How subtle the peril! And it is a peril. Wherever it exists it leads to other evil things. While this man was carrying out the judgments of God upon Israel, he was in his own life corrupt."9

The new king's next assault was aimed at the worshipers of Baal. In order to identify them, he ordered a great holiday in honor of Baal. The house of Baal was filled with worshipers from all parts of Israel, wearing special identifying garments. Care was taken to see that no worshipers of Jehovah were present. After Jehu had offered a burnt offering, he gave the signal for his

soldiers to slay all the idolaters. Eighty men were stationed outside to prevent anyone from escaping. Jehu's men went into the inner room of the house of Baal, removed an idol pillar that was there, and burned it. They ruined the temple of Baal, converting it into a latrine or dung shed (vv. 18-28).

In many ways Jehu was one of the best, perhaps the best of the kings of Israel. He executed God's judgment on the house of Ahab and purged the land of Baal-worshipers. The Lord rewarded what was praiseworthy by promising that his dynasty would continue to the fourth generation (v. 30) (i.e., Jehoahaz, Joash, Jeroboam II, and Zachariah). However, Jehu continued to promote the worship of the golden calves, which Jeroboam had inaugurated. Also, he is condemned in Hosea 1:4 for his extreme cruelty in exterminating the house of Ahab. As a result of his failures, God began to cut short the territory of Israel. Hazael, the king of Syria, captured the land east of the Jordan that had originally been occupied by the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh (vv. 29-36). Elisha had foreseen the activity of Hazael (8:12). The Syrian king was carrying out the judgment of the Lord upon the house of Israel even as Jehu had executed judgment upon the house of Ahab. Behind the activities of these wicked kings the spiritual eye can see the sovereign hand of Jehovah making the wrath of man accomplish His purposes.

Chapter 11

ATHALIAH, Daughter of Ahab, Queen of Judah, 6 years, 841-835 (2 Kgs. 11:1-21; 2 Chrn. 22:10—23:21).

The scene now changes from Israel to Judah. Athaliah seized control when her son Ahaziah was slain by Jehu.

To prevent any threat to her rule, she murdered all (or so she thought) the sons of Ahaziah. That Athaliah could cold-bloodedly order the execution of her own grandchildren shows just how much like her mother (Jezebel) she was. Unwittingly she was also carrying out the curse pronounced on the descendants of Ahab, her father (1 Kgs. 21:21,22). Jehosheba, the wife of Jehoiada (2 Chrn. 22:11) and an aunt of the doomed sons, courageously entered the royal house and stole a lad named Joash (same as Jehoash) from among the sons who were being slain. Athaliah would have cut off the royal line, but the Lord preserved Joash because of the Davidic covenant. The long-range consequences of what she tried to do are staggering. This was a satanic attempt to break the royal Messianic line. Joash was hidden with his nurse in the bedchamber of the unused temple. He remained there for six years while Athaliah reigned (vv. 1-3).

In the seventh year, Jehoiada the high priest called the captains of the Carites and of the guards, showed them the heir to the throne, and made a covenant with them to overthrow Athaliah and crown Joash as king. “The steps taken by Jehoiada to bring about the royal revolution (vv. 4-11) may be thus paraphrased. He sent for the officers of the royal bodyguard, the Carites; these mercenaries came from Caria in Asia Minor. One regiment was ordered to surround the king’s house, and the two remaining regiments to parade in front of the temple. Any person attempting to force his way through the troops was to be put to death. The guard relieved on that morning (v. 9) was not to return to barracks, but to fall in with the relieving guard and join the main body in defense of the king.”10

Then Joash was brought forth to the people. A crown was placed on his head and a copy of the testimony (the law) was handed to him. The shout went up from the people, “Long live the king!” (v. 12 NASB).

When Athaliah was attracted by the noise to the court of the temple and saw what was going on, she cried, “Treason! Treason!” Because Jehoiada did not want her to be slain in the environs of the temple, he ordered that she be taken out between ranks of soldiers and slain at the horse gate (vv. 13-16).

A covenant was then made between the new king and the people that they would serve the Lord. In demonstration of this, the people sacked the house of Baal, which Athaliah had promoted, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal. The king was escorted to the royal palace in a great procession. The people rejoiced, and the city was quiet after Athaliah had been slain (vv. 17-21).

Chapter 12

JEHOASH (JOASH), Son of Ahaziah, King of Judah, 40 years, 835-796 (2 Kgs. 12:1-21; 2 Chrn. 23:1—24:27).

“The forty-year reign of Joash may be divided into two parts—before and after the death of his spiritual guardian, Jehoiada. The statement that ‘Joash did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah all the days of Jehoiada the priest’ is ominous. Without the moral and spiritual courage of this high priest, Joash was as unstable as Lot without Abram. Therefore, God showed His mercy to the people of Judah by extending Jehoiada’s life to an amazing 130 years (2 Chrn. 24:15)! Thus Jehoiada lived longer than anyone on record during

the previous thousand years, since Amram, an ancestor of Moses, died at 137 (Exod. 6:20).”n

In general, the reign of Jehoash was commendable. However, he failed to stop the people from worshiping at the high places (vv. 1-3). His major contribution was his undertaking to repair the temple. To do this he issued instructions to the priests that certain funds should be laid aside for the purpose of restoring the house of the Lord. According to Williams, these were: 1. the money of everyone who passed the account—that is, the census tax of Exodus 30:12; 2. the money that every man is set at—that is, the redemption money of Leviticus 27; 3. all the money that a man desired to bring—that is, the ordinary freewill offerings legislated for in Leviticus (vv. 4,5).12

When no repairs had been made by the 23rd year of Jehoash’s reign, the king called Jehoiada and the other priests and announced a new plan for collecting the money and repairing the temple. The priests would no longer collect the funds directly, nor would they supervise the repairs on the temple (v. 7). Instead, a box with a hole in the lid was to be placed at the right side of the altar to receive money for the restoration of the temple. The king’s secretary and the high priests added up the funds and distributed them to the workmen. The overseers were honest, so it was not necessary to demand a public accounting of the funds (vv. 7-16). Verse 13 seems to contradict 2 Chronicles 24:14; however, verse 13 means that these funds were not used to purchase utensils for the temple while it was being restored, while 2 Chronicles 12:14 means that, after work on the temple was completed, the surplus funds were used for this purpose. In obedience to God’s Word

(Lev. 5:16; Num. 5:8,9), the money from the sin- and trespass-offerings continued to be given to the priests (v. 16).

At this time Hazael, king of Syria, captured Gath and marched toward Jerusalem. Joash gave him treasures from the temple and from the royal palace to dissuade him from attacking the capital of Judah (vv. 17,18).

After the death of Jehoiada, the princes of Judah turned their king to idolatry (2 Chrn. 24). When Zechariah, a son (or grandson) of the high priest, tried to call the people back to the worship of Jehovah, the king ordered him to be stoned to death. Jesus referred to the death of Zechariah when He reproved the lawyers (Luke 11:51). He said that the blood of all the prophets, from the blood of Abel to that of Zacharias, would be required of that generation. Thus He included the blood of all martyrs in the Old Testament period, from that of Abel in Genesis to that of Zechariah here and in 2 Chronicles, the last book of the Hebrew Bible. (The Hebrew Bible contains the same books as our Old Testament but in a different order.) Jehoash's own servants conspired against him and killed him in the house of Millo (vv. 19-21). This was God's judgment on him for the murder of Zechariah.

Jehoiada was a godly man who devoted himself to the service of the kingdom and the temple. He received two blessings in return: His son Zechariah followed in his steps, and he was buried with the kings of Judah, a great honor indeed for one born outside the royal family. Joash, on the other hand, got progressively worse after the death of Jehoiada. He plundered the temple he had once repaired and robbed the royal treasury to buy off

the Syrians. He was not buried in the tomb of the kings because he died under divine judgment for the murder of Zechariah. It is vital that we persevere in godliness lest we hinder the kingdom of God. Jehoiada, a shining example! Joash, a solemn warning!

Chapter 13

JEHOAHAZ, Son of Jehu, King of Israel, 17 years, 814/13-798 (2 Kgs. 13:1-9).

Jehoahaz followed Jeroboam in the mixed worship of Jehovah and the Asherah (v. 6). God punished him by sending the Syrians against Israel. They reduced Jehoahaz's forces to 50 horsemen, 10 chariots, and 10,000 footmen. When Jehoahaz cried to the Lord, He raised up a savior who delivered Israel from the hands of the Syrians. The deliverer might have been Adad-nirari III, king of Assyria, who late in the reign of Jehoahaz caused more and more trouble for Syria, leaving her little time to bother Israel. Some commentators suggest that Elisha was the deliverer. Others say that verse 5 refers to either Jehoash (v. 25) or Jeroboam II (14:26,27). Verse 23 explains why God answered Jehoahaz's prayer: It was because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Notice that verses 5 and 6 are a parenthesis. The parenthesis is one of grace. Before another century passed, Israel would be swept off the promised land because of her persistence in the sins of Jeroboam. By providing a savior for the nation, the Lord was seeking to turn her from her destructive course before the final stroke of judgment fell (v. 5). However, "they did not turn away from the sins of the house of Jeroboam … but walked in them" (v. 6).

JEHOASH (JOASH), Son of Jehoahaz, King of Israel, 16 years, 798-782/81 (2 Kgs. 13:10—14:16).

This king is to be differentiated from the king of Judah by the same name who was reigning at this time (v. 10). The reign of this Jehoash was wicked, patterned after that of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Verses 10-13 give a condensed account of his reign: He became king; he did evil in the sight of the Lord; he slept with his fathers. Verses 14-25 tell of the prophecy and death of Elisha, which took place during the rule of Jehoash.

When the prophet Elisha was dying, Jehoash visited him and wept over him, saying, “O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!” He meant that men of Elisha’s caliber were the truest and best defense of the people of Israel. Elisha had used the same words to lament the passing of Elijah (2:12). He realized that the death of the prophet would be a great loss to the kingdom. From his sickbed, Elisha directed Joash to take a bow and arrow, to shoot one arrow eastward, and then to strike the ground with the arrows. The arrow that shot eastward signified victory over the Syrians, who had occupied Israel’s land east of the Jordan. Because Joash had struck the ground only three times, he would strike down Syria only three times. If he had struck five or six times, the threat of Syria would have been eliminated. But he lacked perseverance and endurance (vv. 14-19). Joash must have known the significance of what he was doing, or else he would not have been held responsible. Elisha’s death (v. 20) spelled no good for the northern kingdom.

In the spring of each year, marauding bands of Moabites used to invade the land. One day as some men of Israel

were taking out a corpse to be buried, they saw one of these marauding bands approaching. Hurriedly they opened the sepulcher of Elisha and threw the corpse in. As soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet (vv. 20,21).

Scripture tells us nothing of the last 45 years of Elisha's ministry (from the anointing of Jehu, in 841 B.C. [ch. 9], until his death, in about 795 B.C.). His final prophecy was one of victory (v. 17). His final miracle (accomplished long after his death) (v. 21) was a validation of his message and ministry to Israel and her king. In fulfillment of Elisha's prophecy, Joash recaptured the cities which Hazael had taken from Israel. This was accomplished by three successive victories (vv. 22-25).

Chapter 14

AMAZIAH, Son of Joash, King of Judah, 29 years, 796-767 (2 Kgs. 14:1-20; 2 Chrn. 25).

Amaziah's reign, though good, lacked the excellence of David's reign. It was more like his father's (Joash) in that both failed to abolish the high places. One of Amaziah's first acts was to kill the conspirators who had slain his father (12:20,21). However, he spared the children of these men, in obedience to Deuteronomy 24:16. Also, he led a brilliant campaign against Edom, killing 10,000 of its inhabitants and capturing the rock city of Selah (probably the same as Petra) (vv. 1-7). Unfortunately, he brought back Edomite gods and began to worship them (2 Chrn. 25:14).

Inflated with pride, Amaziah foolishly invited Jehoash, king of Israel, to a show of strength. Jehoash answered

by a parable in which the thistle (Judah) said to the cedar (Israel), “Give thy daughter to my son to wife” (a weed making an impertinent request to a mighty tree). A wild beast (the army of Israel) trod down the thistle (Judah). Amaziah should be satisfied with his victory over Edom, and not invite disaster by antagonizing Israel. When Amaziah refused to listen, Jehoash marched against Judah, broke down the walls of Jerusalem, and carried away some of its treasures (vv. 8-14).

The antagonism between Judah and Israel which began at this time continued until the fall of Israel (722 B.C.). Amaziah fled to Lachish to escape a conspiracy but was followed and killed there (v. 19).

AZARIAH (same as UZZIAH), Son of Amaziah, King of Judah, 52 years, 792/91-740/39 (2 Kgs. 14:21,22; 15:1-7; 2 Chrn. 26).

The ministry of Isaiah, Amos, and Hosea began at this time in Old Testament history (Isa. 1:1; Hos. 1:1; Amos 1:1). Hosea also began to prophesy at this time (Hos. 1:1). The books of Amos and Hosea reveal the social and religious conditions prevalent in Israel. Through these prophets the Lord constantly warned of coming disaster while trying to woo His people back from the precipice of judgment.

Azariah was coregent with his father for the first 24 years. He built Elath, at the north of the Gulf of Aqaba (v. 22). The fuller record of his reign is given in the next chapter and in 2 Chronicles 26.

JEROBOAM II, Son of Jehoash, King of Israel, 41 years, 793/ 92-753 (2 Kgs. 14:23-29).

The first 12 years of Jeroboam's reign overlapped that of his father, Jehoash. As to his religious policy, this king followed the idolatry of his namesake, Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Politically, he recovered for Israel the land from the entrance of Hamath (Galilee) to the Sea of the Arabah (Transjordan), as Jonah had prophesied. This particular prophecy is not recorded in the Bible. (Verse 25 pinpoints the time of Jonah's ministry, which is important in studying the book bearing his name. It is startling to realize that the Assyrians carried Israel into captivity only 40 to 70 years after the repentance of Nineveh occasioned by Jonah's preaching!) Jeroboam II may be the savior mentioned in 13:5 (cf. 14:26,27). Verses 26 and 27 give deep insight into the tender love and patience of Jehovah. Verse 27 must be understood in context; Israel, and later Judah, were subsequently blotted out for a time, but, according to God's promise to the Jewish fathers, the nation will be regathered and replanted in the land.

Chapter 15

AZARIAH (UZZIAH) (continued) (vv. 1-7).

In general Azariah was a good king. Part of his failure was his permitting the high places to continue in Judah. When he insisted on intruding into the priest's office by offering incense in the temple, despite the protests of the priests, he was smitten with leprosy and had to dwell in an isolated house to the day of his death (2 Chrn. 26:16-21).

The ministry of Amos ended at this period.

ZACHARIAH (also spelled ZECHARIAH, NASB) Son of Jeroboam II, King of Israel, 6 months, 753-752 (2 Kgs. 15:8-12).

Like his predecessors, Zachariah walked in the steps of Jeroboam I, worshiping the golden calves at Dan and Bethel. After a brief reign of six months, he was assassinated by Shallum. The RSV, following the LXX, says he was killed at Ibleam, a town in the Jezreel Valley close to where Ahaziah had been slain by Jehu (9:27). His death marked the end of the Jehu dynasty, Zachariah being the fourth generation which God had promised Jehu would sit on the throne of Israel (v. 12; cf. 10:30).

SHALLUM, Son of Jabesh, King of Israel, 1 month, 752 (2 Kgs. 15:13-15).

Little is recorded about this king. His was the only reign in the sixth dynasty of the ten tribes. Shallum had gained the throne by assassination and now lost it the same way one month later. He was assassinated by Menahem.

MENAHEM, Son of Gadi, King of Israel, 10 years, 752-742/41 (2 Kgs. 15:16-22).

Menahem proceeded to sack Tiphsah (Tappuah, RSV)—not the city of Tiphsah on the Euphrates but the one near Tirzah. When the city refused to surrender, he cruelly massacred the people, including the pregnant women.

At this time the Syrian kingdom had declined, and Assyria had become the leading foe of Israel. During the reign of Menahem, Pul, the king of Assyria, invaded Israel. Menahem gave him 1000 talents of silver to appease him and to enlist Pul’s support in confirming

Menahem's uncertain power. The king of Israel raised this money by taxing all the wealthy men 50 shekels of silver apiece (v. 20). The price of a slave in Assyria at this time was 50 shekels of silver. Menahem was voluntarily submitting to the yoke of Assyria because he felt it was to his personal advantage to do so. Pul is generally considered to be the same as Tiglath-pileser III (v. 29).

PEKAHIAH, Son of Menahem, King of Israel, 2 years, 742/ 41-740/39 (2 Kgs. 15:23-26).

All that we know of this king is that his reign was brief and evil and that he was slain by Pekah and 50 Gileadites in Samaria. His reign ended the seventh dynasty of Israel. He was the only one of Israel's latter kings who did not take the crown by force, but it wasn't long before it was forcibly taken from him by one of his officials.

PEKAH, Son of Remaliah, King of Israel, 20 years, 752-732/31 (2 Kgs. 15:27-31).

Pekah was captain to Pekahiah, whom he slew. From other Scriptures we learn that he invaded Judah and then enlisted Syrian aid against Judah. But Ahaz, king of Judah, called Assyria to aid him. The king of Assyria first killed Rezin, king of Syria, and then attacked Israel. He conquered the 2½ tribes east of the Jordan and the territory of Galilee, carrying the inhabitants into captivity. This was the first phase of the Assyrian captivity. Pekah's power as captain overlapped with Menahem's (10 years) and Pekahiah's (2 years). Supported by Assyria, Hoshea seized the throne of Israel by conspiring against Pekah and killing him. This ended Israel's eighth dynasty.

JOTHAM, Son of Uzziah, King of Judah, 20 years, 750-732/31 (2 Kgs. 15:32-38; 2 Chrn. 27).

The first part of Jotham's reign was spent in a coregency with his father, the last part with Ahaz. His official reign lasted 16 years. Jotham was one of the better kings of Judah, even though he did not abolish the high places. He built the upper gate of the house of the Lord and sponsored other construction projects in the land. Just before his death, Rezin and Pekah began their joint attack against Judah. The prophet Micah began his ministry during the reign of Jotham.

Chronicles includes an editorial comment praising Jotham. "So Jotham became mighty because he ordered his ways before the Lord his God" (2 Chrn. 27:6 NASB). This is in stark contrast to the kings of Israel, who ordered their ways after Jeroboam. Josephus also makes mention of Jotham's godliness.13

Chapter 16

AHAZ, Son of Jotham, King of Judah, 20 years, 735-716/15 (2 Kgs. 16:1-20; 2 Chrn. 28).

Ahaz was coregent with his father for perhaps 12 years. The name Ahaz is a contraction for Jehoahaz. It is by the latter name that the king is known on Assyrian inscriptions. The prefix "Jeho-" stands for Jehovah, and doubtless the Holy Spirit omitted it purposely because Ahaz was an apostate. He followed the kings of Israel in his idolatry, even making his son pass through the fire (vv. 1-4). In the worship of Molech, children were passed between the red-hot arms of the brass idol, signifying cleansing from evil and dedication to the god.

Sometimes the children were actually slain and burned (Jer. 7:31; Ezek. 16:21).

In order to force Judah to join them against Assyria, and to install a vassal king on the throne of Judah (Isa. 7:6), Syria and Israel united to attack Jerusalem. At the same time Syria captured Elath and planted a colony of Syrians there (v. 6). In his distress, Ahaz sent a call for help to Assyria, accompanying it with treasures from the temple and the palace. Tiglath-pileser complied by capturing Damascus and killing the king of Syria (vv. 5-9) in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. But God would make the Assyrians a curse to Judah (Isa. 7:17-25).

On a trip to Damascus to visit Tiglath-pileser, Ahaz saw a heathen altar and decided to build one like it in Jerusalem. So he sent a model of it to Urijah the priest, and he in turn had the altar built before Ahaz returned. Ahaz offered various offerings on his new altar (all but sin- and trespass-offerings) and then commanded Urijah to use it henceforth instead of the brazen altar. The last clause in verse 15 seems to suggest that Ahaz would use the brazen altar for divination. However, it may also be understood to mean, “As for the brazen altar, it will be for me to enquire (or consider) what I shall do with it.”14 Urijah the priest sinfully obeyed the king in his sacrilege instead of fearlessly rebuking him (vv. 10-16). Uriah (the same as Urijah) is mentioned favorably in Isaiah 8:2, but this was before the attack on Jerusalem. His wicked acquiescence to the demand of Ahaz to build the altar took place at a later date.

Verses 17 and 18 tell how Ahaz removed certain furnishings from the temple area, perhaps for fear that

the king of Assyria might take them if he ever captured Jerusalem. (Some think he used them to pay tribute.) Second Chronicles 28:24 tells how Ahaz closed the temple entirely toward the end of his reign. Like other apostate kings before him, Ahaz was not buried in the royal tombs (2 Chrn. 28:27).

Chapter 17

HOSHEA, Son of Elah, King of Israel, 9 years, 732/31-723/22 (2 Kgs. 17:1-41).

We come now to the final king and the ninth and final dynasty of Israel. Hoshea killed Pekah, perhaps because of his inability to resist Assyria's inroads into Israel, and took the reigns of government. He was not as wicked as his predecessors, but the nation had gone too far—his improvements were too late. Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, marched against Samaria and made Hoshea pay tribute. Hoshea conspired with the king of Egypt against Assyria and reneged on his payment of tribute. Therefore the king of Assyria (either Shalmaneser or Sargon, his successor) imprisoned Hoshea, besieged Samaria for three years, and carried some of the people into captivity. We are not told Hoshea's fate; he simply disappears into an Assyrian prison, leaving Samaria without a king during her last days. The final fall of Israel took place in 723 or 722 B.C. (vv. 1-6).

Verses 7-23 explain the underlying reasons why God was displeased with Israel and allowed the nation to be conquered and exiled. They feared other gods (v. 7), walked in the customs of the nations (v. 8), built for themselves high places, sacred pillars, and Asherim everywhere, and multiplied their idolatry (vv. 9-12). They refused to listen to the prophets but stiffened their

necks and refused to believe the word of the Lord (vv. 13,14). They turned their backs on God's commandments and adopted the man-made religion of their neighbors (vv. 15,16). They were zealous in their pursuit of evil, offering their offspring to false gods (vv. 17,18).

The king of Assyria carried the ten northern tribes of Israel away to Mesopotamia and Media. Also, he took people from five other nations which he had conquered (v. 24) and planted them in the land of Israel. Earlier, when Israel obeyed the Lord, He drove out the heathen nations and settled His people in Canaan by the hand of Joshua. When they stopped listening to Jehovah, He drove them out and brought the nations back in by the hand of the king of Assyria. These pagan people worshiped their own heathen deities and thus brought themselves under God's displeasure, especially since they were now living in Immanuel's land. The Lord's anger was revealed when lions roamed through the land, killing some of the people. Someone notified the king that the plague of lions was caused by the presence of these foreigners who did not know the law of the God of Israel. The king of Assyria then ordered an Israelite priest to be returned from captivity for the purpose of instructing the heathen colonists how they should fear the Lord. The priest who returned was one of the idolatrous priests of Israel, not a true priest of Jehovah. He went to Bethel, the seat of calf-worship (although the calf was no longer there), and taught the new inhabitants the polluted religion of Jeroboam, which included, but was in no way limited to, the worship of Jehovah. These foreign colonists intermarried with the Israelites in the land, and this produced the people

known as Samaritans—a half-breed race with its own religion and customs.

Verses 29-34a seem to describe the foreign settlers in the land. Each nationality had its own god and appointed priests from among its own people. They also adopted the worship of Jehovah, and the result was a mixed religion (v. 33), which, as one writer said, was worse than out-and-out paganism.

The section from verse 34b ("they fear not the Lord …") through verse 40 seems to describe the Israelites who remained in the land. They did not heed the repeated warnings of the Lord against idolatry but continued to worship the golden calves.

Verse 41 refers back to the foreign settlers in the land. They appeared to be less guilty than Israel. With what little light they had, they feared the Lord after a fashion; but the ten tribes, with all the light they had, did not fear the Lord (v. 34b).

The prophet Hosea's ministry probably ended at this time— that is, with the fall of Samaria and the captivity of Israel.

Chapter 18

HEZEKIAH, Son of Ahaz, King of Judah, 29 years, 716/15-687/86 (2 Kgs. 18—20; 2 Chrn. 29—32; Isa. 36—39).

More space is devoted to Hezekiah in Scripture than to almost any king since the time of Solomon. The parallel accounts in 2 Chronicles 29—32 and Isaiah 36—39 should be read to better understand the spiritual and political victories that Hezekiah gained through his faith in God.

When Hezekiah came to power, Judah was virtually a vassal state under Assyria. His reign was one of great reform. He conducted a campaign against all forms of idolatry, destroying even the high places and the brazen serpent of Numbers 21 (since the people of Israel burned incense to it). He called it Nehushtan, meaning a piece of brass. As far as his trust in God was concerned, he was the greatest of the kings of Judah (v. 5). Josiah was the greatest of the kings as far as thoroughness in expelling evildoers from the land was concerned (23:24,25) (vv. 1-6).

Eventually Hezekiah rebelled against the Assyrian yoke, perhaps because of his military success in driving the Philistines out of the land from watchtower (country places) to fortified city (thickly inhabited and well-defended places) (vv. 7,8 NASB).

Verses 9-12 are a review of the capture of Samaria by the Assyrians, introduced here perhaps to emphasize the seriousness of the threat which faced Hezekiah at this time. The seeming contradiction between the dates in verses 9 and 10 is explained by the fact that a portion of a year is counted as a year. The siege of Samaria began during the latter part of the fourth year of Hezekiah's reign, continued during the fifth year, and ended in the first part of the sixth year—therefore "three years." Assyria had been having troubles of her own at this time; Sargon II had died and Babylon was in rebellion. It wasn't until 701 B.C. that Sennacherib, Sargon's successor, was able to march on Palestine and Phoenicia. In his annals Sennacherib claimed to have taken 46 fortified cities and 200,000 captives from Judah. Hezekiah sent a servile message to him acknowledging that he had been wrong in rebelling. He

abjectly paid a huge sum to prevent an attack on Jerusalem. At the time, Sennacherib was in Lachish, southwest of Jerusalem, on the way to Egypt (vv. 13-16).

Hezekiah then began to fortify Jerusalem (2 Chrn. 32:5). Perhaps it was news of this that caused the king of Assyria at a later date to dispatch his army officials to Jerusalem, demanding unconditional surrender (vv. 17,18). Three Jewish officials went out to meet the Assyrian emissaries and to hear their demands. In the NIV, verse 17 reads, “The king of Assyria sent his supreme commander, his chief officer, and his field commander with a large army.” In the KJV these officials are spoken of as Tartan, Rabsaris, and Rabshakeh. The words are actually military titles, not proper names. The rabshakeh spoke insultingly to them in their own Hebrew tongue. First, he mocked Hezekiah’s trust in the fortifications of Jerusalem (vv. 19,20). Then he revealed his knowledge that Hezekiah had sought the help of Egypt against Assyria, and ridiculed Egypt as a broken reed (v. 21). Third, he said that Judah could not trust in the Lord because Hezekiah had destroyed all the high places and altars. (The Assyrian did not realize that these were heathen shrines and not places where the Lord was worshiped.) Next he suggested a wager—he would give 2000 horses to Judah if Hezekiah could find that number of horsemen. Judah did not have that many cavalrymen, he taunted, and so had to depend on Egypt’s chariots and horsemen. Finally, the rabshakeh claimed that God had sent Assyria to destroy Judah (v. 25). The Jewish officials quickly suggested that all further discussions be carried on in Aramaic (the language of diplomacy) rather than in Hebrew; they were secretly fearful that such arrogant talk might be

destructive to the morale of the Jewish people listening on the wall. But the rabshakeh countered that he wanted the people to hear and understand their coming starvation and doom. Then addressing the people directly, the rabshakeh warned them not to let Hezekiah deceive them into trusting the Lord for deliverance. If they would surrender, they would be granted the privilege of living in Jerusalem temporarily. Then when the king of Assyria returned from the Egyptian campaign, he would take them to Assyria, “a land like your own.” No other tribal deities had been able to deliver nations from Assyria; how could they expect their God to do it? The people on the wall remained silent while the three Jewish officials returned to Hezekiah, thoroughly disheartened (vv. 26-37).

Chapter 19

HEZEKIAH (continued)

Hezekiah was greatly distressed when he heard of the rab-shakeh’s message; he sent messengers to the prophet Isaiah, saying that Judah was powerless when it needed strength the most (v. 3). Further, he asked Isaiah to pray for the remnant of Judah and Jerusalem (v. 4). Isaiah sent word back to Hezekiah that he need not fear the Assyrian king, that God would put a spirit of fear in him and cause him to hear a rumor and to return to his own land, where he would be slain (vv. 1-7).

When the rabshakeh returned to Lachish, he found that Sennacherib had transferred his assault to the neighboring fortress of Libnah.

Sennacherib heard that Tirhakah, king of upper Egypt, was advancing to attack him. He immediately tried to

frighten Jerusalem into quick surrender by sending a blasphemous letter (vv. 8-13). Some scholars think that the rumor mentioned in verse 7 is explained in verse 9—namely, the rumor of the approach of the Egyptians. Others say that it was a report that the Babylonians were rebelling.

Hezekiah wisely took the letter to the temple and spread it out before the Lord. His prayer was a revelation of his deep trust in Jehovah. In reply, God sent Isaiah to Hezekiah with a twofold answer. Verses 21-28 are addressed to Sennacherib. Verses 29-34 are addressed to Hezekiah.

The prophecy of Isaiah (vv. 21-28) is a taunt song against Assyria. It pictures Jerusalem (the virgin daughter of Zion) as laughing at Assyria's threats (v. 21). It denounces Sennacherib for blaspheming God's holy Name (vv. 22,23a), and for boasting that he would invade Judah (Lebanon), destroy her rulers and great men (cedars and cypresses), and enter the palaces of Mount Zion (lodging place and forest) (v. 23b). Sennacherib also boasted of other foreign conquests, including his victory over Egypt (v. 24). What he didn't realize was that all he had done was what God had already determined to be done (vv. 25,26). God knew him inside and out and would break his towering arrogance, sending back to Assyria the remnants of his shattered army (vv. 27,28).

Then, turning to Hezekiah, the Lord gave a sign that the Assyrian would not conquer Jerusalem. For two years the people of Judah would not be able to raise normal crops because of the Assyrian presence, but would eat things that grew without cultivation; then, in the third

year, they would be safe enough from the threat of assault that they could carry on their normal activities. Not only would the people of Jerusalem survive, but the king of Assyria would not even be allowed to come near the city or to shoot an arrow there.

That night the Angel of the Lord (Christ) visited the encampment of Assyria and slew 185,000 soldiers. When men arose in the morning, the Assyrians were corpses. Sennacherib returned to his capital, Nineveh, where he was slain 20 years later (681 B.C.). (He actually outlived Hezekiah by five years.) Isaiah's prophecy (v. 7) was fulfilled when two of Sennacherib's sons murdered him and a third reigned in his place (vv. 35-37).

Chapter 20

HEZEKIAH (continued)

The events of this chapter are generally believed to have taken place earlier, probably in the early part of chapter 18, during the first invasion of Sennacherib (see v. 6). When Hezekiah was taken seriously ill, Isaiah told him to get his house in order because death was imminent. The king prayed earnestly for recovery and was granted 15 additional years of life (vv. 1-7). "What would I do with the remainder of my life if God told me that I had just 15 years to live? What did Hezekiah do with those years? The Bible does not say, for the last event recorded of his reign was the destruction of Sennacherib's army, in 701 B.C. (which probably occurred less than a year after his sickness). It has been suggested that one reason why God prolonged his life was that he had no male heir to the throne (2 Kings 21:1 states that Manasseh was only twelve when he began to reign). However, it is probable that Manasseh was a

coregent with his father for nearly ten years, because otherwise it would be impossible to fit the 55 years of his reign into this period of Judah's history, working back from the fixed dates of the Babylonian Captivity."15

As a sign that Hezekiah would be healed and would return to the temple to worship, God caused the shadow on the dial of Ahaz (steps of Ahaz, NASB) to go back ten degrees. (Chronologically, verse 7 follows verses 8-11.)

From 2 Chronicles 32:31 we conclude that it was a supernatural event, the news of which reached as far as Babylon (vv. 8-11). The Babylonians worshiped the heavenly bodies and they would certainly notice any irregularities. Word spread quickly that it was on Hezekiah's behalf that this great miracle had taken place.

The king of Babylon, Merodach-baladan, sent congratulations to Hezekiah on his recovery. Doubtless his real purpose was to strengthen his ties with Judah against Assyria. Hezekiah foolishly showed all his treasures to the messengers from Babylon. (From 2 Chronicles 32:31 we learn that God was testing him through this situation to know what was in his heart. The answer: PRIDE!) Isaiah rebuked him for this and prophesied that Judah would be taken into captivity by Babylon and that some of his own sons would be eunuchs (officials, NASB) in the palace of the Babylonian king (vv. 12-18). Before these treasures ended up in Babylon, many of them would first go to Assyria as part of the tribute that Hezekiah paid to Sennacherib when the Assyrians invaded Palestine shortly after Hezekiah's recovery (18:13-16). Hezekiah submitted to God's decree and acknowledged its leniency. "For he thought,

‘Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?’ “ (v. 19 RSV).

Verse 20 describes Hezekiah’s building of a conduit by which water could be brought into Jerusalem from a well outside the city. Such a hidden source would be especially valuable in a time of siege.

The ministry of Micah ended at this time.

Chapter 21

MANASSEH, Son of Hezekiah, King of Judah, 55 years, 697/96-643/42 (2 Kgs. 21:1-18; 2 Chrn. 33:1-20).

Manasseh’s reign was the longest and most wicked of all the kings of Judah. Some of the blots on his record are: He reintroduced the worship of Baal, of Asherah, and of the stars (v. 3); he profaned the temple by building altars there for star worship (vv. 4,5); he made his son pass through the fire (v. 6a); he encouraged spiritists, mediums, and witches (v. 6b); he placed a graven image of an Asherah (an obscene sexual symbol) in the temple of God (v. 7). The Spirit of God dwells on the seriousness of this act by rehearsing God’s promise to His people in connection with the temple (1 Kgs. 8:29; 9:3). Manasseh led the people into worse abominations than those of the Amorites (vv. 8,9). As a result, God said that He would punish Judah as He punished Samaria and the house of Ahab. (The line and the plummet [v. 13] symbolize judgment.) Also, He would empty Jerusalem as a man empties a dish by turning it upside down and wiping it out. His people would be led away into captivity because they had provoked the Lord so grievously (vv. 10-15). In addition to his idolatry, Manasseh shed much innocent blood. According to the noncanonical book The

Assumption of Isaiah, Manasseh had the prophet Isaiah sawed in two (cf. Heb. 11:37).

From 2 Chronicles 33 we learn that Manasseh was taken into captivity in Babylon by the king of Assyria (Ashurbanipal). There, while in prison, he repented and turned to the Lord. After this he was permitted to return to Jerusalem and resume his reign—a fitting proof of the grace, love, and mercy of the Lord. He tried to undo the damage he had done, but it was too late. The people, including his son, followed his earlier example (2 Chrn. 33:14-23).

AMON, Son of Manasseh, King of Judah, 2 years, 642-639 (2 Kgs. 21:19-26; 2 Chrn. 33:21-25).

Amon was notorious for his idolatry and his forsaking of the true God. Some of his servants conspired against him and slew him after a brief reign of two years. The people slew the guilty assassins and then made Josiah king. Neither Amon nor his father were buried in the sepulchers of the kings of Judah.

Chapter 22

JOSIAH, Son of Amon, King of Judah, 31 years, 641-609 (2 Kgs. 22:1—23:30; 2 Chrn. 34, 35).

Zephaniah (Zeph. 1:1) and Jeremiah (Jer. 25:3) began their prophetic ministries at about this time. Habakkuk may have ministered toward the end of Josiah's time. Josiah's reign was the last era of reform in the kingdom of Judah. He took resolute action against idolatry and encouraged the people to return to Jehovah. In the eighteenth year of his reign, when he was 26, he instituted a program for the repair of the temple. Money that had been collected at the temple was turned over to

workmen for labor and materials. Because of their honesty, no accounting was asked for the money which was turned over to them (vv. 1-7). While the repairs were going on, Hilkiah the high priest found a copy of the book of the law, perhaps the entire Pentateuch or the book of Deuteronomy. This was taken to King Josiah and read before him (vv. 8-10). When Josiah heard the Word of God and realized how far the nation had wandered from God, he tore his clothes in penitence. Then he sent five of his officials to inquire of the Lord, realizing that the wrath of God must be hovering over Judah for its sins (vv. 11-13).

The officials went to Huldah, a prophetess who dwelt in the Second Quarter (NASB), a district or suburb of the city. They did not go directly to either Jeremiah or Zephaniah. Huldah was probably Jeremiah's aunt (v. 14; cf. Jer. 32:7). She confirmed Josiah's fears that God was going to punish Judah soon because of the corruption of the people. But she added that it would not happen during Josiah's lifetime because he had humbled himself and was penitent (vv. 14-19).

The fact that Josiah later died in battle (23:29) does not contradict verse 20. "Thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace" may mean "before the promised catastrophe of the Babylonian captivity." Or it may mean that Josiah would die at peace with God (he certainly did not die at peace with man).

Chapter 23

JOSIAH (continued)

The king now held a holy convocation at the temple and read the book of the law to all the people. Standing by

the pillar, he made a covenant to obey all the words of the law. The people also entered into the covenant with Jehovah (vv. 1-3).

Then follows a list of the many reforms which Josiah undertook. He cleansed the temple of all the vessels used in idolatry, burned them, and took the ashes to Bethel (to defile the shrine there) (v. 4). He deposed and probably killed the idolatrous priests (v. 5). He took the Asherah out of the temple, burned them, and scattered the ashes on the graves of the common people (v. 6). He broke down the houses of the cult prostitutes (sodomites) in the temple area, where the women wove tapestries for the Asherah (v. 7). He defiled the high places (v. 8). This means that he desecrated them in such a way that they would not be used again. He brought the priests out of the cities of Judah, where they had offered to Jehovah on the high places (v. 8a). God had designated Jerusalem as the place where these offerings should be made. Josiah barred these priests from further service in the temple, but gave them a share of the unleavened bread (v. 9). He defiled Topheth, in the valley of the son of Hinnom, where child sacrifices had been offered to Molech (v. 10). He removed horses and burned chariots that kings of Judah had used in connection with sun-worship (v. 11). He destroyed idolatrous altars erected by Ahaz and Manasseh (v. 12). Manasseh himself had removed these altars after his conversion (2 Chrn. 33:15), but they were undoubtedly pressed back into service by idolatrous Amon. Josiah made sure they would never be used again. He defiled the high places at the southern end of the Mount of Olives (Mount of Corruption), dating from the time of Solomon (v. 13). He broke down the idolatrous pillars

and cut down the Asherah, and then defiled their locations with the bones of men (v. 14). He destroyed the altar at Bethel and burned the Asherah. Then he took bones from nearby tombs and burned them on the remains of the altar. ("Both Israelites and heathen regarded dead men's bones as a perpetual defilement.")16 All of this was in fulfillment of the prophecy uttered over 300 years previously by the man of God to Jeroboam. Josiah is one of the few men in Scripture named before his birth (1 Kgs. 13:2). He was a chosen vessel, foreordained to fulfill the oracle of the unnamed prophet against the altar at Bethel.

When the king saw the monument (gravestone) of the man of God who had testified against the altar at Bethel, he ordered that no one should move the bones of the prophet. So they were permitted to remain there with the bones of the unnamed prophet who came out of Samaria (vv. 15-18; cf. 1 Kgs. 13:30,31).

Josiah's reforms even extended into Samaria (v. 19). Apparently he had won control over this area, largely because the power of Assyria was declining. He destroyed the high places and killed the idolatrous priests on the altars where they had offered sacrifices (vv. 19,20). Also, he defiled these places with the ashes of human bones. On his return to Jerusalem, he reinstituted the Passover, according to the Word of the Lord which he had read (see 2 Chronicles 35:1-19 for more details). It was the greatest such observance since the time of the judges (vv. 21-23). Other Passovers had been larger and more elaborate, but this one was particularly pleasing to Jehovah. Scripture makes mention of only three Passovers during the kingdom years: Solomon's (2 Chrn. 8), Hezekiah's (2 Chrn. 30),

and Josiah's. He also cleansed the land of spiritists, fortune-tellers, and other wizards (v. 24).

As to the thoroughness of his reforms, he was the greatest of the kings of Judah (v. 25). Hezekiah held the same honor as far as trust in God was concerned (18:5,6). Yet in spite of Josiah's good reign, the Lord did not change His plan to punish Judah by sending the people into captivity and by destroying Jerusalem (vv. 26,27).

In 609 B.C. Pharaoh-Nechoh of Egypt marched north along the coast of Palestine to aid the Assyrians in their struggle against Babylon. (The KJV says he was going "against" the king of Assyria, but it should read "to," as in the NASB.) For political reasons Josiah decided to resist Nechoh's advance and as a result was mortally wounded at Megiddo (v. 29). His servants transported him to Jerusalem, where he died and was buried (v. 30; cf. 2 Chrn. 35:20-24). Nechoh advanced to the Euphrates River, where four years later the Babylonians defeated him in the battle of Carchemish (Jer. 46:2).

JEHOAHAZ (also called SHALLUM), Son of Josiah, King of Judah, 3 months, 609 (2 Kgs. 23:31-33; 2 Chrn. 36:1-4).

Jehoahaz disregarded his father's reforms and allowed the people to return to idolatry. The king of Egypt summoned him to Riblah, in Hamath, a region of Syria where the Egyptians had encamped (v. 33), and there he put Judah under tribute. Later he carried Jehoahaz off to Egypt, where he died (v. 34) (Jer. 22:11,12).

Pharaoh-Nechoh made Eliakim, Jehoahaz's brother, king in his place and changed Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim (v. 34).

JEHOIAKIM, Son of Josiah, King of Judah, 11 years, 609-598 (2 Kgs. 23:34—24:7; 2 Chrn. 36:5-8; Jer. 22:18,19; 26:21-23; 36:9-32).

Jehoiakim was the eldest surviving son of Josiah (cf. vv. 31,36), but the people had placed Jehoahaz on the throne instead. Nechoh reversed this and appointed Jehoiakim as a vassal king. He was more faithful to Pharaoh than he was to Jehovah (vv. 34-36).

Chapter 24

JEHOIAKIM (continued)

Egypt was defeated by Babylon at Carchemish in 605 B.C., and Judah came under the control of the Babylonians (v. 1).

Jehoiakim put Urijah (Uriah, NASB) the prophet to death (Jer. 26:23) and burned the Word of God which Jeremiah had written concerning Judah and Israel (Jer. 36:23). He tried to arrest Jeremiah and also Baruch, his scribe, but the Lord hid them (Jer. 36:26). In the third year of Jehoiakim's reign, Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem, carried some of the inhabitants (including Daniel) to Babylon, and also took some of the vessels from the temple (2 Chrn. 36:7; Dan. 1:1,2). He also bound Jehoiakim in chains to bring him to Babylon. Either he changed his mind or returned the king of Judah to Jerusalem because Jehoiakim subsequently rebelled against the Babylonians (24:1). J. C. Whitcomb describes the situation as follows: "The Chronicler says that Nebuchadnezzar 'bound him in fetters to carry him to Babylon' (2 Chrn. 36:6); but before the plan was fulfilled something of urgent importance happened that caused Nebuchadnezzar to change his mind. He

received word that his father Nabopolassar had died in Babylon on August 15. Realizing that the throne was now in jeopardy, he forced Jehoiakim to promise loyalty as a vassal, then took the short route across the Arabian desert to Babylon."1' God sent invasion armies from four nations against Judah because of Manasseh's sins (vv. 2-4).

The Lord decreed that the king would have the burial of an ass—that is, his body would be drawn outside the city and left exposed to the elements and to the creatures of prey (Jer. 22:19). No details of his death are given (vv. 5,6).

JEHOIACHIN (also called JECONIAH and CONIAH), Son of Jehoiakim, King of Judah, 3 months, 598-597 (2 Kgs. 24:8-16; 25:27-30; 2 Chrn. 36:9,10).

During the short reign of this wicked king, Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city of Jerusalem and carried away a second group of captives. Ezekiel was taken to Babylon in this deportation. Also included were the royal family, 7000 soldiers, and the trained craftsmen. In fact, only the poorest people of the land were left. Nebuchadnezzar also took treasures from the temple and from the king's palace. Verse 14 says that there were 10,000 captives in all. Jeremiah says that 4600 captives were taken (Jer. 52:28-30). The number in Kings may include captives taken on other occasions as well. The king of Babylon appointed Mattaniah, an uncle of Jehoiachin, as king in his place (v. 17). After Jehoiachin had been in captivity for 37 years, Evil-merodach, the king of Babylon, freed him from prison, set him above the other captive kings, gave him a

position of honor in the court, and provided liberally for him (25:27-30).

Ezekiel began his ministry at this period.

ZEDEKIAH, Uncle of Jehoiachin, King of Judah, 11 years, 597-586 (2 Kgs. 24:17—25:21; 2 Chrn. 36:11-21; Jer. 52:1-30).

The king of Babylon changed Mattaniah's name to Zedekiah. Zedekiah made a treaty with Nebuchadnezzar, agreeing to serve as his puppet. But then he broke the agreement, rebelled against Babylon, and sought the help of Egypt. Zedekiah's treachery in breaking his oath and God's subsequent judgment upon him are recorded in Ezekiel 17:11-21.

Chapter 25

ZEDEKIAH (continued)

Zedekiah's intrigue with Egypt brought the final blow on the city of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar besieged it for 18 months, causing severe famine conditions within the walls. Zedekiah and his men of war tried to escape from the city at night and to flee to the wilderness near the Dead Sea. The Chaldeans captured the king and brought him to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah (in Hamath of Syria). After slaying his sons before his eyes, the king of Babylon ordered that his eyes should be put out and that he should be carried in chains to Babylon (vv. 1-7). This fulfilled two remarkable prophecies: Jeremiah had predicted that Zedekiah would see the king of Babylon face to face (32:4; 34:3). This was fulfilled at Riblah. Ezekiel had also prophesied that he would be brought to Babylon but would not see it and would die there (Ezek.

12:13). Zedekiah's eyes were put out before he ever got to Babylon. He died in Babylon.

The final destruction of Jerusalem took place in 586 B.C. by Nebuzaradan, captain of the Babylonian bodyguard. He burned the temple, the royal palace, and all the great buildings; he broke down the walls; and he carried into exile all but the poorest people of the land (vv. 8-12).

Verses 13-17 describe the wholesale looting of the temple treasures. Those things which were too big to be carried away were cut up into smaller pieces. The bronze which was seized "was beyond weight" (v. 16 NASB). In addition, the Chaldeans took all the gold and silver they could find (v. 15).

Nebuzaradan took about 72 of the leading citizens of Jerusalem to King Nebuchadnezzar in Riblah, where they were summarily executed (vv. 18-21).

There are three numerical problems in this chapter, all of them possibly copyists' errors, either here in 2 Kings or else in the corresponding verses in 1 Kings and Jeremiah. They are: the date Jerusalem was burned (verse 8 says the seventh while Jeremiah 52:12 says the tenth); the height of the capitals on the pillars (verse 17 says three cubits but 1 Kings 7:16 says five cubits); the number of advisors slain (verses 19-21 say five were killed; Jeremiah 52:25 says seven were put to death).

GOVERNORSHIP OF GEDALIAH (2 Kgs. 25:22-26).

The king of Babylon appointed Gedaliah to be governor over the people remaining in Judah. When four army captains heard this, they came to him at Mizpeh, perhaps to recommend that the people flee to Egypt. Gedaliah counseled them to submit to the Babylonian

yoke and that all would be well. Later Ishmael, a member of the royal family, attacked and killed Gedaliah and his associates. The people were thus left without organized government and fled to Egypt.

Verses 27-30 close the book with a note of encouragement. Second Kings and Jeremiah have identical endings (cf. 25:27-30; Jer. 52:31-34). After 37 years in exile, Jehoiachin was afforded honorable treatment in the court at Babylon. This gave hope that the rigors of the exile would be eased and later ended completely.

First Kings opens with David's death and 2 Kings closes with Judah's destruction. The nation had failed under Moses, had failed under the judges, and now had failed under the kings. The people refused to listen to God's word. They refused to be moved by the tears of the prophets. They hardened their hearts and stiffened their necks until God appointed the Assyrians and the Babylonians to teach them that the wages of sin is death. The captivity served its purpose well: It purged the heart of God's chosen people of idolatry.

1 John C. Whitcomb, Jr., Solomon to the Exile, p. 64.

2 George Williams, The Student's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, p. 200.

3 Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 344.

4 D. L. Moody, Notes from My Bible, p. 58.

5 Matthew Henry, The Matthew Henry Commentary, p. 409.

6 George Williams, op. cit., p. 207.

7 Merrill C. Tenney, The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. III, p. 49.

8 George Williams, op. cit., p. 209.

9 G. Campbell Morgan, Searchlights from the Word, p. 104.

10 George Williams, op. cit., p. 210.

11 John C. Whitcomb, Jr., op. cit., p. 103.

12 George Williams, op. cit., p. 211.

13 Flavius Josephus, quoted in The Matthew Henry Commentary, p. 420.

14 F. C. Cook, ed., Barnes' Notes on the Old and New Testaments, I Samuel-Esther, p. 273.

15 John C. Whitcomb, Jr., op. cit., p. 127.

16 George Williams, op. cit., p. 221.

17 John C. Whitcomb, Jr., op. cit., p. 146.

1 Chronicles

Outline Of 1 Chronicles

I. The Genealogies (1—9)

A. Adam-Abraham (1:1-27)

B. Abraham-Israel (1:28-54)

C. Descendants of Israel (2—8)

Judah (2:1—4:23)

Simeon (4:24-43)

Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh (east of the Jordan) (5)

Levi (6)

Issachar (7:1-5)

Benjamin (7:6-12)

Naphtali (7:13)

Half-tribe of Manasseh (west of the Jordan) (7:14-19)

Ephraim (7:20-29)

Asher (7:30-40)

Benjamin (8)

D. Those who returned from captivity (9:1-34)

E. Genealogy of Saul (9:35-44)

II. Death of Saul (10)

III. Reign of David (11—29)

A. David’s army (11, 12)

B. Ark brought to Jerusalem (13—16)

C. Desire to build the temple and God's response (17)

D. David's victories (18—20)

E. Census and the plague (21)

F. Preparations for the temple (22—26)

G. Military and governmental leaders (27)

H. David's last days (28, 29)

First and Second Chronicles are combined as one final book in the Hebrew Bible. The name comes from the Latin translation of the Bible by Jerome. The Hebrew is literally "events of the days."

At first glance, 1 Chronicles seems to repeat 1 and 2 Samuel, and 2 Chronicles seems to cover the same material as 1 and 2 Kings. But there are marked differences. The books of Samuel and Kings emphasize the historical side of things whereas Chronicles emphasizes the spiritual. Thus Chronicles concentrates on the reign of David and his successors and on the temple and its worship. It gives details not previously found concerning the priests, Levites, musicians, singers, and doorkeepers. It elaborates on the transporting of the ark to Jerusalem, on preparation for building the temple, and on reforms under some of the good kings of Judah. The northern kingdom is mentioned only in its dealings with David and his dynasty. The chronicler even passes over the tragic stories of Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah, and the faithlessness of Solomon. So the books of Chronicles are by no means an unnecessary repetition. Rather, they are a spiritual interpretation of the history in the preceding books.

Most commentators suggest Ezra as the author of Chronicles. He drew on a number of contemporary works for his information, as can be seen from the following list of reference works which he mentions:

The Book of Samuel the Seer (1 Chrn. 29:29)

The Book of Nathan the Prophet (1 Chrn. 29:29)

The Book of Gad the Seer (1 Chrn. 29:29)

The prophecy of Ahijah (2 Chrn. 9:29)

The visions of Iddo the seer (2 Chrn. 9:29)

The Book of Shemaiah the Prophet (2 Chrn. 12:15)

The Book of Iddo the Seer (2 Chrn. 12:15)

The story of the prophet Iddo (2 Chrn. 13:22)

The Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah (2 Chrn. 20:34; 27:7; 32:32)

The story of the Book of the Kings (2 Chrn. 24:27)

The vision of Isaiah (2 Chrn. 26:22; 32:32)

The sayings of the seers (lit. Hozai) (2 Chrn. 33:19)

"… the affairs of each king's reign were regularly recorded in a book (1 Kgs. 14:29; 15:7; etc.), and it was doubtless from this common source that the passages in the books of Samuel and Kings which are identical with the books of Chronicles were derived."

Chronicles was written after the captivity (2 Chrn. 36:22,23).

Chapter 1

The first nine chapters of the book contain genealogical tables. Genealogies were very important to the Jews in

seeking to maintain their tribal distinctions. After the confusion of the captivity, it was also important to establish the kingly and priestly lines once more.

There are several instances in these chapters where names differ from the names given in other parts of the Bible. There are different reasons for these apparent inconsistencies. Sometimes a man had more than one name. Many cases are copyists' errors. A look at the Hebrew language will show just how easily this could have happened. These "discrepancies" do not stumble the serious student, since they did not exist in the original documents and in no way affect any major doctrine of the faith.

The book of Genesis appears to have been the source of these genealogies. Verses 1-4 go back to Genesis 5 (Adam-Noah). Verses 5-23 give the descendants of Noah, as recorded in Genesis 10. From Genesis 11 comes the genealogy of Abraham (vv. 24-27). Abraham's natural descendants, listed in Genesis 25, are given in verses 28-33. The descendants of Isaac, the son of promise, are dealt with next. Esau, from Genesis 36, is mentioned in verses 35-54, thus clearing the way for the descendants of Jacob (Israel). Chapters 2 through 9 trace the posterity of Israel.

In Chapter 1 the chronicler is narrowing the focus from Adam, the father of the human race, to Jacob, the father of the 12 tribes of Israel. He quickly clears the stage of all but the chosen nation. Here we also have the beginning of the messianic line (cf. Luke 3:34-38).

ADAM
NOAH
JAPHETH SHEM HAM

ABRAHAM
ISHMAEL ISAAC
ESAU JACOB

Chapter 2:1—4:23

Judah was the head of the largest tribe and the foremost in blessing and promise, and thus his genealogy is the first and the longest to be taken up (2:3—4:23). The genealogies of two descendants of Judah are developed more fully—Caleb: 2:18-20, 42-55 (this is not the Caleb of Numbers 13; see 4:15), and David: 3:1-24.

Several historical notes are sprinkled throughout the genealogies. These are things to which the Holy Spirit would draw our attention, points of interest in this panoramic sweep of Jewish history. In the genealogies of Judah, God's dealings with two wicked men and His blessing of one righteous man are brought to our attention. "And Er, the firstborn of Judah, was evil in the sight of the Lord, and He slew him" (2:3). He was the offspring of Judah's marriage to a Canaanite woman (Gen. 38:1,10). We are not told what he did, but only that he was evil in the sight of the Lord. His wickedness cost him his privileges as the firstborn, his place in the messianic line, and his life. His name became a blot on the family record for all generations to view. Men would do well to ponder the consequences of evil before it is too late. "For evildoers shall be cut off; but those that wait upon the Lord, they will inherit the earth" (Psa. 37:9).

The story of Achar (Achan) (2:7) is found in Joshua 7. He "saw," "coveted," and "took" (Josh. 7:21) the things under the ban in Jericho. He troubled Israel in that, because of his sin, 36 men died in the unsuccessful

attack on Ai. He was singled out by the Lord, and he and his family were executed.

“And Jabez was more honorable than his brethren” (4:9). Here was a man who had a large concept of God and honored Him by seeking His blessing. Jabez was a man of faith, and the Lord took note of it. “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). Jabez sought and was rewarded; may God strengthen us to follow his example!

Bithia (4:17) is one of the few women mentioned. She was a daughter of Pharaoh but was now living with the chosen people. Her name means “daughter of Jehovah.”

One apparent discrepancy should be mentioned before we move on. In 2:15 David is called the seventh son of Jesse while in 1 Samuel 16:10,11 and 17:12 he is the eighth son. One of Jesse’s sons probably died childless or before he married and so is not included by the chronicler.

Chapters 4:24—5:26

Simeon, Jacob’s secondborn, is taken up next, probably because of the close association of his tribe with Judah. Simeon’s portion in the Promised Land was within the territory of Judah (Josh. 19:9). The cities listed in 4:28-33 were their inheritance. However, later in history they acquired additional land through conquest (vv. 39-43).

Chapter 5 deals with the transjordan tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. Very little space is

devoted to these tribes. They were among the first to go into captivity (5:26).

Verses 1 and 2 explain why the birthright and the blessing went to other tribes instead of to the Reubenites. When Jacob blessed his children before his death (Gen. 49), he took note of Reuben's wickedness (Gen. 35:22) and removed him from having preeminence. The double portion of land due the firstborn went to Joseph (through Ephraim and Manasseh), and the double portion (as far as leadership was concerned) went to Judah.

The Gadites are listed in verses 11-17, and the leaders of the half-tribe of Manasseh are given in verses 23 and 24.

The rest of the chapter gives us a brief account of the fate of these tribes. Together they had fought successfully against the Hagarites (Ishmaelites) (vv. 10,19-22). With a small army of 44,760 men, they defeated a much more numerous enemy. They had trusted in their God (v. 20), and He gave them victory and abundant spoils (v. 21).

Being constantly exposed to the idolatrous nations around them, they soon "played the harlot after the gods of the peoples of the land, whom God destroyed before them" (v. 25 NASB). They turned to the gods who could not save the Ishmaelites and forsook the one true God in whose strength they had conquered. So God gave them into the hand of the Assyrian king and they were carried away into captivity.

Chapter 6

This chapter takes up the Levites, descendants of Jacob's thirdborn. Verses 1-15 and 49-53 deal with the most famous family of this tribe, that of Aaron. The high priesthood had been given to Aaron and his sons, and thus the importance of an accurate genealogy from Aaron to the captivity.

Samuel (v. 28) the son of Elkanah (v. 27) was a great prophet and the last judge in Israel before Saul became king. His ministry is described in 1 Samuel.

Levi had three sons: Gershom, Kohath, and Merari. Their genealogies are given in verses 16-30. Verses 31-48 contain three genealogies: Heman, a Kohathite (vv. 33-38); Asaph, a Gershomite (vv. 39-43); and Ethan, a Merarite (vv. 44-47).

These were the "songmasters" whom David appointed to minister before the Lord (vv. 31,32).

Heman was probably the author of Psalm 88. He was a descendant of Samuel (Shemuel) the prophet. There are psalms which bear Asaph's name—e.g., Psalm 50 and Psalms 73-83. Ethan may be the author of Psalm 89.

The rest of the chapter (vv. 54-81) is a listing of the cities and pasturelands given to the Levites by the other tribes. This was in accordance with the command of the Lord through Moses (Num. 35:1-8). The command was carried out under the supervision of Joshua (Josh. 21).

Chapter 7

Six tribes are mentioned in this chapter:

ISSACHAR (vv. 1-5)

BENJAMIN (vv. 6-12)

NAPHTALI (v. 13)

HALF-TRIBE OF MANASSEH (west of the Jordan) (vv. 14-19)

EPHRAIM (vv. 20-29)

ASHER (vv. 30-40)

These genealogies are not nearly as complete as those of Judah or Levi, perhaps because neither the throne nor the priesthood is involved.

Although the tribe of Benjamin had at one time been reduced to 600 men because of their folly (Judg. 20), they seem to have regained their strength and size (vv. 6-12).

The writer goes into greater depth with the tribe of Ephraim in order to trace the lineage of Joshua, the most famous Ephraimite of ancient history (vv. 26-27). Men who do exploits for God are a glory to their families and are lovingly remembered and held forth as examples to succeeding generations.

Chapter 8

Benjamin, Judah, and some of the tribes of Simeon and Levi formed the southern kingdom taken into Babylonian captivity. Most of the Israelites who returned to Judah under Nehemiah were from these tribes; hence the larger space devoted to them in these genealogies.

The Benjamites are discussed here more fully than in 7:6-12. When comparing these two lists, as well as those given in Genesis 46:21 and Numbers 26:38-41, the

following principles help us to understand the seeming discrepancies.

Some men had more than one name.

The spelling of some names changed over the years.

Some names are omitted because the men died early or childless.

The term “son” can mean son, grandson, great-grandson, etc.

Some names are left out because they don’t serve the chronicler’s purpose.

Saul, a Benjamite, was Israel’s first king. His genealogy is given in verses 29-40 and in 9:35-44. Only the descendants of his son Jonathan, the friend of David, are given here. Merib-baal (v. 34) is another name for Mephibosheth.

The genealogies of Dan and Zebulun are not given. (Dan is also left out in other portions of Scripture, notably Revelation 7.)

Chapter 9

Verses 2-9 mention briefly some of the sons of Judah and Benjamin who returned to Jerusalem, leaders in their fathers’ houses (v. 10). Verses 10-13 mention the priests while verses 14-34 mention the other Levites who returned, describing some of their duties. Another listing of those who returned can be found in Nehemiah 11.

The last few verses of this chapter, 35-44 (virtually the same as 8:29-40), give the lineage of Saul and set the

stage for the historical part of 1 Chronicles (chs. 10—29). Saul's history is recorded in 1 Samuel.

Chapter 10

A parallel account of the death of Saul and his sons is found in 1 Samuel 31:1-13.

Commenting on verse 5, C. H. Spurgeon writes, "While we earnestly condemn the self-destruction, we cannot but admire the faithfulness of the armour-bearer—faithful unto death. He would not survive his master. Shall this man live and die for Saul, and shall we betray our royal master, Jesus the Lord?"1

In connection with Saul's death several things should be noticed. "All his house died together" (v. 6) refers only to those who fought with Saul (1 Sam. 31:6). Saul had other sons not slain by the Philistines (vv. 13,14; 2 Sam. 2:8; 21:1-8). But even these did not finally escape the fate that overtook their father (2 Sam. 21:1-8).

Verses 13 and 14 give two reasons for Saul's death: He did not keep the word of the Lord (see 1 Sam. 13 and 15) and he sought counsel of a medium (see 1 Sam. 28).

Upon hearing the news of Saul and his sons, the men of Jabesh-gilead marched all night to retrieve their bodies from the Philistines and then buried them (vv. 11,12). Earlier Saul had saved their city from Nahash the Ammonite (1 Sam. 11); these valiant men did not forget his kindness.

This brief account of Saul clears the way for the history of David, God's choice to rule over His people Israel.

Chapter 11

Chronicles does not mention the short and unsuccessful rule of Ishbosheth (2 Sam. 2-4) but moves on to David's coronation at Hebron (vv. 1-3; cf. 2 Sam. 5).

King David's first order of business was to secure a capital for himself. Verses 4-9 tell how Jerusalem was taken (cf. 2 Sam. 5:6-10).

Joab, who was David's nephew and also commander of his army, displayed great courage and bravery in the capture of Jerusalem. In accordance with David's promise (v. 6), he was made chief of the armies of Israel. Although a valiant warrior, Joab was a ruthless man, not named among David's mighty men, perhaps because of his unscrupulous character.

This list of David's warriors is put at the beginning of his reign. In 2 Samuel 23 a similar list is placed at the end of his reign. These men came to David at different times in his career. Some came to him when he was in the cave at Adullam (vv. 15-19). Some came when he was at Ziklag (12:1-22). Some came when David was made king in Hebron (12:23-40).

Following is a list of some of David's "mighty men" and a few of their "mighty deeds":

Jashobeam (v. 11): He single-handedly defeated 300 men with nothing but a spear. God gave him a supernatural victory against Israel's enemies. Valiant men can still do extraordinary things for God when they trust Him and press the battle against the enemy of men's souls.

Eleazar (vv. 12-14): Note first of all that he was "with David" (v. 13). He was loyal to David and stood with him when all others fled. And for what was he risking

himself? A field of barley! Principle, not property, was at stake. That land belonged by promise to Israel, and the Philistines were not to have so much as one foot of it. Today Christians need to realize that they belong to God and must not allow Satan a foothold in their lives, even in a seemingly insignificant area.

The three men at Adullam (vv. 15-19): They were with David in his extremity and knew the longing of his heart. They risked their lives to bring him that which would refresh his spirit, not for the honor they would receive, for their names are not mentioned, but for the pleasure it would afford David. Where are the men today who dwell close enough to Jesus to know the longings of His heart? Where are the men who will risk all to refresh His soul by bringing Him a drink from some needy mission field? Those who do will certainly be reckoned among His mighty men.

Abishai (vv. 20,21): He was the most honored of the second three, the chief of the 30. Scripture tells us that Abishai was a man of unwavering devotion to David; he went with David into the camp of Saul (1 Sam. 26), he was with David when he fled Jerusalem in the revolt of Absalom (2 Sam. 16), he crushed the revolt of Sheba (2 Sam. 20), he saved David from the giant Ishbibenob (2 Sam. 21), and in many other ways he gave faithful service to his king (2 Sam. 10, 18; 1 Chrn. 18). Selfless bravery linked with devoted faithfulness will make anyone a valued friend and servant of the King of kings.

Benaiah (vv. 22-25): His father was a priest (1 Chrn. 27:5) and a valiant man. He was the head of David’s personal bodyguard. A few of his exploits are listed here. Later he took Joab’s place as commander of the armies

of Israel (1 Kgs. 2:34,35). In his victories we see a picture of the overcoming life, where the world (the Egyptian giant), the flesh (the Moabites), and the devil (the roaring lion) are all confronted and conquered.

Although no deeds are recorded in verses 26-47, the names of those who served David heroically are duly mentioned. Some of the names are very interesting. For example:

Zelek the Ammonite (v. 39) and Ithmah the Moabite (v. 46): They were by birth enemies of Israel. But here they are found in the service of Israel's king. We all were born enemies of God, but by His grace we too can find a place in the King's army.

Uriah the Hittite (v. 41): He was a Canaanite whose people were supposed to have been exterminated by the Israelites when they conquered the Promised Land (Deut. 7:1,2). But here he is, a warrior for David. David proved unworthy of his loyalty, ordering Uriah to be murdered so that he could have his wife, Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11).

Chapter 12

Chapter 11 dealt with those individuals who identified themselves with David. This chapter deals primarily with the tribes, along with their captains, who allied themselves with the king. Every tribe is listed here, from those who came to David when he was in hiding (vv. 1-22) to those who came to Hebron after Ishbosheth's death (vv. 23-40). "… and all the rest also of Israel were of one mind to make David king… . There was joy indeed in Israel" (vv. 38,40 NASB).

Many who were in trouble or distress had previously come to David to find protection (1 Sam. 22:1,2). But now these men came to serve David and assist him in obtaining the throne which was his by divine decree. Today the kingdom of God needs men who are equipped by God (v. 2), trained and swift (v. 8), strong in faith, able to prevail against overwhelming odds and put the enemy to flight (vv. 14,15), full of the Spirit, and selflessly dedicated to Jesus (v. 32)—men who have an undivided heart (v. 33)!

David rightly questioned the sons of Benjamin and Judah (v. 17) because earlier he had been betrayed by some of them (1 Sam. 23).

The historical events referred to in verses 19-22 can be found in 1 Samuel 29 and 30. God prevented David from fighting against Israel while he was with the Philistines. He also gave him victory over the Amalekites who had raided Ziklag and captured his family.

The eastern tribes came in large numbers (v. 37), while those closer to Hebron were represented by smaller forces—e.g., Judah, Simeon, etc. (vv. 24, 25 ff.).

Now that Israel was united around their divinely appointed king, there was much rejoicing, feasting, and blessing (v. 40). Division and strife, caused by Saul's disobedience, were past; Israel would now find new prosperity under their godly shepherd-king.

Chapter 13

This chapter records David's first attempt to bring the ark to his newly acquired royal city.

The ark had been neglected during the reign of Saul (v. 3).

The Philistines had captured it for seven months, then returned it to Kirjath-jearim, where it was kept in the house of Abinadab, a Levite (1 Sam. 4—7). Now, at David's instigation, Uzza and Ahio put the ark on a new cart for the trip to Jerusalem. Shihor of Egypt (v. 5) probably refers to the brook of Egypt (Wady el Arish).

When the oxen stumbled, Uzza put out his hand to steady the ark (v. 9). Immediately God struck him dead. The law forbade anyone to touch the ark, even the priests (Num. 4:15). When the Kohathites carried the ark, they placed the staves on their shoulders, but did not come in contact with the ark itself. The place was henceforth called Perez-uzza, the breakthrough (breach) of Uzza (v. 11).

David became angry and fearful of bringing the ark to Jerusalem (vv. 11,12). So it was taken aside to the house of Obed-edom, a Levite, where it remained for three months, bringing great blessing to its host (v. 14).

Chapter 14

After David was established as king over all Israel, Hiram, king of Tyre, sent men and materials to build David a house (vv. 1,2). This was the beginning of a long and close friendship that extended into the reign of Solomon. (Since the name Hiram is also a royal title, some feel that the Hiram who helped Solomon was a different man.)

David sinned against the Lord by "multiplying wives"; this was expressly forbidden in Deuteronomy 17:17. Chronicles, while recording the violation, does not mention its sinful implication. The first four children mentioned in verse 4 were the sons of Bathsheba (1

Chrn. 3:5). 2 Samuel 11 records David's illicit affair with her. However, even here we see the grace of God at work, for the names of two of the children of this marriage appear in the genealogy of our Lord: Nathan (Luke 3:31), ancestor of Mary, and Solomon (Matt. 1:6), ancestor of Joseph.

Upon hearing that David had been made king in Israel, the Philistines came up to attack him (vv. 8,9). David inquired of the Lord (v. 10) and won a spectacular victory (vv. 11,12). When the Philistines recovered and returned for a second attack, David again inquired of the Lord (vv. 13,14). He didn't assume that God's guidance would be the same. This time God gave victory through a completely different battle-plan (vv. 15,16).

The idols, which could not deliver their worshipers from the living God, were carried away (2 Sam. 5:21) and burned (v. 12).

These victories struck fear into the hearts of neighboring nations. Note the connection between verses 16 and 17: "And David did just as God had commanded him… . Then the fame of David went out into all the lands" (NASB).

Chapter 15

Three months after the tragedy of Perez-uzza (ch. 13), David prepared once again to bring the ark to his capital, the city of Zion. However, this time he first made diligent search in the law and then proceeded accordingly.

A tent, not a house, was prepared for the ark at this time because this was the pattern found in the law (v. 1). The tent was probably made in the same fashion as the one

used during Israel's exodus (Exod. 26). However, the ark was the only piece of furniture in David's tent, the tabernacle and its furnishings being at Gibeon (16:39) until the days of Solomon.

The heads of the Levitical households were summoned (vv. 4-10). The chief priests, Zadok and Abiathar (1 Kgs. 4:4), were also called for this occasion (v. 11). The ark was now carried by the right men and in the right way, "as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord" (v. 15). Hence, this effort met with success (16:1).

The sweet psalmist of Israel also made elaborate arrangements for joyful music of praise to accompany the ark (vv. 16-29). Some sang, some played musical instruments, David was leaping and making merry, and all were filled with joy. There was one sour note in this happy symphony, however: Michal, David's wife, was mocking (v. 29; cf. 2 Sam. 6:16 ff.).

Chapter 16

As soon as the ark was placed in the tent, sacrifices were offered (vv. 1-3). The burnt-offering was the highest expression of worship ceremonially possible (cf. Lev. 1). It was wholly consumed by the flames and it ascended in smoke to be enjoyed by Jehovah alone.

The other sacrifice offered at this time was the peace-offering. This was the only Levitical offering in which everyone had a part. The fat and the kidneys were offered up to the Lord upon the altar, a portion of the remainder went to the priests, and the rest was given to the offerer to be shared with his family and friends before the Lord (cf. Lev. 3). The peace-offering pictured communion with the Lord and a sharing of the good

things which came from the Lord. Both peace- and burnt-offerings were prominent in the observance of festivals and solemn occasions, and certainly this was a festive day for all Israel. Everyone received a portion before he left for home (v. 3).

David next acted to insure that thanksgiving and rejoicing before the Lord would be carried on daily and not be reserved for special occasions (vv. 4-7,37-42). Levites were appointed “to celebrate and to thank and to praise the Lord” (v. 4 NASB) with instruments and voices.

The psalm recorded on this occasion has two main parts. Verses 8-22 are addressed to Israel, and verses 23-34 are addressed to all the nations. Verses 35 and 36 form a closing prayer and blessing.

In verses 8-22 the Israelites are exhorted to sing the Lord’s greatness and to seek the Lord’s face (vv. 8-11). They are to remember His deeds, the marvelous things He has done in the past (vv. 12-14), and they are to remember His covenant, the unconditional promises He made to their fathers (vv. 15-22).

Widening the perspectives to “all the earth” (vv. 23-34), the psalmist urges all men to speak of the glory of the Lord (vv. 23,24). Fear is His due as the God of creation (vv. 25,26). Glory is His due as the God of splendor, strength, and majesty (vv. 27-30). Joy is His due as the God who sustains and reigns over His world (vv. 31-34).

Chapter 17

This chapter is divided into three parts: David’s desire to build God a house (vv. 1,2), God’s determination to build

David a house (vv. 3-15), and David's responsive prayer (vv. 16-27). Second Samuel 7 is the parallel passage.

David told Nathan the prophet that he was unhappy to be living in a luxurious home while the ark of God was in a tent (v. 1). His desire to build a house for the Lord met with Nathan's hasty approval (v. 2). But then the Lord corrected Nathan: David was not the man chosen for this task (v. 3).

The ark of God had never been in a permanent house, but in a tent. Neither had God commanded that such a house be built up to this time (vv. 4-6). David later revealed to his son, Solomon, a fact not mentioned here: He was disqualified from building the temple because he had been involved in so much bloodshed and violence (22:7,8). It was left for his son, "a man of rest" (22:9), to bring the ark of the Lord to its rest.

As God had spoken in grace to the patriarchs in the past, so now He singles out Israel's shepherd-king for unmerited blessing (vv. 7-14). These unconditional promises are known as the Davidic Covenant. Second Samuel 7:12-16 and Psalm 89 also record the covenant.

"The provisions of the Davidic covenant include … the following: (1) David is to have a child, yet to be born, who shall succeed him and establish his kingdom. (2) This son (Solomon) shall build the temple instead of David. (3) The throne of his kingdom shall be established forever. (4) The throne will not be taken away from him (Solomon) even though his sins justify chastisement. (5) David's house, throne, and kingdom shall be established forever.""

This covenant, like the other unconditional covenants God made, plays an important part in His dealings with

mankind. It is mentioned in several other places in Scripture (e.g., Isa. 9; Jer. 23, 33; Ezek. 37; Zech. 14). It will find its complete and total fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the throne and the kingdom forever.

Upon hearing these things, David went before the Lord and poured out his heart in believing prayer (vv. 16-27).

Chapter 18

The events summarized in the next three chapters (18—20) took place historically after David was made king (ch. 12) and before the ark was brought to Jerusalem (chs. 13— 17).

Many of Israel's hostile neighbors were now brought under her sway as had been originally intended by God. Sin and disobedience had hitherto kept her in servitude under those she was meant to conquer. Now, tribute was sent from these Gentile nations to Israel in recognition of her superiority and power.

The Philistines, Moabites, Syrians, and Edomites were all defeated because "the Lord helped David wherever he went" (vv. 1-6 NASB). Much wealth was subsequently acquired and dedicated to the Lord (vv. 7-11), later to be used by Solomon in building the temple.

Verse 4 records another failure on David's part to observe the laws concerning the behavior of Israel's kings (Deut. 17:15-17). First he had multiplied wives for himself (14:3), and now he multiplied horses.

David's enemies felt his wrath, but his people enjoyed his righteousness and justice (v. 14). He was not only a good general but also an efficient administrator.

Chapter 19

Nahash (v. 1) had fought against Israel in the days of Saul (1 Sam. 11). Evidently he had also rendered some unrecorded service to David during Saul's reign. Because of this, messengers were sent to console his son, Hanun, after his death. But Hanun followed unwise counsel and treated the ambassadors contemptuously (vv. 3,4). Fearing reprisal, the Ammonites hired mercenaries and prepared for war (vv. 5-7).

Joab along with his brother Abishai defeated the combined forces of the Ammonites and Syrians (vv. 8-15). The Syrians sent for their kinsmen and planned to avenge their recent loss. David realized the danger, gathered his forces, and took up the offensive. The surprised army, under Shophach, was no match for Israel, and the proud Syrians became David's servants (vv. 16-19).

Joab's exhortation in verse 13 inspired the Israelites and showed that he had the proper perspective as he faced the battle.

Chapter 20

Joab had been sent against Rabbah (modern-day Amman) by David while he himself remained in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 12:1). The siege probably lasted about two years. During this time David became involved with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of his 30 "mighty men." Second Samuel 12 tells about David's sin and restoration but, true to the form of Chronicles, the sin is not mentioned here. Joab summoned David when the city was ready to fall, and the crown of the defeated monarch was placed on his head (v. 2).

Verse 3 might refer only to the men of war. Since the Hebrew wording is somewhat obscure in this passage, a possible rendering offered by some commentators is that the people were put under forced labor (see notes on 2 Samuel 12).

Three giants were slain in the course of fighting with Israel's constant enemies, the Philistines. Sibbechai slew Sippai at Gezer (v. 4), Elhanan killed Lahmi (referred to as Goliath in 2 Samuel 21) (v. 5), and David's nephew Jonathan struck down a giant who had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot (vv. 6-8).

"The servants of David, though men of ordinary stature, were too hard for the giants of Gath in every encounter because they had God on their side. We need not fear great men against us while we have the great God for us. What will a finger more on each hand do, or a toe more on each foot, in contest with Omnipotence?"3

Chapter 21

When this chapter is compared with 2 Samuel 24, it is not at first clear who was behind David's sin of numbering the people. Second Samuel says the Lord moved David to number Israel because His anger was kindled against the nation. Here we are told that Satan incited the action. Both statements are, of course, true. God allowed Satan to tempt David. God is not the author of evil, but He permits it and causes it to serve His appointed ends.

Joab was against the census from the start and was not very diligent in carrying out the king's orders. Levi and Benjamin were not even counted (these tribes were dispersed throughout Israel and Judah, and it would

have been difficult to number them) (vv. 1-7). In numbering the people no ransom was collected, as commanded in Exodus 30:12. David's disobedience and pride brought grave consequences.

Although David sinned, he was quick to confess and humble himself before the Lord. When given a choice as to the penalty of his wrongdoing, he chose to fall into the hand of the Lord because he knew that He is merciful. Seventy thousand men were slain before the pestilence was stopped (vv. 8-15).

Through Gad, the Lord directed David to acquire the threshing floor of Ornan (Araunah in 2 Samuel), a Canaanite, and to build an altar there and offer sacrifices (vv. 16-19). Ornan offered the land to David as a gift, but the king insisted on paying for it. Verse 24 is an important spiritual principle: Effective sacrifice is always costly. This threshing floor later became the site of the temple (2 Chrn. 3:1).

It was on Moriah that Abraham offered up Isaac (Gen. 22). Here the plague was stopped, as we read in this chapter. Here the temple stood. And we believe that on this same ridge, although not on the same spot, the Lord Jesus died on the cross for the sins of mankind.

There are differences between the figures given in this chapter and those given in 2 Samuel 24, as follows:

2 Samuel 24 | 1 Chronicles 21
1. Census figures
800,000 valiant men of Israel that drew the sword (v. 9) | 1,100,000 all they of Israel that drew the sword (v. 5)
500,000 men of Judah (v. 9) | 470,000 men of Judah

that drew the sword (v. 5)
1,300,000 | 1,570,000

But note different classifications: valiant men vs. all they of Israel; men of Judah vs. men of Judah that drew the sword. The figures necessarily include different classes.

2. Years of famine | seven years (v. 13) | three years (v. 12)

The seven years may include the three-year famine caused by Saul's slaying of the Gibeonites (2 Sam. 21:1). If David chose three additional years, any part of an intervening year would count as a year, and thus the total famine would be seven.

3. Price paid to Araunah | 50 shekels (v. 24) | 600 shekels (v. 25)

The 50 shekels were for the threshing floor and the oxen. The 600 shekels were for "the place of this threshing floor," the larger area of which the threshing floor was only a part.

Chapter 22

David recognized that the threshing floor (21:28) was the future site of the temple and of the altar of burnt-offering (v. 1). Therefore he began to make preparations for construction, though he knew that Solomon was the one who would have the privilege of building the temple (vv. 2-5). The foreigners mentioned in verse 2 were the Canaanites who remained on the land (1 Kgs. 9:20,21). Israel was supposed to have destroyed them, but, having failed to do this, the Jews now subjected them to forced labor.

In a rather formal address to Solomon, David rehearsed his own desire to build the temple, his disqualification because he had been a man of war, and the Lord's promise that his son Solomon would build the house of God (vv. 6-11). He requested that the Lord would be with Solomon, giving him discretion and understanding, and urged Solomon to be obedient to the law of God. Finally, David told Solomon about the men and materials that he had assembled for the task (vv. 12-16).

Then the king urged the leaders of Israel to cooperate with Solomon (vv. 17-19). Notice that building for God is first a matter of the heart, then of the hands: "Set your heart… and build ye the sanctuary."

Chapter 23

Chapters 23—26 have to do with the division and duties of the Levites.

Near the end -of David's reign, a census was taken of the Levites above 30 years of age, the age at which they could begin their active service (vv. 1-3). However, David lowered the minimum age to 20 because more manpower would be needed in the service of the temple (vv. 24-27). The 38,000 men were then divided into four general groups: 24,000 overseers in the temple, 6000 officers or judges, 4000 gatekeepers, and 4000 musicians and singers to worship continually before the Lord (vv. 4,5). These instructions were divinely inspired and communicated to David through his prophets (2 Chrn. 29:25).

In verses 6-23, the Levitical genealogies are again given: Gershonites (vv. 7-11), Kohathites (vv. 12-20) (including

Moses and Aaron, the most famous Levites of all), and Merarites (vv. 21-23).

Certain priestly functions had been committed exclusively to Aaron and his sons forever (v. 13). Burning incense, ministry to the Lord in the holy place and Holy of Holies (for the high priest alone), and blessing in the name of Jehovah (Num. 6:23-27) were reserved for the priests.

Next the duties of the Levites are spelled out. They would no longer carry the tabernacle and its furniture as they had been commanded by Moses, since the temple would be a permanent house for God (vv. 25,26). The 6000 judges were probably dispersed throughout Israel while the other Levites served in relation to the temple. The 24,000 overseers of the work in the temple were to assist the priests in the duties enumerated in verses 28-32.

Chapter 24

In this chapter we are told how the priestly and Levitical divisions were formed. There were 24 households or divisions of priests (vv. 1-19) and 24 divisions of Levites (vv. 20-31). Each division was assigned on a rotating basis to minister in the temple, thus giving all the opportunity of serving approximately two weeks each year.

The households of Aaron’s two surviving sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, comprised the priesthood, 16 divisions belonging to the former and eight divisions going to the latter (v. 4). The lot was cast in the presence of David, the princes of Israel, and Zadok and Ahimelech the priests; the results were recorded by Shemaiah the

scribe with meticulous care (vv. 6-19). The Levites also cast their lot before David and the princes (vv. 20-31). The lot apparently determined the division to which each man was assigned. Zacharias (Luke 1:5) belonged to the eighth course, the course of Abijah (v. 10).

Chapter 25

In this chapter another group of Levites, the singers and musicians, are set in their courses to perform their sacred service (v. 1). These are the sons of Asaph (v. 2), Jeduthun (v. 3), and Heman (vv. 4,5). These 288 men were appointed to sing in the house of the Lord, accompanied by cymbals, harps, and lyres (vv. 6,7). They were assigned to their 24 courses or shifts by lot, as indicated in verses 9-31.

Chapter 26

Details concerning the gatekeepers and the gates to which they were assigned by lot are given in verses 1-19. Here we find the Korahites (v. 1), "… their duty being to prevent the presumption of which their father was guilty (Num. 16). Such are the ways of God."4 Here too is Obed-edom, who sheltered the ark after the death of Uzza (13:14). God had not forgotten his faithfulness.

Some Levites were appointed to guard the temple treasures, the spoils and the freewill offerings that had been dedicated to the Lord (vv. 20-28).

A third group of Levites were set apart as officers and judges, 1700 west of the Jordan and 2700 on the east side of the river

(vv. 29-32).

Chapter 27

The army, like the Levites, served in divisions. Twenty-four thousand men were on duty each month. All the commanders are listed among David's mighty men (ch. 11 and 2 Sam. 23).

The tribes are listed in a designed order in verses 16-22. First listed are the sons of Leah, in their proper order: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. Then the sons of Rachel: Joseph (represented by his sons Ephraim and Manasseh) and Benjamin. The children of Bilhah are given (but not in chronological order): Naphtali and Dan. The sons of Zilpah (Gad and Asher) are not named here.

Those 20 years and under were not recorded in the census that David had ordered (v. 23). The census was never completed because the wrath of the Lord fell before Joab finished (v. 24). David, perhaps ashamed of his sin, ordered that the result of the ill-fated census should not be put in the public records (v. 24).

David had 12 rulers who had charge of his domestic affairs (vv. 25-31). He also had counselors and close friends who advised him (vv. 32-34). Ahithophel's sad story is given in 2 Samuel 15 and 17. He was, like Joab, a man of high privilege but low character. How much nobler was Hushai, "the king's friend" (v. 33). Ahithophel was a self-seeking opportunist, but Hushai was a self-effacing servant. Each one reaped what he had sown (see 2 Sam. 15—17). Both served the king, but each had different motives. The opportunist works for his own glory, but the servant for that of his master.

Chapter 28

David summoned the heads of the various divisions and the princes and commanders to Jerusalem (v. 1). Once again he explained his desire to build a house for the Lord and the reasons why he had not been permitted to do so (vv. 2,3). But he had been chosen and established as king in Israel, and his son Solomon had been chosen to succeed him (vv. 4-7). Since David's house had been firmly established by God, the people were to obey the Lord through Solomon as they had through David (v. 8).

Next David addressed his son (vv. 9,10). Verse 9 contains a command, a promise, and a warning. The command: "And thou, Solomon my son, know the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind." The promise: "… if thou seek Him, He will be found of thee." The warning: "But if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off forever." Since the Lord had appointed Solomon to build the temple, he should take courage and do so (v. 10).

But, like Moses before him, Solomon must build according to the pattern given by the Lord, perhaps in a vision. There was no room for human imagination or ingenuity, for the temple is a type of Christ. David gave Solomon the plans he had drawn up under the inspiration of the Lord (vv. 11-19). He had even weighed the raw materials to be used for each piece of furniture. (More complete details are given in 2 Chronicles 2—4.) Solomon now had the plans; the materials were collected; the temple servants, the Levites, had all been assigned their duties. God was with him and would not fail him; therefore his father urged him again, "Be strong … and act" (vv. 20,21 NASB). "Chariot of the

cherubim" (v. 18) probably means "the cherubim as the chariot upon which God enters or is throned."5

Chapter 29

Although David had given so much already to the work of the temple, yet as a final offering and as an example to the people he dedicated more silver and gold from his private funds and urged the people to give generously (vv. 1-5). Their generous response brought rejoicing to their own hearts and to the heart of the king (vv. 6-9). David then offered a magnificent prayer of worship and thanksgiving. He eulogized the Lord as worthy of all honor, as Lord over all, and as the Source of all riches and honor. He acknowledged that he and his people were unworthy to give to God, and that what they gave had come from Him anyway. He prayed that the present devotion of his people would become a permanent trait, and that his son would have an obedient heart in building the temple (vv. 10-19). When he called on the congregation to bless the Lord, they bowed low and did homage to the Lord and to the king (v. 20). The next day they sacrificed 3000 animals, and they ate and drank before the Lord (vv. 21,22).

Solomon was made king a second time (v. 22; cf. 23:1); then, after David's death, he sat on the throne, enjoying the blessing of the Lord and the allegiance of the people (vv. 23-25). His glorious kingdom prepictures the splendor of Christ's millennial reign over the entire earth.

First Chronicles closes with a brief summary of David's reign. He died full of days (he was 70), riches, and honor (v. 28).

1 C. H. Spurgeon, Spurgeon’s Devotional Bible, p. 265.

2 John Walvoord, quoted by J. Dwight Pentecost, Things to Come, pp. 101,102.

3 Matthew Henry, The Matthew Henry Commentary, p. 445.

4 George Williams, The Student’s Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, p. 236.

5 Merrill F. Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, p. 190.

2 Chronicles

Outline Of 2 Chronicles

I. Kingdom of Solomon (1—9)

A. Worship, wisdom, and wealth (1)

B. Preparation, construction, and dedication of the temple (2-7)

C. Splendor of the kingdom (8:1—9:28)

D. Death of the king (9:29-31)

II. The Division of the Kingdom (10)

III. The Kingdom of Judah (11—36:19)

A. Rehoboam (11, 12)

B. Abijah (13)

C. Asa (14—16)

D. Jehoshaphat (17—20)

E. Jehoram (21)

F. Ahaziah (22:1-9)

G. Usurpation of Athaliah (22:10—23:21)

H. Joash (24)

I. Amaziah (25)

J. Uzziah (26)

K. Jotham (27)

L. Ahaz (28)

M. Hezekiah (29—32)

N. Manasseh (33:1-20)

O. Amon (33:21-25)

P. Josiah (34, 35)

Q. Jehoahaz (36:1-3)

R. Jehoiakim (36:4-8)

S. Jehoiachin (36:9,10)

T. Zedekiah (36:11-19)

IV. Babylonian Captivity (36:20,21)

V. Decree of Cyrus (36:22,23)

Second Chronicles takes up where 1 Chronicles leaves off. In 1 Chronicles 29 David established Solomon as his successor. Second Chronicles traces the Davidic line from Solomon to the return of the Jewish remnant from the Babylonian captivity. First and Second Kings covers basically the same time period, but the emphasis in Kings is more on Israel while in Chronicles the emphasis is on Judah, as we noted earlier. The kings of Israel are mentioned only as they relate to the history of Judah. Also, the emphasis of Chronicles is spiritual while that of Kings is historical. Although much of the material is the same in both books, Chronicles sometimes contains details not found in Kings, Chronicles being written at a later date and for a different purpose. We will comment on some of the differences between the two books, but it will be impossible in this survey to go in depth into all of them. (Other books have been written for this purpose.)

In commenting on 2 Chronicles, we must note that there are some seeming discrepancies between this book and the parallel accounts in 1 and 2 Kings. If we overlook these differences, we do a disservice to our readers. On

the other hand, if we overemphasize the differences, we run the risk of undermining confidence in the Word, and we certainly do not want to do this. Our solution is this: We have decided to bring the principal differences out into the open, even if we can't solve them all. At the same time we want to make it clear that they in no way affect the inspiration of the Scriptures. We believe that the Bible, as originally given, is inspired by God, inerrant, and infallible.

Many of the discrepancies are copyists' errors. We should not be surprised if scribes made minor mistakes in copying and recopying the Bible over the course of many centuries. Even today it is almost impossible to publish a book without some typographical errors creeping in. Someone might ask, "If God could guide the original writers of Scripture to be free from error, why couldn't He cause the scribes to produce error-free copies?" The answer, of course, is that He could have, but in His wisdom He didn't choose to do so. The important point is that, in spite of minor scribal or copyists' errors (mostly in the spelling of names and in numbers), the Bible as we have it today is the Word of God. Any problems have to do with minor details and not with any Bible doctrine. It is reassuring to remember that when Jesus was on earth, He used a version of the Old Testament (not the original manuscripts) and He quoted this version as the Word of God. We can use reputable versions of the Bible today with the same confidence that they are the Word of God.

Chapter 1

First Kings 1—3 tells us what went on between the death of David (1 Chrn. 29) and the time when Solomon

was established as king. Adonijah and Joab were killed in a power struggle as Solomon secured his father's throne according to the word of the Lord (1 Chrn. 22:9,10).

With his kingdom secured, Solomon called together his subordinates and led them in a solemn procession to Gibeon, where the tabernacle was located (vv. 1-3). David had moved the ark to Jerusalem (1 Chrn. 13—15), but the rest of the furniture of the tabernacle was at Gibeon, including the brazen altar (vv. 4,5). Upon this altar Solomon offered 1000 burnt offerings, a display of his devotion and loyalty to Jehovah, the God of his father (v. 6).

Jehovah appeared to him that same night in a dream and asked him what he most desired (v. 7; 1 Kgs. 3:5). Solomon's request for wisdom in ruling the people so pleased the Lord that He also promised him unparalled riches, wealth, and honor (vv. 7-12). In a sense, God appears to every believer and asks him what he wants. What we want in life largely determines what we get.

Solomon returned to Jerusalem to a reign of great prosperity. Verses 14-17 dwell on his chariots, horsemen, chariot cities, silver, gold, cedar, horses, and linen. But his prosperity contained the seeds of his eventual failure, as is often the case.

Chapter 2

In preparation for construction of the temple, Solomon assigned 70,000 men to carry the materials, plus 80,000 stonecutters and 3600 supervisors (vv. 1,2). Then he sent for help to Huram (Hiram), King of Tyre, who had supplied cedars for David's royal palace. After

describing the spiritual significance of the project, Solomon asked specifically for a skilled craftsman to work with the artisan whom David had hired, and also for the necessary timber. Solomon promised to pay handsomely for any help given (vv. 3-10).

Huram's reply seemed to indicate a genuine, spiritual recognition that the undertaking was historic. He said he was sending Huram-abi, a worker with impeccable qualifications. (This man is called Hiram in the parallel account in 1 Kings 7:13.) He also promised to send timber in exchange for wheat, barley, oil, and wine. The timber would be floated on rafts down the Mediterranean Sea to Joppa, then transported overland to Jerusalem (vv. 11-16). The strangers or aliens of verse 17 were Canaanites whom the Israelites had failed to destroy. Now they were used as forced laborers.

Problems in chapter 2:

How much did Solomon pay Huram? First Kings 5:11 states one amount while verse 10 gives another. First Kings refers to a personal gift given to Huram's household while verse 10 refers to the supplies given to Huram's workmen who were cutting lumber for Solomon.

Who was Huram-abi's mother? Verse 14 says she was a Danite while 1 Kings says she was a widow from the tribe of Naphtali. The answer is that she was a Danite whose first husband was from the tribe of Naphtali; hence she was a widow of Naphtali. Her second husband was a man of Tyre.

How many overseers were there on the temple project: 3600 (v. 18) or 3300 (1 Kgs. 5:16)? There are two other important passages to look at in resolving this problem.

Second Chronicles 8:10 says that Solomon had 250 officers who ruled over the work. Add this number to the 3600 overseers (v. 18) and you get 3850. First Kings 9:23 numbers Solomon's officers at 550. Add this number to the 3300 overseers mentioned in 1 Kings 5:16 and you get 3850. The total number of officers and overseers is therefore the same in both books; the proportion is just enumerated differently. The term "officers" refers to military or political personnel, while the term "overseers" refers to industrial personnel (i.e., superintendents or foremen).

Chapter 3

After much planning and preparation, the construction finally began in the fourth year of Solomon's reign. With over 150,000 workmen and almost limitless resources, it would still take over seven years to complete this mammoth undertaking.

The foundations were laid on Mount Moriah. The temple would be 90 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 45 feet high (vv. 1-3) (see 1 Kings 6, where more details are given). It was roughly twice the size of the tabernacle and had a porch 30 feet long (v. 4). The interior of the temple was divided into two rooms on the main floor. The two rooms were the holy place or great house (main room) and the Holy of Holies or the house (room). The building was of stone. The interior was paneled with wood which was overlaid with fine gold, ornamented with various designs, and studded with precious stones (vv. 5-9). All that was visible inside the temple was gold, the symbol of deity, picturing the glory of the Lord which was to fill the place.

Two cherubim were put into the Holy of Holies (in addition to the two cherubim which formed part of the mercy seat atop the ark). Their combined wingspans extended the entire width of the Most Holy Place. The ark would later be placed under them (5:7) (vv. 10-13). Cherubim are spirit-beings which appear often in Scripture. The walls and the veil were adorned with them, symbolizing their continual waiting on God. The temple and the tabernacle were types of the true dwelling place of God—i.e., heaven, where He is worshiped and glorified day and night by myriad hosts (Heb. 8:5). They were also types of Christ (John 1:14; 2:19).

A veil separated the two rooms, just as in the tabernacle (v. 14). There were also doors between the rooms in the temple. Two pillars with capitals and ornaments were placed in front of the temple. The pillar on the right side was named “He shall establish” and the one on the left was called “In Him is strength” (vv. 15-17).

Problems in chapter 3:

How high was the porch, 120 cubits (v. 4) or 30 cubits (1 Kgs. 6:2)? Some say this is a copyist’s error. Others, like Josephus, maintain that 120 cubits was the actual height. Matthew Poole thinks the 120 cubits refers to a kind of turret.

How tall were the pillars in front of the temple, 35 cubits (v. 15) or 18 cubits (1 Kgs. 7:15; Jer. 52:21)? Notice that 1 Kings specifically refers to the height of one pillar, while the margin of verse 15 says the pillars were 35 cubits long (i.e., together). In other words, 35 cubits was the total length of the pillars, which were probably cast in one piece and then cut in two. This

would make the two pillars 18 cubits each (to the nearest cubit).

Chapter 4

The two chief metals used in the temple were bronze and gold. Chapter 4 briefly lists some of the furnishings made from these metals. Bronze was used for the altar of burnt offering (v. 1), the sea and supporting oxen (vv. 2-5,10), ten portable basins (v. 6), overlay for the doors of the court (v. 9), various utensils (vv. 11,14-18), and the two pillars and capitals (vv. 12,13). These were all cast in the clay ground between Succoth and Zeredah (v. 17).

Solomon used gold for ten lampstands for the holy place (vv. 7,20), ten tables for the showbread (vv. 8,19), a golden altar (v. 19), various utensils (vv. 8,21,22), and overlay for the holy place and Holy of Holies (v. 22). Gold was used primarily for items inside the temple while the bronze furnishings were mainly employed outside.

All the furniture for the temple was made by Solomon except the ark of the covenant. That was brought from the tabernacle.

Problems in chapter 4:

The measurements given for the laver in verse 2 are sometimes used to show that the Bible contains error. If the diameter was 10 cubits (180 inches), the circumference would be 180 times pi (3.1416) or 565.49 inches, instead of 30 cubits (540 inches). The difficulty is solved by noting that the laver was a handbreadth thick (4 inches). Verse 2 gives the outside diameter and the inside circumference. The inside diameter would have

been 180 inches less two handbreadths (8 inches) or 172 inches.

Multiplying 172 times pi, we get 540.36 inches, which to the nearest inch equals the 30 cubits of the text.

How much water did the laver hold: 2000 baths (1 Kgs. 7:26) or 3000 baths (v. 5)? The answer: both. Two thousand baths was probably what the sea held normally, but its brimful capacity was 3000 baths.

Chapter 5

Now the temple was completed (v. 1; cf. 1 Kgs. 8). Verses 2-10 tell about the transporting of the furniture from the tent of meeting to the temple. The ark was placed in the Holy of Holies. Perhaps the other items, like the altar of incense and the table of showbread, were put into the treasury at this time, since they were not used in Solomon's temple.

The Levites who carried the ark were priests (vv. 4,7). They set the ark in its place under the wings of the guarding cherubim (vv. 7,8). Exodus 25:15 required that the staves stay with the ark. ("Drew out," v. 9 KJV, is inaccurate.) According to 1 Kings 8:8, the ends of the staves could be seen from the holy place. The two tablets of the law were in the ark at this time (v. 10).

Verse 11b, "the priests did not then wait by course," means that all the priests present that day participated, not just the course that was assigned the duty.

When the Levites and priests assembled at the east end of the altar, praising the Lord for His goodness and mercy, the glory of the Lord filled the temple so that the priests could not minister inside (vv. 11-14).

Chapter 6

The central part of this chapter is Solomon's prayer of dedication (vv. 12-42). It is the longest prayer recorded in the Bible and is full of praise and petition.

Before addressing the Lord, Solomon rehearsed to the people how, in Israel's earlier history, the Lord had not chosen a city as the religious capital or a man as ruler. (It is true that Samuel and others were leaders, but they did not have the power of a sovereign.) But the time came when God chose Jerusalem as His city and David as king over Israel. David desired to build the temple, but his good intention was to be carried out by one of his sons. And now here Solomon stood, a testimony to the faithfulness of God. Ascending a special platform in the temple court, he spread out his hands and prayed. He had much for which to be thankful. Emboldened by grace, he had much for which to ask.

Verses 14-17: Solomon prayed first about the throne of Israel. God had kept His word thus far concerning His promises to David. Solomon asked that His faithfulness might continue.

Verses 18-21: These four sentences contain the sum and substance of the entire prayer. All that follows is an expansion of the simple thought expressed by the three verbs in verse 21: listen, hear, and forgive.

Verses 22 and 23 request the Lord to hear and judge oaths taken before His altar.

Verses 24 and 25 request forgiveness from sins that might cause Israel to be defeated by her enemies.

Verses 26 and 27 request rain after drought caused by sin.

Verses 28-31 request deliverance from famine or pestilence in order that the people might learn the fear of the Lord.

Verses 32 and 33 request that foreigners may see God work when they come to call on His great Name.

Verses 34 and 35 request victory in battle.

Verses 36-39 request deliverance from captivity once the people repent and confess their wickedness.

Solomon closed by asking three things (vv. 40-42). He prayed that his prayer might be accepted. He asked for grace and joy for the priests, those who serve God in His temple. He prayed for favor for himself based upon God's great love for his father David.

Lest we think that this prayer consists of petitions only, let us go back through it once more. There is a great deal about the attributes of God here. Solomon mentioned God's: uniqueness (v. 14); loving-kindness (v. 14); transcendence (v. 18); immensity (infinity) (v. 18); omnipresence (v. 18); justice (v. 23); forgiveness (vv. 25,27, etc.); omniscience (v. 30); grace (v. 33); mercy (vv. 38,39).

Besides all these, the Lord's omnipotence and holiness are implied throughout.

Chapter 7

As soon as Solomon finished praying, fire from heaven consumed the sacrifices and offerings, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. The people saw the glory cloud coming down upon the temple, and they bowed on the pavement, worshiping and praising the Lord (vv. 1-3). Solomon then led the people in offering thousands

of oxen and sheep as sacrifices to the Lord (vv. 4,5). Verse 6 is clearer in the NIV; it reads: “The priests took their positions, as did the Levites with the Lord’s musical instruments, which King David had made for praising the Lord and which were used when he gave thanks, saying, ‘His love endures forever.’ Opposite the Levites, the priests blew their trumpets, and all the Israelites were standing.” The bronze altar was apparently too small for the enormous number of sacrifices and offerings (v. 7).

The dedication feast lasted for seven days, including the Day of Atonement. This was followed by the Feast of Tabernacles, after which Solomon dismissed the people (vv. 8-10).

After Solomon had finished the temple and his own palace, the Lord appeared to him at night with promises and warnings. In the event that God sent drought, locusts, or plague on the people, they should humble themselves, pray, seek His face, and turn from their wicked ways. Then He would forgive their sin and restore them. If Solomon would live in obedience before God, He would establish his throne and allow Solomon’s descendants to sit upon it. On the other hand, if Solomon and his people forsook the Lord for idols, they would be carried into captivity, and God would reject the temple so that it would be an object of derision and a testimony to the nations that Israel had forsaken the Lord (vv. 11-22).

Verse 16 seems to imply that the temple would endure forever; yet we know that it was destroyed in 586 B.C. The explanation, of course, is that God’s promise was conditioned on Israel’s faithfulness and obedience (vv.

19-22). Verses 19 and 20 specifically warn that if the people became idolaters, God would reject the temple.

Chapter 8

Here we read of Solomon's accomplishments and successes in various areas. First he undertook a vast urban-development program, rebuilding or capturing storage cities, fortified cities, chariot cities, and settlements (vv. 1-6).

He conscripted Canaanites for his slave-labor force but used the Israelites as fighting men, commanders, and chief officials (vv. 7-10).

He would not allow his wife, the daughter of Pharaoh, to live in the royal palace, saying that it was holy because the ark of the Lord had entered there (v. 11). This does not mean that the ark had actually been taken inside the palace, but rather that the palace was holy by reason of its proximity to the ark in the temple. The fact that Solomon restricted her to a special residence did not restrict her from leading him off into idolatry (1 Kgs. 11:1-8).

The king was careful to obey the sacrifices and offerings connected with the religious calendar. He also appointed the priests and Levites to serve according to the schedules prepared by his father (vv. 12-15).

Verse 16 reads in the RSV: "Thus was accomplished all the work of Solomon from the day the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid until it was finished. So the house of the Lord was completed."

Finally we read of Solomon's maritime ventures in partnership with Huram. The ships traveled between Ezion-geber and Ophir (vv. 17,18).

Problems in chapter 8:

How many officers were in Solomon's administration, 250 (v. 10) or 550 (1 Kgs. 9:23)? See notes on problems in 2 Chronicles 2.

Did Solomon receive 450 talents of gold from Ophir (v. 18) or only 420 (1 Kgs. 9:28)? The Hebrew numbers 2 and 5 could very easily be confused by later copyists. Some suggest that the 30-talent difference went to pay for supplies and wages for the trip.

Chapter 9

When the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she traveled with a great caravan laden with gifts to find out for herself. After seeing the splendor of his kingdom and testing his wisdom with hard questions, she was overwhelmed. She confessed that the half had not been told. She realized that Solomon's prosperity was due to the favor of his God (vv. 1-9). Verses 10 and 11 interrupt the narrative to explain the source of some of Solomon's wealth and the uniquely beautiful uses to which he put it. When the Queen of Sheba left, Solomon gave her gifts greater in number and value than those she had brought to him (v. 12).

Solomon received over 666 talents of gold each year (vv. 13,14) and used some of it to make shields (vv. 15,16), to overlay his throne (vv. 17-19), and to make goblets and tableware (v. 20). His greatness brought him honor and wealth from other nations (vv. 22-24). He was rich in the abundance of horses, territory, silver, and cedar (vv. 25-28). Although he reigned over the territory from the Euphrates westward (v. 26), it was not incorporated as

part of Israel but consisted of vassal states that paid tribute to him.

Solomon died after he had reigned for 40 years, and was succeeded by his son Rehoboam (vv. 30,31). The noncanonical books mentioned in verse 29 were probably used as resource materials by the chronicler, but they have been lost since.

Problems in chapter 9:

How did Solomon's ships, based in the Red Sea, get to Tarshish (v. 21) (i.e., Spain), since there was no Suez Canal at that time? Archaeologists have discovered a copper smeltery at Ezion-geber, Solomon's seaport on the Red Sea. Unger says that such a station from which raw copper ore was exported was called a tarshish, and that the ships especially equipped for transporting such cargoes were called tarshish ships.1 Thus these ships didn't go to Spain but stayed primarily in the Red Sea.

Did Solomon have 4000 stalls for his horses (v. 25) or 40,000 (1 Kgs. 4:26)? The NASB margin points out that 1 Kings 4:26 reads 4000 in one ancient manuscript. Since there were only 12,000 horsemen, the figure in 1 Kings might be a copyist's error.

Chapter 10

Perhaps to conciliate the northern tribes, Rehoboam decided to go to Shechem for his inauguration (v. 1). The people promised to serve him if he would lighten the oppressive yoke of taxes which Solomon had placed on them (vv. 2-4). "All Israel" (v. 3) means representatives from all the northern tribes. Rehoboam asked for three days to consider the people's request (v. 5).

First he checked with the elders who had served his father. They told him to listen to the people (vv. 6,7). He next turned to the young men for advice and heard what was more appealing to him (vv. 8-11). They urged him to speak roughly to the people.

When the people returned after three days and heard the king's threats, they rebelled (under the leadership of Jeroboam).

The kingdom was divided, fulfilling the word of the Lord through Ahijah (1 Kgs. 11:29 ff.) (vv. 12-17). After the murder of Hadoram, Rehoboam retreated to Jerusalem, where he reigned over Judah and Benjamin (vv. 18,19).

"This fulfillment of the prediction of Ahijah affords an instance, similar to many others in the Scriptures, of prophecies being accomplished by the operation of human passions, and in the natural course of events. Men think that they are obeying their own wills and carrying out their own plans, unconscious that the matter is of God, and permitted and overruled by Him for the performance of His Word."2

Chapter 11

When Rehoboam returned to Jerusalem, the Lord intervened through the prophet Shemaiah to prevent a civil war. He told Rehoboam to accept the status quo because "this thing is done of me" (v. 4). Rehoboam had not listened to wise counsel before, but he did this time. There was constant strife between the two kingdoms (12:15), but all-out war was avoided (vv. 1-4). The expression "all Israel in Judah and Benjamin" (v. 3) refers to all in the southern kingdom who were loyal to David's dynasty.

Much of the king's time was spent in building cities of defense for Judah (vv. 5-12). The cities, located south of Jerusalem, showed that he feared attack from Egypt.

Meanwhile Jeroboam plunged the northern kingdom into gross idolatry (1 Kgs. 12), causing those priests and Levites who were loyal to Jehovah to flee to Judah. They were followed by all those who had hearts for God, and in this way Rehoboam's kingdom was strengthened (vv. 13-17).

It cost them everything to come to Jerusalem, for they left their homes and friends behind (v. 14).

Rehoboam was a polygamist, although he did not match his father in this regard (vv. 18-23). He had 18 wives, 60 concubines, 28 sons, and 60 daughters (v. 21). The wives mentioned by name were Israelites from the royal family and not heathen women.

Chapter 12

Whereas 1 Kings 14:22-24 mentions some of the details of Rehoboam's apostasy, Chronicles simply says that "he … forsook the law of the Lord" (v. 1) and "prepared not his heart to seek the Lord" (v. 14). Now five short years after the powerful monarch Solomon had died, the Egyptians were.at Jerusalem's gates to carry away her treasures (vv. 1-4). Rehoboam's fortified cities availed nothing. Shishak subdued Judah not because of Egypt's military superiority but because of Judah's unfaithfulness to Jehovah.

When the prophet Shemaiah came to Rehoboam a second time (see 11:2) and delivered his message of doom (v. 5), the king and the princes of Judah humbled themselves before the Lord and acknowledged His

righteousness in the coming judgment (v. 6). Instantly the Lord's mercy and grace provided deliverance (v. 7), but not without a painful lesson on the difference between serving Jehovah and serving their captors (v. 8). The people were spared but the kingdom was spoiled (vv. 9,10).

Rehoboam tried to adjust as much as possible. He substituted bronze shields for gold (vv. 10-12), unwittingly showing that God's presence and favor (gold) were being replaced by His judgment (bronze).

Verses 13-16 conclude the story of Rehoboam by stating that he did evil (v. 14) and slept with his fathers (v. 16). The difference between Rehoboam and his grandfather David can be seen by comparing Psalm 27:8 with verse 14. David sought the Lord's face whereas Rehoboam did not.

Chapter 13

Abijah became the next king and reigned three years (vv. 1,2). First Kings 15 mentions his sin in not following after the Lord, as David had done. But Chronicles skips over everything in Abijah's reign except one battle with Jeroboam (v.

In his speech before the battle, Abijah reminded Jeroboam that God had given the kingdom to David and to his posterity (v. 5). Jeroboam had rebelled against the Davidic dynasty and had mustered a band of outlaws against Rehoboam when the latter was virtually defenseless (vv. 6,7). Israel hoped to win the victory because of its superior numbers and the golden calves (v. 8). Israel had set up a counterfeit priesthood which men could enter without divine authorization (v. 9).

Judah, by contrast, clung to the Levitical priesthood, which was still serving the Lord in the prescribed manner (v. 11). God was the Captain of Judah's army, and His priests used their trumpets to sound the alarm against Israel. It was folly, therefore, for the northern tribe to fight against God (v. 12).

Instead of listening to Abijah, Jeroboam set an ambush. When the trap closed on Judah, the men called on the Lord and the priests blew the trumpets. The Lord answered by giving Judah a great victory. half a million chosen men of Israel fell—a staggering price to pay for turning away from God (vv. 14-17)!

Abijah acquired additional territory, although he didn't completely subdue Israel (v. 19). The loss was devastating for Jeroboam, who was later struck down by the Lord (v. 20). But Abijah became powerful and prosperous (vv. 21,22).

Problem in chapter 13:

Who was Abijah's mother, Michaiah the daughter of Uriel (v. 2) or Maachah the daughter of Absalom (11:20)? Josephus tells us that Uriel was Absalom's son-in-law and the father of Michaiah or Maachah (two names for the same person).3 This makes Michaiah the daughter of Uriel and the granddaughter of Absalom. (The Hebrew word for daughter can also mean granddaughter.)

Chapter 14

The next three chapters give us a brief report of Asa and his 41-year reign. First Kings 15:9-24 should be read along with these chapters. (Verse 1 belongs to the

previous chapter. The Hebrew Bible starts chapter 14 with verse 2.)

The source of Asa's peace was his heart's attitude toward Jehovah. He put away many of the sins of his fathers and urged his people to seek the Lord, leading the way himself by zealously purging his kingdom of idolatry (vv. 3-5). During this time of rest, Asa fortified his cities and gathered a large army (vv. 6-8).

Judah's peace was shattered by an Ethiopian army of one million men with 300 chariots. Judah's smaller force was victorious because of their trust in Jehovah. The enemy was routed decisively (vv. 9-15).

Asa's prayer in verse 11 is short and to the point. There is no time in battle to be eloquent, but prayers born out of desperate need are very effective if the man praying is in a right relationship with God, as Asa was. Because he followed the Lord in peace, he knew the Lord would care for him in war. The fight began in Mareshah, a city in Judah, and ended around Gerar, a city belonging to the Philistines. Many were slain, including those who owned livestock, and a huge amount of booty was carried back to Jerusalem. "Tents of cattle" (v. 15) probably means livestock encampments.

Problem in chapter 14:

Verses 3 and 5 state that Asa removed the high places, but 15:17 says that he did not. Which is right? Both statements are true. Some high places were dedicated to idols while others were dedicated to Jehovah (e.g., 1 Kings 3:2). Some scholars think that Asa destroyed only the idolatrous shrines. "Keil thinks that the second text merely implies that the king did not succeed in carrying his reforms out thoroughly. Rawlinson suggests that the

above texts refer to different times; Asa in the early part of his reign, putting down idolatry with a strong hand, but in his later years, when his character had deteriorated, allowing idol-worship to creep in again."4 See also the solution to this problem suggested in the earlier commentary on Asa (1 Kgs. 15).

Chapter 15

Asa and his men were jubilant over their recent success against overwhelming odds. As they returned to Jerusalem, the Lord had a lesson for them. First, Azariah reminded them that the Lord was with them because they had sought Him (vv. 1,2). But He would forsake them if they forsook Him. And history proved more times than not that Israel had forsaken their God. Consequently they had no peace, and they were continually beaten by their enemies (vv. 3-6). But when the nation sought the Lord, they found Him always ready to forgive and restore (v. 4). Since Asa was seeking after Jehovah, Azariah encouraged him to keep up the good work and not to lose courage, because his labor would have a sure reward (v. 7). The parallel for believers today is 1 Corinthians 15:58. "Oded" (v. 8) refers to Oded's son, Azariah (see NASB).

The king responded to the word of the prophet with real enthusiasm. He stepped up his reformation program immediately, removing more idols (cf. 14:3), not only from his own land but from the land he had taken in battle (v. 8). He restored the altar in the temple and consecrated it with sacrifice (vv. 8,11). He called a solemn assembly at Jerusalem, offered part of the Ethiopian spoil to the Lord on the altar, and bound the people with an oath to seek the Lord (vv. 9-15). He left

no room for dissenters: All who did not obey the covenant were to be executed (v. 13). He removed his grandmother (not his mother) from her position as queen and destroyed her idol (v. 16). For comment on verse 17 see the notes on problems in chapter 14. Treasures were brought into the temple instead of being taken out (v. 18). His work was rewarded as the Lord had promised through Azariah, and he had peace (v. 19).

Problem in chapter 15:

According to 1 Kings 15:33, Baasha, the third king of the northern tribes, died in Asa's 27th year. But verses 19 and 16:1 speak of war between Baasha and Asa in Asa's 36th year. Thiele maintains that Judah's history and not Asa's sole reign is meant here. The 35th year of Judah's kingdom, dating from Rehoboam's rebellion, would have been the 15th year of Asa's personal reign. This explanation is not without problems, too detailed to go into here. Many simply suggest that a copyist's error is the cause of the discrepancy.

Chapter 16

When Baasha attempted to prevent his people from defecting to Asa by fortifying Ramah, a town not far from Jerusalem, Asa turned to the assistance of man instead of trusting in the arm of the Lord, as he had done earlier when invaded by the Ethiopians (v. 1). He sent the Lord's treasure to purchase the help of Ben-hadad (vv. 2,3). The Syrian king then attacked Israel and forced Baasha to withdraw from Ramah to defend his northern border (vv. 4,5). Asa's scheme apparently worked (v. 6), but God was displeased. The end certainly did not justify the means in Jehovah's eyes, so He sent His prophet Hanani to speak to Asa.

Hanani boldly accused the king of foolishness (vv. 7-9). Had not the Lord delivered him from the Ethiopians (v. 8)? Was not God continually looking for men through whom He could work (v. 9)? Since Asa had chosen to war according to the flesh, he would have wars from then on (v. 9). Asa was enraged. Instead of heeding the word of the Lord, as he had done earlier (15:8), he jailed Hanani (v. 10).

Asa chose to work contrary to the way of the Lord, so the Lord afflicted him with a foot disease (v. 12). But Asa still refused to repent and turn back to Jehovah. He tried the physicians instead, and shortly thereafter died (v. 13).

Despite his sad end, Asa was one of the best kings Judah had (15:17). The people greatly mourned his death (v. 14). The great burning of verse 14 refers to the burning of incense, not to the cremation of his body.

Chapter 17

Jehoshaphat succeeded his father and reigned 25 years (20:31). Much more space is devoted to him in 2 Chronicles (chs. 17—20) than in Kings. The material in chapter 17 is not paralleled in 1 Kings.

Upon ascending the throne, Jehoshaphat strengthened his kingdom against Israel (v. 1). He fortified his kingdom, but the secret of his successful reign was that he followed the Lord, as David had done (vv. 3-5). (It is interesting how David is constantly used as the standard by which kings were measured. If they walked after his example, they prospered and were blessed. If they did not, they failed.) The land was at peace under

Jehoshaphat (v. 5), and his enemies paid tribute (vv. 10-12).

The Word of God had high priority in Jehoshaphat's life. He was zealous in following its precepts and took "great pride" in obeying it (v. 6 NASB). He also made it the rule of his kingdom, sending a special commission of princes, Levites, and priests to educate the people in the ways of the Lord (vv. 7-9), thus obeying the word of the Lord in Deuteronomy 6:6ff.

Under Jehovah's blessing, Jehoshaphat "waxed great exceedingly" (v. 12). And what an army he had! Rehoboam started out over 60 years earlier with 180,000 men. Now Judah's militia numbered 1,160,000 men, not counting those stationed in the fortified cities (vv. 14-19). Many of these men had no doubt defected from Israel because they saw that the Lord was with Judah. It is too bad that Jehoshaphat did not use his manpower more wisely, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Chapter 18

Up until now Israel and Judah had been hostile toward each other. But Jehoshaphat's son married Ahab's daughter (21:5,6), thus forming an alliance between the two kingdoms (v. 1).

Ahab asked Jehoshaphat to help him attack the Syrians, who held some of Israel's territory (vv. 2,3) (cf. 1 Kgs. 22:3,4). Jehoshaphat immediately consented to help Ahab, but he suggested that they first inquire of the Lord (v. 4). Accordingly Ahab sent for the prophets, who with one voice predicted success (v. 5). However, they must not have been too convincing, because

Jehoshaphat, who possessed a measure of spiritual discernment, asked for “a prophet of the Lord” (v. 6), as if to say that the 400 prophets already assembled were not in touch with Jehovah. It appears that Ahab also knew the difference between his prophets and a real prophet. But Micaiah, the one man through whom they could get the word of the Lord, was hated by Ahab because he always prophesied evil concerning the king (v. 7).

When Micaiah was being summoned, Zedekiah dramatically portrayed how the Syrians would be destroyed (perhaps the two horns he put on signified the two Jewish kings), while all the other prophets chimed in their assent (vv. 9-11). Micaiah meanwhile was being pressured by the king’s messenger to agree with the other prophets in forecasting victory, but Micaiah promised only to deliver the word of the Lord (vv. 12,13). Verse 13 should be the motto of every preacher and every Christian: “As the Lord liveth, even what my God saith, that will I speak.”

At first Micaiah pretended to go along with the others, but it was soon apparent that he was not serious (v. 14). When Ahab urged him to speak the truth, he told of Israel’s coming defeat and of Ahab’s death (vv. 15-17). Micaiah also explained why Ahab’s prophets were giving him false information: They were under the influence of a deceiving spirit which the Lord sent because of Ahab’s wickedness. Ahab was now the object of judgment, as had been prophesied earlier by Elijah (1 Kgs. 21:19-24) (vv. 18-22). “It is not without the divine permission that the devil deceives men, and even thereby God serves his own purposes. Thus Micaiah gave Ahab fair warning, not only of the danger of proceeding in this war, but of the

danger of believing those that encouraged him to proceed."5

Micaiah suffered for his honesty. Zedekiah struck him (vv. 23,24) and Ahab imprisoned him (vv. 25,26), probably intending to kill him. To both men Micaiah responded by saying that the Lord would prove that he was telling the truth. Scripture does not tell us what happened to Zedekiah, but we do know that Ahab was slain in battle, according to the word of Jehovah (v. 27).

The prophet's words must have had some impact on Ahab, because he tried to disguise himself and thus escape God's judgment. He suggested that Jehoshaphat wear his kingly robes while he (Ahab) donned a soldier's uniform (vv. 27-29). But the word of the Lord came to pass. Jehoshaphat was delivered from the Syrians, after learning a lesson about the dangers of unholy alliances (2 Cor. 6:14) (vv. 30-32). Ahab was not delivered. God directed a seemingly random arrow into a joint of his armor, and he died (vv. 33,34).

Chapter 19

When Jehu, Hanani's son, who was also a prophet, rebuked Jehoshaphat for his alliance with Ahab, he responded by repenting (vv. 1-4).

His relationship with the idolatrous Ahab had set a poor example for his subjects. So the king went throughout his kingdom to bring the people back to the Lord (v. 4). He also established a judicial system (v. 5) in accordance with the Mosaic law (Deut. 16:18-20). This, along with his earlier dispersal of teachers throughout the land (17:7-9), showed Jehoshaphat's tremendous respect for the Scriptures. These actions also displayed his concern

for his subjects and his desire to act faithfully as Jehovah's regent.

The king's exhortations were taken from the law. He reinforced Jehovah's original commands to those who would act as judges among His people. Since they were judging God's covenant people and since He was watching all that was done, the judges were to fear the Lord and "take heed" (vv. 6,7). Judges were also appointed in the capital city of Jerusalem, where difficult cases could be brought (vv. 8-11). Amariah the priest was in charge of religious cases, and Zebadiah the head of the tribe of Judah was responsible to handle civil matters. The Levites served as officers.

Chapter 20

A huge army from across the Dead Sea declared war on Judah (vv. 1,2). (One manuscript reads "Edom" for "Syria" in verse 2.) Jehoshaphat was justifiably alarmed (v. 3). He proclaimed a fast and called the people to the temple, where he prayed to Jehovah (vv. 4,5). This is the third "king's prayer" in 2 Chronicles (see also Solomon's prayer, chapter 6, and Asa's prayer, 14:11).

Jehoshaphat reminded the Lord that the Jews were His covenant people (v. 7). The temple, where Jehoshaphat was praying, was God's sanctuary and the place where He promised to hear and answer prayer (vv. 8,9). Those to whom Israel had once shown kindness were now coming to destroy her and take away her land (vv. 10,11). Jehoshaphat closed his impassioned appeal, and with all Judah stood before the Lord awaiting His answer (vv. 12,13).

The Spirit of the Lord spoke through Jahaziel, dispelling the fear that had gripped the nation. The battle was the Lord's; the people had only to go out the next day and see what He had done (vv. 14-17). By faith the people rejoiced in their victory even before it came to pass (vv. 18,19). The next morning they were up at dawn to see what the Lord had done. They marched to the battlefield as though they were going to a festival, the singers leading the way (vv. 20,21). God confounded the enemy when He heard His people singing their song of faith. He stirred up the opposition so that they fought and destroyed one another (vv. 22,23). When Judah arrived, the only thing left to do was collect the spoil, a task requiring three days (vv. 24,25). With unbounded joy they praised the Lord and returned to Jerusalem singing (vv. 26-28). The neighboring nations took notice, and Judah enjoyed peace (vv. 29,30).

Verses 31-34 give the customary summary of the reign of Jehoshaphat. Despite his efforts he was unable to stamp out idolatry (v. 33). But on the whole his had been a good reign. He sought to do good and, even though he was not perfect, he usually did what was right in God's sight (v. 32).

Verses 35-37 are a postscript concerning Jehoshaphat's partnership with the wicked King Ahaziah of Israel. They made ships at Ezion-gaber to travel to Tarshish, but the Lord wrecked the project, as announced by a prophet named Eliezer.

Jehoshaphat was 60 years old when he died. His son Jehoram, who had been his coregent, succeeded him on the throne of Judah (21:1).

Chapter 21

Beginning with the reign of Jehoram, 2 Chronicles is a downhill story ending in calamity and captivity.

Two Azariahs are listed in verse 2 as brothers of Jehoram. The NIV changes the spelling of one to Azariahu.

Judah's fifth king chose to walk in the ways of the kings of Israel instead of in the ways of David (vv. 1-11); Jehoram was a murderer and an idolater. He ruthlessly killed his own brothers to strengthen his hold on the throne. Scripture leaves us in no doubt as to the evil influence that caused Jehoram to act so wickedly: Ahab's daughter was his wife (v. 6). Earlier Jehoshaphat had arranged the marriage between the two kingdoms, and now Judah was infected with the same wickedness that was ruining Israel. Ahab's daughter Athaliah was a tool in Satan's hands to bring judgment upon God's people. But the Lord remembered the Davidic Covenant and so He did not deal as sternly with Jehoram and Judah as He had with Ahab and Israel. ("A light" [v. 7] means a descendant to serve as king.) Still, Judah was to suffer much because of this unholy union.

The Edomites, who had feared Judah during the days of Jehoshaphat (17:10), now revolted (vv. 8,9). Libnah, a city in Judah, also rebelled (v. 10). Jehoram made matters worse by leading his people further and further into idolatry (v. 11). Even the prophecy of Elijah, contained in a letter to the king, failed to turn him from his course of evil (vv. 12-15). Jehoram certainly knew of the prophet's powerful ministry in Israel, but he proved as unresponsive to it as Ahab had been.

Elijah was taken to heaven sometime during the reign of Jehoshaphat (2 Kgs. 2:11). Since Jehoram reigned with his father for about five years, Elijah may have been alive when this message was delivered. Or the prophet might have written the letter by divine instruction and given it to Elisha to deliver at the appropriate time.

The Philistines and Arabs carried away Jehoram's family (even as he had murdered his father's family) and took away his treasures (vv. 16,17). When Jehoram died, there was no public mourning. Since he had not walked as the other kings had in life, he was not buried with them in death (v. 20).

Chapter 22

The trouble caused by association with the house of Ahab now reached to the third generation. Ahaziah (same as Jehoahaz, 21:17, and Azariah, v. 6 NASB marg.) became king after Jehoram's death. He was 22 years old at the time.

His mother, Athaliah, a granddaughter of Omri (NASB), continued her pernicious influence in Judah after the death of her husband. She was her son's chief counselor to do evil—"to his destruction" (vv. 1-4). Ahaziah had been spared (v. 1) so as to leave a son of David on the throne, but he proved himself ungrateful by repeating his father's sins. He joined with Jehoram (Joram) to war against Syria. Jehu and his men found him hiding in Samaria and slew him. The king's servants gave him a decent burial (2 Kgs. 9:28) because he was a son of the godly Jehoshaphat. Ahaziah left no son old enough to carry on the kingdom (vv. 5-9).

Having lost her husband and now her son, Athaliah seized the throne for herself (v. 10) by killing her own grandchildren. Satan was the unseen motivator behind this ruthless slaughter of the royal family, attempting to cut off the messianic line as he had tried to do earlier and would try to do again. But since the promise of Genesis 3:15 guaranteed the Lord's preserving the line through which the Lord Jesus would eventually come, Jehovah moved Jehoshabeath to hide her nephew Joash (v. 11). He was hidden in the temple, where Jehoshabeath's husband, Jehoiada, took care of him for six years (v. 12).

Second Kings 8—11 gives more details concerning these events and also relates what was going on in Israel at the same time.

Problem in chapter 22:

Verse 2 says that Ahaziah was 42 years old when he began to reign. But since 2 Kings 8:26 says he was 22, and since this age seems probable because his father was only 40 when he died, 42 years old is almost certainly a copyist's error.

Chapter 23

Until he felt that Joash was old enough, Jehoiada had to bide his time while the usurper sat on David's throne. But in the seventh year he called together the princes and Levites and plotted Athaliah's overthrow (v. 1). Word went out throughout the kingdom (v. 2) and many entered into a covenant to set Joash on his father's throne (v. 3). The words in verse 6b "all the people shall keep the watch of the Lord" mean that they were to observe the law forbidding entrance into the temple (see

v. 6a). The Levites and princes were given their assignments, and a sabbath was chosen as the fateful day. As new divisions came to the temple, the old divisions were not dismissed; thus Jehoiada was able to gather a large number of men without drawing suspicion. The men were equipped with David's weapons, which were in the temple, and when all the preparations were complete, seven-year-old Joash was brought out of the temple and crowned (vv. 4-10). He was given a copy of the law (the testimony) in accordance with the word of Moses (Deut. 17:18-20) (v. 11). Some think this was the original copy of the law which had been placed in the ark (Exod. 25:21; 2 Chrn. 5:10).

The queen came to the temple to investigate the cheering and shouting, only to find a child rival she thought long dead now wearing a royal crown. But what must have alarmed her even more was the realization that the people were solidly behind him (vv. 12,13). No one listened to her charge of treason. After all, she was the usurper, not Joash. Jehoiada ordered her killed, but not inside the temple. She was taken to the Horse Gate, where she was put to death for the atrocities she had committed in Judah (vv. 14,15). "Have her forth of the ranges" means "Bring her out into the open" (v. 14).

With Athaliah out of the way, reform was swift. Jehoiada and the people covenanted to be Jehovah's. To demonstrate their commitment, they destroyed the temple of Baal and killed his priests (vv. 16,17). As a priest, Jehoiada was sensitive concerning the temple and divine worship. One of the first things he did was to set the temple service in order, as had been commanded by Moses and David. The Levites and priests were assigned

to their duties. The holiness of the temple was no longer to be treated as a light thing; gatekeepers were to keep out ceremonially unclean people. Jehoiada knew that reform must begin in the house of God (vv. 18,19). Joash was taken to the king's house (v. 20). The people looked forward with expectancy to life under Joash, thankful that a son of David sat on Judah's throne once more (v. 21).

Chapter 24

In order to restore the temple, Joash ordered the Levites to expedite the collection of funds from all Israel. When the Levites failed to respond promptly, he became upset with Jehoiada. Finally a special chest was set before the temple, and the people were commanded to come and deposit their "temple tax." This was then taken and distributed to the workmen who restored the house of the Lord (vv. 4-14).

When Jehoiada died, after a long and fruitful life, he was honored by being buried with the kings, an unusual honor for one who was not of royalty (vv. 15,16). But with his godly influence gone, Joash turned to idolaters for advice, to the ruin of his kingdom. Jehovah sent prophets to warn him, but rather than repent, Joash rebelled (vv. 17-19). Zechariah spoke God's warning to the people, and the king ordered him stoned for it. Joash did not remember the kindness which Jehoiada, the father (or grandfather) of Zechariah, had shown to him (vv. 20-22). Perhaps in answer to Zechariah's dying prayer (v. 22b), the Lord sent a small army from Syria to plunder Judah and to slay the officials and princes. Those who had given wicked counsel to Joash were killed, and Joash himself, now critically ill, was

murdered by his servants. Like wicked Jehoram before him, he was denied burial with the kings of Judah (vv. 23-26).

Because Joash forsook the Lord in the latter part of his life, all that he had done earlier was for nothing. He had repaired the temple and had refurnished it, only to hand over its treasures to Hazael the Syrian (2 Kgs. 12:17,18). It is good to start well, but it is far more important to finish well. The Apostle John, knowing the tendency people have to "fade in the stretch," warns us to "Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward" (2 John 8 NASB).

Second Kings 12 gives more details about the life and reign of Joash (there called Jehoash); see comments on that chapter.

Problems in chapter 24:

Where was the chest for the collection of the money placed— outside the gate (v. 8) or beside the altar (2 Kgs. 12:9)? Some commentators think there were two chests, one outside and one beside the altar. Others think that there was only one box but that it was moved.

Second Kings 12:13 says that no temple vessels were made out of the money collected, but verse 14 says that vessels were made with the surplus. Second Kings refers to that which went to the workmen for the repairing of the house, while Chronicles refers to what was done with the surplus afterward.

In verse 20 Zechariah is said to be the son of Jehoiada. However, our Lord referred to him as the son of Berechiah (Matt. 23:25). A different Zechariah, the

author of the book by that name, is also said to be the son of Berechiah (Zech. 1:1,7). A probable explanation is as follows. The Zechariah mentioned in 2 Chronicles 24 was the grandson of Jehoiada and the son of Berechiah; in Hebrew usage, “son” can also mean “grandson.” The Zechariah who wrote the book that bears his name was also the son of Berechiah, but a different Berechiah, of course. Both names were common in Old Testament times.

Chapter 25

After establishing his throne and dealing with his father’s murderers according to the law (vv. 1-4), Amaziah turned his attention to foreign affairs. The Edomites had rebelled against Judah during the reign of Jehoram (21:10), and now perhaps Amaziah wanted to bring them back under his rule. So he hired mercenaries from Israel. However, after being warned by a man of God, he sent the Israelites home. Although he was concerned about losing the money he had already paid the mercenaries, he accepted the prophet’s assurance that the Lord would give him much more to make up for his foolish investment (vv. 5-10).

Amaziah and his men killed 10,000 Edomites, then took 10,000 others captive, only to kill them later by hurling them over a precipice (vv. 11,12). The latter victims may have been guilty of unusual cruelty, or Amaziah may have only been following an accepted wartime policy of that day. The mercenaries whom Amaziah had sent home to Ephraim angrily attacked the cities of Judah, killing 3000 people and taking much spoil (v. 13). When Amaziah began worshiping idols which he had brought back from Edom, a prophet reproved him for thinking

that idols which could not deliver their own people could help him. Amaziah interrupted the prophet with a threat, perhaps a veiled allusion to Zechariah, who had lost his life by prophesying against Amaziah's father (24:20-22). The prophet responded to the king's warning by saying in effect, "I am not going to be struck down. Since you have refused my counsel, you are the one who is going to be destroyed" (v. 16). Amaziah did not listen to the counsel of God (v. 17). Foolishly he made war with Joash of Israel, refusing to heed Joash's warning (vv. 18-21). Judah was routed and Amaziah was humiliated and impoverished. Jerusalem was invaded and the temple was pillaged (vv. 22-24). Amaziah's subjects conspired against him, and eventually he fled from Jerusalem. He was murdered in Lachish, then brought back to Jerusalem and buried (vv. 25-28).

Chapter 26

The reason for Uzziah's success is given early in the chapter. He did what was right and sought the Lord (vv. 1-5). Zechariah (not the same as the prophet Zechariah) was his godly counselor, a man of understanding.

Everywhere Uzziah turned, he was blessed. He warred successfully against the Philistines (vv. 6,7) and the Ammonites (v. 8), and he increased Judah's defenses as well (vv. 9,10). He assembled an elite army and built up a powerful armory to equip it (vv. 11-15). He also built cities (vv. 2,6) and encouraged agricultural development (v. 10). "Engines" (v. 15) means catapults.

But Uzziah was lifted up with pride. He entered the temple to burn incense before the Lord, something which only the priests were authorized to do. Azariah and 80 other priests, all valiant men, went in after the

king. The priests' rebukes angered Uzziah, but before he could do anything the Lord struck him with leprosy. He was hurried out of the temple, to which he never returned. He remained a leper from that day forth, living in a separate house while his son Jotham ruled (vv. 16-23). Uzziah was not buried in the graves of the kings, because he was a leper; he was interred in the field adjacent to the royal graves (v. 23).

Chapter 27

Like his father, Jotham enjoyed peace so that he was able to build and improve his capital and the surrounding cities. He followed his father's example, except in the matter of Uzziah's sin. However, the high places were not removed, and Jotham does not appear to have been much of a reformer. He did little to prevent his people from acting wickedly (vv. 1-4).

The Ammonites had been subdued by Uzziah (26:8), but perhaps his death prompted them to withhold their tribute. Jotham fought against them and they were forced to pay tribute once again (v. 5). His strength lay in the fact that he considered God in all he did (v. 6). Jotham was buried in Jerusalem, and his son Ahaz became Judah's next king (vv. 7-9).

Chapter 28

To get the full story of Ahaz, one should read 2 Kings 16 and Isaiah 7. He was the most wicked king that Judah had yet known.

After Ahaz became king, he wasted no time plunging into idolatry. He chose the evil kings of Israel as his pattern instead of David (vv. 1,2). Ahaz revived the abominable ritual of child sacrifice in the valley of Ben-

Hinnom, outside Jerusalem (v. 3). The worship of Molech, of which this was a part, had not been practiced since the days of Solomon (1 Kgs. 11:7), but now all forms of idolatry were widely practiced and encouraged (v. 4).

Because of this the Lord brought many adversaries against Judah. Isaiah tells us that Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, were allies against Jerusalem. They did not succeed in overthrowing the capital city but they did great damage to Judah. The Israelites killed 120,000 men in one day and carried off 200,000 people captive. Many noblemen were slain at this time (vv. 5-8). It was when Ahaz was threatened by Rezin and Pekah that God in grace gave him the promise of the virgin-born Immanuel (Isa. 7:14).

The Israelites intended to enslave their brethren from Judah, which was forbidden in the law of Moses, but the Lord sent a prophet to warn them not to do so, for the burning anger of the Lord was against them. True, Israel had been God's instrument of judgment, but their cruelty had been unwarranted (vv. 9-11). Some of the princes of Ephraim had enough sense to heed Oded the prophet and secure the release of the captives, who were then fully equipped and fed from the spoil, and returned to their land (vv. 12-15).

At this same time Ahaz was also troubled by those nations which his fathers had subdued, Edom and Philistia. But rather than turn to the Lord in his extremity, Ahaz turned to the king of Assyria, Tilgath-pilneser. He hired the Assyrians with gold from the temple and the king's house. The king of Assyria then attacked Syria and killed Rezin in Damascus (2 Kgs.

16:9). When Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tilgath-pilneser, he became enamored with the gods of the Syrians (2 Kgs. 16:8-10). Ahaz's alliance with the king of Assyria proved costly, since Assyria deceived him and exacted heavy tribute. But his alliance with the idols of Syria proved fatal because it provoked Jehovah to great anger. Ahaz established idolatry so strongly in Judah that not even good Hezekiah, his son, would be able to root it out (vv. 16-25). When Ahaz died, he was not buried in the tombs of the kings (vv. 26,27). Ahaz is called the king of Israel in verse 19.

Sometimes the kings of Judah were given this name (see 2 Chrn. 21:2).

Problems in chapter 28:

If Ahaz was 36 years old when he died (v. 1), that would make him only 11 when Hezekiah was born (29:1). Some think that Ahaz could possibly father a child at 11. Others suggest that a copyist's error may be involved. The simple fact is that we do not have enough information to solve the problem of Ahaz's chronology.

Where was Ahaz buried? Second Kings 16:20 says he was buried with his fathers while verse 27 says he was not buried in the tombs of the kings. Both statements are true. He slept with his fathers and was buried with them (i.e., in the city of Jerusalem), although not in the actual royal sepulchers.

Chapter 29

Much space is given to Hezekiah's reign. Three chapters are devoted to him in 2 Kings (18—20), four in the book of Isaiah (36—39), and four here. Chronicles mentions primarily his religious dealings while 2 Kings relates

more of his political and foreign accomplishments. Both books bring out his outstanding character and devotion to the Lord.

Hezekiah started his reformation with the religious leaders. He called together the priests and Levites and ordered them to consecrate themselves and the temple. Because of unfaithfulness on the part of their fathers, the wrath of Jehovah was on the land and many people had already been slain or taken captive. The king wanted to get right with God, and he urged the priests and Levites to do the same (vv. 1-11).

The men listed by name in verses 12-19 led their brothers in obeying the king's command. They cleansed the courts for eight days, then the temple itself for eight days (v. 17). They set the utensils in order for temple-service, then informed the king that all had been carried out according to his word. Hezekiah offered a sin-offering on behalf of the nation. The blood from the sin- and burnt-offerings was used to purge the altar (vv. 20-24).

The priests and Levites were stationed in their places as appointed in the time of David, and they sang and played the holy instruments while the burnt-offerings were being offered. All those present bowed in worship along with the Levites, and those who were so inclined brought burnt- and thank-offerings.

So much was brought for this freewill gift that the Levites had to help the priests slaughter the animals because not enough priests had consecrated themselves. The people rejoiced because of the suddenness of the revival and because it produced a glimmer of hope for a

better future for Judah (vv. 25-36). But this was only the beginning of Hezekiah's reforms.

Chapter 30

This whole chapter is taken up with Hezekiah's reinstatement of the Passover Feast, which had not been observed in such fashion since before the kingdom was divided (2 Chrn. 8:13).

In the first month the king had purified the temple and reestablished its services. In the second month he prepared to observe the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Passover could be celebrated in the second month according to Numbers 9 if observance during the first month was not possible. "… at that time" (v. 3) means at the usual time in the first month. Since it was a national feast, all the nation must be invited. So messengers were sent throughout Judah and Israel to call the people to Jerusalem. Israel was an Assyrian province at this time, the bulk of the people having been taken into captivity. However, Hezekiah was able to invite the remaining Israelites without opposition from the Assyrians (vv. 1-5).

Most of the Israelites ridiculed the couriers who exhorted them to return to the Lord. However, a small remnant did repent and travel to Jerusalem to observe the Passover (vv. 6-12) in the First year of Hezekiah's reign, 716-715 B.C. (2 Chrn. 29:3).

The zeal of the people shamed the priests and Levites and brought them to a more serious consideration of their duties. The city was cleansed of its heathen filth, and every vestige of idolatry was thrown in the brook Kidron (vv. 13-15). The Levites aided those who were

ceremonially unclean and Hezekiah prayed that the Lord would overlook the irregularities and accept the heart attitude of the people. And the Lord did (vv. 16-20). The Feast of Unleavened Bread was such a joy to all that they decided to celebrate an extra seven days (vv. 21-23). The king and the noblemen contributed animals for this extended feast and there was great joy in Jerusalem (vv. 24,26). Everyone was blessed (v. 25); things were as they had been in Israel's golden age (v. 26), and once more the prayers of Jehovah's priests were heard in heaven (v. 27).

Chapter 31

The first verse of this chapter is linked to the closing verse of the previous chapter. When the men of Israel left Jerusalem, they thoroughly destroyed the idols and idol shrines in Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh, then returned to their homes (v. 1).

Hezekiah now assigned the priests and Levites to their respective duties, then provided for their support through tithes. The people responded so generously that there was enough and plenty to spare (vv. 2-10).

Special rooms had to be set aside in the temple to store the surplus, and capable men were appointed as overseers (vv. 11-19).

While the principle of tithing (giving one-tenth) is not commanded in the New Testament, the practice of systematic, proportionate giving is taught.

Chapter 31 closes with a commendation of Hezekiah (vv. 20,21). Whatever he did for God, he did with all his heart. No wonder he prospered!

Chapter 32

Having carried the northern tribes into captivity (2 Kgs. 17), the Assyrians were now threatening to do the same to Judah. Hezekiah, who had earlier paid tribute to Sennacherib (2 Kgs. 18:13-16), was hard-pressed by the Assyrians to surrender his kingdom as well.

When Sennacherib invaded Judah, Hezekiah responded by cutting off the water supply outside the city (vv. 1-4), rebuilding and repairing the walls of Jerusalem (v. 5a), providing weapons and officers (vv. 5b,6), and encouraging the people to look to Jehovah instead of fearing the army of the Assyrians (vv. 7,8). “It would seem to be a strange answer of God to the faithfulness of His servant that a strong foe should at this moment invade the kingdom. The story needs more details than are found in this record. They may be found in 2 Kings 18:7-16. From that passage we find that Hezekiah had flung off the yoke of the king of Assyria which his father Ahaz had consented to wear. Then Sennacherib had invaded Judah; and in a moment of weakness Hezekiah had paid him a heavy tribute, and again yielded to his rule in order to buy him off. The result was not what he desired, for Sennacherib now demanded an unconditional surrender. In this hour of crisis, resulting from his own vacillation, his faith and courage were renewed. He took immediate action to embarrass the foe by stopping the supply of water, by strengthening the fortifications, by mobilizing his army, and finally by assuring the people: ‘There is a Greater with us than with him.’”6

While besieging Lachish, the king of Assyria taunted Hezekiah and the people (vv. 9-19), implying that

Jehovah was no more powerful than the other gods he had already conquered, and suggesting that the wise thing to do was to stop listening to Hezekiah and to surrender. Verse 12 shows that even the Assyrians had heard about Hezekiah's reforms. But Sennacherib had not counted on two things: the loyalty of the people to King Hezekiah and the power of Jehovah.

After Sennacherib derided the Lord (vv. 14-19), Hezekiah and Isaiah devoted themselves to prayer (v. 20), and Jehovah destroyed the Assyrian army (v. 21).

Sennacherib returned home in humiliation and was later murdered by his own sons (v. 21).

Hezekiah's illness and recovery probably took place before the siege of Sennacherib. In his sickness he called on the Lord and was promised an extension of life, confirmed by a sign in which the sun seemed to go backward. When he failed to respond properly to this mercy, the Lord was angry with him, but because he humbled himself the punishment didn't come upon Judah until after his death (vv. 24-26).

Special mention is made of his riches and honor, and of the tunnel he built to bring water from a spring in the Kidron Valley to a reservoir inside Jerusalem (vv. 27-30).

Envoys came from Babylon, intrigued by the celestial sign that God had given Hezekiah. They would be especially interested in this since they worshiped the sun and stars. The king foolishly showed them his treasures, arousing their desire to possess them, a desire that was soon to be fulfilled (v. 31).

When Hezekiah died, he was buried with full honors. His son Manasseh reigned in his place (vv. 31,33).

Chapter 33

The list of Manasseh's sins is great. He polluted God's city and temple with his idols and revived the practice of burning children to Molech in the valley of Ben-hinnom. He was an inveterate murderer (2 Kgs. 21:16); Josephus states that daily executions were ordered by him. Tradition says that he murdered Isaiah the prophet by having him sawn in two. When Manasseh refused to listen to the Lord and turn from his wickedness, the Lord moved the king of Assyria to take him away to Babylon, which was then under Assyrian control (vv. 1-11).

Only Chronicles mentions Manasseh's repentance (vv. 12,13). After serving every kind of detestable idol for years, Manasseh learned that the Lord is God (v. 13), and he was converted. He did what he could to lead the people back to faithfulness to Jehovah and to purge idolatry from his realm (vv. 14-20). The high places mentioned in verse 17 were used for sacrificing to Jehovah away from Jerusalem. This was forbidden by the law, but went on anyway. After his death his son did not follow his reforms but rather his earlier sins (vv. 21-23). Amon lasted two years before he was killed (vv. 24,25).

Chapter 34

The idolatrous altars which Manasseh had removed from the city (33:15) had been brought back by Amon and the people. Josiah made sure the same mistake would not be made again by completely destroying everything connected with idolatry and burning it or grinding it to powder (vv. 3-5). He extended his reforms to the farthest reaches of Israel (vv. 6,7). Like the great reformers before him, he soon turned his attention to repairing the

temple (vv. 8-13). A copy of the law was subsequently found and read before the king (vv. 14-18).

Josiah took its warnings seriously and sent to Huldah the prophetess to see if there was still a chance for mercy (vv. 19-22). Her words only confirmed that God's wrath was on the way. However, Josiah would be spared from seeing Judah's day of judgment because he humbled himself and believed the word of the Lord (vv. 23-28).

Even though Josiah knew that judgment was inevitable, he still gathered the people and entered into a covenant with the Lord. He set the Word of God before the people that they might understand how grave their situation was and see the deep need for repentance (vv. 29-32). Because of his strong leadership, he was able to promote fidelity to Jehovah throughout his lifetime (v. 33).

Verse 33 is expanded in 2 Kings 23:4-20. The reform that followed the finding of the law and the making of the covenant was even more thorough than Josiah's first purge of his kingdom.

Chapter 35

Like Hezekiah before him, Josiah encouraged the priests and Levites to carry out their appointed services. They were to put the ark back in the temple, organize themselves in their respective divisions, take up their station in the temple, and be cleansed and ready to celebrate the Passover (vv. 1-6). There are several suggestions as to why the ark had been removed from the temple, and was now to be returned (v. 3). The priests may have carried it on their shoulders from place to place to protect it from being profaned. Manasseh or

some other idolatrous king may have ordered it to be removed. Josiah may have had it removed elsewhere while the temple was being restored.

Since the land was impoverished by the Assyrians, Josiah provided most of the animals for the feast, with other noblemen and priests providing what they could (vv. 7-9). The Mosaic ordinances for the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were followed to the letter. Amid songs of praise, the king and the people celebrated the most notable Passover since the days of Samuel. It was not the largest or most elaborate, but it was the most pleasing to Jehovah, perhaps because of the quality of the worship (vv. 10-16). This Passover was held in the same year as the great temple restoration (v. 19; cf. 34:8ff).

Nothing is mentioned about the next 13 years of Josiah's reign. When he was 39 he went out to fight against Necho of Egypt (vv. 20-24). The Egyptian army was on its way to fight (along with the Assyrians) against the Babylonians (2 Kgs. 23:29). Josiah could not imagine that God's hand was behind Necho's movements and did not inquire of the Lord to see if the pharaoh's words were true. Although he disguised himself, he was slain in the battle. His people greatly mourned his loss, and those who believed the word of the Lord knew that with Josiah gone, divine wrath was imminent (34:22-28).

John C. Whitcomb, Jr., comments on these events. "Now came one of the strangest episodes in Old Testament history. The heathen king, Necho II of Egypt, informed Josiah that 'God hath commanded me to make haste' and that if Josiah interfered with God's plan, God would destroy him (II Chron. 35:21). We would immediately

dismiss such a statement as propaganda, of course, were it not for the explanation by the Chronicler that Josiah 'hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mount of God' (II Chron. 35:22)! Furthermore, Necho must be believed, for Josiah was killed. What does this mean? Did Josiah lose his salvation because of disobedience? No, for Huldah had said he would die 'in peace' (II Chron. 34:28). Was Pharaoh-necho a prophet of Jehovah? No, for God had spoken to pagan kings directly at various times without necessarily transforming their hearts (see Gen. 12:17-20; 20:3-7). We may conclude that God wanted to maneuver the Egyptian army to the Euphrates so that Nebuchadnezzar could destroy it as well as the Assyrian army, and thus fulfill His warning that the Babylonians would conquer and chasten Judah (see Jer. 25:8-11).'"

Jeremiah lamented Josiah's death. The singers remembered him even after the captivity (v. 25). He was a man of one Book; he lived by the law of the Lord, and his faithfulness is forever recorded in the Word of the Lord (vv. 26,27). In Jeremiah 22:16 (NASB) we read, " 'He pled the cause of the afflicted and needy; then it was well. Is not that what it means to know Me?' declares the Lord." Josiah evidenced by his life that he knew God. He started early to seek the Lord (34:3) and carefully obeyed the subsequent light he received. "And before him there was no king like him who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him" (2 Kgs. 23:25 NASB).

Problem in chapter 35:

Where did Josiah die, in Megiddo (2 Kgs. 23:29) or in Jerusalem (v. 24)? He was mortally wounded in the battle at Megiddo, and Kings speaks of him dying there because that is where he received his death wound. Chronicles more specifically states he actually died in Jerusalem. Today we might say a person died in an automobile accident even though he actually died in a hospital a few hours later. What we mean is that the accident was the cause of death even if it was not the location of the person's last breath.

Chapter 36

The captivity of Judah took place in stages. In 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar entered Jerusalem, made Jehoiakim a vassal, and took captives to Babylon, including Daniel (2 Kgs. 24:1). In 597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar again invaded Jerusalem, deported Jehoiachin, and took additional captives, including Ezekiel (2 Kgs. 24:10). Finally, in 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple and took captive all but the poorest of the people (2 Kgs. 25:1-10).

Jehoahaz reigned only three months, then was dethroned by the Egyptian king and forced to pay heavy tribute. He was an evil man, not at all like his father (cf. 2 Kgs. 23:31-34). He was taken to Egypt, where he died.

Eliakim, also called Jehoiakim, was Jehoahaz's older brother. He was placed on the throne by Necho. His 11-year reign was characterized by wickedness and was ended by Nebuchadnezzar, who looted the temple at this time (about 606 B.C.). Nebuchadnezzar intended to carry Jehoiakim to Babylon but did not succeed. Although Chronicles does not record the fact, we know

that he died ignominiously while still in Jerusalem, as Jeremiah had prophesied (Jer. 22:19; 36:30).

After a short reign of three months, Jehoiachin surrendered Jerusalem and spent the next 37 years of his life in prison in Babylon. After the death of Nebuchadnezzar, he was released and elevated to a place of honor (2 Kgs. 25:27-30).

Zedekiah, whose Hebrew name was Mattaniah, was a son of Josiah. When Jehoiachin proved unfaithful to the Babylonians, they chose Zedekiah as his successor. But he broke his oath to Nebuchadnezzar and rebelled. Jerusalem underwent a terrible siege lasting 18 months. When the Babylonians took the city in 586 B.C., they destroyed it and the temple, then took all but the poorest of the land into exile. The people had refused to keep the sabbatic year for 490 years; now their land would keep an enforced Sabbath for 70 years (v. 21). For different ways of computing the 70-year captivity, see notes on Ezra.

While the people of Judah were in captivity, Babylon was conquered by Medo-Persia. Seventy years after the captivity began, Cyrus, King of Persia, issued a decree permitting the Jews to return to their land (vv. 22,23).

Problem in chapter 36:

Verse 9 says Jehoiachin was eight years old when he became king while 2 Kings 24:8 says he was 18. Most likely verse 9 contains a copyist’s error, because Jehoiachin had wives when he surrendered to the Babylonians, only a few months after his ascension to the throne (2 Kgs. 24:15).

1 Merrill F. Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, p. 1036.

2 George Williams, The Student's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, p. 246.

3 Flavius Josephus, quoted by John Haley in Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible, p. 317.

4 John Haley, Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible, p. 323.

5 Matthew Henry, The Matthew Henry Commentary, pp. 396-97.

6 G. Campbell Morgan, Searchlights from the Word, p. 127.

7 John C. Whitcomb, Jr., Solomon to the Exile, p. 141.

Chronology Of Ezra, Nehemiah, And Esther

(Dates are approximate)

538 BC — The decree of Cyrus to rebuild the temple.
538/7 BC — Zerubbabel's expedition to Jerusalem.
536 BC — Foundation of the temple laid.
535 BC — Work on the temple halted.
520 BC — Ministry of Haggai and Zechariah.
520 BC — Decree of Darius to resume work on the temple.
516 BC — Temple completed.
486 BC — Reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) begins.
479/8 BC — Esther crowned queen.
464 BC — Reign of Artaxerxes begins.
458 BC — Ezra's expedition to Jerusalem.
444 BC — Nehemiah goes to Jerusalem.
444 BC — Walls completed.
420 BC — Nehemiah's second journey to Jerusalem.

Ezra

Outline Of Ezra

I. Return of Captives to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel (1—6)

A. Decree of Cyrus (1:1-4)

B. Preparations and provisions (1:5-11)

C. Register of those who returned (2)

D. Construction of altar and temple foundations (3)

E. Opposition to rebuilding of temple (4)

In reign of Cyrus (4:1-5,24a)

In reign of Ahasuerus (4:6)*

In reign of Artaxerxes (4:7-23)

F. Encouragement to rebuild by Haggai and Zechariah (5:1,2)

G. Opposition during the reign of Darius (5:3-17)

H. Completion of temple through favorable decree of Darius (6)

II. Return of Captives under Ezra (7—10)

A. Generous authorization by Artaxerxes (7)

B. Register of those who returned (8:1-14)

C. Account of the trip to Jerusalem (8:15-36)

D. Mixed marriages, and Ezra’s prayer of confession (9)

E. Covenant of Jews to put away foreign wives and children (10)

*Verses 6-23 belong later in the outline chronologically. See Chronology of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one book in the Hebrew Scriptures. Ezra relates the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the end of the captivity (Jer. 29:10-14) and the return of two expeditions to the land.

Chapter 1

The first three verses duplicate the last two verses of 2 Chronicles. God used Cyrus, king of Persia, to issue a decree permitting the Jews to return to Judah and to rebuild the temple. In addition, he commanded their neighbors to contribute generously to the returning remnant (vv. 1-4). Many years before his birth, Cyrus had been named by God and set apart for this high destiny (Isa. 44:28—45:13).

The decree ended 70 years of captivity for the Jews. The 70-year period can be calculated in two ways: from 605 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem and led off the first deportation, to 535 B.C., when the foundation of the temple was laid; or from the fall of Jerusalem, in 586 B.C., to the completion of the temple, in 516 B.C.

In addition to the wealth donated by the neighbors of the Jews, Cyrus gave them 5400 vessels of gold and silver that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem (vv. 7-11). Sheshbazzar (v. 8) is the Babylonian name for Zerubbabel. Notice the mention of 29 knives in verse 9. If God cares for such details, how much more does He care for His people!

Chapter 2

In verses 1-61 we have a list of those who returned to Judah under Zerubbabel. Some are recorded according to parentage (vv. 3-19) and some according to hometown (vv. 20-35). Special mention is made of the priests (vv. 36-39), the Levites (vv. 40-42), and the Nethinim or temple-servants (vv. 43-54). They would occupy important roles in the reconstructed temple. Some who claimed to be priests but who could not prove their pedigree were barred from serving or from eating the priests' food until they were authorized through the use of the Urim and Thummim (vv. 62,63). The tirshatha or governor (v. 63) was Zerubbabel.

A list of names similar to the one given in this chapter is found in Nehemiah 7. While there are some minor differences in tabulations, both give the total number of Jews returning to Judah as 42,360 plus 7337 servants. Ezra adds 245 singers and Nehemiah adds 200. So the total of the returning remnant was about 50,000—a small fraction of those who had been carried away.

When the Jews reached Jerusalem, their princes contributed gold and silver for the construction of the temple and garments for the priests (vv. 68,69). Then the people settled in their respective cities (v. 70).

Chapter 3

In the seventh month, which was the beginning of the civil year, the repatriated Jews gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. Under the leadership of Jeshua and Zerubbabel, they built an altar and offered burnt-offerings, as required by the law of Moses. They felt that by thus honoring Jehovah He would protect

them from their enemies (vv. 1-6). Then they moved ahead with preparations for building the temple, using help from Tyre and Sidon (v. 7). The actual construction began 14 months after the return. As soon as the foundation was laid, the priests and Levites led in a service of dedication (vv. 8-11). But many of the older men wept when they compared the splendor of Solomon's temple with the plainness of the one now being built (Hag. 2:3). Their cries of sorrow mingled with the shouts of praise so that it was difficult to distinguish them (vv. 12,13).

Chapter 4

The adversaries mentioned in verse 1 were descendants of colonists from other countries who had been planted in the land when Assyria took the northern kingdom into captivity. These colonists intermarried with the Jews who remained in the land, and their offspring were known as Samaritans. They came to Jerusalem and pretended that they wanted to assist in the rebuilding of the temple. They too worshiped Jehovah, but He was only one of many gods in their idolatrous system of religion. So their offer was refused by Israel's leaders (vv. 1-3).

The Samaritans then changed their strategy, hiring counselors to lobby against Israel at the royal court and hindering the Jews through the use of scare tactics. The work on the temple thus came to a halt (vv. 4,5).

Verse 6 mentions a letter that was written during the reign of Ahasuerus, bringing accusations against the Jews. Verses 7-23 describe another letter, written in the days of Artaxerxes, accusing the Jews of rebuilding the

city and its walls as an act of rebellion. The king thereupon ordered the work to stop.

The rebuilding of the temple was completed during the reign of Darius, who ruled before Ahasuerus (v. 6) and Artaxerxes (v. 7). Therefore, the letters described in verses 6-23 were written after the temple was rebuilt. They have to do with attempts to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, not the temple. But they are placed here, out of their chronological order, as further illustrations of attempts made to obstruct the work of the returned exiles.

Verse 24 follows verse 5 chronologically. The enemies of Judah succeeded in having work on the temple stopped until the second year of Darius's reign.

From 4:6 to 6:8, the language used is Chaldee or Aramaean instead of Hebrew. This was the language used by Persia in official decrees.

Chapter 5

From Haggai 1:1 and Zechariah 1:1 we learn that this chapter belongs to the second year of Darius's reign (v. 1). These two prophets urged the Israelites to resume work on the temple instead of building expensive houses for themselves (Hag. 1:4). Zerubbabel and Jeshua obeyed the Lord and ordered construction to begin immediately (vv. 1,2). Notice here that it was not by the power of the king's decree that the work was resumed, but by the power of the Holy Spirit speaking through His prophets (cf. Zech. 4:6).

Opposition arose quickly. The Persian governor and his associates came to Jerusalem and asked what authority the Jews had to start building and what the names of the

leaders were (see vv. 9,10). They were given the names of the Jewish leaders (vv. 3,4). These Persian officials were more reasonable than their predecessors (ch. 4). They did not stop the work, but sent a letter to Darius to determine its legality. Because the Jews had started to obey God's word, His eye was upon them to fulfill it (v. 5).

In their letter to Darius, Tatnai and Shethar-bozenai told of their conversation with the Jews and the latter's reply. The elders of the people first of all gave their divine authority. They were servants of the one true God, but they had been delivered up to the Babylonians because of their sins. Now that Jehovah had brought them back to their land, they were to rebuild His temple. As to human authority, they had the decree of Cyrus which gave them permission to rebuild the temple. Cyrus himself had contributed generously to the project. The governor requested that a search be made to determine if Cyrus had made such a decree and asked Darius to notify him what action should be taken (vv. 6-17).

Chapter 6

After diligent search, the decree of Cyrus was found in what used to be his capital city, Achmetha (Ecbatana in the NASB). (The edict was much more detailed than is summarized in chapter 1.) In it, the specifications of the temple were given along with an order to return all the temple-vessels taken by Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 1-5).

Darius then spelled out to Tatnai and his colleagues their responsibilities toward the Jews. They were not to hinder the work (vv. 6,7) but were to pay for the cost of the temple out of the royal treasury (v. 8). Provisions for the temple service were to be supplied upon request of

the priests (v. 9) so that the Jews might find favor in the eyes of God and hence be effectual in their prayers for the king and his family (v. 10). Darius put some teeth into his decree by making it a capital offense to hinder the work (v. 11). He called on God to deal with anyone, kings included, who might try to destroy the temple in the future (v. 12).

The king's orders were quickly obeyed and the work on the temple surged ahead. With encouragement from God's prophets and provisions from Darius's treasury, the temple was completed four years later, but 19 or 20 years after the laying of the foundation (vv. 13-16). Artaxerxes (v. 14) actually lived later; he contributed to the maintenance of the temple, not to its building. A second dedication was held and sacrifices were offered. Solomon's temple had been dedicated with many more animals, but God was pleased with this smaller offering, knowing the limited ability of the people. Afterward the Passover was observed and the Feast of Unleavened Bread was kept with great joy, for the people clearly saw God's hand behind the favors they had obtained from Darius. Darius is called the king of Assyria because he was ruling over the old Assyrian empire (vv. 17-22).

Chapter 7

There is about a 58-year gap between chapters 6 and 7 (see chronology of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther). During that time Darius was succeeded by Ahasuerus (Xerxes). His reign covered the events recorded in the book of Esther. After him, Artaxerxes (Longimanus), mentioned in verse 1, came to the throne.

A brief genealogy of Ezra is given in verses 1-5 to show his priestly ancestry. Besides possessing a distinguished

pedigree, Ezra was “a ready scribe in the law of Moses” (v. 6). “As messengers of the will of God, the scribes took the place of the prophets, with this difference: instead of receiving new revelations, they explained and applied the old. Of this new order Ezra was at once the founder and type… . He was expert in exposition and application of the Law. The qualifications for such work are very clearly set out in the statement made concerning him in the tenth verse of this chapter. He ‘set his heart to seek … to do … to teach.’”1

Certainly Ezra was a man of the Book and a living illustration of the first three verses of Psalm 1. Because he meditated on the Law of the Lord day and night, he prospered in what he sought to do for God (v. 6). Jehovah once more directed the heart of a heathen king to carry out His counsels. A decree was issued which made possible a second return to Jerusalem, this one under Ezra (vv. 6-9).

The king of Persia granted sweeping powers to Ezra (vv. 11-26). Any Israelites who desired could accompany him to Jerusalem, where he was to inquire if everything was being done in accordance with the law of Moses. Generous gifts had been donated by the king and his counselors. These, along with any temple vessels which were still left in Babylon, were committed to his charge. The gifts were to be used to maintain the temple services, and any surplus was to be distributed at Ezra’s discretion. If that was not enough, silver, wheat, wine, oil, and salt were to be supplied abundantly from the royal treasury. The last four items were essential ingredients in the Jewish sacrificial system. Those who served in the temple were granted exemption from taxes. Finally, the edict gave Ezra the political power to

appoint judges for the Jews living west of the Euphrates River. These judges were to teach and enforce the laws of God.

In his thanksgiving prayer, Ezra blessed God for directing the king to beautify the temple and humbly thanked Him for the enabling strength He gave to undertake such an important work (vv. 27,28).

Chapter 8

The first 14 verses list those who went back to Jerusalem with Ezra. Several from these same families had returned under Zerubbabel years earlier (ch. 2). Almost 1500 men made up this second expedition. While stopped at the river near Ahava (location unknown), Ezra noticed that there were no Levites in his company, so he commissioned 11 of the leading brethren to go to Gasiphia, where he evidently knew that some Levites had settled, to encourage the Levites and temple servants to join him. Thirty-eight Levites and 220 servants responded (vv. 15-20).

Before the Jews began their 900-mile journey, they camped at the river of Ahava, and there Ezra called for a fast. He had previously testified of God’s goodness and power to the king. To ask for a military escort now would be to deny his words by his actions. Instead he put his faith on the line, trusting in the God who delights to save those who lean hard on Him. He was not disappointed. After a 3’/2-month trek, the entire party reached Jerusalem without incident. The money and utensils that had been given to Ezra were weighed out to 12 priests and 12 Levites. Since these things were holy (set apart for sacred use) they had to be kept by men who were holy. Upon arrival in Jerusalem

everything was weighed again and given to those in charge of the temple (vv. 21-34).

The first order of business for the exiles was to offer burnt-and sin-offerings on Jehovah's altar for all Israel. When they had taken care of their spiritual obligations, they delivered the king's edict to the officials in the western provinces, who in turn supplied them accordingly (vv. 35,36).

Chapter 9

Ezra had not been in Jerusalem long when some of the leaders approached him with the disturbing news that the rulers and the people were intermarrying with the heathen (vv. 1,2). This was one of the sins for which Israel had been punished in days past. The law was clear (Exod. 34:16; Deut. 7:3); God's people must be holy.

Disturbed by these mixed marriages, Ezra plunged into deep mourning until the evening sacrifice. With robes torn and patches of hair missing from his head and beard, he sat in silence while others who feared the Lord gathered around him (vv. 3,4). As the blood of the evening sacrifice was being poured out before Jehovah for the sins of the people, Ezra fell to his knees and lifted his voice in confession. Making the people's sin his own, he was humiliated that they had responded so wickedly to the grace which had preserved them through past judgments. They should have known better; the prophets had spoken clearly. So they were without excuse, especially in light of the recent favors God had granted them. "We are before Thee in our trespasses"; there was nothing else to say (vv. 5-15).

Chapter 10

Ezra's prayer of confession caused the people to weep bitterly. Acting as a spokesman, Shechaniah confessed their guilt but reminded Ezra that there was yet hope, if their confession was followed by forsaking the unequal yoke. He suggested that Ezra lead them in making a covenant to put away the foreign wives and children. The priests, Levites, and entire company responded to this plea for national repentance (vv. 1-5).

All the exiles were summoned to Jerusalem for a solemn time of public confession. Those who refused to come and face the issues were threatened with loss of property and excommunication (vv. 6-8). With only three days to respond to the command, the people hurried to Jerusalem from the surrounding cities. Adverse weather did not deter them, for the matter to be settled was very grave and caused more consternation than did the rain. Ezra spoke to the gathering, pointing out their sin. They were quick to acknowledge that they had disobeyed God's law. But because of the rainy weather and the large number of cases involved, they suggested that the individual cases be examined city by city. Four men tried to oppose the plan but were unsuccessful. Judges were appointed, and in less than two weeks the inquiry began. Within three months the probe was complete (vv. 9-17). Those indicted are listed in verses 18-43: priests first (vv. 18-22), then Levites (vv. 23,24), and finally the people (vv. 25-43). Verse 44 reads in the RSV: "And these had married foreign women, and they put them away with their children." Though it is not stated, it is likely that adequate provision was made for the support of these wives and children. The sorrow created by the disruption of these families must be weighed against the

importance of maintaining the solidarity of the nation destined to produce the Messiah.

The unequal yoke is still forbidden (2 Cor. 6:14-18). It should not be found among the children of God. But 1 Corinthians 7:12,13 is the New Testament rule for those already bound to an unbeliever at conversion. Under grace, the believer is not required to put away the unbeliever or the children. The latter are set apart in a position of external privilege by the believer.

The book of Ezra is a study in revival. When men read the Word of God and apply its truths to their lives, when intercessory prayers flow for the saints, and when there is confession and separation from known sin, there will be power in the church to do great things for God.

1 G. Campbell Morgan, Searchlights from the Word, p. 131.

Nehemiah

Outline Of Nehemiah

I. Nehemiah’s Restoration of Jerusalem (First Visit) (1—12)

A. Consternation over Jerusalem’s condition (1)

B. Authorization for Jerusalem’s restoration (2:1-8)

C. Reconstruction of Jerusalem’s wall (2:9—6:19)

Private inspection and public opposition (2:9-20)

Workmen and their work (3)

External hindrances and special precautions (4)

Internal problems and social reformation (5)

Total completion despite persistent hostility (6)

D. Organization of Jerusalem’s guards (7:1-4)

E. Registration of Jerusalem’s population (7:5-73)

F. Revitalization of Jerusalem’s religion (8—10)

G. Repopulation of Jerusalem’s precincts (11)

H. Tabulation of Jerusalem’s priests and Levites (12:1-26)

I. Dedication of Jerusalem’s wall (12:27-47)

II. Nehemiah’s Reformation of Jerusalem (Second Visit) (13)

A. Expulsion of Tobiah from the temple (13:1-9)

B. Restoration of tithes for the Levites (13:10-14)

C. Elimination of illegal activity on the Sabbath (13:15-22)

D. Dissolution of interracial marriages (13:23-31)

Nehemiah was the third great leader in the Jewish restoration. Zerubbabel led the first group of exiles back to Jerusalem in 538-537 B.C. (Ezra 2) and supervised the building of the temple. Almost 80 years later, Ezra the scribe came to the holy city with a second group of Jews, bringing sweeping reforms through his ministry of God's Word. But in time things degenerated in Jerusalem. Thirteen years after Ezra's expedition, Nehemiah was burdened by God about conditions there. After receiving permission to rectify the situation, he provided the kind of quality leadership the Israelites desperately needed. His roots were deep in God (notice the numerous references to his prayer life); this enabled him to weather the storm of opposition that buffeted him from the outset of his mission. It has been well said that "there are three kinds of people in the world—those who don't know what's happening, those who watch what's happening, and those who make things happen." Nehemiah was a man who made things happen. Whereas the book of Ezra deals with the temple and worship, Nehemiah deals with the walls and everyday work. The book of Nehemiah brings God into the everyday affairs of life.

Chapter 1

Little is given by way of introduction in this first chapter. We are told only two things about Nehemiah: his father's name was Hachaliah and he himself was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, a very important and influential position (vv. 1,11). His reaction to the news from

Jerusalem shows that he was a man of spiritual character.

“It is rather an uncertain time of history, but it seems very likely that some of the enthusiasm engendered by the mission of Ezra took a political or nationalistic direction; enthusiasm was so roused that it began to flow out into an unauthorized rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. Some of the enemies of God’s people in the area reported this matter back to … Artaxerxes, and he commanded that the building work should cease. The enemies of God capitalized on this by going up to Jerusalem with the royal mandate in their hands, causing the work to cease, and tearing down the city walls. It is very likely that it was the news of this action which came to Nehemiah.”1

Nehemiah had a burden for the remnant in Judah. Even though he had not experienced their hardships, he identified with them, denying himself the luxuries of the palace in order to fast and pray. He confessed their sins as his own and asked God to remember His Word and to be faithful in regathering His people as He had been righteous in scattering them. He also asked the Lord to grant him favor in the eyes of the king, for a bold plan to aid his brethren was taking shape in his mind. For days he pleaded his case before the Most High (vv. 2-11).

Nehemiah is often used as an example of effective leadership. First, he had a vision of a goal to be achieved. After analyzing the problem, he decided on a proper course of action. Then he motivated others to share his vision and to become actively involved. Next we see him delegating authority and assigning tasks. He

supervised the work and checked on performance until the project was satisfactorily completed.

Chapter 2

It was three or four months before Nehemiah's faith was rewarded in a most unexpected way. One day when he was serving wine to the king, his countenance betrayed his heaviness of heart. The king's question brought on a wave of fear, for sadness was not allowed in the royal presence (Esth. 4:2). Williams notes, "Eastern monarchs being in daily dread of poison, any appearance of agitation in the cup-bearer would be regarded as especially suspicious."2 But Nehemiah meant no harm to the king. The cause of his sorrow was the desolation of Jerusalem, his ancestral home (vv. 1-3).

Nehemiah's prayerful dependence upon the Lord was not in vain (vv. 4-8). Not only did the king give him what he requested; he also made him governor of Judah (5:14). Artaxerxes' decree fulfilled the word of the Lord to Daniel (Dan. 9:25), even as the earlier decree of Cyrus had fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah (Jer. 29:10; Ezra 1).

In answer to the king's question, Nehemiah told him how long he expected to be away (v. 6). As it turned out, Nehemiah was away from Persia for at least 12 years (5:14).

Along with the official letters, Artaxerxes sent an armed escort with Nehemiah (vv. 9,10). Shortly after his arrival, the new governor surveyed his capital under cover of darkness in order to attract as little attention as possible and to keep his plans secret. He knew it was imperative that the walls be repaired if the city was to

survive. At one place the rubble was so deep that his mount could not pass (vv. 11-16). Later he called the leaders together, told them what needed to be done, and encouraged them by relating how the hand of the Lord had been with him so far. The Jews were excited and ready to begin. Their enemies scoffed and tried to stop the building project by raising the cry of “rebellion” (vv. 17-19). But Nehemiah was not intimidated; God had promised success (v. 20).

Chapter 3

The priests were the first to begin the task by repairing the Sheep Gate. This gate, located in the northeastern corner of the city, was so named because the sheep destined for the temple altar were brought through it. The gates are mentioned counterclockwise: the Sheep Gate (vv. 1,2); the Fish Gate (vv. 3-5); the Old Gate (or Corner Gate) (vv. 6-12); the Valley Gate (v. 13); the Dung Gate (v. 14); the Fountain Gate (vv. 15-25); the Water Gate (v. 26); the Horse Gate (v. 28); the East Gate (v. 29); and the Gate Miphkad (Inspection Gate, NASB) (v. 31). Verse 32 brings us back full circle to the Sheep Gate. Two other gates are mentioned in the book—the Gate of Ephraim (8:16) and the Prison Gate (Gate of the Guard, NASB) (12:39). There were 12 gates in all, even as there will be 12 gates in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:12). It is significant that God keeps a careful record of all those who serve Him; this is seen in the listing of those who repaired the walls and gates. Men and women, craftsmen and laborers, princes and commoners all labored side by side. There was only one case of disunity —the nobles of Tekoa shirked their responsibility (v. 5). Some who finished their assigned task took on an

additional portion of the wall (cf. vv. 4 and 21; 5 and 27). God has given different work assignments to believers today. He has equipped us with various gifts and abilities appropriate to our calling, and He knows who is not really involved and who is doing double duty. “Each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work” (1 Cor. 3:13 NASB).

Chapter 4

When Sanballat and Tobiah mocked the early rebuilding efforts (vv. 1-3), Nehemiah responded by prayer and went on with the work (vv. 4-5). While the imprecatory language of verses 4 and 5 was acceptable in the dispensation of law, it would not be suitable for Christians in this age of grace (Rom. 12:19-21). Soon the wall reached half its intended height (v. 6). External pressure was not the only threat (vv. 7,8); at times the immensity of the job almost crushed the Jews. The seemingly unending piles of rubble sapped their strength and drive (v. 10). When their countrymen living outside Jerusalem warned of imminent attack, Nehemiah stationed his men by the walls and armed the workers, encouraging them to “remember the Lord … and fight” (vv. 11-14).

With the element of surprise lost, Judah’s enemies abandoned their plan for a direct attack. From then on, half the Jews stood guard while the other half continued to build. Even the builders carried weapons. Nehemiah kept a trumpeter with him at all times to sound the alarm in case of attack and rally the men who were spread out along the wall. Those who came from outside

Jerusalem were ordered to spend the night within the city so as to be readily available if needed. Their strategy was to pray, watch, and work. The people emulated the courage and resoluteness of their indomitable leader. Nehemiah, his relatives, his servants, and the Persian guard that accompanied him gave themselves no leisure as they kept vigil over the city (vv. 15-23).

Chapter 5

In the midst of rebuilding, an ugly internal problem arose. Food was evidently scarce and expensive. Inflation plus the tax burden placed on the Jews by the king had reduced many of them to poverty. They were forced to borrow money from their wealthier brothers and to mortgage their property. Some even had to sell their children as slaves. And since their land was owned by others, they were left without means to buy back the children. When they told Nehemiah of their sad plight (vv. 1-5), he called the wealthy to a solemn assembly and rebuked them. Was it not inconsistent to drive their brethren into slavery when Nehemiah and others had been redeeming them from bondage to their heathen neighbors (v. 8)? Was it not imperative for their safety that they maintain a right relationship with the Lord? How could they afford to alienate Jehovah by breaking His holy law by charging usury (v. 9; cf. Exod. 22:25)? Even as their leader, Nehemiah, had set an example by not charging interest on loans he made, should they not do the same (v. 10)?

After Nehemiah urged the rich to return the property gained by usury and to restore a measure of the interest exacted on loans of money, grain, wine, and oil, they

promised to do so. The priest was called and they sealed their pledge with an oath (vv. 11,12). A vivid warning was then given of what would happen to anyone who reneged. He would be shaken off the good land like the dust off a garment. With a hearty “Amen” the men left the meeting and performed their vow (v. 13).

A short account of Nehemiah’s 12-year tenure as governor closes the chapter. He supported himself rather than charge the people with his maintenance. He did not take advantage of his position to acquire land or feather his nest for the future. His time was devoted to making Jerusalem safe for his brothers, not to building his own personal fortune. He supplied his own table and welcomed strangers to share his hospitality (vv. 14-18). He did all this because he feared the Lord (v. 15). If God kept track of his sacrifices, that was sufficient for Nehemiah (v. 19).

Chapter 6

Having failed to obstruct the Jews by other means, the enemy next tried to destroy Nehemiah. Four times Sanballat and Geshem tried to get Nehemiah to leave his work and meet with them in the plain of Ono. Four times Nehemiah refused, knowing that they were plotting harm to him. The work must not be stopped (vv. 1-4). Still pretending to be his ally, Sanballat accused Nehemiah in a letter of planning to make himself king of Judah in rebellion against the king of Persia. Sanballat said he wanted to help Nehemiah avoid trouble with the king and suggested that they get together to discuss the matter. But Nehemiah refused, knowing all too well that Sanballat did not have his best interests at heart.

Besides, the charges were false. Nehemiah's loyalty spoke for itself (vv. 5-9).

It was no secret that Nehemiah was a devout man and one who feared the Word of the Lord. So false prophets were hired to trick him into sinning and incurring God's displeasure. Shemaiah warned Nehemiah about a supposed plot on his life and suggested that the governor accompany him into the temple for safety. Nehemiah saw through the prophet's ruse. God's Word forbade any but the priests to enter the temple. Nehemiah would rather lose his life than violate the law. And so Sanballat's third scheme fell harmlessly to the ground (vv. 10-14).

Verses 9 and 14 are examples of the "arrow prayers" that characterized Nehemiah's life (see also 2:4; 4:9; 5:19). He habitually turned to God in times of crisis.

Despite continued opposition, the walls were completed in 52 days, a remarkable feat. This evidence of divine blessing demoralized Judah's enemies (vv. 15,16). One further grief Nehemiah endured while the walls were going up is added in verses 17-19. Many of the nobles in Jerusalem stayed on friendly terms with the wicked Tobiah because they were related to him by marriage. (Tobiah was governor of the Ammonites—2:10.) The nobles reported Nehemiah's words to Tobiah on the one hand and praised Tobiah in Nehemiah's hearing on the other. We meet Tobiah again in chapter 13.

Although it took only 52 days to finish the walls (v. 15), Nehemiah had plenty of other duties to fill up his 12 or more years as governor.

Chapter 7

As soon as the walls and gates were finished and the gatekeepers, singers, and Levites were appointed to their posts, Nehemiah turned the charge of the city over to his brother Hanani and to Hananiah. Both were godly men, well-suited for the responsibility. Hananiah had a deep reverence for the Lord, which made him of kindred spirit with Nehemiah (vv. 1,2). Instructions were given to insure Jerusalem's security (v. 3). The gates were to be open only during daylight hours, and guards were to be posted around the city, with each man serving by his own house.

By faith Nehemiah had built the walls where they used to be, even though the enclosed area was too large for so few inhabitants. As he planned to repopulate the city with those whose genealogy proved their descent as Jews, he found a list of those who had returned under Zerubbabel (vv. 4-6). This list in verses 7-65 is almost identical with the one given in Ezra 2. In verses 66-69 we have a recapitulation of the total assembly, total number of servants, singers, and animals used for transport. Donors and their contributions to the work are listed (vv. 70-72). The chapter closes peacefully with the cities populated and secure (v. 73). Verses 70-72 differ significantly from Ezra 2:68,69. The accounts may refer to two different but overlapping collections. The governor's plan for Jerusalem was not fully carried out until chapter 11.

Chapter 8

This important chapter tells of spiritual revival among God's people through the public reading of the Scriptures. Notice that Nehemiah is now referred to in

the third person (until 12:31). Ezra is the main character in the next few chapters.

On the first day of the seventh month, the people gathered together for a holy convocation, the Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:24,25), typifying the regathering of Israel from among the Gentile nations. Standing on a special platform and flanked by 13 Levites, Ezra read from the law of Moses for several hours (vv. 1-6). The people showed deep respect for God's Word as the Levites, mentioned in verse 7, helped them to understand what was being read.

Their tears showed that the message was taken seriously (v. 9). They were right in taking the Word of God seriously, but they did not need to be overwhelmed by grief. The feast was not for weeping but for rejoicing. Only one occasion for mourning and fasting was found among Israel's feasts, and that was the Day of Atonement. The rest of the feasts were to be kept with joy and celebration. The fruit of the Spirit was to be visible: love, in sharing with the less fortunate; joy, in eating and drinking before the Lord; peace, in calming their fears and putting their hearts at rest. Their sadness was turned to joy, and the joy of the Lord was their strength (vv. 10-12).

The next day a special time for Bible study was held for the leaders, the priests, and the Levites. They discovered the ordinances concerning the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles), which was to be observed later that month (vv. 13-15). It foreshadowed the time when Israel would dwell securely in the Promised Land. They quickly made provisions to keep the feast, the first time it had been done by the entire assembly since the days

of Joshua. (A partial observance of the feast had been kept by the first exiles who returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel—Ezra 3:4.) Booths were built on rooftops, in courtyards, and in the streets. Joy ran high as the Word of God was daily opened to hungry hearts. The Feast lasted from the 15th through the 22nd of the month (vv. 16-18).

Chapter 9

After the feast the people assembled for a great day of national confession. They separated themselves from the foreigners in their midst and humbled themselves before the Lord. With fasting and mourning, they read the Scriptures for three hours (vv. 1-4).

Afterward the Levites mentioned in verses 4 and 5 led the people in a great prayer of confession (vv. 6-37) and dedication (v. 38). Some think Ezra led the prayer, although his name is not specifically mentioned. It is one of the longest prayers in the Bible, and its roots go deep into sacred history. The overriding theme is God's faithfulness despite Israel's waywardness. The prayer can be outlined as follows: creation (v. 6); the call of Abraham and the covenant God made with him (vv. 7,8); the exodus from Egypt (vv. 9-12); the giving of the law at Mount Sinai (vv. 13,14); God's miraculous provision during the wilderness journey (v. 15); Israel's frequent rebellions in the wilderness contrasted with God's unfailing kindness (vv. 16-21); the conquest of Canaan (vv. 22-25); the era of the judges (vv. 26-28); unheeded warnings and ultimate captivity (vv. 29-31); appeal for forgiveness and deliverance from the consequences of the captivity (vv. 32-37); the people's desire to make a covenant with God (v.'38).

Another way to outline the prayer is to follow its progress through the books of the Bible: vv. 6-8, Genesis; vv. 9-13, Exodus; v. 14, Leviticus; vv. 15-20, Numbers (except v. 18); vv.

21-23, Numbers and Deuteronomy; vv. 24,25, Joshua; vv. 26-29, Judges; vv. 30-37, 1 Samuel through 2 Chronicles. That is biblical praying! Events are seen from God's point of view. His faithfulness is acknowledged throughout, and mercy and grace are recognized as the only foundation upon which the nation can stand.

In many ways the last verse (38) is the most significant part of the prayer. The Jews realized that the problem was with them, not with the Lord, and they determined to do something about it (see chapter 10 for the details of the covenant). Prayer and confession, important as they are, are no substitutes for obedience.

Chapter 10

Verses 1-27 list the men who signed the covenant on behalf of the people (9:38b). Nehemiah's name heads the list (v. 1), followed by the priests (vv. 2-8), the Levites (vv. 9-13), and the leaders of the people (vv. 14-27).

Verses 28 and 29 form a preamble to the covenant, stating that the entire population agreed "to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and His judgments and His statutes." More specifically, the Jews bound themselves to refrain from foreign marriages (v. 30), to observe the sabbath and the sabbatical year (v. 31), to make an annual contribution for the temple services (vv. 32,33), to provide wood for the altar of the Lord (v. 34), and to bring the redemption

money for their firstborn and the firstfruits of their crops to the temple for the support of the priests and Levites—i.e., to restore the tithes (vv. 35-39).

Concern for their religious life was central in this covenant. With the exception of verses 30 and 31, the covenant deals exclusively with the maintenance of the temple and its servants. The words “Thus we will not neglect the house of our God” (v. 39 NASB) expressed the overriding concern of the postexilic Jews. Out of this genuine care for the externals of their faith would grow the corrupt pharisaical system which so violently opposed the Lord Jesus because He stressed the weightier issues of the law—obedience, mercy, etc. But in its original innocence such devotion must certainly have pleased Jehovah.

Chapter 11

This chapter is closely related to the last verse of chapter 7. Nehemiah was concerned about the sparse population in Jerusalem; more people should have been living there to defend the city in case of attack. But fear kept many Jews in the country. Finally, lots were cast to bring one out of every” ten residents of the small towns into Jerusalem. Others who volunteered joined them in the holy city (vv. 1,2).

Having been enrolled earlier (ch. 7), the families living in Jerusalem are named here (vv. 3-24). There were 468 men of Judah, each the head of a household (vv. 4-6). The Benjamites were 928 families strong (vv. 7,8); Joel and Judah were their overseers (v. 9). Three divisions of priests are listed in verses 10-14; Zabdiel was their leader. The Levites in Jerusalem numbered 356, 172 of them being gatekeepers (vv. 15-19). The temple

servants, under Ziha and Gishpa, lived in Ophel, a section of Jerusalem close to the temple (v. 21). A man named Uzzi had overall charge of the Levites, and Pethahiah was the king's agent in the city, under Nehemiah, of course (vv. 22-24). The rest of the Jews lived in the neighboring towns: Judah lived in the towns listed in verses 25-30, and Benjamin in the towns listed in verses 31-35. Some divisions of Levites that formerly lived in Judah now moved over to the territory of Benjamin (v. 36).

Chapter 12

The priests who returned with Zerubbabel are named in verses 1-7. The Levites who came back are listed in verses 8 and 9. Verses 10 and 11 name the high priests from Jeshua (in the days of Zerubbabel) (v. 1), until Jaddua. In verses 12-21 we have the priests who served in the time of Joiakim, whose son Eliashib was the high priest in Nehemiah's day (3:1). Most of them were probably still alive. The Levites were registered under succeeding high priests from Eliashib until Jaddua. The men mentioned by name in verses 24-26 served before and during Nehemiah's tenure as governor.

For the dedication of the wall, the Levites (particularly the singers) from the surrounding areas were brought to Jerusalem. The priests and Levites ceremonially purified themselves along with the wall and the gates (vv. 27-30). Then Nehemiah assembled the princes of Judah on the wall and divided them into two groups. They headed in different directions around the wall, with the singers in front and the people following behind their leaders until they met again at the temple (vv. 31-42). Great sacrifices were offered amid loud rejoicing (v. 43). On that day

men were appointed to oversee the collection of “the stores, the contributions, the firstfruits, and the tithes” (NASB) for the support of the priests and Levites, as required by the law. The people contributed joyfully because they were happy to have the divine services resumed. The priests and Levites performed their duties of worship and purification. The singers and gatekeepers also carried on their assigned tasks, tasks that, as far as the singers were concerned, dated back to the time of David and Asaph (vv. 44-46). In the days of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, the people provided all that was necessary for the support of the singers, gatekeepers, Levites, and priests (v. 47).

Chapter 13

After serving for 12 years in Jerusalem, Nehemiah returned to Babylon 434 B.C. for an unspecified time. Then he obtained permission to visit Jerusalem again, a visit that dealt with the correcting of abuses. “On that day” (v. 1) may refer back to the last chapter, or it may refer to another day during Nehemiah’s absence (v. 6). In either case, the Word was read and the people responded once again (vv. 2,3). In expelling the foreigners, they were finishing the job they started in 9:2. Eliashib the priest had made a home for the wicked Tobiah in the forecourt of the temple, using a storeroom which should have been full of tithes for the Levites and priests (vv. 4,5). It did not take Nehemiah long to remedy the situation upon his return (vv. 6-9). Other problems had also appeared in his absence, and Nehemiah indignantly campaigned to halt these evils.

Neglecting the Levites (vv. 10-14). Nehemiah rebuked the officials in charge of such matters for their

irresponsibility. The Levites who had been forced to work in the fields to make a living were regathered, and faithful men were appointed to distribute the tithes among them. For this deed Nehemiah asked the Lord to remember him (v. 14).

Profaning the sabbath (vv. 15-22). Nehemiah had to rebuke the rulers who allowed the people to work on the sabbath. The foreigners who lived among them tried to make it a market day. But the sabbath must be kept holy, by force if necessary. Men were sent to secure the gates, and the greedy merchants camping outside the city were run off under threat of violence. Illicit activity came to an abrupt halt. For this too Nehemiah asked to be remembered (v. 22).

Intermarrying with the heathen (vv. 23-31). Several years earlier the foreign wives had been put away at the command of Ezra (Ezra 10). The people had since then made a covenant to separate themselves from the heathen (ch. 10) and had done so to a certain extent. But in time the practice flourished once more, even in the priesthood. Some of the malefactors were physically punished; others were excommunicated. A grandson of the high priest was sent away. (Josephus says the exiled rebel went to Samaria, where Sanballat built him a temple which became a refuge for apostate Jews.) The heathen were driven away and the Lord was asked to deal with those who had defiled their holy offices. Once more Nehemiah requested of the Lord that he be remembered (v. 31).

Throughout his rule Nehemiah was a man of action. Nowhere is that more evident than here, as zeal for the things of God consumed him (Psa. 69:9). Because he was

no respecter of persons, his anger was felt equally by all who transgressed the law of the Lord. He warned, admonished, reprimanded, contended, struck, pulled hair, and generally made things difficult for the ungodly. He was a courageous man and a tenacious general in the front lines of the fight against evil. He was a tireless worker and a great builder for God.

This chapter brings Old Testament history to a close. The books that follow Nehemiah fit chronologically before this time (except for Malachi, which is contemporary with Nehemiah). The period following Nehemiah is known as “The 400 Silent Years.” The Old Testament Apocrypha, though uninspired, contains valuable historical information concerning this period.

1 J. Alec Motyer, Toward the Mark, further documentation unavailable.

2 George Williams, The Student’s Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, p. 264.

Esther

Outline Of Esther

I. Dethronement of Vashti Decreed (1)

II. Elevation of Esther Accomplished (2)

III. Extermination of the Jews Planned (3, 4)

A. Haman’s talk with the king (3)

B. Mordecai’s talk with the queen (4)

IV. Extermination of the Jews Thwarted (5—9)

A. Esther’s supplication and Haman’s rage (5)

B. Haman’s humiliation and Mordecai’s honor (6)

C. Esther’s accusation and Haman’s execution (7)

D. Mordecai’s promotion and the Jews’ deliverance (8)

E. The enemy’s destruction and the inauguration of the Feast of Purim (9)

V. Exaltation of Mordecai (10)

The events in this book took place between the sixth and seventh chapters of Ezra, during the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes), king of Persia. The book is concerned with those Jews who decided to remain in Babylon rather than return to Jerusalem with the small remnant that returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2). The author of the book is unknown. It derives its name from its principal character, Esther, the orphan girl who became queen. Hadassah, her Hebrew name, means “myrtle”; Esther, her Persian name, means “star” and may have been derived from the goddess Ishtar.

Ahasuerus held court in Shushan (Susa, NASB), one of three principal capital cities in Persia, the others being Achmetha (Ecbatana, NASB) and Babylon. Shushan is the Hebrew name and means “lily.” The prophet Daniel spent time there (Dan. 8). Nehemiah served there after Esther’s day (Neh. 1). It is there that our story takes place, beginning in the year 483 BC. (Xerxes came to power in 486 BC; chapter 1 opens in the third year of his reign—v. 3.)

One of the remarkable features of the book is that the name of God is not found in it, a fact that has caused some to question its right to a place in Scripture. But J. Sidlow Baxter points out that the name Jehovah is hidden four times as an acrostic (1:20; 5:4; 5:13; 7:7), and the name Ehyeh (I am that I am) is found once in acrostic form (7:5). In the first two occurrences of the Jehovah acrostic (YHWH), the initial letters of the Hebrew words spell the name forward. In the other occurrences, the final letters of the Hebrew words spell the name backward.

Although God’s name is not found explicitly, His presence and power are clearly manifested throughout as He provides deliverance for His people through a series of designed coincidences. Even if Jehovah’s name is not explicitly associated with those who voluntarily stayed in Babylon instead of returning to their own city and land, His care for them cannot be questioned. They were still His people, and He would protect them from the anti-Semitism (inspired by the devil) which sought to exterminate them. God is the Author of all history, even if He does not sign His name at the bottom of every page.

The words of James Russell Lowell are a fitting commentary on the book of Esther:

Truth forever on the scaffold,
Wrong forever on the throne… .
Behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadow,
Keeping watch above His own.

Chapter 1

Although not all scholars agree as to the identity of Ahasuerus (a royal title, like Pharaoh), most modern commentators believe him to be Xerxes, the son of Darius the Great. Xerxes reigned from 486 to 465 BC.

The first banquet did not necessarily last uninterrupted for 180 days. Rather, this was the time required to display the wealth of the kingdom. Probably different nobles came at different times throughout this period, since the empire was so vast (vv. 1-4). The second feast lasted seven days and was open to all the inhabitants of Susa (vv. 5-20). Wine flowed freely from golden vessels in the elegantly furnished garden court. Guests were permitted to drink as much or as little as they chose (v. 8). The inebriated Xerxes ordered his chamberlains to bring Queen Vashti, who was hosting the women at a separate banquet. He wanted her at the public celebration so that he could display her beauty. Since Persian modesty required women to be veiled in public, it appears that the king was asking her to degrade herself to satisfy his drunken whim. She refused to be lewdly put on display, thus greatly angering the king. When he consulted his wise men, they told him that Vashti’s behavior would prove a bad example to the women throughout the realm. They therefore suggested

that Vashti be deposed by a royal decree and that the decree be circulated in every part of the kingdom (vv. 10-20). Knowing that the law of the Medes and Persians was unalterable, the wise men might have suggested such a drastic step to ensure that Vashti would not return to power and punish them.

The king rashly signed their advice into law and ordered it published in every province in the language of every people. Included was the law that every man should be master in his own house and that his language should be the one used there (vv. 21,22 NASB).

Chapter 2

When the king seemed to have second thoughts over what he had done to Vashti, his counselors proposed that a search be made for a maiden to become queen in her place (vv. 1-4). As potential young women were brought to Susa, Esther, one of the capital's maidens, joined them. She had been adopted by her cousin Mordecai after the death of her parents (vv. 5-8). Mordecai was a Benjamite, a descendant of Kish, who had been carried into captivity with Jeconiah (2 Kgs. 24:14-16).

Hegai, the keeper of the harem, showed special favor to Esther by supplying her and her attendants generously with everything they needed and giving her first place in the harem. In obedience to Mordecai, she did not reveal her nationality yet. Although Mordecai could not contact her directly, he had ways of getting news of her progress every day (vv. 9-11).

The course preparing the young ladies to be brought into the king's bedchamber lasted for 12 months. They

went through a ceremonial purification program with ointments, spices, and cosmetics. Then, when the turn of each one came, she could request anything in the way of apparel, adornments, or jewels. She then spent one night with the king, and would never be with him again unless she so pleased him that he asked for her by name (vv. 12-14).

Instead of making lavish requests for outward adornments, Esther followed Hegai's advice. Perhaps he suggested that she depend on her natural beauty. In any event, the king loved Esther more than any of the others, chose her as his queen, and made a great feast in her honor. The "release" he made to the provinces may have been an amnesty, a remission of taxes, or simply a holiday. He also gave gifts in keeping with his wealth (vv. 15-18).

A second gathering of virgins took place, perhaps to add to the king's harem. Esther was still keeping her nationality secret, and Mordecai was still positioning himself strategically at the king's gate. It was at this time that he overheard a plot to assassinate the king. He reported it to Esther, who in turn notified the king. The assassins were apprehended, tried, and executed, and the incident was routinely recorded in the official chronicles of the kingdom (vv. 19-23).

Chapter 3

There is a five-year interval between chapters 2 and 3. The last important figure in the drama of Esther comes on stage in verse 1. We are not told why Haman was promoted, but subsequent history makes it clear that the hand behind the hand of the king was Satan's. Haman was an Agagite, a descendant of the kings of the

Amalekites (Agag was a royal title). The Lord had declared perpetual war against Amalek (Exod. 17:8-16). The book of Esther relates the last recorded battle in that war (see also 1 Sam. 15:32; 30:1-10; 1 Chrn. 4:43).

By official order Haman was now to be given reverential treatment as one second to the king (v. 2). But Mordecai refused to bow to a mere man, especially an Amalekite. The law of Moses did not forbid showing due respect to those in authority, but it did forbid the worship of any but God. Eastern monarchs often demanded such worship. Mordecai's fellow workers sought to gain favor in Haman's eyes by pointing out his refusal. Haman was a very egotistical man, and the sight of Mordecai's blatant disrespect infuriated him beyond reason. Instead of dealing with Mordecai alone, he set in motion a plan to annihilate all the Jews in the kingdom (vv. 3-6).

His first step was to cast lots to determine a suitable date for the mass execution. By a seeming coincidence the date indicated was nearly a year away. As someone has said, "Even superstition was chained to the divine chariot-wheels." God overruled to allow sufficient time to thwart Haman's plan. "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord" (Prov. 16:33 NASB). Haman next approached the king with an inflammatory report about the Jews, representing them as a danger to the empire. He urged that a decree be issued ordering their extinction. According to the law of the Medes and Persians, this decree, once issued, could never be changed or withdrawn. As added incentive, Haman offered to pay 10,000 talents of silver into the royal treasury, now badly depleted by the king's losses in Greece. Ahasuerus sealed the death writ, sentencing thousands of innocent men, women, and children to be

sacrificed at the altar of Haman's pride (vv. 7-11). Verse 11 might mean that the spoil (silver) taken from the slain would belong to Haman.

Copies of the execution order were sent out with great thoroughness, setting the thirteenth day of the twelfth month aside for the atrocity. In the palace Ahasuerus and Haman complacently sat down to drink, but in the city there was great perplexity (vv. 12-15).

"The last phrase of chapter 3 is significant: 'But the city Shushan was perplexed' (KJV). Not only the Jews, but non-Jews reacted to this outrageous example of violent despotism. Sometimes the masses are wrong, but not always. Here was a situation where a king and his high minister were an erring minority with extensive authority. But all people—nations and individuals alike—must reckon with the highest Authority—God. The king's decree was issued and posted, but the King of kings would have the last word."1

Chapter 4

The Jewish population was stunned as the news broke throughout the land. Mordecai put on mourner's garb and lamented through the city until he came to the king's gate, beyond which he could not go because sadness was not allowed in his majesty's presence. He knew he was the main object of Haman's hatred. The fate awaiting his nation had been unwittingly prompted by him (vv. 1-3). Since custom forbade Esther to leave her confinement in the palace, she sent a servant to take some clothes to Mordecai so that he might not be seen in sackcloth by the king and lose his life. But Mordecai refused to disguise his anguish. When Hatach, Esther's personal servant, came to find out why he continued in

mourning, Mordecai told him the whole story. A copy of the edict was sent back to the queen along with an appeal for her to use her office to intercede for her people (vv. 4-9).

Esther responded to Mordecai by reminding him that it was a capital offense to appear before the king uninvited, unless he spared the intruder's life by extending the golden scepter. She told of a further complication which would make such action doubly dangerous: She had not been summoned by Ahasuerus for 30 days, indicating that she may have somehow incurred his displeasure (vv. 9-12).

Mordecai's reply to Esther's rationale was to the point: She would not escape when the rest of the Jews were slain, even if she was queen. If she refused to act now, someone else would rise up to deliver His people. But she would be destroyed. And perhaps this opportunity to save her people was the reason she had been exalted to the throne (vv. 13,14). The words of verse 14 should challenge each of us: "… who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Each of us has an essential role to play in the ongoing plan of God.

Making her decision, Esther instructed all the Jews to fast with her for three days. Then she would go before the king (vv. 15-17).

"If I perish, I perish" (v. 16): "Although my danger be great and evident, considering the expressness of that law, and the uncertainty of the king's mind, and that severity which he showed to my predecessor Vashti, yet rather than neglect my duty to God and to His people, I will go to the king and cast myself cheerfully and

resolutely upon God's providence for my safety and success."2

The Christian's attitude in trying circumstances should not be one of fatalism but of optimism, especially when it comes to approaching the heavenly throne for grace to help in time of need. We have bold and confident access; the scepter of God's forgiveness has been stretched out to us at Calvary. "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16 NASB).

Chapter 5

When the fast was completed, Esther put on her royal robes, summoned her courage, and appeared before Ahasuerus uninvited. Recognizing that only a very important matter would cause Esther to risk her life, the king extended the scepter to her and granted her safety. He also promised to grant her request, up to half his kingdom (a figure of speech meaning that he would give her anything at all within reason) (vv. 1-3).

At this point Esther simply invited the king and his favorite minister, Haman, to a banquet (the fourth banquet in the book). During the meal the king again tried to find out what the queen wanted. Once more Esther procrastinated and asked Ahasuerus and Haman to return the following day for another banquet. Then she would make her matter known (vv. 4-8). Opinions vary as to why Esther planned these two delays before making her request: 1) She wanted time to ingratiate herself with the king, having apparently been out of favor with him (see notes on 4:9-12); 2) her courage failed her both times; 3) she wanted to build up an

element of suspense and impress upon the king that her business was vitally important and no mere feminine whim; 4) she wanted to inflate Haman's pride and take him off guard before she exposed him as a vicious murderer.

Filled with pride, Haman left the banquet in good spirits. When he met Mordecai on the way out of the palace, he was filled with indignation but restrained himself from violence. Calling his family and friends together, he recited all the favorable things that had happened to him. The only cloud on his horizon was that stubborn Jew. Zeresh, his wife, advised him to make a gallows 75 feet high, then get permission from the king to hang Mordecai on it (vv. 9-14).

Chapter 6

While Haman slept, God kept Ahasuerus awake to thwart the evil scheme. In trying to make the best of his insomnia, the king had the chronicles of his reign read to him. By divine coincidence the portion that was read contained the account of the attempt on his life which had been foiled by Mordecai. Upon inquiry it was learned that nothing had ever been done to reward Mordecai for this service (vv. 1-3).

It is good to notice what Bellett calls "the wonderful interweaving of circumstances which we get in this history. There is plot and underplot, 'wheels within wheels,' circumstances hanging upon circumstances, all formed together to work out the wonderful plans of God."3

Probably it was in the morning that Haman came for permission to hang Mordecai. Strangely enough, it was

at the same time that the king had an impulse to reward the man who had saved him from the assassins. When Haman entered, the king asked the general question, “What shall be done unto the man whom the king delights to honor?” Thinking that his own great moment had come, Haman suggested the most elaborate parade and the bestowing of honors second only to those of the king himself. Haman further suggested that a public announcement be made as the parade moved through the city: “Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.” Thereupon the king ordered Haman to bestow all these honors on Mordecai the Jew. Haman went out to proclaim his enemy as the man whom the king delighted to honor (vv. 4-11).

Crestfallen, Haman retreated to his home and reported these strange developments. His wife and wise friends saw in the day’s events an omen of victory for the Jew and defeat for Haman. But by then it was time for Haman to hurry off to Esther’s banquet (vv. 12-14).

Chapter 7

Esther’s second banquet (the fifth in the book) turned out to have ramifications which would shake the entire kingdom, starting with Haman’s house. At the king’s bidding she finally made her appeal. She asked for her own life and the lives of her people, who had been sentenced to death (vv. 1-4). If they had only been sold as slaves she would have held her peace, “for the trouble would not be commensurate with the annoyance to the king” (v. 4b NASB). But the seriousness of their plight impelled her to act.

The king indignantly asked who had instigated such a heinous plot against Esther’s people. The queen had

wisely invited Haman for just this moment. To his face she charged “this wicked Haman.” Haman’s true character was now fully revealed. Ahasuerus stalked to the garden like a raging panther. His conscience might have been bothering him too as he remembered his part in approving the terrible scheme. It was hitting much closer to home than he had anticipated (vv. 5-7).

In mortal fear Haman threw himself before Esther to plead for his life. The king, returning to the room, interpreted this as an attempt to assault his wife sexually. Haman’s fate was now sealed. Without an express word from the king the servants covered his face, a preliminary to execution. One of them told the king about the gallows Haman had built, and Ahasuerus ordered the villain to be hanged on it. Thus Haman took Mordecai’s place on the gallows (vv. 8-10).

Chapter 8

Haman’s house was given to Esther and his position was given to Mordecai (vv. 1,2).

Haman was out of the way but his destructive plot was still in motion. Once again Esther appeared before the king uninvited, careless of her own life, and tearfully pled for her people. Again the scepter of grace was extended to her. Verse 3 gives the gist of her plea, verses 5 and 6 the exact words. She asked that the first decree be revoked. But according to the law, no edict signed and sealed by a Persian king could be altered. However, after reminding Esther of what he had already done on her behalf, the king permitted her and Mordecai to write another decree counteracting the first one (vv. 3-8).

The scribes were called and Mordecai dictated an edict which gave the Jews the right to defend themselves. With great speed the new law was carried to the utmost parts of the kingdom on royal mounts (vv. 9-14). How much more should the news of man's redemption from the power of evil be disseminated through Satan's realm with thoroughness and speed! Having discarded his sackcloth, Mordecai left the palace in robes of splendor (v. 15). The Jews were filled with gladness when they heard of the sudden turn of events, while the rest of the people were filled with dread. Not wanting to be numbered among their enemies, many became proselytes to the Jewish faith at this time (vv. 16,17).

Chapter 9

When the fateful day arrived—the thirteenth day of the twelfth month—the Jews gathered together in their respective cities and destroyed their enemies. Even the princes and rulers aided them because they feared Mordecai the Jew, now the second-most-powerful man in the kingdom (vv. 1-5). In the capital alone 500 men were slain, along with the ten sons of Haman (vv. 6-10). When it was reported to the king, he realized that the slaughter in the rest of the land must be great as well (vv. 11,12). Esther requested that an additional day be given the Jews in Susa to wipe out any remaining pockets of anti-Semitism. As a result 300 more men were executed. She also asked that the bodies of Haman's sons be publicly hanged (vv. 12-15).

In the provinces 75,000 were killed, but the Jews had not taken any of their foes' property. This would make it clear to all that they were interested only in protecting themselves, not in growing rich (v. 16). The Jews in the

provinces held a great feast on the fourteenth of the month while those in Susa celebrated on the fifteenth. This was the beginning of the feast of Purim. The name Purim comes from “Pur”—the lot which Haman had cast (3:7). Later Mordecai decreed that both the fourteenth and the fifteenth should be observed by all the people. Like the feasts of old, it was to be celebrated annually as a reminder to succeeding generations of this marvelous deliverance (vv. 17-28). Apparently two letters went out to the Jewish people charging them to keep the feast of Purim—the first one in verse 20, and the second in verses 29-32. The book referred to in verse 32 was probably the chronicles of the kingdom (cf. 2:23; 6:1; 10:2).

Chapter 10

The book of Esther closes with the exaltation of Mordecai. His advancements were recorded alongside the accomplishments of Ahasuerus in the book of the chronicles of the kings (w. 1,2).

It is said of Mordecai that he sought the welfare of his people (v. 3). This is a worthy goal for all who occupy places of leadership in the church today.

1 Irving L. Jensen, Ezra/Nehemiah/Esther, p. 88.

2 Matthew Poole, Matthew Poole’s Commentary on the Holy Bible, p. 913.

3 J. G. Bellett, further documentation unavailable.