

**EVANGELICAL BIBLE COLLEGE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**



**The Last of the Kings**  
**(INTO THE VALLEY OF THE**  
**SHADOW OF DEATH)**

**BY**

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**2 KINGS CHAPTER 14****INTRODUCTION**

Amaziah begins his rule by identifying and executing the murderers of his father, but he shows mercy to their families, and this was unusual in his day, although absolutely correct before the Lord. He follows the Mosaic Law rather than the traditional practises of the day, and in this there is hope for him and the nation, but the "high places" of worship are not removed. He sadly continues the religious compromises of his father, and works without divine guidance in a number of political areas, and in the end loses his kingdom's power and military superiority, just as his father did, and so, like his father he dies by the hands of assassins.

In the north there is no spiritual change at all, although the Lord honours His word through the prophets to the kings there and they have temporary military success, but nothing brings them back to embrace the spiritual truth. The parallel passage to this chapter is 2 Chronicles 25, where the priestly perspective is laid before us of the events described here, and important facts are added to our account from the priest's records of events. Read this chapter in Chronicles now, before advancing in the one before us. Reflect also on Jesus words before we enter this chapter. God seeks passionate and whole-hearted faith from his leaders, and anything short of that robs the leader of their blessing and means they will always fall short of achieving the goals they could.

**Matthew 6:25-34.** *"25. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?"*

*26. Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?"*

*27. Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?"*

*28. And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:*

*29. And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*

*30. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"*

*31. Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?"*

*(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.*

*33. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

*34. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."*

**2 KINGS 14:1-29**

**1** In the second year of Joash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel reigned Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah. **2** He was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. **3** And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, yet not like David his father: he did according to all things as Joash his father did. **4** Howbeit the high places were not taken away: as yet the people did sacrifice and burnt incense on the high places. **5** And it came to pass, as soon as the kingdom was confirmed in his hand, that he slew his servants which had slain the king his father. **6** But the children of the murderers he slew not: according unto that which is written in the book of the law of Moses, wherein the LORD commanded, saying, The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall be put to death for his own sin. **7** He slew of Edom in the valley of salt ten thousand, and took Selah by war, and called the name of it Joktheel unto this day. **8** Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, Come, let us look one another in the face. **9** And Jehoash the king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying, Give thy daughter to my son to wife: and there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon, and trode down the thistle. **10** Thou hast indeed smitten Edom, and thine heart hath lifted thee up: glory of this, and tarry at home: for why shouldst thou meddle to thy hurt, that thou shouldst fall, even thou, and Judah with thee? **11** But Amaziah would not hear. Therefore Jehoash king of Israel went up; and he and Amaziah king of Judah looked one another in the face at Bethshemesh, which belongeth to Judah. **12** And Judah was put to the worse before Israel; and they fled every man to their tents. **13** And Jehoash king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash the son of Ahaziah, at Bethshemesh, and came to Jerusalem, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem from the gate of Ephraim unto the corner gate, four hundred cubits. **14** And he took all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house, and hostages, and returned to Samaria. **15** Now the rest of the acts of Jehoash which he did, and his might, and how he fought with Amaziah king of Judah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? **16** And Jehoash slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel; and Jeroboam his son reigned in his stead. **17** And Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah lived after the death of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel fifteen years. **18** And the rest of the acts of Amaziah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? **19** Now they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem: and he fled to Lachish; but they sent after him to Lachish, and slew him there. **20** And they brought him on horses: and he was buried at Jerusalem with his fathers in the city of David. **21** And all the people of Judah took Azariah, which was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah. **22** He built Elath, and restored it to Judah, after that the king slept with his

fathers. 23 In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel began to reign in Samaria, and reigned forty and one years. 24 And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. 25 He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gathhepher. 26 For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter: for there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel. 27 And the LORD said not that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven: but he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash. 28 Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, how he warred, and how he recovered Damascus, and Hamath, which belonged to Judah, for Israel, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 29 And Jeroboam slept with his fathers, even with the kings of Israel; and Zachariah his son reigned in his stead.

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 – 4.** Amaziah did what was “right”, but not with a “perfect heart”. 2 Chronicles 25:2. The Hebrew word used by the writer of the Chronicles is “Shalem”, and it is similar in meaning to the later Greek word “Teleos”. The meaning of both words is primarily “completeness”. It has the secondary meanings of “prepared”, “quiet”, “peaceful and settled within”. If we combine the meanings of this word we can see the failure of this king explained by it very clearly. This man was not spiritually prepared for the position he will have within the Angelic Conflict as the king of Judah.

As the leader of Judah, a son of David, and an ancestor to the step father of the humanity of the Messiah, Amaziah stands at the focal point of history in his generation. He had God’s Word on this from Jacob, recorded by Moses for him to know and apply into the fabric of his daily life. Genesis 49:8-10. The Word of God is there for us to keep us safe, as we know its promises and warnings, and expect its prophecies to be fulfilled. He is the focal point of the Plan of God and so must be walking close to God, or he will be “nailed” by evil. He was casual in his faith and he got “nailed”!

When we know something is going to happen through faith in the Word, we live and act as if we expect it, and we thereby guard ourselves in the Angelic Conflict. **Ephesians 6:10-18, James 4:6-10, 1 Peter 5:5-10.** These three passages sum up, and are, our “daily orders”, and if we fall short of obedience to these words, then we will “fall short” in reaching our assigned goals in this life. We make our self a target for the enemy. The kings were not to multiply horses or wives, and they were to hear the words of Moses daily. **Deuteronomy 17:16-20.** He had to obey to be blessed!

He is a significant target for satanic attack, and the man who is called to stand for God, God’s Word, and God’s Righteousness for the Lord’s people, in his generation. He does not understand the angelic forces malice towards him as a crucial person in God’s Plan, and he does not see that the Lord’s demands of him are higher than upon those around him. He does not walk close to God in SPIRITUALITY, but walks as an ordinary, foolish, macho man, in CARNALITY. This is the path of death! Moses could not have been clearer in his words

**Deuteronomy 30:15-20.** “15. See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil;  
 16. In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it.  
 17. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them;  
 18. I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it.  
 19. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:  
 20. That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

We all have a part to play upon the stage of this life. If we walk in the power and under the direction of the Holy Spirit we fulfil our destiny in the Plan of God, but if we walk in the strength of our human flesh and our carnal mind, we fail and fall short of the call upon our lives. We are, when doing our assigned task before the Lord, being watched by the angels, who are anxious to applaud our success in the Angelic Conflict. Hebrews 12:1. We all have a unique role to play in our brief walk upon this earth before we enter eternity, and we work this role out before the eyes of the Lord and His elect angels. We need to be spiritually trained and ready to play that part, and we need daily to put on our spiritual armour and walk in God’s light and power.

This man got distracted by the allure of power and the trappings of kingship, and like too many in history, he started to believe his own publicity machine! This man was called to prepare the way for spiritual revival in the land, and he was called to focus upon the need for spiritual oversight of the Lord’s people, not political power projection and wealth building. He was called to listen to the prophets (and the Lord will give him several), but he tended to act first and accept guidance later. He falls short of the standards required by God and so spiritual revival does not occur, and like his father he is led astray by religious compromise into foreign paganism. We are either standing and advancing in the Plan of God or we are going backwards – no-one stands still in this world. we advance only in the Holy Spirit’s power and a casual attitude to spiritual things will always slow and then undermine advance.

**Verses 5 – 7.** He begins carefully, thoughtfully, and politically correctly. He first establishes his power base in the court, and as soon as he is secure militarily and politically he acts against his father's assassins, who appear to still be in the court. It may even be that they even acted to get him on the throne, and eliminate his weak and failure plagued father. It may be that they may have believed he would support them. They were wrong on all counts, and correctly Amaziah acts to eliminate the regicides, for the Lord does not ever support the murder of rulers. Corrupt, evil, or stupid rulers, are to be prayed for, and the Lord's path is to be sought if they need removal, and that path will not involve believers being party to murder. Romans 13:1-10, 1 Peter 2:11-17.

Bible doctrine teaches clearly that the bad ruler is in charge of the nation for a purpose in the Plan of God, normally associated with spiritual discipline! As we will see in Amaziah's bad decision to attack Israel, the Lord's hand was in it as a means of bringing the nation to repentance. 2 Chronicles 25:20. When a nation finds itself with evil at its head, that nation's believers are called to pray for spiritual revival, for evil has power due to the sin and evil in the heart of God's people in that nation. We cannot ever blame politicians for the national mess we find ourselves in, for God's verdict upon us is always centred in the spiritual state of the nation, and it is our call to pray and work to change that by spiritual means. Biblical leadership is seen in any nation by their repeated and loud calling for prayer and more prayer.

A nation always gets the government it deserves, and as believers we have no mandate to raise rebellion, only to purify our hearts and pray for the Lord's path out of the evil that led such a person to be our political leader. When the Lord briefed the disciples about their call to be His witnesses in the last days, He spoke of being called to stand before corrupt and evil rulers of nations, and He spoke only of giving the Gospel message clearly, not of being part of any resistance movement. Mark 13:9-11, Luke 21:12-19.

It is the peace of mind and the patient waiting for the Lord's path through the evil days that is to be the hallmark of the mature believer in the corrupt world of politics. We stand against the "rulers of darkness", Ephesians 6:12, and we have our example in the behaviour of Paul before Agrippa II, Bernice, Festus and Felix. These men and women were morally corrupt, and had the blood of many innocents upon their hands, but Paul does not get into condemnation of their many sexual and other sins. He is polite, respectful of their political authority, and he calmly speaks of the Gospel truths only to these evil people. Acts 25:13ff, 26:2ff. This is our challenge also as biblically focused leaders.

We are not to be distracted by temporary political gains, for the plan of God is not advanced by politics, but by the power of the Holy Spirit working upon and through godly, spiritual, and God-focused and centred people. We are also to remember that the Holy Spirit convicts the unbeliever of sin, John 16:8-11, and that it is not our job to speak of sin to unbelievers. The many sexual and other sins are not the issues for them; their attitude to the saviour, who took all these sins away, is the only issue for the unbeliever as they hear the Gospel message. The only sin that we see them in the lake of fire with Satan and his demons is the sin of final rejection of Jesus as their Saviour.

Two actions are mentioned in these verses and the Chronicles writer expands upon them, so read 2 Chronicles 25 now if you haven't before this point. The first action was the execution of the plotters and their associates. All involved in the plot to murder his father were executed, but their families were spared execution. This was different to the practise of most kings of the day. 2 Kings 25:7, 18-21. No child was ever to die for its father's sins according to the Mosaic Law. Deuteronomy 24:16.

The so called "Four Generation Curse" of Exodus 20:4-6, would be used by some to justify the elimination of an entire family, after a father's sin, but it was based upon a false interpretation and application of this passage. God acts to eliminate a family from history, only if after four generations of determined and persistent rejection of holiness, the last generation refuses repentance, and keeps up their hatred of God and God's Plan. God acts directly to eliminate such people, and unless we execute their members for individual, personal, evil acts, then we ourselves are committing sin and evil. No-one is to execute any other person, except for evil and then only through judicial or other legal process.

The second action of Amaziah was to declare war upon the Edomites who had resurged in power during his father's reign and whose raiding parties, and their paganism, were a danger to the southern areas of Judah. The Chronicles writer reports that Amaziah re-organises the army of Judah after his father's neglect and the disgrace and humiliation of his defeat at the hands of Syria. By launching a war to deal with their pagan adversaries in the south he had the opportunity to rebuild the morale of the people by a series of victories and also rebuild the finances of the nation. This was bone fide, but they needed to achieve this by spiritually binding together as a nation under God, not add in additional troops who worshipped the golden calves of Israel.

Amaziah will now make three mistakes that will prove fatal to his nation's integrity and honour. The first is to include unbelieving Israelites in his newly reformed army. He did not seek spiritual counsel before the invasion and ask a prophet about the inclusion of these Israelite mercenaries. Most of these men were pagans, and as such they did not strengthen his army, they weakened it spiritually. God does not need superior numbers to obtain victories over evil forces, He needs spirituality, obedience, and courage on the part of His people. Amaziah then does the right thing, in response to the prophet's warning, and sends these pagan descendants of Jacob back to the north, but the manner in which it is done produces great resentment on the part of these brutal and evil relatives of Judah from the ten northern tribes.

The Chronicles writer records the second fatal mistake that Amaziah makes after his defeat of the forces of Edom and his seizure of their capital city Selah and its renaming Joktheel. Instead of destroying the fake "gods" of Edom he brings the idols back to Jerusalem and establishes a shrine for them and goes to the point of worshipping them! This is

incredible on the part of a man who we have been told is a believer, but it shows how far we all can fall if we slide away from our close walk with God. 2 Chronicles 25:14-16. The Lord sends another prophet to rebuke this action. Amaziah is angry at this rebuke and although he takes some form of action, the prophet's final words to him indicate to us that his actions fell well short of total obedience.

This man believes he can play with paganism. He does not see the seriousness of the Angelic Conflict and the fatal consequences of playing with evil religions. We are to hate all such things, and flee from pagan behaviours of any sort. 1 Corinthians 6:18, 10:14, 1 Timothy 6:3-11. Paul's advice to Timothy in this last passage (FLEE!!!) covers every point at which Amaziah failed. God's hand of judgement is upon him and upon Israel as a result, but Amaziah dismisses the prophet and then "takes counsel" from his mates in the court about the next step to take. 2 Chronicles 25:17. As a result he makes his third mistake. His mates in the court, all flushed from their victories over Edom, believe it is time to show the northern tribes who is the boss of all Israel. They encourage him to challenge Israel to a battle for supremacy.

**Verses 8 – 10.** The third fatal mistake this king makes is heeding this advice of his arrogant friends, rather than the prophet of the living God. Even if he was trying to "get even" on Israel for the disgraceful behaviour of their mercenaries after being dismissed from his service, his decision making was flawed, and the path he took was wrong. 2 Chronicles 25:13. These mercenary soldiers had their blood lust up, for they had joined his army to kill, rape, and plunder the Edomites and when that option was denied them they simply turned their murderous intentions upon the cities of northern Judah, and murdered 3000 people in these cities and plundered their goods. Israel needed to be punished for this outrage, but God's path had to be sought for this to work. Amaziah believes he knows better than any scruffy prophet and believes he has the numbers to defeat the Israelites. He turns away from good counsel and embraces arrogance; such an embrace leads always to disaster for many, for arrogance has satanic logic behind it.

His challenge to Joash of the north is a "macho" one, to fight man on man and prove who is toughest. Macho behaviour like this is pride based, and this whole piece of nonsense is false manliness. It remains the plague of our own day and is supported by nearly every television program today. It has its origin in Satan himself, for it is he who believes "he is the greatest". Ezekiel 28:1-10, 17-19. This man is proud and believes he is really tough, but he does not have the power and character to back his false impression of himself!

The king of the north, Joash, sees the truth; that this challenge stems from the arrogance of Amaziah after his defeat of the Edomites. His answer is insulting but sadly true. He uses the parable method of teaching that is still common in the Middle East today, comparing himself to a cedar and Amaziah to a thistle. He intimates that he will "tread upon" Amaziah if he heads north. By Amaziah hiring the northern mercenaries he has already betrayed the fact that he previously believed he wasn't strong enough alone to beat Edom and needed Israelite help. Having betrayed his weakness to the north he cannot now challenge them and expect to be taken seriously. His errors of judgement now begin to compound, but the most fatal is his new idolatry, for it has robbed him of God's help against the northern tribes.

**Verses 11 – 14.** In his arrogance and fat headedness he still rides north to do battle with the forces of Israel, their relatives. This is an evil, for to shed their relative's blood without seeking the Lord's guidance and permission is to court judgement from God. The evil actions of the northern mercenary army require justice, but God's verdict should have been sought and listened to, not the macho nonsense here entered into so foolishly. The southern army is well and truly beaten, even though they may outnumber their opponents.

They are so well beaten that the northern army is able to capture Amaziah, then march straight into Jerusalem, and steal every piece of gold that is there, and then demolish over 200 metres of the wall facing north from the city and leave Amaziah there to face his misfortune after such humiliation. They do not appear to murder their fellow Jews, nor abuse people in the process of the invasion and capture of the city. There is an important historic note about this reference to the northern wall.

The marvel is that they could demolish 200 yards of one side of the Ephraim gate on northern wall, (a cubit is around 18 inches, and so 400 cubits is about 200 yards, around 180 metres) because this indicates that the northern wall may have been twice this long. Many Commentators have argued that ancient Jerusalem, from Solomon to Nehemiah's day, was quite small, but these measurements indicate otherwise. This length for a north facing wall certainly indicates that the city was far larger than has been postulated by most scholars. Refer back to my discussions on the building of Solomon's palace in the commentary on 1 Kings chapters 7 – 10, as I argue that the city was very large indeed to fit Solomon's palace within it, and have the rooms for all his wives and retainers!

I believe that much of the northern area enclosed by the present city Moslem period wall was probably in the city at this time also, and Amaziah has to accept a great gaping hole in his northern defences as a punishment for his stupidity in attacking the northern kingdom. Hostages are also taken to the north, and these will be held there for years, possibly life, as a bond for future good behaviour and a guarantee of no rebuilding of the northern wall. It is a humiliating defeat, and like his father, Amaziah will pay with his life for this national shame, that most see he has brought upon them.

In light of all this disaster how can our writer give him the verdict of "right" in his actions as a king? This is a strong insight into the writer's view of the grace and mercy of God, for this man was a "good man", but like us all, a flawed one. In men who do not have the burden of great decisions upon them, macho tendencies do not cause much mischief, but in a king like this they lead to disaster. Small problems with small men create "small problems", for they are restricted to their family circles and most outside don't see them, but it doesn't mean they are small to those immediately affected. As leaders we cannot allow our "small" character flaws to be unchallenged by the Holy Spirit – we must eliminate them.

This man's weakness is written large simply because he plays his part on a very public stage and many are hurt and killed by his foolishness, but he is still forgiven by the Lord when he repents of his stupidity, which apparently he does. He limps on in his rulership for another decade or so, but he remains spiritually weak. He is saved, but scrapes into heaven as the believer in Paul's parable, "through the fire of divine discipline", and in his case, under the SIN UNTO DEATH. 1 Corinthians 2:14 – 3:15.

Stupidity in marriage and family life is always disastrous to the children and partners of all involved. This man Amaziah is a lesson to us all, for his all too human weaknesses lead to the humiliation of his nation and the death of many of his best soldiers in battle. We need personally to deal with any tendency to pride that we have before it unhinges us and brings shame and disgrace upon all we touch. Pride destroys all that is good over time, and those who are righteous, but do not deal with their pride, will end up becoming anything but righteous. It is a foolish thing to think you can run your own life, for as men we simply do not have the facts required to make good decisions, by through the Holy Spirit's leading we can.

**Proverbs 3:1-7.** *"1. My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments:  
2. For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.  
3. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart:  
4. So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.  
5. Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.  
6. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.  
7. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil."*

**Jeremiah 10:23-24.** *"23. O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.  
24. O LORD, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing."*

Amaziah was a good man but stupid, and that is inexcusable in a believer! We are to grow in the grace and the applied knowledge of the Word of God not build ourselves up in false carnal pride! 2 Peter 3:18. No believer is to play the fool with pride, or he will be made a fool of, and bring the Lord's name into disgrace. Let us grow up, and in our churches let us urge men to be humble and godly, not macho and boy like! Biblical Leadership is mentoring in godliness and humility and it is Word based, not resting upon the unsure foundations of man's evil.

**Verses 15 – 20.** The battle we read of above is only one of several that Joash fought against Amaziah and so this final defeat and the destruction of the wall of Jerusalem would have been a body blow to Amaziah's popularity and reputation within his nation and abroad. After the death of Joash of Israel Amaziah lived another fifteen years. These years were clearly not successful ones, and by the end of the period there is a serious plot against him in Jerusalem and he flees to Lachish, one of the fortified cities.

It is always fatal to flee to a place from which there is no escape, and this one was fatal for foolish Amaziah. He runs out of places to run, and is brought back dead to Jerusalem from there. The writer doesn't specifically tell us how he dies, but he notes that he is brought back on horses (plural). This opens the door to his being dragged back behind horses, or cut into pieces and brought back in bits! We cannot be clear of this, but we can be clear he dies the "SIN UNTO DEATH". He is buried with David in the tomb of the kings, but he is not mourned, nor is his reign remembered fondly, for their city wall is still a mess and their nation is a second rate and bankrupt power by the end of his life.

**Verses 21 – 29.** The people select a replacement who their courtiers think they can control; they pick the sixteen year old son of this stupid king, young Azariah (a name meaning "in Jehovah is help"), and make him their king. He takes, or is given by his soldiers, the name Uzziah (meaning "whose strength is Jehovah"), soon after he takes the throne. He must have surprised them all by his energy, intelligence, and courage. He rebuilds Elath and restores it to Judah, and that indicates a serious military campaign into the southern lands. This indicates a clear thinking strategist, for by doing this he has secured his southern flank, and then can turn north to where the real danger is rising.

This young man is like another young man several centuries later by the name of Alexander the Great, for as a teenager Uzziah restores the power and manna of the nation of Judah, and rebuilds its military and economic power. He is from earliest days a mighty warrior, and he is a winner, and everyone loves a winner. Our writer will return to his great feats later, but he quickly now opens the door to the last chapter of the northern kingdom's history. During Uzziah's father's and his own rule in the south a new Jeroboam begins to rule in Samaria. He is also a mighty warrior, and he lives at a time when he needs to be.

Jeroboam II enters the scene during the increasingly dark days of what some biblical historians call the "Assyrian Crisis". Around this time, in the 820s BC the Assyrian Empire begins to grow in strength and starts to fill the power vacuum within the Fertile Crescent. Israel will come more and more into conflict with the Assyrian forces, whose cruelty to conquered foes became legendary for its ferocious evil. They controlled Babylonia, Syria, and what is now northern Iraq by 824 BC, and their southern border touched that of Israel which they continually harassed and raided until destroying it in 721 BC. Jeroboam keeps them at bay for his reign and rebuilds much of Israel's military power during his reign.

Before the writer continues with the story of Uzziah in Judah, who will be the greatest and most successful warrior in the south since David, he takes up the story of Jeroboam in the north again, reminding us that the kings there had every opportunity to walk away from the golden calf worship and be restored to Solomonic Worship at the temple, and for the

nation to be united again before God. He also reminds us of the great military pressures they were under. But most of all he reminds us that God had not forgotten Israel and cared for its tortured and disobedient people and desired their repentance and restoration to the place of blessing. 2 Peter 3:9. Jeroboam II had a great prophet in Jonah speaking to him, but he ignored him. He could have been both militarily great and spiritually great, but he stopped half way.

Jonah is known in the Bible from his ministry to Nineveh, the capital of the resurgent Assyrian Empire, but the writer here tells us that the Lord's preparation for that mission was his previous work as a prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel. Jonah's mission to Nineveh is amazing given the great evils the Assyrians perpetrated upon the north through the years we are entering now in our history. The Assyrians started to expand their empire seriously through this period, and by the early 700s they controlled all of what are now the nations of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and much of Turkey and Iran, and by 671 they controlled Israel, Judah and Egypt as well. The period that begins with their serious expansion in 824 BC is the time for Jeroboam of Israel to seek the Lord God with a serious heart, and the Lord provided the prophet Jonah to teach him, but the opportunity was lost, and the fourth cycle of national discipline upon the north deepened in the years following.

As a united people the ten northern tribes have less than 100 years of existence to enjoy before they leave the pages of history. They leave the pages of history because they will not repent and be restored to the Mosaic Law and Temple worship, and they will not hear the prophets the Lord sends them. In this last hundred years the North will receive the ministry of Jonah, Amos, and Hosea. Let none say that the Lord gives up easily on rebellious people! God is patient and gracious to us all. Let us hear the Lord's Word today and every day, and let us apply it fully, lest we also leave the pages of history without fulfilling Gods Plan for our life! Do not doubt the Lord's love for his people Israel, nor for us today.

**Exodus 34:5-9.** *"5. And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD.*

*6. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,*

*7. Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.*

*8. And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped.*

*9. And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O LORD, let my LORD, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiff necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance."*

**Numbers 14:8-9.** *"8. If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.*

*9. Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not."*

**Psalms 86:15-17.** *"15 But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.*

*16. O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid.*

*17. Shew me a token for good; that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed: because thou, LORD, hast holpen me, and comforted me."*

**2 Peter 3:9.** *"9. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."*

## **PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. We each have a part to play upon this earth. We are each called to a unique destiny in the PLAN OF GOD; each and every one of us. As the pastors/leaders of the Lord's flock, let us seek the Lord's path of service for our life, and for each of the Lord's people. We are not here to satisfy our own desires and pleasures, but to find the path that the Lord has called us to walk and serve Him there. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, 1 Timothy 1:5, 2 Timothy 2:3-7.

At various times in my ministry I have faced choices where my natural desire for a quiet and pleasant life pointed to one path, and yet it was clear that the Lord was calling me to the other, that was not as pleasant, involved far more stress, but was the anointed path of ministry. Let us be very scared of falling short of the Lord's standards in life and the failing to walk the Lord's path for our life. Hebrews 3:7 – 4:2. We are not here to relax but to worship and to serve.

2. No political distractions! This has been a major theme under the surface of the entire history of the Kings of Israel and Judah. They fall short of God's standards, and they fail in their part in the great eternal Plan because they get distracted by political manoeuvring, pleasure, or power itself. Let us be focused upon the Lord our God alone, and let us seek His "well done" alone, and have our eyes fixed upon eternal rewards rather than the temporary baubles of time that men can give us. Let us walk the spiritual path, not the political!

3. Men are no more foolish than when they start to believe that all the good things their friends say about them are true. When we start to believe our own publicity machine we are open to the mistakes that pride will always lead to; and over-estimation of one's own power, and an under-estimation of the enemy. No godly leader ever seeks conflict with others, rather they are known as peace-makers. God's leaders fight only when they have to fight for righteousness sake,

and then they fight to win, with all their spiritual and military power. Let us avoid and abhor all "macho" type activities and beliefs, for such thinking has no place in the Church of God. If we need to fight let us do so prayerfully and spiritually, and with all our might, but let us be righteous in this path, not macho!

4. God has no time for people who remain spiritual babies, for they are a menace to all they interact with. Spiritual growth is an imperative not an option. We are to grow or face the Lord's discipline for our slackness. Let us be wary in the church men's group of doing dumb and macho type things, but let us encourage the spiritual growth of believing men in true godly manliness.

### **REFLECTION – SPIRITUALITY or CARNALITY – our daily choice**

1. All Christians have the Holy Spirit indwelling them. When we allow Him to control our lives, we are said to be "filled with the Spirit" or "walking in the Spirit".

2. The filling of the Holy Spirit can be lost by

- a) Grieving the Spirit - by sin
- b) Quenching the Spirit - by not submitting to His leading
- c) This is called being carnal, or controlled by the flesh, the old sin nature.

3. The filling of the Holy Spirit can be regained by

- a) Confessing sin (1 John 1:9)
- b) Surrendering your life to God (Romans 12:1-2)
- c) This is called being spiritual, or controlled by the Holy Spirit.

4. Only the Holy Spirit in us can produce good works acceptable to God - anything in our own strength is unacceptable (Romans 8:8-9, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

5. The spiritual believer

- a) Imitates God. (Ephesians 5:1, 1 John 3:9)
- b) To glorify Christ. (John 7:39, John 16:14)
- c) Fulfills the Law. (Romans 8:2-4, Romans 13:8)

6. In the Bible the human race is divided in three Categories:-

[a] Natural Man - A person born physically alive, but not regenerated. He may be highly sophisticated, civilised, gentle and kind, but is completely ignorant of any spiritual phenomena. (1 Corinthians 2:14) Equivalent to the cold person in the church in Laodicea.

[b] Carnal Man - A person regenerated or born again but living his life under the power of his old sin nature. Prolonged activity in this area produces a Christian who is still a baby. (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). Equivalent to the lukewarm person in the church of Laodicea.

[c] Spiritual Man - A person regenerated and living generally in the power of the Holy Spirit. He discerns the difference between the things of God and man. (1 Corinthians 2:11-13) He has fellowship with God in his daily life. (Ephesians 5:18-20) Equivalent to the hot person in the church of Laodicea.

7. Carnality

[a] The believer possesses an Old Sin Nature after salvation (1John 1:8, Romans 7:14,15).

[b]. The Old Sin Nature is desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9).

[c]. The believer under the control of the Old Sin Nature is called carnal (1Corinthians 3:1-3, Romans 7:14).

[d]. The Old Sin Nature frustrates bona fide production in the life of the believer (Romans 7:15).

[e]. The Old Sin Nature is acquired at the point of physical birth (Psalm 51:5).

[f]. We are therefore considered spiritually dead at the point of physical birth (Romans 5:12).

[g]. The Old Sin Nature has several facets: areas of weakness produces sins, areas of strength produces human good. It has trends towards asceticism or lasciviousness. In many cases asceticism is considered to be spirituality.

[h] The Old Sin Nature is not found in the resurrection body.

### **WALKING AS GOD HAS CALLED US TO WALK THROUGH THIS WORLD**

1. Physical walking is analogous to the faith rest life: step by step. Romans 14:5,6, Ephesians 5:16-18, James 4:13-15.

2. Being regularly filled with the Spirit and feeding on the Word are similar to walking.

3. Attacks on believers occur when they are caught off balance. Romans 13:13.

4. Walking depicts the pattern and function of the believers life in time. Philippians 3:18, Ephesians 4:17.

5. It can also represent a backsliding believer who are said to be walking backwards. Ephesians 4:17.

6. We are all told to:

- a) Walk in the Spirit. Galatians 5:16, 25
- b) Walk in the faith. 2 Corinthians 5:7, Colossians 2:6, 4:5
- c) Walk in doctrine. 3 John 3
- d) Walk in the truth. 2 John 4

7. Walking is an analogy for spirituality

- a) Walk not after the flesh. (Romans 8:4)
- b) Walking in Love. (Ephesians 5:2)
- c) Walking in newness of Life. (Romans 6:4)
- d) Walking worthy of our vocation. (Ephesians 4:1)
- e) Walking worthy of the Lord. (Colossians 1:10, 1 Thessalonians 2:12)
- f) Walking honestly as in the day. (Romans 13:13)
- g) Walking in good works. (Ephesians 2:10)
- h) Walking in light. (Ephesians 5:8, 1 John 1:7)
- i) Walking in Christ Jesus. (Colossians 2:6)
- j) Walking circumspectly. (Ephesians 5:15,16)
- k) Walking as ye ought. (1 Thessalonians 4:1)

### **LIGHT**

1. God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:5)
2. The Lord is the visible manifestation of that light. (John 1:4, 8:12, 12:46)
3. The Lord's coming as the Light of the World was prophesied. (Isaiah 49:6)
4. The light was seen in the darkness of the world. (Matthew 4:16; Luke 2:32)
5. The Lord brought light and immortality through the gospel. (2 Timothy 1:10)
6. Believers are said to be light bearers. (Matthew 5:14-16; John 12:36)
7. We are said to be the children of the light. (John 11:9-10; Ephesians 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:5; 1 Peter 2:9)
8. Light is necessary for man's existence on the earth. (Ecclesiastes 11:7; Jeremiah 31:35)
9. Divine guidance of Israel was provided by God through light. (Exodus 14:20)
10. Bible doctrine in the soul is portrayed by light. (Psalm 119, 105,130)
11. The gospel is called light. (2 Corinthians 4:3,4; 2 Timothy 1:10)
12. Salvation brings the believer out of darkness into light just as the planet Earth was brought out of darkness into light by God. (Luke 1:79; 1 Peter 2:9).
13. Satan is the distorter, the angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:14)
14. Satan's strategy is to outshine the true light with his own false gospel. (2 Corinthians 4:3-6)

### **KEY KINGS AND DATES FOR THE GROWTH OF ASSYRIAN POWER**

911BC This date begins the new phase of Assyrian power growth and power projection.

911 – 891 BC Adadnirari II begins to expand and consolidate Assyrian power.

883 – 859 BC Ashurnasipal II builds his capital at Calneh; it will become the metropolis, or better the first world megapolis of Nineveh.

853 BC The Battle of Qarqar where Ahab of Israel and an alliance of Phoenician and other Syrian powers fights the Assyrian Army to a standstill and stops their expansion for a time.

744 – 727 BC Tiglath-Pileser III (Pul) (mentioned in 2 Kings) seizes the throne and begins a systematic campaign to conquer every nation that has opposed their expansion in the previous 150 years. He seizes Bablyon and is "appointed" its king. He takes Damascus and becomes "king" of Syria, and seizes much of the Phoenician coast. Nineveh is his vast

megapolis of three cities (Nimrud, Khorsabad, Calah) connected by a great wall miles long, and holding several million people within its high walls. Jonah visits this great super-city.

727 – 722 BC Shalmanesar V begins the conquest of Israel and Sargon completes it.

722 – 705 BC Sargon II completes the siege of Samaria and takes Israel into captivity in 721 BC. He then attacks the southern kingdom of Judah and takes forty fortified cities but Jerusalem holds out and a revival under Isaiah with king Hezekiah holds back Assyrian power.

705 – 681 BC Sennacherib continues the conquests, and punishes Babylon for a rebellion there with great brutality. He forces Hezekiah's son Manasseh to submit to him and pay tribute monies.

680 – 669 BC Esarhaddon captures Egypt and incorporates it into the Empire. Judah is a client kingdom of the Assyrian Empire now and the kings there rule by permission of the Assyrians. The feeling of the Jewish people would be not unlike that of the French during Nazi occupation in World War II.

668 – 633 Ashurbanipal expands the empire further and it becomes the largest empire the world has seen to that point in world history. The next Assyrian kings are still militarily strong and have their armies intact but the winds of history in other places start to blow against them and the legacy of their cruelty to their conquered peoples makes their enemies determined to destroy them so that they can never rise again.

664 – 610 In Egypt a new pharaoh who is energetic and builds military strength arises. He is Psammetichus I and he begins to re-assert Egyptian power towards the north and begins by throwing off the Assyrian bondage, and Assyrian armies do not re-enter Egypt in victory. He comes to some form of "arrangement" with the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal and when Nineveh falls in 612 BC he tries to help the survivors of the disaster who have fled to at Haran by entering the field on the Assyrian side.

626 BC In Babylon the native kings rise up and throw off the Assyrian yolk of bondage. They are led by a powerful leader in Nabopolassar. He is ably supported by his young son who becomes his general by 615BC. This young man is called Nebuchadnezzar II. They organise a loose alliance of two other powers, with only one objective, the total destruction of Assyrian power and the elimination of the Assyrians from the face of the earth. The Babylonians join with Cyaxares of Media, and the chief of the Scythian tribes from the steppes of Russia. The Scythians were raiders and lived for plunder and the pleasure of fighting. They are recruited and promised all the women they can carry away with them, and any loose gold they take from any body. The Medes and Babylonians agree to divide the major items of spoil from the temples of Assyria. In 615 BC they move.

612BC Just as the combined armies are about to lift their siege of Nineveh because they cannot take its walls behind their Tigris river defences the great river floods. A great wall of flood waters weeps down the channel and takes away several miles of the wall of the great city and the combined armies surge in. Every man caught in the city is killed, and all the women are carried off to Scythia, and the children enslaved by the Babylonians. The Scythians ride back to their northern steppes with their new wives and some easy to hide golden jewellery, and the Medians ride back east with all the gold they can carry in their wagons and tens of thousands of slaves. They build their power with these assets and will challenge the Babylonians later the next century. One Assyrian Army escapes the slaughter and flees to Haran and fortifies that place and tries to rebuild Assyrian identity and power from there.

609 BC Egypt plays power broker and tries to support the Assyrian survivors as a counter balance to Babylonian dominance, and in the process Judah is caught up in the battles, and their last good king, Josiah is killed at Megiddo. The Egyptians arrive too late to support the Assyrians who are killed to the last man, 608 BC, but the Pharaoh takes Jerusalem and places his man on the throne as a regent, and then heads north to his date with destiny. The Egyptians seize the city of Carchemish as their base on the other side of the Euphrates to the doomed stronghold of the last Assyrian army at Haran. They garrison this city and challenge Babylonian power by their presence.

May-June of 605 BC Battle of Carchemish. Nebuchadnezzar moves to deal with the Egyptians and defeats them totally. The Egyptians flee back home and leave Jerusalem open for Nebuchadnezzar to conquer it and use the king as his own regent. He takes the first deportation of Jewish aristocracy to Babylon at that point. 2 Kings 25:34-37, Dan 1:1ff.

**NOTES**

**CHAPTER 15****INTRODUCTION**

We are now entering the days of the Assyrian Empire, which ruled over the central Middle East with fear and loathing from around 824 BC through until its destruction. Its Capital was thoroughly destroyed at the height of its power, in 612 BC, at the hands of the triple alliance of Babylonia, Persia and the Scythian tribesmen, (as their mobile horse borne archers). Their last stand will be at Haran around 608BC when Nebuchadnezzar, as the general of his father, the Babylonian king, defeats and kills the last remnant of their forces, who fought with Egyptian support. We will come to this time in the history of Judah when we reach the last chapters of 2 Kings.

After his total defeat of Assyria Nebuchadnezzar will then turn his attentions against Egypt and Judah, capturing Jerusalem for the first time in 605 BC and taking Daniel and the others into Babylonian Captivity, but this is in the next century to our present chapter. For all the 700s, right up until 613 BC, when the siege of Nineveh begins, it is Assyria that everyone fears, and it is Assyria that the Lord uses to discipline his erring people in Israel and Judah.

Assyria is the one Empire in world history that rises suddenly to power in immediate greatness and then equally suddenly totally disappears, without any decline in power before its final fall. They are the foreign power that brings ultimate discipline to the northern kingdom, carrying them away into captivity in 721 BC. As I have mentioned above, the entire population was not lost however, so there are no "ten lost tribes" of Israel as a result of the Assyrian conquest. The believing remnant of Israel, possibly tens of thousands of them, fled south as refugees throughout this period we enter in this chapter, and joined their brethren in Judah.

Finally Judah and Benjamin itself will be decimated by the Assyrians, and then the Babylonians who follow them, and it is the surviving remnant of all the twelve tribes that will enter Babylonian captivity. This chapter summarises the final century of the northern kingdom's life and it is a catalogue of murder in politics, and evil in the spiritual realm. To the south, in Judah, there is military strength under Uzziah's long reign, but on-going spiritual conflict and compromise, and their spiritual revival and political salvation will only come through the work of the prophet Isaiah at the end of the century around 770-700 BC. 2 Chronicles 26 is the parallel passage to this chapter and it should be read now, before beginning our history here, as the priestly writer there gives us additional, and very useful, information.

**2 KINGS 15:1-38**

**1** In the twenty and seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel began Azariah son of Amaziah king of Judah to reign. **2** Sixteen years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned two and fifty years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jeholiah of Jerusalem. **3** And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done; **4** Save that the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burnt incense still on the high places. **5** And the LORD smote the king, so that he was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house. And Jotham the king's son was over the house, judging the people of the land. **6** And the rest of the acts of Azariah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? **7** So Azariah slept with his fathers; and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David: and Jotham his son reigned in his stead. **8** In the thirty and eighth year of Azariah king of Judah did Zachariah the son of Jeroboam reign over Israel in Samaria six months. **9** And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, as his fathers had done: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. **10** And Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him, and smote him before the people, and slew him, and reigned in his stead. **11** And the rest of the acts of Zachariah, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. **12** This was the word of the LORD which he spake unto Jehu, saying, Thy sons shall sit on the throne of Israel unto the fourth generation. And so it came to pass. **13** Shallum the son of Jabesh began to reign in the nine and thirtieth year of Uzziah king of Judah; and he reigned a full month in Samaria. **14** For Menahem the son of Gadi went up from Tirzah, and came to Samaria, and smote Shallum the son of Jabesh in Samaria, and slew him, and reigned in his stead. **15** And the rest of the acts of Shallum, and his conspiracy which he made, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. **16** Then Menahem smote Tiphshah, and all that were therein, and the coasts thereof from Tirzah: because they opened not to him, therefore he smote it; and all the women therein that were with child he ripped up. **17** In the nine and thirtieth year of Azariah king of Judah began Menahem the son of Gadi to reign over Israel, and reigned ten years in Samaria. **18** And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he departed not all his days from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. **19** And Pul the king of Assyria came against the land: and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to confirm the kingdom in his hand. **20** And Menahem exacted the money of Israel, even of all the mighty men of wealth, of each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and stayed not there in the land. **21** And the rest of the acts of Menahem, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? **22** And Menahem slept with his fathers; and Pekahiah his son reigned in his stead. **23** In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah Pekahiah the son of Menahem began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned two years. **24** And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. **25** But Pekah the son of Remaliah, a captain of his, conspired against him, and smote him in Samaria, in the palace of the king's house, with Argob and Arieah, and with him fifty men of the Gileadites: and he killed him, and reigned in his room. **26** And the rest of the acts of Pekahiah, and all that he did, behold, they are written in the book of

the chronicles of the kings of Israel. 27 In the two and fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah Pekah the son of Remaliah began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned twenty years. 28 And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. 29 In the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglathpileser king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abelbethmaachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria. 30 And Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and smote him, and slew him, and reigned in his stead, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah. 31 And the rest of the acts of Pekah, and all that he did, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. 32 In the second year of Pekah the son of Remaliah king of Israel began Jotham the son of Uzziah king of Judah to reign. 33 Five and twenty years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jerusha, the daughter of Zadok. 34 And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD: he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done. 35 Howbeit the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burned incense still in the high places. He built the higher gate of the house of the LORD. 36 Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 37 In those days the LORD began to send against Judah Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah. 38 And Jotham slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father: and Ahaz his son reigned in his stead.

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 – 7.** The beginning of the reign of Uzziah is fifteen years into the reign of Jeroboam of Israel, as we have seen in the last chapter, not 27 years, as noted in these verses, which would appear to be a copyist error as the two Hebrew letters for 15 and 27 are very close. Uzziah reigns for 52 years, and it is an exceptionally long period of stability, and a blessed time for the nation. As the Chronicles passage makes clear, he restores political and military stability, and economic prosperity under his reign is like that of the days of Solomon. He walks the line in the political arena, keeping out of the power plays in the north involving the Assyrians.

Uzziah built up an officer corps that he could trust of 2600 men and they were his administrators throughout the land. He understands the military challenges he faces and takes appropriate and strong action to deal with the very real threats to Judah. He successfully warred against the Philistines, Ammonites, and Arabians, and his name was respected even to Egypt. He built fortresses throughout the land and rebuilt the defences of Jerusalem, strengthening the towers and also building defensive heavy artillery to be sited upon the towers; great stone and heavy arrow throwing machines were built and sited on each tower for dealing with any attacker. These are counter-siege machines that will not change much in design until the days of Leonardo da Vinci. He was ready for the northern kings and for the Assyrians if they wanted to come to fight against him.

He was ready to fight, and his military preparedness meant he didn't have to too often. His people had peace within their borders while he ruled. He was also faithful to God's Word while he grew in power, and kept the Law, heeding the words of the prophet of his day named Zechariah. 2 Chronicles 26:4-5. Zechariah was a common name at this time, and this is the second prophet we have met so named. The third man we will meet named Zechariah is the author of the biblical book, and works to encourage the temple rebuilders around 520 BC after the exiles have returned to Jerusalem.

The writer of the Chronicles account records the sad truth about our king Uzziah. 2 Chronicles 26:15b – 16. "He was marvellously helped (by God) till he was strong, but when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction, for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense". Now both David and Solomon had offered sacrifices, but only Solomon went so far as to burn incense, and the writer of the King's history makes it clear that he was wrong. 2 Samuel 6:17, 1 Kings 3:4. It is the pagan kings of the north who burn incense upon their altars, usurping the power of their fake priesthoods. Uzziah had no business imitating them, or going beyond what David and Solomon did. 1 Kings 12:33, 13:1-2.

Now it is not absolutely clear whether King Solomon and David even slew the animals for sacrifice, or simply placed their hands upon the animals heads, and then the priests did the work. Given the numbers of animals involved I believe the priesthood did the sacrificing under the king's direction and oversight. Clearly however Uzziah believed he could get away with this act of worship himself. To be there for the offering of sacrifices was one thing, even to do what Solomon did and burn incense upon the great altar was dangerous, but to enter the Holy Place and burn incense upon the golden altar was quite another thing altogether.

Even if Solomon had done this thing, (and he did offer incense, as recorded in 1 Kings 3:3, 9:25, but only upon the great altar, not entering the Temple itself), it was foolishness on the part of Uzziah to place himself in the company of the man who built the Temple, for the Lord forgave Solomon, even though he did wrong here, but there would be judgement for Uzziah for his arrogant act. Solomon was excused for his actions, because they were done as part of the Temple building, and there is no record of him burning incense upon the great altar after the Temple's completion.

It was gross arrogance on Uzziah's part to think he was a match for David or Solomon, and it was foolish arrogance to usurp the role of the priest, rather than magnify the priestly role. His role as king was to honour the Temple system, and draw the people's attention to the significance of what the priests were doing, and as we would put it today, to maintain the separation of church and state.

He is judged by the Lord for his arrogance and struck down with leprosy. His son Jotham must thereafter serve as his regent, with Uzziah living in separate quarters until his death. He dies as a believer, under the forgiving grace of God, but he dies also under the judgement of the SIN UNTO DEATH. Refer again to the biblical passages that teach this, for so many die under this judgment through these terrible years of apostasy. 1 John 5:16-17.

**Verses 8 – 12.** These verses indicate just how “hasty, brutish and short” the lives and reigns of the northern kings were after the death of Jeroboam II. He was the last of the line of Jehu that had received blessing from the prophet of God. Of the six kings that follow Jeroboam II, only one dies of natural causes. Violence and chaos characterise the last years of Israel. The nation remains in the fourth cycle of national discipline until they disappear from history at the hands of the Assyrians in 721BC.

These northern kings continue the calf worship begun by Jeroboam I. This worship was based upon the Aaronic sacrifices, but followed Aaron’s error rather than Moses correction in the Levitical Law. They worshipped Jehovah by name, but ignored the words of Jehovah that ordered them to attend the temple in Jerusalem. All these men worship Jehovah in form and words, but their hearts are far from God. Isaiah 29:13, Matthew 15:8, Mark 7:6.

The Lord seeks reality not hypocrisy. These kings play act with religious faith, and in reality they end up having a form of paganism. The fruit of their worship is the evil in the north and the murder of their kings. Remember Jesus words through all this time period we are studying. Matthew 7:16. “You shall know men by their fruits”. You can tell the truth about the faith of a man by the impact it has upon and within their life and work; evil life work = evil religious heart at the core of their life. Hypocrisy is not just a sign of mental and spiritual confusion, it may be the sign of great danger to genuine faith; it may be the hallmark sign of a satanically controlled person.

**Verses 13 – 15.** Shallum rises to power through open and very public murder of the previous king, and lasts “one full lunar month”. The humour of our writer is visible here, for the consequences of this man’s sin are immediately seen by all within one lunar month. Exactly as he was a slayer he is slain by an even worse gangster and thug. Menahem is a thorough murderer and consolidates his power in the blood of men women and unborn children. Both men have Hebrew names that are mocked by their actions. Shallum’s name is a variation of the greeting, “Shalom”, meaning peace, and friendliness. Menahem’s name means “comforter”, and he is the exact opposite.

The history we are reading is not deliberately a parable, but the story told by these men’s hypocritical names is a commentary upon how evil men can become when they practise the form of religion without its truth and power. We are warned that as the days grow darker towards the end of this present age that men will resemble these kings more and more. 2 Timothy 3:1-9. Let us be more on guard against the “wiles of the devil” than we are! We are often too casual towards the evil and malice of satanic religious systems than is safe to be! Remember Satanic strategies and tactics. Refer to the reflections at the end of the previous chapter. 2 Corinthians 2:11, 11:13-14, James 4:7-8, 1 Pet 5:8-9.

**Verses 16 – 22.** Menahem begins his reign by launching an attack upon the Assyrian area to the north, possibly trying to take Assyrian military pressure off his own borders. His main assault is an attack on a key communications centre; the city on the Euphrates called Tiphshah (Thapsacus). Possibly on the way there, he conducts an extermination campaign from Tirzah, three hours ride to the north of Samaria, right to the banks of the Euphrates. In his violence against any town that did not immediately open its doors to him and deliver plunder, he copied the Assyrians, who ripped apart pregnant women for sport. When a man claims to worship God and does such evils he is well beyond salvation, and so it was with this man and those who followed him.

His mimicking of the Assyrians soon drew the attention of the first of the great conquering Imperial Assyrian kings, referred to as “Pul” here. He responds to this provocative assault and invades the land of Israel. He is only bought off by a severe payment of a silver fine of what was called “tribute money”. Every year after this the nation of Israel must pay this “protection money” to Assyria. Menahem discovers that the problem with being a gangster, is that once you have set the rules, then another, far more powerful gangster, will play by these same rules against you. As we sow, so do we reap! It is a principle that cuts both ways, and Hosea quotes Solomon, and speaks directly to these northern kings about their dangerously evil behaviours. Proverbs 22:8, Hosea 8:7, 10:12, Galatians 6:7-9.

Having paid once to send the Assyrians away he must pay annually to keep them away, and he makes the mistake of paying also for their help at times. Hosea records this in Hosea 5:13, 7:11, 8:9. When we need help the Lord requires that we seek it only from Him; that we never touch the support of evil men, nor take offerings from them from polluted sources. Malachi 1:7-10,12-14, 2 Corinthians 6:17. Remember that through this time the northern kingdom is witnessed to by the Lord through three prophets, Jonah, Amos and Hosea. These wicked gangster-kings have no excuse before the Lord for their on-going evils. They have heard the truth, and they can read the truth in the Mosaic Law, and yet they turned from the truth and followed after their own lusts.

**Verses 23 – 26.** Pekahiah begins and ends the same way as his predecessors, with evil at the start, evil on the way, and evil at the end of his reign. All the time the Assyrians are growing more powerful and threatening, and their tribute demands more overwhelming. The Israelites stick with their golden calf worship and refuse to budge towards the temple in Jerusalem and towards godly worship. One of his generals, Pekah, rebels against Pekahiah and uses forces drawn from the Gilead to unseat him and murder him. His actions are hinted at by our writer but he skips over them with his standard reference to the no longer extant “Chronicles of the Kings of Israel”.

There is nothing more to say about these men, for their deeds are evil and the nation of Israel is on the skids towards its end. The writer doesn't waste words on these evil men, because they are men of no consequence in the Plan of God, for they have opted to join the enemy of mankind and those who join Satan's team will have their wages paid in full, and the wages of their sin is death! Romans 6:18-23, Revelation 20:10-15.

**Verses 27 – 31.** It is the last year of Uzziah's life that Pekah begins his reign of terror in the north. He reigns for twenty years and during this time he enters into relationships with the Assyrians that entwine the destiny of Israel with the malice of Assyria. One of the great Assyrian kings who we know a great deal about is now mentioned as moving against Israel and the Phoenicians of the Lebanon; he is Tiglath Pileser (Pul) and he conquers the East bank of the Jordan and many of the key defended cities of the northern tribal areas of Naphtali and takes all the population there into slavery in Assyrian held lands. It is a preview of things to come. Pekah's life ends as did the man he slew, for he is himself murdered by one of his own generals, Hoshea, who becomes the last king of the northern kingdom around 730 BC.

Each of these men in their fat-headed state of mind believed that they were the one to lead their country to victory over the Assyrian menace, but none of them saw that they were facing defeat due to their spiritual condition. Each of these men becomes worse than the previous one because they are addicted to power and blind to the spiritual reality that has led their nation to disaster.

Before we "tut tut" over them and refer to them as "fools", let us reflect upon our own days. We live in a time when economic catastrophe has struck our world, and warfare with terrorism is almost world wide, earthquakes occur in "diverse places", tsunamis kill tens of thousands, and yet few are looking to the spiritual state of their nation and our world generally to find explanations for these great and terrible events.

We are in the same sort of time as these kings were and the reason is exactly the same. Our own religious systems in the Western World resemble more the Golden calf worship of Israel than the holy, prayerful, and moral worship that has been revealed down the centuries to the people of God. Let us challenge ourselves to be more like the early Church and less like the circus type rock concerts that masquerade as churches today!

**Verses 32 – 38.** We confront another time problem, or copyist error in the dates given for Hoshea and Jotham here. It is difficult to date things accurately at this distance, and with the co-regency of Jotham with his leprous father Uzziah (which may be counted as Jotham's or Uzziah's reign) we have no real way of answering the problems here with absolute accuracy when an event happens or a reign begins. We have both possible copyist error with numbers, and also the fact that at this time the Hebrews used a lunar calendar that does not match with our own at all. It is only when we get to the Babylonian and Persian Period that we have some absolutely fixed dates that we can be sure of to the very day.

So, I cannot provide an answer that I am happy with over this matter of the start and end times for Pekah and Jotham's reign, but I am content with that. If there is textual copyist error here then I am glad that the satanic attack on the text of scripture has only had these minor victories, in simply confusing a few numbers. I for one am able to relax with the Lord in His Word, as I want to see what the writer is saying about these men, not be sure of the day, month and year of an event at this distance. The key point about these last verses, is not being clear about dates we cannot be clear about, but being very clear about the spiritual principles behind these verses.

Jotham rules in the place of his father, and his father's experience after worshipping incorrectly in the temple ensures that Jotham does not enter the temple at all! It may be that he is so terrified of making a mistake in the temple area that he doesn't worship there at all. 1 Chronicles 26:2. This is possible, and may start a pulling back from genuine worship that leads to near disaster in the days of his son and grandson. The people continued in their corrupt worship forms on the high places in his reign. He does rebuild the walls around the fortress of David and he rebuilds the gate of the temple, but does not go through that gate.

This man is a mentor of fake holiness, for he so "fears the Lord" that he withdraws from fellowship. God requires fellowship in holiness, and the "fear of the Lord" must not hinder the believer's approach to the Lord. We are to draw close to the Lord, and we must do so having dealt with sin in our life, or else we will drift steadily closer by the day to the enemy! James 4:6-10, 1 John 1:5-10. Jotham does not address the sin problem, and so he remains in the same state of arrogance as his father Uzziah did. He robs himself and the nation of blessing as a result. With the Assyrians to the north he has no time to be carnal, but he remains in that state, and so the nation drifts downhill spiritually.

Jotham avoids any possibility of angering the Lord by avoiding the issue of following the Law exactly, by simply failing to worship at all, but he does rule reasonably righteously in what he does do. Yet like his father he stops short of calling for the total and systematic revival that the nation requires. As king he is not tasked with leading that revival, but he is tasked with praying for it, and leaving the provision of the prophet to lead it with the Lord. His job was to throw himself before the altar and seek the Lord's guidance and the move of the Holy Spirit upon the nation.

It is exactly the same today with us as godly leaders in the Church Age. If you are a pastor-teacher then you are tasked with the duty to call for, and then lead, revival of the spirit of God's people, but if you have any other spiritual gifting then you are tasked with praying for revival! Jotham fails his people, because he does not see the deep spiritual conflicts and dangers that exist in his day, and he does not enter the Temple and throw himself before the Lord to seek the Lord's path

out of the dangers. The obvious clue to Jotham that revival is required is the entry of the nation of Judah into the fourth cycle of national divine discipline with the state of constant war with the tributaries of Assyria.

Both Israel and Syria have sold out to Assyrian power and they are used by the kings of Nineveh to attack Judah and so weaken it before the Assyrian Army can take over the job. The Assyrians will use these "client states" until they also are destroyed and absorbed into the Assyrian power system. The cunning and malicious dealings of the Assyrians were the ultimate expression of the later philosophies of Sun Tzu and Machiavelli.

They would use their "allies" to "soften up" their future enemies until the time was ripe to destroy them all totally, and at that point they would send in their own armies. Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 27-28. King Ahaz is born into the days when the final acts of the tragedy of Israel's apostasy will be played out with the death or enslavement of hundreds of thousands of people. The cost of their apostasy is terribly high.

### **PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. We must be very careful of straying anywhere near the sin of Uzziah. He offered incense in the Holy Place, upon the Altar of Incense; a role and activity reserved for the priesthood alone. We have many people today seeking the titles of "prophet" and "pastor", and they are ignoring the warnings of scripture not to claim or exercise a gift or role that the Lord has not specifically called you to fulfil. James 3:1. The Bible warns that great roles carry great responsibility, and there is double discipline for the pastor or prophet who fails, let alone the person who is claiming to have these gifts and does not have them at all. Let us walk humbly before our God and be very scared of falling short of the Lord's standards and operating outside His plan for our lives. Let us warn the foolish people of today against the dangers of Uzziah's sin.

2. You will know the spiritual reality of people's belief systems by the impact of their belief system upon their life and work. If the fruit in the life is evil, then their real belief system is pagan and has its origin in Satan's kingdom, not in God's kingdom. No matter what men and women say or do, if they have evil in their lives they are not servants of God. The disciple resembles the master. Remember also, that there have always been more false prophets than true ones since the beginning of time, and this will remain the case until the Lord comes and finally sweeps away all hypocrisy and deception. God hates hypocrisy, and the hypocrite is much more sinister than most recognise today, for their play acting with true faith indicates they may indeed be servants of the enemy, not just confused believers!

3. Let us remember the warnings of Paul to Timothy and flee from evil, and to hold the truth with integrity, for the days are getting darker as I write, and men like the evil kings of the north abound in our business and political worlds. Let us not despair regarding this, for the Lord has warned us of it in advance, but let us redouble our efforts in teaching the truth, that God's people might be protected from evil in these increasingly dark days.

4. Let the Lord's people speak of holiness before the Lord again! Let us challenge ourselves about the structure, form and content of our worship services and ensure that the Lord is magnified and the people taught the truth, and encouraged to worship in the beauty of holiness. Let us be different from the world, not mimicking the world! Let us be very scared believers, and let us be terrified of judgement pastors, for following satanic models of worship rather than biblical ones!

### **REFLECTION UPON SATAN'S STRATEGY AND TACTICS**

1. Believers are warned against him and his tactics. (Ephesians 4:27, 6:11-13, James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:8)
2. We must be ready and alert. (2 Corinthians 2:11)
3. Satan is a deceiver and a counterfeiter. He uses deception - not obviously wrong or sinful - but very subtle changes to the truth (Genesis 3:1). Remember, a counterfeit looks like the original.
4. Satan is described as an "angel of light" - often seeming attractive and "good". (2 Corinthians 11:14)
5. His tactics
  - a) Towards unbelievers.
    - i) to blind them regarding the gospel. (2 Corinthians 4:3, 4, 2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10)
  - b) Towards believers.
    - i) Satan seeks to hinder our growth and witness. (1 Peter 5:8)
    - ii) Satan will mislead into false doctrine and legalism. (1 Timothy 5:14-15)
    - iii) He persuades believers to ignore the will of God through disobedience (Genesis 2:17, James 4:7-8)
    - iv) Satan often attacks our assurance of salvation so that we doubt God.
    - v) Worry (1 Peter 5, 7-9)
    - vi) Fear of death. (Hebrews 2:14-15)
    - vii) He accuses believers of sin both to God and to the believer (using guilt). (Revelation 12:9-10, Job 1:6-11)
    - viii) He takes our focus off Christ by getting eyes on self (1 Corinthians 1:10-11), on people (1 Corinthians 1:12), on things (Hebrews 13:5-6)
    - ix) When we don't allow the Holy Spirit to control our lives, we open ourselves up to Satanic attack. (1 Corinthians 7:5, 2 Corinthians 2:11, 1 Timothy 5:14-15)

- x) The Lord will allow Satan to attack a believer as discipline for unconfessed sin. (1 Timothy 1:20 cf 2 Corinthians 12:7)
- xi) Satan cannot indwell or possess a believer, only beguile them. (Galatians 3:1)
- c) Towards the world in general.
  - i) The World - Satan tries to deceive the nations. (Revelation 20:7-10)

### **JUDGEMENT – THE GREAT WHITE THRONE**

1. The judgement of the Great White Throne is the last judgement. (Revelation 20:11, 15)
2. Only the unsaved are judged at the last judgement as there is no condemnation for Christians. (Romans 8:1)
3. The last judgement occurs at the end of the Millennium. (Revelation 20:7-15)
4. The unsaved are judged according to their works from the Books of Works (Revelation 20:12)
5. The judgement is to show that the Human works of man cannot satisfy the justice of God. God is totally fair and shows that He is only satisfied by “The Good Work” – the death of Christ on the Cross.
6. Having shown the unsaved they have failed to satisfy the holiness of God, the condemned are cast into the Lake of Fire. (Revelation 20:15)

### **NOTES**

**CHAPTER 16****INTRODUCTION**

After over fifty years of political dominance in the area, and the great wealth that Uzziah's policies brought into Judah, there was great prosperity in the land. A ruling class had emerged from the new officer elite, the old elders, and the princes, who had all done very well through the Uzziah years. They were wealthy, prosperous in their business enterprises and acted as if peace was going to last forever. This is always the sin that is associated with prosperity; people become careless of spiritual things because they feel they don't need God's help, as they are doing so well on their own. They forget that it is God alone who has given them this prosperity. They ignored the great Assyrian menace on their northern border and the threats from the Assyrian Empire's "bought men" in Samaria and Damascus.

In this chapter we have the shock that Ahaz also is a "bought man" of Assyria; that he also has established some form of treaty or bond-man relationship with the Assyrian king. All that Uzziah has built up is lost by this foolish and very evil man. He is twenty years old when he begins to reign and reigns for only sixteen years, but they are disastrous, and he dies the Sin Unto Death, under the judgement of God for his great evils. The Lord's judgement is upon those who follow the "prosperity gospel" into the self centred pleasures of paganism. Ahaz and all Israel had only to hear God's Word, but they would not. Deuteronomy 32:15-47.

The evil of foreign alliance or dependency relationship was bad enough, but Ahaz walked into evils that were far worse. He was addicted to pleasure, and to narcissistically pleasurable, feeling based religious experiences. He throws himself into the sexualised and perverted worship of the pagan fertility gods, and the high places are given over to this evil form of satanic religion. Ahaz goes even further, bringing a pagan altar into the temple to replace Solomon's altar, and he offers his own children up in the pagan groves as burned sacrifices! He has many wives and many mistresses and sets aside a number of his children while babies as sacrifices to the satanic gods. We must remember, that pagan gods are demons, and the fruit of demonism is always the abuse, rape and murder of children. Leviticus 17:7, Psalms 106:34-42, 1 Corinthians 10:19-24.

Ahaz walks into disaster, but he does not walk alone, or without God's challenge and God's solution being offered. The Lord sends one of the greatest prophets, Isaiah, into Judah in his reign. Isaiah will minister through his reign, Hezekiah's, and into Manasseh's. Tradition records that Manasseh murders/martyrs Isaiah when Isaiah is an old man, by sawing him in half with a wooden saw. Hebrews 11:36-38. To get the flavour of the reigns of Ahaz and the early days of Hezekiah read Isaiah chapters 1 – 6, and see his condemnation of the "ease of Zion"; the careless way the wealthy were living with the enemy on their very doorstep, and the paganism they toyed with and followed after. They were so besotted with their self centred pleasure that they did not see the spiritual or the military danger they were walking into. The parallel passage in Chronicles is 2 Chronicles 28. Read this passage now before beginning our study in 2 Kings 16.

**2 KINGS 16:1-20**

**1** In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah Ahaz the son of Jotham king of Judah began to reign. **2** Twenty years old was Ahaz when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem, and did not that which was right in the sight of the LORD his God, like David his father. **3** But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel. **4** And he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree. **5** Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to war: and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome him. **6** At that time Rezin king of Syria recovered Elath to Syria, and drove the Jews from Elath: and the Syrians came to Elath, and dwelt there unto this day. **7** So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglathpileser king of Assyria, saying, I am thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me. **8** And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent it for a present to the king of Assyria. **9** And the king of Assyria hearkened unto him: for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried the people of it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin. **10** And king Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglathpileser king of Assyria, and saw an altar that was at Damascus: and king Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the fashion of the altar, and the pattern of it, according to all the workmanship thereof. **11** And Urijah the priest built an altar according to all that king Ahaz had sent from Damascus: so Urijah the priest made it against king Ahaz came from Damascus. **12** And when the king was come from Damascus, the king saw the altar: and the king approached to the altar, and offered thereon. **13** And he burnt his burnt offering and his meat offering, and poured his drink offering, and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings, upon the altar. **14** And he brought also the brasen altar, which was before the LORD, from the forefront of the house, from between the altar and the house of the LORD, and put it on the north side of the altar. **15** And king Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest, saying, Upon the great altar burn the morning burnt offering, and the evening meat offering, and the king's burnt sacrifice, and his meat offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, and their meat offering, and their drink offerings; and sprinkle upon it all the blood of the burnt offering, and all the blood of the sacrifice: and the brasen altar shall be for me to enquire by. **16** Thus did Urijah the priest, according to all that king Ahaz commanded. **17** And king Ahaz cut off the borders of the bases, and removed the laver from off them; and took down the sea from off the brasen oxen that were under it, and put it upon the pavement of stones. **18** And the covert for the sabbath that they had built in the house, and the king's entry without, turned he from the house of the LORD for the king of

**Assyria. 19 Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 20 And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David: and Hezekiah his son reigned in his stead.**

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 – 4.** Once again ignore the debate over date references to the years of each man's reign, and even their ages ascending the throne, as with the co-regencies, and variations of calendars, let alone occasional copyist errors with numbers, we cannot be 100% sure of these references. We are however getting into a time period where we have external references that give us fairly accurate, but still approximate dates, for most events that will be described from here onwards. Remember, the calendars (plural) of the world at this time varied from country to country also, and most were lunar calendars, and so even the lengths of years varied depending on what method the people used, and it changed through the centuries. These are the main reasons why dating and calculating reigns of kings is fraught with difficulties from the outset, but with events from here onwards we are on more solid ground, as we have several records, from widely dispersed places of most major events, and these give us a "navigational fix" on these events.

The key thing to hear from our writer about Ahaz, is that he follows the example of Ahab rather than David his ancestor. He accepts paganism. The great sadness of his decision making is that it may have been influenced by his grandfather's leprosy as a judgement from God, and his father's decision to stay away from the temple. We cannot blame our parents for our decisions as their children, but parents can blame themselves for not setting a good example, and Jotham failed his children by his failure to bring them up in the love of the Lord their God. Jotham didn't love the Lord, he feared that he would be judged as his father Uzziah had been, and so his son grew up away from God, and in adult life he went further and further away. All that the Mosaic Law strongly warned against and forbade in the worship of the Canaanites, this grandson of Uzziah threw him self into. Leviticus 18, 20, Deuteronomy 12, 17, 18.

This man did what no king of Judah had ever done before him; he actually followed after the evils of paganism and sacrificed his own children to the gods. He not only worshipped on the high places, he got involved in the sexualised paganism that was taking over the traditional high places where God had previously been worshipped. The sad thing about religious compromise is that the paganism that it leads to keeps on flowing morally down hill from there, and does not stop. Paganism will lead to every form of depravity known to man over time, and what people would previously have shunned, they will embrace.

This man would have become involved in promiscuity, "sacred" prostitution, homosexuality, bestiality, and finally the unspeakable evil of child sacrifice (the burning of children alive on the red hot arms of the heated metal pagan idol). These evils were gross to a level almost unthinkable to all but the most perverted of men, yet they grew in popularity through this period as a result of the religious compromises that Jotham made, and in the environment of wealth that Uzziah's military strength had provided. Our own modern world where child abuse abounds and sexual perversion is able to be viewed from almost every internet page is moving very close to the level of evil of Ahaz day. Ahaz was extremely religious, but his religion was sexualised paganism and it would lead his nation to the brink of extinction.

**Verses 5 – 8.** Everyone is betraying everyone else at this time in history, and Assyria is playing all these petty and foolish kings off against each other in order to weaken them all, and ensure that they can conquer them all easily when the time is right for total control of the area. It is a cunning game Tiglath Pileser III plays, and it is successful, and Ahaz does an evil thing here in calling on him for help, and his words betray his own earlier devious dealings with the Assyrian Empire. How can he say to this great northern tyrant that he is his "servant and thy son"? The only answer to that question is that he has already made some sort of deal with the Assyrian Empire. The Syrians move quickly to the south of Judah and retake the port of Elath, and the combined army of Syria and Israel then besiege Jerusalem looking for a quick victory. They cannot take the city, for it has been strengthened for seventy years now by Uzziah and Jotham and the counter-siege engines on every tower would have made it hard for the attackers.

Ahaz appeals for help, but his appeal is backed by a serious amount of money, and once again the treasury of the nation is emptied by a weak king, who has spent his time in religious-sexual activity rather than building strength into his army and the great defence system he inherited. He takes all the spare silver and gold from the Temple (as he didn't care much for the Temple anyway) and all the spare gold and silver from his personal treasures and he buys the Assyrian intervention.

The Assyrians were cunning in this demand for additional payments for special favours, for by keeping their next targets poor they kept them unable to buy arms and prepare to resist the Assyrian Army when it would arrive. They kept their future targets in the weakest place possible financially and militarily until they were ready to launch their assault upon them. Tiglath Pileser is likely delighted at the behaviours of all the three foolish kings, for they weaken themselves militarily and financially by their in-fighting and Ahaz opens the door for him to invade the northern states.

**Verses 9 – 13.** Assyrian armies roll into Syria and besiege Damascus. We are not told how the campaign unfolded but it may have gone like this; Rezin is in the south besieging Jerusalem, and so the sudden attack upon Damascus would catch him unawares. The Assyrians seize and burn the city, and carry off its population as slaves. Rezin marches north and is defeated in open battle and killed. Syria then becomes a province of the Evil Empire.

The Israelites are also beaten up badly, but they keep their independence a little longer. Ahaz must visit Tiglath Pileser III in Damascus to pay homage to the great king, and ensure he has paid enough money! While he is in Damascus he

does some sight seeing, and as he is addicted to new and exciting forms of worship, he visits all the bigger temples, and in one he sees an altar that he desires to have. He is a client king, so cannot ask for altars to be trucked down to Jerusalem, so he gets his high priest to do a detailed drawing of it.

Urijah the priest of the temple at the time is happy to organise the building of this altar to replace the great bronze altar of Solomon. This tells us the state of worship in the temple at the time. The priesthood has become as corrupt as the king and his court. This priest is ready to dismantle and melt down many of the items of Solomon's great temple and make room for this new pagan origin, but very decorative altar. The real altar is moved over to the northern side of the temple courtyard, and the new demonic one is placed in front of the steps to the temple of Solomon.

The king is delayed in Damascus a long time at the court of his "benefactor" Tiglath Pileser III, and so by the time he returns to Jerusalem the new altar is in place. None raise a word to complain about this outrage. The Lord wanted a plain altar, so that the emphasis was upon the sacrifice and what it meant, not the altar itself. Exodus 38, 2 Samuel 24:18-25, 2 Chronicles 4:1. Ahaz loved this new decorative and beautiful altar, and upon this new one he offered up all the Levitical sacrifices, but without their being any spiritual significance in them. It was the form of true religion, but without any spiritual reality to it, other than evil.

Notice this clearly pastor. This man was piously offering up all the Levitical sacrifices on a regular basis and the Temple was full when he did it. The new form of worship of Ahaz had the numbers, and sadly full churches is still what many judge to be success in our present world. Let us be very scared of such evil thinking! It is not numbers we are to seek lest we end up with Ahaz, it is holy and God-centred worship we must seek. The people turned up to watch their king and see the new altar with its wonderful relief carving, but their faith was not genuine, for when the sun set they were all to be found (with their king) in the torch lit processions to the groves where they could mix sex and religion in their paganism.

In gambling terms they were all placing their spiritual bets with a dollar each way; supporting the Mosaic Law and paganism simultaneously. Ahaz was a pious hypocrite and so were those who attended the temple services; they were all play acting the genuine expression of faith of their day, but doing it in a way that made a mockery of all that the sacrifices stood for. The Levitical Sacrifices all represented Christ's person and His work, and God's people were to separate themselves from even the hint of paganism.

By using a pagan model for the altar, the sacrifices that were meant to draw people to the reality of the coming Saviour drew people to the pagan gods represented on the relief carving of this evil altar! It was the ultimate perversion of the truth. Ahaz was getting the priesthood to do the things required by the Mosaic Law upon the altar, and being a part of it all himself, but the altar was giving a different message. It was an evil that was even more dangerous than that of Uzziah, or Jotham. Remember, Satan loves men to be religious, just hates them being holy!

Notice the three variations of evil in worship with these three kings:

**Uzziah** worshipped in arrogance and usurped a role that was not his, but he was a believer in the Lord at least. He was arrogant and foolish, but he did genuinely worship, and he accepted his judgement for doing what he was not permitted to do. His son **Jotham** builds up the gate of the temple but doesn't go through it. He appears to be a believer, but in fear won't worship at all in the temple. His father went too far in his worship, but he refuses to worship at all. The next man, **Ahaz**, worships all the time, day and night he is worshipping something, but his worship is pagan at its heart. Ahaz does all the right things on the altar of the temple but he has made the altar itself a pagan one. He perverts true worship, and then joins in sexual and murderous worship of the devils behind the pagan gods every afternoon and evening. In these three men we have the three most common errors in worship.

**Verses 14 – 15.** The brazen altar of Solomon is moved to the north of the new altar, and the new one is used for all the sacrifices of the Mosaic Law and the altar that was dedicated to the Lord is rendered redundant. Now it has been operating for over 200 years now, and so it will look pretty battered about and will have no beauty to it at all, but that was the Lord's point. The Cross, of which the altar spoke, has no beauty to it at all either. The bronze altar was meant to speak of the judgement of sin. Its purpose was to make people lower their eyes to the ground and feel the awfulness of sin, not make them look up at the beauty of the altar!

Paganism is driven by Satan, and he is the driver behind all attempts to make beautiful, things that the Lord wants us to be humbled over, and cast our eyes downwards. Satan wants fun and loveliness, but the Lord wants contemplation of holiness, sinfulness, and the terrible price of the payment the Lord Jesus Christ made upon the Cross for our salvation. Satan wants mankind distracted from the Cross, and his main tool is all forms of pleasant and undemanding religions. John 16:8-11, 1 Corinthians 1:17-18, Hebrews 12:1-3, James 4:7-10.

God wants us to sit with the horror of our sinfulness, feel deeply the terrible cost of the remedy for it, and tearfully acknowledge that debt to the Lord, and then rise to worship and serve Him for the "so great salvation" that He has won for us through the awfulness of the Cross. Ephesians 2:1-5. The brazen altar reminded the people of all these things, and so the satanically inspired Ahaz had to put it in a corner in order to push his pleasant pagan alternative religion.

**Verses 16 – 20.** Urijah the weak priest, does all he is told; he is a true "yes man" for the pagan king. Many today in the main line churches are like Urijah; they foolishly believe that if they change a few things in the church, then the pagans will come in and join in the worship, and that in some way they will be changed by it. These fools do not see, that having changed their worship to get the pagans to join them, there will be no life change within the pagans, just good

fun and big numbers in their services. The sign we are walking in the paths of God is the presence of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the people we influence, not the numbers of adherents we have.

Ahaz didn't stop with his removal of the altar, he also removed the laver from its stand and melted down the base of it. There may be a practical reason for this lowering of the laver onto the ground, but there may also be a sinister reason behind it. He has given away all his valuable metals to the Assyrians to get them to help him against Israel and Syria, and it may be he simply needed the metal. Read the account of Solomon's making of the lavers in 1 Kings 7:23-40, and refer to the Commentary on these items.

It may be that the water reticulation system taking the fresh water to the high laver was broken and that they needed to lower it off its base to ensure pure water flowed for the use of the priests, but it may also be to provide bronze to make the Baal statues that we know Ahaz made. Read in 2 Chronicles 28:2 and see that he specifically made these, and the only metal he has is this metal in the Temple. To do the things he did to these great lavers would have ruined them, and so the only reason can be to cause them to be melted down for the bronze to be used for other things.

He also dismantles the formal and obviously very ornate "Sabbath Stand/Covering" and the ornate work over the gateway that led from the palace into the temple and gives these items to the king of Assyria as presents. Now much debate centres around this verse and what this actually means. As the Assyrians had their own carvers and stone masons and their work has lasted the millennia the last thing Tiglath Pileser III needed was a kit set stone gateway or pavilion!

My suspicion is that the ornate pavilion that was the cover over the throne of the king whenever he entered the temple was made of a frame work of metal, covered by either ornate cedar panels or valuable silk or cotton cloth. Such portable pavilions were used by monarchs throughout this region and were ornate and valuable. Such a pavilion would make a fine present to the conquering king, for it was just such things that were set up on a victorious battlefield, for the king to dispense judgement from upon his captured enemies.

The gateway ("King's entry") may refer to specific decorative panel work that Jotham had completed around and over the gate into the temple from the palace. 2 Kings 15:35. It would all be easily unscrewed and made into a decorative frieze for gifting purposes. These actions indicate just how desperate this man was for the Assyrians favour. He foolishly believed that this meant something good for him, whereas to the cruel Assyrian tyrant, it simply meant Ahaz was a cowardly slave to his emotions and his kingdom was so weak that it needed Assyria. This was the message the evil king of Assyria delighted in hearing, and so he would have arrogantly received the gifts with a wave of his hand and known he had Ahaz and Judah where he wanted them.

The king of Judah lives and dies a pagan, and illustrates the dangers of failing to bring up your children in the discipline and love of the Lord. Proverbs 2:1-15, 3:6, 14:12, 16:25, 19:16, 28:18, Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:21. The writer of Chronicles reveals that they buried him in the city of David but not with David and the other godly kings. 2 Chronicles 28:27. This man did great evil in the moral, religious and political worlds, and the subsequent generations reaped this evil seed sown in his compromises of faith and politics with Assyria.

## **PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. Let us be very scared for our own generation when we survey the world today. A friend of mine said recently, (and this man is a world leader in his field but not a believer), "John, you would almost think that the internet was developed by pornographers, as it is used by them more thoroughly than by any other group". He is right in this, and what we today call pornography, in Ahaz day they called "religion". Let us be praying and calling for revival today! We stand in perilous places.

2. Let us preach directly and strongly against the "ease of Zion" that in today's world is called the "prosperity gospel". It is a great evil, and runs counter to the entire content of prophetic revelation from the beginning to the end of the Bible. God's choicest servants faced suffering, and the prosperity gospel would have you believe they did so because of sin in their life. The truth is, they suffered because they stood for truth against satanic lies! The eleventh chapter of Hebrews corrects this doctrinal error, and we must preach it strongly in our increasingly dark day. It is crucial in our day that we confront this neo-paganism because of the nature of the world in the End Times. People must be warned where all such compromise with truth ends up, and they must know where the world is going! 1 Timothy 4:1-11, 2 Peter 2:1-22.

3. Let us notice and reflect upon the significance of Ahaz's false altar. Let us see that much of what occurs in the church services in many places today, draws people away from holy contemplation upon the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us ensure that nothing we do draws us away from the Lord and prayerfully contemplating Him. Our services are to centre in **HIM**, and anything that distracts us from prayerful meditation and contemplation upon His person and work is to be eliminated! Let us cleanse our services of any pagan elements that interfere or distract the people of God from thinking upon the person, work, and plan of God when they meet together.

4. Let us avoid the worship errors of the three kings, and let us preach about their errors that believers might be warned of ever present danger. Let us not be like Uzziah and usurp a role and position in worship that is not our spiritual gifting and part in the plan of God for our life. Let us not avoid the worship service as Jotham did, and "forsake the assembling together" that is God's plan for godly fellowship for His people. Let us beware of pagan elements entering into our services and leading away the hearts of the people into self centeredness. The main purpose of worship is to

draw closer to the Lord in holy and concentrated contemplation and meditation upon His Person and Work! Let us ensure nothing interferes with that in our services.

5. Compromises of faith lead to compromises in morals, finances and politics. The entire nation suffered at the hands of the Assyrians due to their following of their evil king into the paganism he marketed to them. The people were willing worshippers of the evils their king supported, and they would die for their own sins in these matters, but their king opened the flood gates of apostasy. As leaders we are held personally responsible for setting a bad example, but each person is also personally responsible for their decision making. Let us then preach the truth with vigour, and so ensure that all who die are without excuse before the Lord. 2 Timothy 4:2.

### **REFLECTION UPON THE SATANIC NATURE OF RELIGION**

1. Satan's religion is a humanly acceptable one: no sin, no judgement, no Saviour and no Hell. Satan appears as an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:13-19,26)

2. Many pastors in the churches are servants of Satan's policy, knowingly or unknowingly, by preaching falsehoods. (Isaiah 30:12, Jeremiah 2:8, 2 Peter 2:1-10)

3. Satan's strategy towards unbelievers is to keep them blinded to the gospel. (2 Corinthians 4:3-4, Colossians 2:8, 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10)

4. Satan's strategy towards believers is:-

- a) To confuse by false teaching. (Matthew 7:15, Romans 16:18)
- b) To appeal to pride. (2 Corinthians 10:12)
- c) To promote idolatry. (Habakkuk 2:18,19)
- d) To promote legalism. (1 Timothy 1:7-8)

5. Satan's policy calls for counterfeit faith:-

- a) Counterfeit gospel. (2 Corinthians 11:3-4)
- b) Counterfeit pastors. (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)
- c) Counterfeit communion. (1 Corinthians 10:19-21)
- d) Counterfeit doctrine. (2 Timothy 4:1)
- e) Counterfeit righteousness. (Matthew 19:16-28)
- f) Counterfeit way of life. (Matthew 23)
- g) Counterfeit power. (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10)
- h) Counterfeit gods. (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4)

### **NOTES**

**CHAPTER 17****INTRODUCTION**

As we have seen many times in our study of 2 Kings, the judgement of God upon His people is God's "strange work". Isaiah 28:19. In the chapter before us the writer takes time out from the story to explain the Lord's final judgement upon the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The Lord takes no delight in judging His people with the FIVE CYCLES OF NATIONAL DIVINE DISCIPLINE, Leviticus 26, but mankind is placed upon the earth to be productive for their creator.

We are not here just to please ourselves, but to please the one who called us, saved us, and desires for us to serve Him. We are born into the ANGELIC CONFLICT and we either join ourselves wholeheartedly to the Lord, or we will end up in the enemy of man's camp. We are called to follow the Lord, and we follow the example He set in this matter. John 8:28-32, James 4:7-10.

As we adopt this "servant-follower-disciple" model as believers, and a "servant leadership" model as pastors, we "imitate Christ". This is our call while we live upon the earth. The only real alternative to service and worship is discipline and judgement; there is no third option! 1 Corinthians 9:22-27, 1 Thessalonians 3:12 – 4:2, 2 Timothy 2:1-15. Through the prophet Isaiah, as through the Lord later (as recorded in John 15:1-17), God made it clear to the people of Israel and Judah that they were required to be spiritually productive for Him, and that if they were not, then they would lose their tenure of the land of Promise. Isaiah 28:14-29.

Wealth and power were the snares that unhinged most of the kings and their prosperous people. As the people of Judah and Israel grew wealthy, and perceived themselves to be militarily strong, they left their whole hearted worship of and obedience to the Lord, and they went into pleasure centred activities. As a result, they slid slowly but systematically into moral sins, and finally into overt and finally fatal evils. The challenge for all believers through the ages, is to walk the path of the Lord's choosing for them in humility, obedience, and contentment.

Our biggest test is always the prosperity test, for when we have the opportunity to be distracted by wealth and power, it is easy to wander off the "narrow path" the Lord has called us to. Matthew 7:13ff. All physical things we save up here on earth are left behind for others to use, build upon, give away, or lose. In light of the temporary nature of our stay upon the earth, let us value the ETERNAL LIFE, and REWARDS AND CROWNS, of the Lord, not the temporary things of man. Psalms 49:16-17, Proverbs 15:16-17, 33, Ecclesiastes 2:18-19, Philipians 4:10-13, 1 Timothy 4:8, 6:6-10.

A good Pastoral Theology introduction to this reflective chapter, (and to 2 Chronicles 36:13-21, where there is a similar reflective piece) is to do a word study in your concordance of two words, "Disciple(s)", and "Follow/followers". As you look up each and every verse where these words occur you will build up the correct biblical picture of just how important these concepts are to the Lord, and how vital it is that every believer becomes a true disciple and follower of the Lord. Let us read this chapter before us, and the parallel passage in 2 Chronicles 28, with a careful and prayerful spirit, so that the Lord's sadness at the events described here might be felt and applied into our own hearts and lives.

The Lord desires to bless us, and it is only our self-centeredness, disobedience, pride, and foolishness, that hinders that blessing from being enjoyed now and forever. Let us focus on this in our life this very day. Let us, in the words of the old hymn, "fix our eyes upon Jesus, and look full in his wonderful face, so that the things of earth grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace."

**Hebrews 12:1-3.** *"1. Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."*

**2 KINGS 17:1-41**

**1** In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah began Hoshea the son of Elah to reign in Samaria over Israel nine years. **2** And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him. **3** Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant, and gave him presents. **4** And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea: for he had sent messengers to So king of Egypt, and brought no present to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year: therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison. **5** Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. **6** In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. **7** For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods, **8** And walked in the statutes of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. **9** And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the LORD their God, and they built them high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city. **10** And they set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree: **11**

And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as did the heathen whom the LORD carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger: 12 For they served idols, whereof the LORD had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing. 13 Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. 14 Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God. 15 And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them. 16 And they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. 17 And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. 18 Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only. 19 Also Judah kept not the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made. 20 And the LORD rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until he had cast them out of his sight. 21 For he rent Israel from the house of David; and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king: and Jeroboam drave Israel from following the LORD, and made them sin a great sin. 22 For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them; 23 Until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day. 24 And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof. 25 And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the LORD: therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which slew some of them. 26 Wherefore they spake to the king of Assyria, saying, The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land. 27 Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, Carry thither one of the priests whom ye brought from thence; and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the manner of the God of the land. 28 Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD. 29 Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt. 30 And the men of Babylon made Succothbenoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, 31 And the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burnt their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. 32 So they feared the LORD, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places. 33 They feared the LORD, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence. 34 Unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the LORD, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances, or after the law and commandment which the LORD commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel; 35 With whom the LORD had made a covenant, and charged them, saying, Ye shall not fear other gods, nor bow yourselves to them, nor serve them, nor sacrifice to them: 36 But the LORD, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and a stretched out arm, him shall ye fear, and him shall ye worship, and to him shall ye do sacrifice. 37 And the statutes, and the ordinances, and the law, and the commandment, which he wrote for you, ye shall observe to do for evermore; and ye shall not fear other gods. 38 And the covenant that I have made with you ye shall not forget; neither shall ye fear other gods. 39 But the LORD your God ye shall fear; and he shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies. 40 Howbeit they did not hearken, but they did after their former manner. 41 So these nations feared the LORD, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day.

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 – 5.** The writer is writing at least a hundred years after the events he will describe here, and he uses this chapter to explain how the Samaritans came to dwell in the northern kingdom's area. They still survive even until the 21<sup>st</sup> century of our own era. A small group of them remain in the general area of ancient Samaria today and their ancestry traces back to the days of the Assyrian Empire in the late 600s BC. The tragic drama of the loss of Israel begins with the anointing of Hoshea as the last of the gangster-kings of the northern kingdom of Israel.

Ahaz in the south, has only four more years to rule when Hoshea takes the throne, so the cataclysmic events that Ahaz unleashes by inviting the Assyrians into the land unfold in his last years. He likely dies regretting the consequences of his actions, but regret is a bitter and useless thing, for it changes nothing. Without being aware of it, Ahaz is the hand of God in this, for the north and he are being judged for their persistent evils through the swords of the hard Assyrians.

Hoshea reigns in evil, but he is not evil like those who went before him, and the writer wants us to see that this man is different, but that difference does not save him, for it is not a spiritually significant difference. What was needed was genuine faith in the real God over all the earth, but this man falls well short of that. He has heard of the words of the northern prophets, Amos, Jonah and Hosea, and he has the words of Isaiah and Micah reported to him, for they ministered through his reign. He has the opportunity to repent, but it must be wholehearted repentance, not polite "nod to God" actions. He stumbles towards disaster, when he could have bowed before God and been saved.

He ignores God's holy demands upon his life and he plays politics trying to balance one evil power (Assyria) by using another evil power (Egypt). Rather than dealing with the crisis by deepening his spiritual life, he deepens his political scheming. He loses the political, and then the military battle, and his life into the bargain. Several hundred thousand people either die or become slaves for the rest of their lives in foreign lands as a result. The cost of sin is always great; the wages of sin is truly death! Romans 6:23.

Hoshea faces one of the great warrior kings of Assyria; the first of a line of ruthless conquerors. This king, Shalmaneser, has an unstable court, and the historian's suspicion is that he was assassinated by poisoning. The apparent weakness and instability of the court is no clue to anything however, for the Assyrian court was a 'Darwinian' place. It was a ruthless place where only the strongest survived, and that did not lead to weakness, but to greater strength. These kings were gangster-kings on a far greater scale than Hoshea could ever have been and their resources were far greater. They could call upon the wealth and manpower of what is now part of Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and parts of Turkey and Arabia.

Hoshea needed to accept he was well and truly beaten and come to terms with that reality, but he was proud and tried to find a way to unhinge and slay the giant. Only God does that, and he would do anything except turn to God. He initially became the servant of the king of Assyria, and received his kingdom back as a client kingdom. This involved paying annual taxes, as "protection money". While the money flowed to Nineveh he was safe, but if he stopped paying then the Assyrians would come and kill and enslave everyone. The rules of the Evil Empire were simple; if you play by their rules you live, and if you break them, you die!

Hoshea paid the tribute money for a few years but then tried to organise rebellion by enlisting the king-pharaoh of Egypt's help. Isaiah will be particularly scathing of anyone who trusts in Egyptian help at this time, for the Lord has made it clear, there will be no help whatsoever from Egypt, and they will prove a mirage, not a saviour. Isaiah 19, 20, 30, 31. In Isaiah 36:6-9, the prophet describes the pharaoh of Egypt as a broken staff, so that if anyone leans on him for support, then the staff will break and pierce the very hand that has leaned upon him.

Only by leaning upon the Lord and casting themselves upon the Lord alone will the people be saved. Some from the north will flee to the south and do that very thing, forsaking their paganism and accepting the temple worship of their ancestors again. They will be delivered as the saved remnant of Israel, all the rest will perish or go into slavery.

Hoshea tried to work a deal with So, Pharaoh of Egypt, but it failed and the Assyrian king "invited" him to Nineveh to discuss the matter, and Hoshea went, thinking his deception was not known, and walked into the trap. He was jailed for the rest of his life and died in prison in Nineveh. Meanwhile the new king of Judah, Hezekiah had re-established Temple worship and invited all the people of the north to join their brethren in the south and worship the Lord for the first Passover in many decades. Many took up the opportunity and the northern believers went south, and many stayed in safety there. 2 Chronicles 30:1-13. Read the words of the invitation, for Hezekiah has heard the prophet's Micah and Isaiah, and he believes them. He knows that their words will be fulfilled and Israel and Judah also will be judged for their sins. Isaiah 28:1-8.

Even though some of the "drunkards of Ephraim" mocked the invitation, all the people who were believers in the Lord responded, and so were delivered from the Assyrians through their worship. Hoshea's people who remained in their cities did not fare any better than their king, for the king of Assyria invaded the land and besieged Samaria around the very time that Hezekiah called the faithful from amongst them to join the Passover celebration. Believers were provided with their one way of escape and all who responded and worshipped were delivered in the south, while the north was destroyed. No Israelites were left in the north after 720 BC! At least 500,000 people had "disappeared"!

**Verses 6 – 12.** The city of Samaria was very strong and held out for three hard fought years against the toughest army in the world at that time, but fell finally in 721 BC, its walls in ruins, and with disease, and death stalking its streets well before the Assyrians broke in. The northern kingdom was snuffed out and its surviving people were carried away to the far lands of the Assyrian Empire. They were settled in Halah, Habor, Gozan, and into the Median territory. Look up these places in a biblical encyclopaedia and you will discover that they are all places in the later Medio-Persian Empire.

The Lord's grace is seen in these locations, for when the children of Judah are allowed to return in 535BC the Medio-Persian Empire will control all these places and allow the descendants of these people to return to Israel also if they wanted to. Even in the worst times and places the grace and mercy of the Lord still operated and many were delivered in these extreme situations. Only in heaven will we discover how many of these people met the Lord in real faith through the terrible things they suffered.

The writer now spiritually explains the reality behind the awful military and human disaster that unfolds for the hundreds of thousands of Israelites in the north. We have no idea of how many died in this three year campaign of invasion and extermination, but it would have been hundreds of thousands, with tens of thousands being taken into captivity in the end. The Assyrians enjoyed killing their captives slowly and sadistically and would give any SS storm trooper of the Nazi era a run for his money in sheer sadistic evil.

They broke the morale of many besieged cities by taking their captives from one area and taking them to another where their relatives were still holding out against them. They then staked the captives out on the ground outside the besieged walls. They then killed the besieged people's relatives slowly, just outside the walls. Why did the Lord allow these people

to execute such a judgement upon Israel that they did? The writer records that the Lord was left without any other choice after over 200 years of total rejection of His Word and will. All the specific warnings against idolatry and apostasy in the Mosaic Law had been ignored, and the godly prophets either insulted or murdered.

The Israelites had refused the smooth path, and so were sent along the rough path of discipline. They did “secret” pagan worship, thinking that because it was after dark and hidden away from prying eyes, that all would be well. Like the pornographer of today who works alone in his study, just with his computer, these people did evil under cover, but all was seen by the Lord. They did wicked things, and all they did was specifically forbidden. Hebrews 10:31, 12:28-29.

The result was the people who were sent against them were even more wicked than they had become; they reaped what they had sown. The extent of the Assyrian evil against them was simply a reflection of the evils they had done to each other and to their brethren in Judah over the previous years. All the evils their armies had done in Judah were done to them with interest. The biblical message is clear; as we weigh out to others, so it will be weighed back to us!

**Verses 13 – 17.** It was not just the prophets who we know, and have names for, that testified against Israel and Judah through this period of massive apostasy. There were many prophets and seers who spoke ceaselessly the truth of the Lord about what the people were doing through their idolatry and other evils. The voices of all these people were heard in the land but there was minimal response. There was not enough response to save the nation, but there was enough positive response to save those who were positive!

The believers who wished to be were saved from the catastrophe that unfolded, but they had to walk away from their homes, communities, neighbours, and families and join God’s people in the south. Separation was called for and that is a hard thing to follow through on when it means moving away from all you have known to that point. Test yourself and your Christian friends on this matter. Would the company of other spiritual believers in another country be preferable to your own family, friends and nation if they were not spiritual?

The message of the prophets and seers was simple and repetitive; they called for the rejection of paganism in all its forms and a thorough return to the practises detailed in the Mosaic Law. The issue was that the people “would not hear”, and they went further into evil, and “hardened their necks”. This is an interesting and psychologically accurate phrase to describe the internalised stress of a person who is determined to do a wrong thing. As the stress reaction deepens the body produces a cortico-steroid called Cortisol, and this stress hormone tightens the muscles of the neck, shoulders, and stomach and bowel. A “stiff necked person” is a stressed person; and in this context it is a person in rebellion against their Lord.

These people rejected the God of their fathers and accepted the gods of the pagans that surrounded them and who had been defeated by Joshua’s armies. It was a dumb thing to accept gods whose power had been proven in battle to be inferior to the God of Israel. Their hard-necked attitude will be a feature of Hebrew rebellion until the entire nation goes into Babylonian Captivity in 586 BC. Stephen will refer to this mental attitude of their ancestors and be stoned to death for his truth telling. Acts 7:51-60.

These people followed after “vanity” and they reaped the results of all pride based belief systems. They entered Satan’s religious system at this point and the only way from that decision point is straight down to Hell itself. The Satanic belief systems are evil and these people got into the regular practise of worship in the “high places”, and these places became more given over to idolatry and sexualised religion as time went on, and finally the great evils of child sacrifices were practised there. They also got involved in witchcraft and all forms of divination and occultic practises.

They literally sold themselves to evil and would have nothing to do with God and the purposes of God for them. God wanted them whole heartedly sold out for Him but they wholeheartedly sold themselves out to evil. There was no alternative by the end except total judgement. God calls us to a holy separation from even the very appearance of evil, but these people embraced evil. “Flee” is the call to all believers in relation to evil. 1 Corinthians 6:18, 10:14, 1 Timothy 6:11, 2 Timothy 2:22, James 4:7.

**Verses 18 – 23.** The Lord is angry with believers who reject the truth. Let us sit with this concept for a second and feel its power. God gets angry, and His anger is at those who select evil rather than good for their life work. The writer identifies that the tribe of Judah alone survived, and that is true as an organised tribe, but remember, Benjamin and Levi are with them in their area, and they also survive. Just as Benjamin and Levi survive by joining with Judah, so do members of all the northern tribes (they become from this point onwards – member of Judah = “Jews”). They lose their old identity and take on the identity of their southern relatives and so are saved. We also are saved the same way today; we were once children of disobedience, but we join ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith and become new creatures.

The saddest thing for our writer is recording that the southern kingdom of Judah also did many of the things that led their northern cousins to disaster. The evils of the north also affected the people of the south. Evil does not remain stationary; if it’s not stopped many get infected by its influence. Satanic religions go in cycles and are like fashions, and the “fashion” of the day at this time was the pagan worship of the Canaanites and the people of the south were affected by it all, just as their northern relatives were. The only remedy against evil is wholehearted devotion to truth and goodness, and the people of Israel and Judah were slow to see this, and both nations had to go into captivity to have these evils purged from them.

Even in the last days of Judah the people of Israel were still away from their northern land and the Samaritans were there. It would only be after 535 BC, and the Edict of Cyrus the Great that they would be allowed to return with the others, and few of them it would appear took the opportunity to return. Their compromise religion first sapped their spiritual strength and morality, and then their very identity itself.

**Verses 24 – 28.** The Assyrians were the first to really understand genocide and apply it thoroughly by a combination of military extermination and racial mixing of survivors. They wanted to breed a new race of Assyrian slave-client peoples who would owe their allegiance to the Empire only, and this is how the Samaritans came about as a new people group. Ezra tells us that it was finally Esarhaddon, the conqueror of Egypt, around 680 BC who consolidates his power in Israel by fully establishing new colonies of these mixed race people there. Ezra 4:2.

They were a mix of people from many diverse places. 1. Babylon. 2. Cuthah, which is north-east of Susa in Persia. 3. Ava, which is the old kingdom of Hebeh, on the Euphrates, destroyed by the Assyrians around the time of Esarhaddon. 4. Hamath is the old town also called Epiphania, and is on the Orontes River in Syria. 5. Sepharvaim or Sippara, the southern most town on the Euphrates in southern Mesopotamia. These five places are widely separated and binding such a diverse group together was a real challenge to the Assyrian governors and they tried to do it by a synchronistic religion.

The new settlers settled the destroyed towns and cities and rebuilt them, just as the Israelites had done to the Canaanite towns 800 years before, when they entered the land and took the Canaanite towns. These foreigners were just as pagan as the Israelites had been, and had no respect for the Lord of the Land, and so the Lord sent in the wild animals that had been hunting freely there until their arrival. The Asiatic lions ate a number of people and they panicked and sent to the Assyrian governors and asked for help to learn about the God of Israel, so that they do not make more religious mistakes.

The Assyrians found a priest of the old calf worshipping cultic centres of Bethel or Dan and sent him to help the new settlers. Their thinking is typical pagan thinking, and they simply wish to find out the magic formulas that they need to use to satisfy the “god of the land” and so not have trouble. They want to simply add in Jehovah to their own pantheon. This is a continuation of the synchronistic religion that led Israel to disaster.

One of the priests of the cult of the Golden Calf was sent from his place in the captivity and he taught the Samaritans about Jehovah, and a new variation of the Mosaic system of worship enters into the Samaritan religious spectrum. Finally their form of worship will utilise the Mosaic first five books of the Bible and reject the rest. This tells us that the priest who came must have had a reasonable copy of the Mosaic Law, for that becomes their Bible through the centuries. It tells us also that the Israelite exiles still had the books of Moses at least, and that they were being taught from them, and their priests were still able to be identified, and were still working with the Law to instruct the exiles.

They were cultists in their Golden Calf worship, but they must have kept some elements of the faith of Israel pure, and perhaps there was a genuine revival of faith in their exile. We will only know the answers to these things in heaven when we meet these people, if they are there! Like all cultic and mixed groups, the Samaritans will finally claim to be the pure followers of Moses, and reject the Jews as those who fell away from the truth and were exiled from the land! The separation between the two peoples will be broken down only by the Lord and the disciples. John 4:1-42, Acts 8:25. Those not saved by meeting the Lord continued on their separatist way, and several hundred still live in Nablus and Jaffa today, meeting in their own synagogues.

**Verses 29 – 34.** The Samaritans did not stop their paganism however, and they rebuilt not only the cities of the Israelites but their high places also. In these now totally pagan places they set up statues of their gods and worshipped them there. Each of the new colonists had hidden away their old gods in their luggage when they came to Samaria, and these idols were all brought out and found a new home in the old high places of apostate Israel. One of the groups even practised the same abominable child sacrifices that the Israelites had fallen to.

They still “feared the Lord (Jehovah)”, in the sense that they did certain things the priest had taught them to acknowledge Jehovah God, but their fear was that of the devils; they trembled but still refused to serve the Lord in spirit, holiness, and in truth. Our worship must be more than the devils! They know the truth and can “tick the boxes” on all the statements of a decision card, but they will not worship and serve the Lord who is God over all. James 2:19.

The writer records that these people have carried on in their paganism to his own day and that they will not change their behaviours, but follow after all their paganism, just tacking on the name Jehovah as one of their “gods”. Their religion is pure satanic evil and their tenure of the land was accepted only as it was a judgement of the Lord. The returning exiles will push them steadily into small enclaves through the years and Jewish settlers would reclaim much of the traditional Promised Land by the days of the Lord’s journeying through the land.

A small enclave of Samaritans would be a thorn in the side of the Jewish people until the Great rebellion of 67-70AD when they would be seriously attacked by the Jewish rebels but left alone by the Romans. The emperor Hadrian did persecute them seriously and the later Christian Emperors also persecuted them and drove many to accept Christianity, at least nominally. Their veneration for the five books of Moses means they are a group that may yet play a part in the dramas of the last days in Israel, but like their Jewish neighbours they face the reality of accepting the words of Zechariah. Zechariah 12:10 – 13:9.

**Verses 35 – 41.** Our writer reminds us of the words of the Lord through Moses to all the people of Israel. The Jewish people were not to bow to any other god, serve them in any way, nor sacrifice anything to any fake god. They were to see paganism for what it was; the religion of the devil and his fallen angels who were behind every god. The God who had delivered Israel was alone to be worshipped and served in the land and out of it.

The Lord God alone was worthy of fear/respect, worship and sacrifice. Other gods were not to be feared for the Lord alone was God above all. God alone would deliver them from their enemies, not any fake gods, nor any foolish politicking by stupid politicians. These Samaritans “feared the Lord”, but continued to add in other gods besides Him and so their worship was pointless and empty. We are to have no gods beside the Lord alone. Nothing is to be added to genuine faith, or it is no longer genuine faith. Jude 1-5.

### **PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. How highly do we value spiritual realities above the social and cultural bonds that keep us in our communities? Are you ready to leave all that you hold dear and all that you have known and head in a different direction as the Lord may lead? What do you seek in this life believer? Do you seek a pleasant life and quiet retirement, or do you seek to walk the path of God wherever it leads? Open yourself to the path of God for your life and receive His blessing and eternal rewards. Value His “Well done” ahead of anything that the world offers off His path.

2. We are either productive for the Lord or we are His enemies upon the earth. In a battlefield there is no neutral option; you are with one side or the other. In the ANGELIC CONFLICT there is no third option to either standing for the Lord God, or with Satan. Let us throw ourselves into our obedience, not just play with spiritual realities, as if it is a game. It is a battlefield believer, not a sports field where everyone gets a prize.

3. True faith is to be kept pure from all pagan elements and from all pagan gods. While modern man does not set up obvious idols, he often sets up things that are worshipped that are not worthy of worship. Let us worship the Lord, devoting our time and energy to pleasing the One who gave all for us, not wasting our time on things that do not matter.

### **REFLECTION UPON THE REALITY OF ETERNAL LIFE**

1. **DEFINITION:** Life belonging to the ages (Greek word *aionios*). This is the life of the believer who had a beginning in time but whose life will continue through the other side of death into the infinite future.

2. Mankind were created for eternity. God's purpose was to create a being to enjoy fellowship with forever. 2 Peter 3: 9.

3. The issue for entry into eternal life is faith in Christ. The choice for man is clearly stated in John 3:36, 5:24, Acts 13:46, Galatians 6:8, Matthew 25:6.

4. Those who are serious about life and concerned about death ask about it and seek eternal life with God with all their hearts. Matthew 13:40-43, 19:16, Mark 10:17, Luke 10:25, 18:18.

5. The Lord's words provide the answer to the questions about eternal life. John 6:68, Romans 5:20, 21, 6:22, 23. It is the Lord who gives eternal life, John 5:39, 40, 12:50.

6. The Lord gives eternal life to those who believe on Him - John 10:28, 17:2. The door to fellowship and all that goes with it is opened by faith in Him as Saviour - John 3:15,16, Acts 13:48, John 6:40, 47. “To Eat His Flesh and Drink His Blood” is graphic language to picture His work and our need to appropriate it for ourselves - John 6:54, 4:14.

7. While it may only be fully known in heaven the believer may grasp a glimpse of eternal life here and now by way of anticipation and relationship. Knowing God is a glimpse of eternal life now, John 17:3, and fellowship with Him is the joy of every believer now and forever. 1 John 1:1-4, 5:10-12, 20, 1 Timothy 6:12, 19.

8. Eternal life is received in full at the resurrection/rapture when we all receive our new bodies from the Lord. Rewards are received then to enjoy with the Lord forever. We are all urged to live each day with the eternal life perspective in mind, thinking of our place with the Lord forever. Matthew 19:29, 30, Mark 10:29-31, John 12:25, John 4:36, Romans 2:6,7.

9. Eternal Life is the believers hope, associated with the Rapture and Resurrection, and should be on our mind through each day, as it sets us apart from the unbelievers who have no such hope. Philippians 3:20, 21, Titus 1:2, 2:13, 3:7, 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 4:13, 1 Peter 1:3,

10. The assurance of eternal life is grounded in the promise of God given through Christ. 1 John 2:24,25, 1 John 5:13-15.

**CHAPTER 18****INTRODUCTION****The “Last days” of Judah, and Israel’s destruction – The Great Pastoral Example of the Young King Hezekiah**

Hezekiah and the prophet of God Isaiah, who walks with him through his twenty nine year reign, see the last great revival of the history of the Southern Kingdom of Judah (there is a minor one under Josiah 100 years later but it doesn't last). This king is the best since David, and he is equally flawed. Isaiah the prophet leads the people back to God in spirit and in truth in the years 724-720, and 703-701 BC and so the Southern Kingdom is saved from the invasion of Shalmaneser and Sennacherib who otherwise would have destroyed Judah, as the latter finally destroyed Israel in 721 BC.

In later years, under King Josiah, there is another brief burst of spiritual life, through the ministry of Jeremiah, but it does not save the land that time. The revival under Isaiah briefly restores spiritual life, but 90 years later under Jeremiah it sadly does not go deep enough, and the paganism that has become dominant by this time, re-emerges. Even Isaiah's revival doesn't last long. Isaiah will be murdered by Hezekiah's own son Manasseh within a few years of the old king's death, and 100 years later Jeremiah will spend his last years in the doomed city under arrest.

We enter now the last days of the Southern Kingdom, and even though they have seen their northern brethren enter exile and lose their land, the people of the south remain casual in their commitment to God. It is said by psychologists that one of the hallmark signs of what is called “Narcissistic Personality Disorder” is that the people involved have a sense of “entitlement”, in spite of any facts they confront. In the land of Judah the people are carelessly content, feeling entitled to relax and enjoy themselves.

They expect the best, and they expect the best to continue with no spiritual effort from themselves. The sad thing about the people of the Southern Kingdom is that they expected God's blessing because they were close to David's city, and were worshipping in Solomon's Temple. Now they did have what the Bible recognises as “blessing by association”, but such blessing only continues as subsequent generations embrace the spirituality of the blessed ancestor.

These people followed Solomon's errors, not his early godliness, and so all they could expect was his kingdom's judgement. As I have noted before, they had a “lucky rabbit's foot” type of faith, believing that while they had these great buildings around them that belonged to godly ancestors, they were lucky people, and safe from harm. They believed they could actually get away with whatever sins they desired to commit because they had the Temple there.

The Temple was their “good luck charm”, but such faith is a delusion, as is any faith not anchored in godly worship and service of the Lord God. The parallel passage to this chapter is 2 Chronicles 29-32. Read these four chapters now, as the priestly writer of the Chronicles explains the great revival in far more detail than the author of Kings. Once we see the spiritual actions of the king and people we will understand the political story that much better.

Notice in the 2 Chronicles Chapter 29 account the following points:

1. Hezekiah is a young man with a godly mother and grandfather, and he follows their faith, not the faith of his father. Let us not under-estimate the faith and prayers of a mother or father, and the prayers and examples of godly grand-parents. Verses 1-2.
2. The first thing he does is re-open the door to the Temple that his father locked up. He wants an open door for worship, for himself and his people. Revival begins with the prayerful deep desire for worship of the Lord for who He is. Verse 3.
3. He briefs the priesthood and Levites about what he wants done, and orders them to sanctify themselves in accordance with what he knows the Law of Moses required. He does not expect them to be ready, or even know their own text book, but he tells them what is required in simple words and orders them to obey the Lord and him. Verses 4 – 5. He has been studying God's Word for years by the time he takes over the kingdom. He is ready!
4. He is absolutely clear as to why disaster has come upon Judah, and in his words we see just how much pain and anguish has been caused, with even some of the wives of the priests taken as hostages/captives to Assyria. He takes personal responsibility for the evils done by them all, and he leads them by example. He publicly confesses the sins of their fathers, and confronts their own spiritual slackness that has caused all this. Verses 6 – 10.
5. He calls them as priests to their ancient duty, and challenges them to stand for righteousness, and resume their assigned roles before the Lord. Verse 11. This man understands **CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**,
6. The filth of paganism and compromise religion literally filled the Temple. It took seven full days to clean the pagan garbage out to just reach the porch alone! Verses 12 – 17.
7. The pagan items were to be totally cleaned out, and destroyed by burning, away from the site of the Temple. God's worship was not to be contaminated by paganism of any sort. It took sixteen days to cleanse out all the garbage, and when it was all done the Levites reported to the king the successful completion of their task. They have worked through what would have been the Passover season, but the job is done. There are times when we have to work hard through what would otherwise be a holy day, and if we are required to do such things, then we ought to do it with vigour, and save up our worship for the end.

8. The king understood the importance of open confession of public sin, and he offers up the sacrifices for all the people of Israel and of Judah. He is inclusive, opening the door to the salvation and restoration of the northern peoples. Just a few years before their destruction Hezekiah becomes the means for their salvation and deliverance by this act of sacrifice. Verses 18 – 24. He has positioned himself to be a missionary-evangelist by this action.
9. Having dealt with the corporate sins of the two nations, Hezekiah instructed the Levites and the singers to begin Davidic worship using the Psalms of David and Asaph that make up our Psalter. Praise and worship is only bone fide when sin is covered, and Hezekiah gets the order right, and opens the door then for individuals to bring their own personal sacrifices to set their own lives individually in order. Verses 25 – 33.
10. He is flexible in the administration of the sacrifices. As there are not enough priests to conduct all the sacrifices, the Levites assist them. This is a special event and so special provision is made without getting tied up in legalism. Verses 34 – 35.
11. The king receives the fruit of the Holy Spirit as he worships. He achieves all this very quickly (within twenty days of taking the throne!) but the reason is, he has done this with all his heart, and he has used his waiting time as regent to prepare himself for this action. It is this whole hearted (and pre-prepared) worship that the Lord seeks from us all. Verse 36. All good leaders prepare for rulership while they wait in the wings!

Notice in 2 Chronicles chapter 30 the following points:

1. Hezekiah knows that the dangers facing all the Jewish people demand unity of spirit, even though there has been war between the two kingdoms, and much ill feeling between the tribes for over 200 years now. He puts aside the past, and focuses upon the challenge they face and steps outside the political to embrace the crying spiritual need of all the Jewish people. Verse 1.
2. He is flexible in his worship, making the Passover a month later for this unique year. He takes guidance and advice from all before he announces his plan so that he has the people's support through this unique time of their history. He gets what today in business is called "buy in". He leads his people; he doesn't drive them. Verses 2 – 5.
3. His letter to the northern people is exactly the same as his letter to all of his own people; he seeks the unity of all the tribes in and through their worship of the Lord their God. His letter is open, warm, but also blunt. He does not mince his words. He refers to the "stiff-necked" disobedience of all the Israelite people in their paganism, and he calls them to repentance. This is not a politically correct and liberal appeal for an ecumenical service; this is the call of a godly man for all people to do business with their God. God seeks from us truth and honesty before all men, for only if we tell the truth can men respond to the truth and be saved. Hezekiah's honesty leads to the salvation and physical deliverance of many of the people of the north who otherwise would have died at the hands of the Assyrians. Verses 6 – 9.
4. He is not concerned about the mockers, for he is focused upon saving those from the fires of judgement that he can; in his own kingdom and the northern one. Verses 10 – 13. This is the spirit and thinking behind Jude's words as recorded in Jude 20-23.
5. Hezekiah then involves all the people in the clean up of the city, destroying all the idols and high places in the vicinity of the city. People learn best by being active in application of what they have heard. Knowledge that does not work out in action quickly is temporary knowledge. By getting the people involved actively in the destruction of paganism, he challenges them to later deal with all the pagan elements in their own towns also. Hezekiah prays for the people, standing as their intercessor and making confession on their behalf, and opening the door of salvation and sanctification for them through his public prayer on their behalf. Verses 14 – 20. Our role as pastors includes being intercessors for our people.
6. Hezekiah knows that his Levites are ignorant after so many years of apostate priesthood, and he takes the burden and teaches them. He doesn't take a heavy hand and tell them all off, but speaks positively to them. God's disobedient people do not need the pastor to scold them, for that is the Holy Spirit's job. John 16:8-11. Verses 21 – 22. God's call to us as His pastors is to speak words of challenge and comfort, and to feed the flock of the Lord. John 21:15-23.
7. Hezekiah worshipped with all his heart, and he opened his wallet also. He provided food for the people and they were able to keep a fourteen day feast as a result of the king and princes generosity. This kept the people together for another crucial seven days and allowed the people of the northern tribes to integrate with those of the south and stay with them after the feast, and so they avoided death at the hands of the Assyrians. Verses 23 – 27. All experienced the fruit of the Holy Spirit in joy. This is the Lord's desire for us all. John 15:11.

Notice in 2 Chronicles chapter 31 the following points:

1. The revival leads to a wholesale destruction of idolatry throughout the land, and even into the north there was some revival and destruction of idols. Verse 1. While this verse indicates all the people returned to their cities, even in the north, later events there indicate either many did not return, but stayed in Judah, or quickly came back after their attempts to destroy idols failed because of opposition from their neighbours. Verse 6 makes this point strongly.
2. Hezekiah restores the priesthood's worship organisation so that the temple will function properly thereafter. He doesn't want the revival to peter out, but for regular worship to sustain its momentum. Verses 2 – 5. Regular worship sustains us, and stopping corporate worship is the path to spiritual coldness. Hebrews 10:24-25.
3. Hezekiah opens the door for giving to begin again, and the people give from their open hearts and they open their storehouses in accordance with their renewed love of the Lord. Verses 5 – 13. When there is revival there will never be any need to beg for money to do mission work, for a revival of spiritual life will

lead to renewed giving. The challenge is to ensure the administration and accounting systems are in order to receive and give proper account for all that the Lord will move His people to give. Refer to the BTB study on GIVING.

4. Hezekiah's service at this early time in his reign was absolutely whole heartedly devoted to pleasing the Lord, and the Lord prospered all he did at this time. Verses 20-21. This is the real "prosperity gospel" message. It is not material prosperity that is being talked about, but spiritual prosperity and blessing, for that lays the godly foundation for good business success. It is not the focus upon wealth that brings wealth, but the focus upon holy worship, godly lives and ethical business practises.

Notice in 2 Chronicles chapter 32 the following points:

1. After the time of preparation the testing time comes. 1 Corinthians 10:11-13. The Lord always gives us the time to prepare for crises, and if we are alert to the realities of the Angelic Conflict, and use that time to build spiritual resources, then we are ready for the crisis.
2. The crisis comes in the form of the final conqueror of Samaria and destroyer of the northern kingdom. He moves south and challenges Hezekiah twice before his death. The first time is a moderate challenge (around 721 or 712 BC), but the second time (around 703 – 701 BC) he seriously assaults every major city and takes most of them, leaving only Jerusalem standing. Isaiah leads the revival at that time and saves the nation. Hezekiah, like Winston Churchill many centuries later recognises the evil of the Assyrians and sees that he must fight them eventually. He readies himself for the battle, and devotes all his strength to preparing the city of Jerusalem and his other major defended cities for the sieges that will come. He digs a major engineering marvel of its time in the tunnel he puts through bed rock under Jerusalem, to take the waters of the Gihon spring under the city to a pool within the defended citadel. It remains one of the great tunnelling feats of the ancient world and a highlight for visitors to the city is to walk the tunnel today. Other tunnelling projects were undertaken in other places, but the Jerusalem one is the best known and was the most successful. Verses 1 – 4.
3. He seriously strengthened the wall of Jerusalem and the foundations of this great wall he rebuilt have just recently been found, and the wall is twenty eight feet across! Verse 5. Once again, this wall has just been found and can be seen today, for the first time in over 2700 years! These archaeological findings are proof that what we have been reading here is not mythic history but real records of real events and people. Verse 5. Our faith does not rest on speculation and history written well after the events, but on eye witness accounts, for after the siege of Jerusalem in 586 BC all this evidence was buried for over 2500 years!
4. Hezekiah rests upon the strength of the Lord in the battles that are to come, and in the years 723 – 700 the men he led served faithfully and well, and those who applied the words of Isaiah had victory in the Lord. Hezekiah's words are words of great faith, and will be repeated with variation by Nehemiah three hundred years later. Nehemiah 4:4-18.
5. He gave excellent advice on how to deal with the psychological warfare techniques of the Assyrians. The main episode recorded here at the end of chapter 32 is probably the major siege of Jerusalem around 703-701 BC, during which time the entire nation was assaulted and each fortified city taken one by one, with great loss of life and deportations of the survivors. We will come back to this chapter as we discuss the chapter in Kings before us. The other parallel passage to these ones is found in Isaiah 36 – 39.

With over three chapters devoted to this king in Chronicles we know that this man is a major figure according to the priests, and from the details recorded we can see why. He restarts the Temple worship and re-consecrates the priesthood for service. He restores the glory of the priesthood and the glory of the full sacrificial system. The LEVITICAL OFFERINGS all spoke of the Lord Jesus Christ, so their significance is major. What Hezekiah did was restore the main way, under the Mosaic System, that people got to know about the grace and mercy of God.

## **2 KINGS 18:1-37**

**1** Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign. **2** Twenty and five years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Abi, the daughter of Zachariah. **3** And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did. **4** He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan. **5** He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. **6** For he clave to the LORD, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses. **7** And the LORD was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth: and he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not. **8** He smote the Philistines, even unto Gaza, and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city. **9** And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria, and besieged it. **10** And at the end of three years they took it: even in the sixth year of Hezekiah, that is in the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken. **11** And the king of Assyria did carry away Israel unto Assyria, and put them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes: **12** Because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed his covenant, and all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and would not hear them, nor do them. **13** Now in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah did Sennacherib king of Assyria come up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them. **14** And Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, I have offended; return from me: that which thou puttest on me will I bear. And the king of Assyria appointed unto

Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. 15 And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house. 16 At that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the LORD, and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria. 17 And the king of Assyria sent Tartan and Rabsaris and Rabshakeh from Lachish to king Hezekiah with a great host against Jerusalem. And they went up and came to Jerusalem. And when they were come up, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is in the highway of the fuller's field. 18 And when they had called to the king, there came out to them Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder. 19 And Rabshakeh said unto them, Speak ye now to Hezekiah, Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest? 20 Thou sayest, (but they are but vain words,) I have counsel and strength for the war. Now on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me? 21 Now, behold, thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt unto all that trust on him. 22 But if ye say unto me, We trust in the LORD our God: is not that he, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and hath said to Judah and Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem? 23 Now therefore, I pray thee, give pledges to my lord the king of Assyria, and I will deliver thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them. 24 How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put thy trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? 25 Am I now come up without the LORD against this place to destroy it? The LORD said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it. 26 Then said Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, and Shebna, and Joah, unto Rabshakeh, Speak, I pray thee, to thy servants in the Syrian language; for we understand it: and talk not with us in the Jews' language in the ears of the people that are on the wall. 27 But Rabshakeh said unto them, Hath my master sent me to thy master, and to thee, to speak these words? hath he not sent me to the men which sit on the wall, that they may eat their own dung, and drink their own piss with you? 28 Then Rabshakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and spake, saying, Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria: 29 Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you: for he shall not be able to deliver you out of his hand: 30 Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, The LORD will surely deliver us, and this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. 31 Hearken not to Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria, Make an agreement with me by a present, and come out to me, and then eat ye every man of his own vine, and every one of his fig tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his cistern: 32 Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of oil olive and of honey, that ye may live, and not die: and hearken not unto Hezekiah, when he persuadeth you, saying, The LORD will deliver us. 33 Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? 34 Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? have they delivered Samaria out of mine hand? 35 Who are they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand? 36 But the people held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not. 37 Then came Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder, to Hezekiah with their clothes rent, and told him the words of Rabshakeh.

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 – 4.** This king will become gravely ill around the mid-point of his reign and face the real possibility of his death. He will be restored to health by the Lord, but will die relatively young around aged 54 years a few years after the deliverance in 701 BC. The total destruction of Nineveh in 612 BC paradoxically gives archaeology a great deal of material about the Assyrian Empire because their archive was on clay tablets and it was baked hard by the fires that destroyed the city, and 20,000 plus tablets have been found.

A great deal is still to be read and published, but this archive and the work of archaeologists in the land of Israel itself gives us a good insight into the tremendous destruction of cities in the Assyrian period in the land.

The destruction of the northern kingdom was total, as would the Babylonian destruction of the south be around 586 BC. Very little was left standing. The destruction layers are in places well mixed, and after 2600 years it is hard to distinguish layers that are only ten to twelve years apart. It appears there were two invasions of the south; the first around Hezekiah's fourteenth year, 714-712 BC, and the second around his twenty fifth year, 703-701 BC. Our writer will not be too concerned about distinguishing the events as such, as his purpose is to illustrate God's deliverance and the lessons learned by the king and people.

Hezekiah's arrival on the scene as King provided the north with a three year opportunity for salvation before their total destruction at the hands of the Assyrian Empire. As we have seen from the Chronicles account, Hezekiah began his reign with a major spiritual outreach to his own "paganised" people and to those in the north. His own father had followed the paganism of the north, and Hezekiah totally rejects his father's legacy and sets about with all his heart to undo it through spiritual revival of genuine Temple worship. His mother was "Abi" the shortened form of Abigail, and this gives us a lovely picture of a woman whose name was shortened in affection, and whose heart was given over to bringing her son up to be the man his father was not.

Hezekiah initially threw himself into reform, and he declared total war on paganism of all forms in the land. Sadly, after his death his own son will return to the worst of the paganism that he has attacked, but this man does his best at this early point in his reign. Remember, Satan does not sit back and let a victory be scored over him! The spiritual battle for

the hearts and minds of Israel flows back and forth through these last centuries of their life as kingdoms. The kings will lose their crown because of their compromises in these spiritual areas. 2 Chronicles 36:15-20. We must remember the consistent malice of our spiritual enemy, and ensure we do not celebrate victories that are not won, and maintain a prayerful and alert regime in our churches. More prayer is required as we draw near the end, not ever less.

Hezekiah knew that the Angelic Conflict in Judah and Israel was a serious one for him to throw himself into. He had to attack satanic power and influence on three fronts. He had to restore Temple worship as the focus of the entire nation's holy and biblically based worship. He also had to set the example of godly and penitent prayer for the sins and evils of the past and present. He had to be the intercessor and so open the door for cleansing of the spirits and souls of his people. He also had to attack the private pagan religious sites and destroy them so that the pagan option was not as easily available to the spiritually weakened people. Hebrews 12:12-15.

He understood that after so many years of the false "prosperity gospel" of his grand-father, and the open paganism of his father, the hearts of the people were compromised by the evil that had by his reign become "normal" for them. He had to remove the temptations to evil by removing the places of pagan worship. He had to re-establish the true place of worship and get the priesthood teaching the truth again. He had to pray for the forgiveness of the people, and for their protection over the next years, so that they were able to become strong in godly paths again. Recovery after years of backsliding into evil takes time and each of these three elements was required.

The four targets for immediate destruction were, the idols and their altars in the Temple and cities, the "high places", the groves, and the bronze serpent that Moses had made. The first target was achieved after three weeks of hard work by the entire surviving population of the priesthood and the Levites. The idols of the pagans that had been placed in the Temple were removed and everything associated with them was taken to the valley outside the city and burned to dust. The "high places" of ancestral worship around the land were originally simply places where an altar had been built and where a prophet or priest gathered the people to pray and offer up sacrifices to supplement those of the tabernacle that was far away. Samuel, the godly prophet used these places, as did the other Judges.

By this time however they have become formal religious sites and were seen by communities as rivals to the temple, and in many cases preferred to the temple. Some had buildings and formal altars with surrounding grounds given over to worship, but sadly no longer the worship of Jehovah God. Paganism had taken over these sites through the centuries. It is over 400 years since Samuel's day and holy worship in these ancient sites was well and truly over. The buildings and altars needed to be destroyed and Hezekiah declares war on these traditional sites of community worship.

Now pause and reflect upon the impact of Hezekiah's actions on local communities. Put your self in the place of these people many miles from Jerusalem. After 400+ years of your family putting its resources of time and money into beautifying a holy site for community worship, these places had become special to the people. Even though they no longer really worshipped the Lord God of Israel there they were places of the heart. Even today many genuine believers find it hard to leave a family church that has gone into liberalism, and often stay and listen to garbage for years!

Hezekiah calls for the total destruction of sites that whole communities had seen as "traditional" for centuries. He calls for change and that was not totally popular, and the pull of the old paganism will be stronger through the next 130 years than the claims of the truth. The groves were the openly sex oriented pagan sites where fertility gods and goddesses were "worshipped" with sex acts of different sorts. Pornography was popular then as it remains now. It is a major satanic religious offensive through the ages. Satan's pull on the carnal soul is strong.

The last target was one of the very icons of the Exodus; the bronze serpent that Moses had made to stem the plague of snakes that came from the desert lands of Edom that the people had to walk through. Numbers 21:4-10. Just looking to that bronze serpent healed those bitten by the snakes and they lived. John 3:14-15, 6:40. By the days of Hezekiah however the "good luck charm" thinking had become all pervasive and this old piece of bronze was now a danger to spiritual life, just as it had been their means of deliverance 800 years before.

What was a symbol of salvation by faith had become a superstitious object of worship in itself. What had been the means for the deliverance of their ancestors became a snare to them, and they worshipped the bronze snake. It had been named and become "Nehushtan" = "the brass thing". Hezekiah saw the danger and destroyed the snake totally. The message for revival is clear. Even ancient treasures are to be destroyed if they become idols to a new generation. Nothing must come between the people and their genuine spiritual worship of the Lord. John 4:23-24, 8:32-46, 14:6, 16:7-13, 17:17-19. Let us be the idol destroyers – for only pure and passionate worship of God keeps us safe.

**Verses 5 – 7.** The writer now betrays the perspective from which he writes, and the time frame; which is that by the time he writes this the last king has been deposed and the line of kings is no more. This is our additional clue that the author (or final editor) works in the time of the captivity, or just after it. As we have seen, he needs to know about Hezekiah's wall and the tunnel, and knowledge of this was lost when the exile generation had died out, and he needs to have seen the last king deposed and taken away, and that occurs in 586BC. My belief is that the author of the Kings account is Jeremiah, but it is only in heaven that we will actually know who this man was.

The author is fulsome in his praise of this man Hezekiah. He kept the Law, and he believed the Lord would deliver them, and he did everything he could to avoid disaster. He clung to his faith, and at times he was sorely tested in his faith, as we will see in the next verses. He read the Word of God and kept the Word of God in all its details. He was forced into a tributary relationship with Sennacherib after the collapse of the northern kingdom, but at some point he rebelled against

the Assyrian yoke and faced a full invasion. Now an invasion was going to come at some point even if he paid the annual tribute money. The Assyrians were only looking for an excuse to invade and would have simply increased the tribute to unpayable levels to get their excuse. At some point he needed to fight them and he did so when he was as ready as he could be. It will be a close run contest and he will be saved by the barest margins each time.

**Verses 8 – 12.** Part of his preparation was to neutralise the Philistine threat on his western front, and he launched attacks upon them, pushing them back into their strongholds and ensuring they didn't force him to divide his forces in the coming battle against Assyria. They themselves became the victims of Assyria later and were all carried away into captivity just as the northern Israelites had been.

As you read these verses remember that the Jewish way of telling a story is to give an overview, or make the key point, then return to the beginning and take up the story again. That is what these verses do here. Verse seven is the key point, and Hezekiah's actions will lead to all out warfare around 712 and also possibly around 702. However, for the first years of his reign he was at peace and under tribute to Assyria, and he deals with the Philistines in this time frame.

In the first six years of his reign he sees the Assyrians take away the northern people and faces the reality of the threat upon himself and his own people. He understands the spiritual reasons for the collapse of the north and is determined to ensure that they do not face the same fate as the north. He hears the Mosaic Law, he believes it, and he applies it, and he goes beyond that and he teaches it to others, for he sees that doctrine applied will alone save the nation.

**Verses 13 – 16.** The words of verse thirteen are blunt and shocking; Sennacherib comes up and takes the cities of the land with apparent ease. All the military preparations of the king are rendered useless and he is beaten on all fronts, and Jerusalem is besieged. While the Assyrian king is besieging Lachish Hezekiah sends his emissaries and negotiates a peaceful withdrawal of the Assyrian Army, but at a high cost. Kings in this day would charge full actual costs for any invasion, plus the tributes not paid in the years beforehand. The cost is high and Hezekiah has to literally peel the gold leaf off the walls and doors of the temple itself to pay off the Assyrians, and probably every household in the kingdom had to pay towards the fine the "evil empire" put upon them.

Every spare piece of silver and gold goes to the Assyrians and they leave. Hezekiah probably saves the key defended cities of Libnah and Lachish and some others, and buys King Sennacherib off from attacking Jerusalem. He was not so lucky the next time around 702 BC, for all the cities were taken except Jerusalem then. If the key fortified cities faced destruction around the 712 invasion the local people cleaned them up before the second one ten years later. The destruction layers from the final sieges of Libnah and Lachish especially are significant, and their final end must have been horrific.

**Verses 17 – 21.** I believe that verse seventeen jumps from the first to the second major invasion towards the end of Hezekiah's reign. In this invasion the Assyrians followed the same, tried and proven route, for their attack, and the siege of Lachish and Libnah preceded that of Jerusalem. While the last acts are being played out at Lachish, before its final fall, Sennacherib sends three members of his war cabinet to conduct psychological warfare upon the people of Jerusalem. They are men we only know from their titles, which we have given here, in Chronicles, and in Isaiah.

Tartan is a senior general, or Field Marshal of the Assyrian Army, and in Isaiah 20:1-6 we have recorded that in the first or second invasion, the Philistine city of Ashdod was taken by this man. He is a tough and successful military commander. Isaiah 36 – 39 also records the historical details of the sieges of the various cities and that of Jerusalem itself. The other two men are the Head of Intelligence Operations (Rabshakeh), and the Chief of the General Staff (Rabsaris).

When they arrive at the city of Jerusalem they specifically select the place they are going to speak to the people on the wall and in the city from. They select a position on the north ridge above the city so they can look down into the city and have their voices heard, but there is also another reason. Rabshakeh has a lot more information about Jerusalem, Hezekiah and his beliefs, than most will believe possible. By torture and by simple intelligence gathering he has got information about the belief system of the king, and the people, although he will have key errors in his "fact" list.

He knows the words of Isaiah and has heard about or possibly even read copies of his prophecies. He selects the place by the upper pool because Isaiah gave a prophetic word there. Isaiah 7:3ff. It was the very place that Isaiah had urged King Ahaz to stand firm and not fear the alliance of Israel and Syria. It was a place associated in the minds of the people of Judah with the truth of Isaiah's prophetic words, and as he is now calling for them all to be courageous and trust God again, Rabshakeh selects this very place to try to undermine the people's faith in Isaiah and in Jehovah God.

Hezekiah does not send his top military commanders out to meet the Assyrian delegation, but three court officials. He sends the priest Eliakim son of Hilkiah, the reforming High Priest, who he has made minister of Internal Affairs for Judah. With him he sends Shebna the scribe, who is the Minister of Finance for Judah, and Joah the son of Asaph, who is also an administrator. Hezekiah does not send any armed military man out, and thereby outplays the Assyrians.

He gives them no military men to frighten, but sends three frightened administrators, who are simply there to receive and carry messages. The three Assyrians have come with a mighty army and so the king of Judah is ready for an immediate attack and has his best men well out of harm's way behind the wall with their troops. These three men are brave, but they are politicians, and so expendable, and they probably know it, as they stand before the entire enemy army here.

Rabshakeh is the head of psychological warfare for Assyria and we see in these next verses and in the parallel passages in Isaiah just how good he was at psychological warfare. His purpose was to break down the morale of the besieged city by the right mix of terror, threat, and promise. Their normal modus operandi was brutal and very effective in breaking the morale of the people they fought.

He first had his men stake out several hundred captive Jews in sight of the walls. They would call aloud the names of those staked out, and then they would say, "these men fought against us at XXXX instead of surrendering when we told them to, and we want you to understand that if you do what we ask you will live, but if you don't then you will suffer as these will." The captives were then flayed alive (all their skin peeled off their bodies) one by one. They would die screaming over a period of days under the hot sun, eaten alive in the end by the ants and other small creatures in the soil. This terror would be followed by a cleaning away of the bodies and a renewed offer of surrender, which many cities accepted at that point.

Rabshakeh probably has already conducted the terror part of his campaign against the city by this point, and now he calls these three frightened administrators to listen to him and report his words back to Hezekiah. It is this interaction that indicates to me that we are dealing with the second invasion here, whereas verses 13-16 dealt with the first. Hezekiah has not been to Lachish this time, nor has any tribute or ransom been paid, but he is holed up in Jerusalem, and has been there since the beginning of the sieges.

Rabshakeh's purpose at this point is to speak directly to all the people, and so he speaks in Hebrew, not the language of Diplomacy which was the Syrian language called Aramaic. Now within 100 years Aramaic will be the language of culture, commerce and diplomacy for the entire Middle East, and it will remain that way until the days of Alexander the Great when Greek will join it as another international language, but will still not supplant it. Arabic will finally replace both in the seventh century of our era.

Rabshakeh's main thrust is to undermine the faith of the people in the words of Isaiah and Hezekiah, and then their faith in Jehovah God. He understands that it is a spiritual conflict that they fight here, and that the people with the strongest faith and mental attitude will win the battle in the end. He has the arrogance of his paganism, as he is a winner, and as he sees it, that means his gods are tougher than the gods of other people. He thinks like a pagan, but he does not understand the one creator God who is the God of Israel.

He does not see that the playing field here is different than any other place he has ever attacked before. This man is not used to losing and he considers the Israelites as losers, and he has good reason for that! By the point he is outside Jerusalem he has captured thirty eight (38) Jewish cities in this invasion (Lachish will be the 39<sup>th</sup> according to a monument found in Assyria relating to this invasion). He has previously invaded and taken all the northern cities, and not one city remains functioning there without an Assyrian banner over its battlements.

His challenge to the people on the wall is for them to assess just where they want to place their confidence. He is clearly quoting the very words of Hezekiah in verse 20, and he mocks them, for all the preparations Hezekiah made for this war have been shown to be inadequate to stop the Assyrian war machine. The last piece of their strategy was to depend upon Egypt, and he uses the very words of Isaiah to describe the pharaoh of Egypt. Isaiah 30:1-7, 31:1-3.

Isaiah went on after warning against trusting Egypt to tell the people to trust in God, and that is where Rabshakeh goes next, to attack faith in God, but here he comes unstuck. He does not understand God as well as he thinks he does, but this man is otherwise very well prepared for his assault upon the hearts and minds of the Israelites.

**Verses 22 – 26.** It is here that Rabshakeh makes his error, but it is the error that modern liberal theologians also make, for they also consider Jehovah God just a "Hebrew tribal deity" who becomes over time, by evolutionary processes, the monotheistic God over all the earth. Had this been the faith of the people in Jerusalem at this time, then they would have broken under this pressure situation. Neither Hezekiah or Isaiah believe in any tribal deity; they worship the one true God, the Creator and Saviour of all.

Isaiah has taught the people well and he has made it clear, backing Hezekiah's destruction of the "high places", that God is not worshipped in these now pagan places, and that the gods of the groves and high places are demons and have nothing to do with the real God. The gods of the high places are truly like the Assyrian gods, and they will all show themselves to be inferior to the real Lord God over the heavens and the earth.

Rabshakeh thinks he has dealt with God enough at this point, and so now turns to the military situation, and by direct insult hopes to undermine the people's will to fight. He sets out to underline the fact that he has the biggest army, and that as a result of the battles around the land, Hezekiah has no field army left. He makes a "deal" with the people on the wall. If they will pay a bond for the privilege, he will loan them 2000 extra horses from his cavalry army, if they can find the riders to put on them.

He knows that they cannot muster that many cavalry from Jerusalem, and possibly they do not even have 2000 fully trained professional soldiers inside the walls. Every man in the city was a militiaman, but the professional army of Hezekiah has been beaten in 38 cities by this point and the 39<sup>th</sup> is about to fall. The military situation is every bit as bleak as Rabshakeh paints it. Without God's help the nation is as doomed as the northern kingdom was twenty years before.

Rabshakeh now miss-quotes Isaiah to further undermine the people's morale. Satan's men always delight in misquoting scripture and so the only protection for the people of God is a thorough knowledge of the Word of God so they cannot be disturbed by lies, and the twisting of a text. 2 Peter 3:14-18. He tells them that the least of his men will prove more courageous than the bravest of their men. He believes that morale is so low in the city that he will be able to get them to surrender if he keeps up this sort of pressure on them. He then turns his attention to Egypt again and reminds them that Egypt is a spent force.

He then returns to the theological attack. His main thrust in verses 25-26 is that the Lord Jehovah God has sent him to Judah to punish them as he punished the north twenty years before. Isaiah 10:5-11. Now Rabshakeh quotes these verses but doesn't go further, where Isaiah records that Assyria also will be punished for its pride. He also avoids quoting verse 24, and Isaiah chapter 14:25, 30:31, and 31:8. All these passages indicate that the Assyrians will be dealt with by God and the city of Jerusalem will be saved. The three scared men who are standing shaking before Rabshakeh plead with him to speak only in Aramaic for they fear that the people will have the same response to his words as they have had. His response indicates the evil and dark malice of this man.

**Verses 27 – 32.** He knows that Hezekiah has sent out "expendable" administrators, and really insulted him by sending such a delegation, and so he arrogantly and crudely brushes them aside and directly cries aloud at the people assembled on the city wall listening to every word. We still speak of being so scared we "pee our pants", even lose control of our bowels, and it appears that this has happened to at least one of the three men standing before him. He calls aloud to the soldiers on the wall and invites them to eat their own excrement and drink their own urine with the three scared men before him. This is one tough soldier!

He then cries even louder to the men on the wall in the name of his king, who he refers to as "the great king". Now this is his second major error, for there is only one king of kings and lord of all lords, and that is the Lord God. He has insulted God and for this he will pay dearly later. Psalms 136:3, 1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation 17:14, 19:16. He strongly states that neither Hezekiah, nor Jehovah God will deliver the people from the hand of the king of Assyria. He then offers them deportation to his land as slaves, and verses 31-32 are a marketing expert's delight! Look at how he packages deportation! He is making a strong appeal to a mythical pleasant life in Assyria as slaves, and such lies have been believed by sad fools all through history, but Satan lies, and is the father of liars!

**Verses 33 – 37.** It is here that the enemy unravels, for he has placed Jehovah God in the same category as the pagan gods who are all nothings. They could not save their people, for they are demons, just like the Assyrian gods, and Assyria's demons may have more temporary power than their competitors, but they are no match for the real God. Verse 35 is a direct challenge to the Lord God and such a challenge can be left with the Lord for its appropriate answer.

Verse 36 tells us just how prepared and ready Hezekiah was. He knew their modus operandi and he has briefed his people on what to expect and the men on the wall hear the words, and reject them, and hold their ranks in silence. The three scared men come into the presence of their king with their garments torn in grief at what they have heard, but the king is ready to face this crisis God's way.

## **PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. Hezekiah was a prepared man. He had used his time as crown prince to study God's Word and ready himself for taking charge when the day came. He was spiritually saturated in the Law of Moses and so he knew his part as king and the priest's part as the servants of the Temple. He was ready to be their spiritual leader, but he was also ready to instruct the priests on their duty, for he knew that his father's actions had destroyed the knowledge base of the priesthood. When we are waiting for a role, the right thing to do is always saturate ourselves in the Word of God. Let us do that each and every day we find ourselves otherwise inactive in service. Worship and study prepares for more service.

2. Leadership requires "buy in" from those we lead, and this means a prepared leader is able to calmly and logically explain what he is doing and why, and secure the people's commitment to the tasks ahead. Let us practise good leadership by leading people into the Word of God every day the church is open! Let us be as blunt and truthful as Hezekiah was in our dealings with God's people. Let us ignore the mockers and focus upon those who have positive volition and strengthen that. Matthew 12:20.

3. Spiritual recovery takes time after people have been swept away for years by nonsense or evil. We must be as careful and systematic as Hezekiah was. We have to destroy by direct assault all pagan elements, and simultaneously we must provide the true alternative, and the teaching to back its use. The entire enterprise of spiritual revival must be backed by regular prayer. Nothing was to be considered "sacred" except the relationship of God with His people.

The bronze serpent of Moses was destroyed to stop idolatry. Even their last form of physical contact with Moses was to be destroyed if it interfered with the relationship with God that Moses had called them to. The bronze snake was the last visible item that connected them with Moses (the Ark with the tablets of stone was hidden in the Holy of Holies), but it had to be destroyed when it stopped godly worship. Nothing was to be considered sacred if it led people away from their living spiritual and godly relationship with the Lord their God.

4. How well prepared are you believer, and pastor, for a thorough assault upon your heart and mind by the enemy? Rabshakeh really knows his stuff, and his words will unhinge the faith of all but the strongest believer. Would

you be amongst that group? Satan often sends against us very clever people, but a thorough knowledge of the Word of God will still protect the believer and hold them secure in their faith. Satan is the liar and the father of all liars, and only a thorough knowledge of the truth protects us. Only real and tested faith, absolutely grounded in Bible doctrine, will save us under this level of pressure and we may be asked to demonstrate this level of faith. It is to train people for this sort of pressure that we are called pastors! Let us teach the Word of God as strongly as we can, for Rabshakeh is an example of the calibre of some of the troops that Satan has at his disposal.

### **GOD – THE ANCHOR OF THE SOUL**

1. The only anchor for the soul in the storms of life is the certainty, stability and dependability of the character of God, upon which our salvation, sanctification and eternal life rests.
2. The Lord's character is sure and steadfast, and upon his character his plan is built. We are part of the plan of God for eternity.
3. The anchor is sure and certain because it is grounded in the heart of God's love for us, and his holy commitment to his plan of salvation. All these things depend upon our study, and application of the living Word of God; for without the knowledge of scripture we do not have the certainty we ought to have.

### **GOD IS IN CONTROL - COMFORT FOR BELIEVERS**

1. God is in control. Nothing will ever happen to you as a Christian that you have not had the opportunity to develop resources to deal with. (1 Corinthians 10:13)
2. God's character is stable.
  - (a) If God is for you who can be against you. (Romans 8:31-34)
  - (b) No matter what happens God's love is stable. (Romans 8:35-39)
3. God's promises are secure for He is always with us. (Matthew 28:19-20, Jeremiah 1:19)
4. God's power is always the same:-
  - (a) He will always keep us. (John 10:29, 2 Timothy 1:12,)
  - (b) God does not forget us or lose His power to keep. (Jude 24)
  - (c) Even if we fall away from fellowship we still are saved. (2 Timothy 2:13)
5. God knew before time what we would need in time and has provided for the supply of all our needs. (Philippians 4:19, Hebrews 4:16, Ephesians 3:12,)
6. God has the power to bless us. (2 Corinthians 9:8)
7. God is able to make all grace abound towards us. (Ephesians 3:20)
8. We should grow to the place of real confidence and blessing. (2 Peter 3:18)
9. We do this by feeding on His Word. (John 6:29, 33, 63)

### **NOTES**

**CHAPTER 19****INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter we have some of the best examples of doctrinally based actions and prayers of faith in the Bible. Hezekiah faces the great threat of a major Assyrian Army right outside Jerusalem's walls. The siege of the great fortress of Lachish is over, and all its people are either dead or captives, and the siege of Libnah is begun. It also will be reduced to ashes by the Assyrians, and even today archaeologists note the violence of the ends of these two great fortresses at the hands of the Assyrian army. The slaughter must have been horrific.

Hezekiah faces these last months of the assault upon Judah with no realistic hope for rescue except from God. False hope for some people rises with an assault upon the Assyrian army from the south by Tirhakah the pharaoh of Egypt, but he is beaten off by the Assyrians and within fifty years an Assyrian Army is in Egypt and makes it a province of their Empire. Hezekiah faces the loss of over 90% of his people, and all his fenced and defended cities except Jerusalem.

As we read these words below, remember the carnage that is unfolding outside the city, for the smoke the people see on every horizon is the smoke of the cities and the bodies of their relatives. Possibly as many as a million people have died or been taken into the slow death of slavery to Assyria; the survivors in Jerusalem will never see their relatives again. These people face the ultimate faith test.

They face it in faith because their king literally lays all the problems before the Lord, and they have a prophet in Isaiah who hears the Lord and relays the words of the Lord to the king and people. There is spiritual revival, and it saves the remnant of the people. Only a remnant of the people of Judah will survive to repopulate their land; possibly less than 100,000 people live out of a population of over a million! This is a greater holocaust than 1942-1945, with fewer than 10% of the total population surviving. Parallel passages to this chapter are, 2 Chronicles 32:9-23, and Isaiah 37:8-38.

**2 KINGS 19:1-37**

**1** And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD. **2** And he sent Eliakim, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz. **3** And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy; for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth. **4** It may be the LORD thy God will hear all the words of Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God; and will reprove the words which the LORD thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that are left. **5** So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah. **6** And Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say to your master, Thus saith the LORD, Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. **7** Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land. **8** So Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah: for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish. **9** And when he heard say of Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, Behold, he is come out to fight against thee: he sent messengers again unto Hezekiah, saying, **10** Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. **11** Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered? **12** Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed; as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden which were in Thelasar? **13** Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah? **14** And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD. **15** And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said, O LORD God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth. **16** LORD, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, LORD, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God. **17** Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands, **18** And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. **19** Now therefore, O LORD our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD God, even thou only. **20** Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard. **21** This is the word that the LORD hath spoken concerning him; The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; and the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. **22** Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel. **23** By thy messengers thou hast reproached the LORD, and hast said, With the multitude of my chariots I am come up to the height of the mountains, to the sides of Lebanon, and will cut down the tall cedar trees thereof, and the choice fir trees thereof: and I will enter into the lodgings of his borders, and into the forest of his Carmel. **24** I have digged and drunk strange waters, and with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of besieged places. **25** Hast thou not heard long ago how I have done it, and of ancient times that I have formed it? now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest be to lay waste fenced cities into ruinous heaps. **26** Therefore their inhabitants were of small power, they were dismayed and confounded; they were as the grass of the field, and as the green herb, as the grass on the house tops, and as corn blasted before it be

grown up. 27 But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me. 28 Because thy rage against me and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest. 29 And this shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, and in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof. 30 And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall yet again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. 31 For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion: the zeal of the LORD of hosts shall do this. 32 Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. 33 By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. 34 For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. 35 And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. 36 So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. 37 And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead.

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 – 4.** Hezekiah is a Bible saturated thinker at this point thanks to the teaching of Isaiah. He knows God's Word, and he sees the words of Rabshakeh from God's perspective. He sees them as lying words of blasphemy, which the Lord has the responsibility of replying to. He recognises also that his nation has suffered terribly because of his decision to fight the evil empire of Assyria, and he faces his personal responsibility for that fateful decision. He also faces the awful fact that they have been severely beaten on all fronts except Jerusalem. He sees that reality as a judgement for their idolatry, and recognises that even though spiritually he did all things correctly in the years leading up to 701, what was done was not enough to guarantee total success.

He confronts the awful fact that his people must have failed to reject their paganism totally; for he sees that the destructive success of the enemy is an indication of the sinfulness of his own people. He also possibly faces his own sin in seeking Egyptian help in the rebellion against Assyria, for it has been slow in coming, and he was wrong to trust the Egyptians when Isaiah had told him not to. He confronts the limitations of human viewpoint, and sees that the Lord alone gives any hope.

He already knows what he must do, and that is to lay the entire matter before the Lord in prayerful confession and humble acceptance. This man has the moral courage to sit with the truth long enough to pass the entire situation over to the Lord in confidence that the Lord will hear and answer. He also knows he must hear a specific word from the Lord, and so he sends immediately to Isaiah the prophet.

The prayer for help the court officials bring to Isaiah reflects the biblical and doctrinal perspective of the king; he sees the words of Rabshakeh as a rebuke to them for their sins, his errors of judgement, and their clearly inadequate spiritual reform, and they see that Rabshakeh has directly insulted God. They expect the Lord to vindicate His own name, and in so doing help them; they cast their cares upon the Lord, who alone is their help and shield. We often think that we cannot ask the Lord to "bail us out" of a previous bad decision, but if we are walking with Him now, we can, to the glory of his holy name! We do not ask for help as fools who have erred, but as sons and daughters who have returned to our merciful and loving father.

**Genesis 15:1,** "1. After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."

**Deuteronomy 33:27-29,** "27. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them.

28. Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew.

29. Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places."

**2 Samuel 22:3-4,** "3. The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence.

4. I will call on the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies."

**Psalms 3:2-4,** "2. Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. Selah.

3. But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.

4. I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah."

**Psalms 28:6-9,** "6. Blessed be the LORD, because he hath heard the voice of my supplications.

7. The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him.

8. The LORD is their strength, and he is the saving strength of his anointed.

9. *Save thy people, and bless thine inheritance: feed them also, and lift them up for ever."*

**Psalm 33:20-22.** "20. *Our soul waiteth for the LORD: he is our help and our shield.*  
21. *For our heart shall rejoice in him, because we have trusted in his holy name.*  
22. *Let thy mercy, O LORD, be upon us, according as we hope in thee."*

**Psalm 84:9-12.** "9. *Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed.*  
10. *For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.*  
11. *For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.*  
12. *O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee."*

**Proverbs 30:5,** "5. *Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him."*

**Ephesians 6:16,** "16. *Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."*

**1 Peter 5:5-11.** "5. *Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*  
6. *Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:*  
7. *Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.*  
8. *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:*  
9. *Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.*  
10. *But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.*  
11. *To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."*

The traditional way to show great sorrow and reflect the inner spirit of confession of personal and national sin was to put on sackcloth and place ashes upon the head. Eliakim, Shebna and the senior priests are all sent dressed in sackcloth to Isaiah to seek his counsel, and hear any word from the Lord that he has for them. They are all aware of the spiritual meaning of the loss of the 38 cities, and the coming doom of the 39th; it means that the nation has sinned greatly before God. They have been asleep and spiritually inactive and ineffective while evil grew around them.

They are all thinking biblically now, and they all repent of the national sin of idolatry and accept their share of the national responsibility for the calamity that is upon them. It is important to reflect upon this sense of national responsibility for the sins of our fellow citizens. As biblical leaders we are to accept the sins of our fellow citizens as our own, and repent ourselves of our own slackness in upholding and preaching righteousness that our nations have got to this state. As we stand in the gaping hole that sin and evil has made in our national life so we can ask the Lord for the revival we need.

When a nation falls under judgement, every pastor-teacher bears some responsibility for the judgement, for our role is to preach revival and see revival come to save the people. If revival does not come thoroughly and the nation is judged, then we must take some of the responsibility for it. We are tasked to let the Holy Spirit loose upon our people, and if we have fallen short in our call for prayer and our own daily Bible teaching, then we are held responsible by the Lord for our nation's state. The Bible does teach corporate responsibility for the sin and evil of the nation we live within. Before the humbled delegation even arrives at Isaiah's house he has heard from the Lord and has the answer they need for the king and nation.

Isaiah has been praying already for the state of the nation and he is hearing messages from the Lord and passing them on to the people. The preaching messages he delivers through the year or more of the siege of Jerusalem are recorded in Isaiah 40 and following. The last section of the book of Isaiah is his "collected sermons" from this crucial year and before it. This man, with his older contemporary Micah have been faithful, but the majority have been lukewarm and compromising, and evil has grown to crisis point. One hundred and thirty years later God will speak to Ezekiel and spell out very clearly the responsibility and accountability of all pastors, leaders, preachers and prophets.

**Ezekiel 3:17-21.** "17. *Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.*  
18. *When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.*  
19. *Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.*  
20. *Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling-block before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand.*  
21. *Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul."*

**Verses 5 – 7.** Isaiah is a man of God and a true prophet, so the answer of the Lord is already received by him before the question of the king's men is even asked. This is the mark of the true prophet; the Lord speaks to him/her at the very time the need has arisen, and the answer is there for the people in a timely manner. God is never "caught out" by any surprise events, for all is a part of His plan and has been known in the heart of God since eternity past. Prophets always speak directly and precisely into real situations, and anything less than this is not biblical prophecy.

The prophet of the Lord is able to say, "Thus saith the Lord". This is not a phrase to use lightly, for the Lord judges those who speak falsely in His name, and through history there have always been more false prophets than true prophets. This will be most marked in the last days of Judah when Jeremiah and Ezekiel ministered. Note this reality, for the darker the days, the more the satanic counterfeiters abound! Jeremiah 5:25-31, 14:13-18, 23:1-2, 25-32, Ezekiel 34:1-10.

The true words of the Lord through Isaiah are specific encouragement to the people and their king. They are not to be afraid firstly. The Lord has heard these words of Sennacherib and his servant Rabshakeh and will deal with this evil empire! The message is clear; there will be a rumour of danger that will reach Sennacherib and he will flee back to his own land and there he will die in the place he believes himself to be most secure. As they look out upon the great army with Rabshakeh, there is no sign at all of weakness, or any of the rumour that will arrive, nor is there any indication of the disaster that is about to be unleashed upon their army outside Jerusalem.

God's call to His people through the centuries is the call to FAITH; for us to see things in light of God's Word, not our eyes alone. Hebrews 11:1ff. The king and people are called to trust in the promises of the Lord and rest secure in His deliverance at the exact, right moment. They are called to hold the promises of God's Word higher than the things they see with their eyes. This is the challenge of faith; to see as God sees, not as men see. We are to see our problems from the other side. We are to see them as if they are already solved, and we are to praise the Lord for their solution now, as if that salvation has already been given to us.

**Philippians 4:4-7.** *"4. Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.  
5. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.  
6. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.  
7. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*

**Verses 8 – 13.** Rabshakeh returns to report his mission to Sennacherib at Libnah, as the siege of Lachish is now over. Shortly after his arrival there, they hear that the Egyptian Army has entered Judah from the south to fight against the Assyrians. They will have to either quickly finish off Libnah, or leave it for a week and head away to deal with the Egyptians. The fortresses of Libnah and Lachish were incredibly strong, but had only a few thousand men within them and were able to be taken by siege ladders with tens of thousands of soldiers simply pouring over the walls, but Jerusalem was an altogether harder proposition.

It was a far larger city, and had stronger defences that simple ladders and siege engines couldn't easily break through. There may have been tens of thousands of soldiers in Jerusalem, and while they were militia, they were practising all the time with their bows and arrows, and the losses for the Assyrians by a full assault would be very heavy. Nebuchadnezzar, one hundred years later, will require two full years to starve the city into submission each time he takes it. To ensure what he believes will be final victory, Sennacherib will concentrate all his forces to attack the Egyptians, and so those in Jerusalem will hear of this event, and some may take hope from it.

The psychological technique of warfare of the Assyrians demanded that they keep the mental attitude offensive and ensure that the Jewish people do not have any hope at all, and that this incursion by the Egyptians is seen as simply another demonstration of total Assyrian power. Rabshakeh is sent off back to Jerusalem again to ensure the message of hopelessness is given with renewed force in light of the arrival of the Egyptian Army. The Assyrians are confident that they can deal with Tirhakah and his Ethiopian troops, and their confidence proves well founded, for the Egyptians are well beaten, as Isaiah has already predicted they would be. Isaiah 19, 20, 30:1-3, 31:1ff, 36:6-9. The grave mistake of Rabshakeh and Sennacherib in their words over Tirhakah, is that they accuse the Lord Jehovah God of deceiving His people, when it is actually the satanic words of the Assyrians that are deceiving, (if the people pay heed to them).

The people do not need to hear the words of Rabshakeh against the Egyptians, for they have the words of Isaiah already. Once again Rabshakeh reminds the Jewish people inside Jerusalem that they will be treated exactly like all the other places that have held out against them; they will be destroyed totally. He lists all the recent places they have destroyed in other nations and mocks their gods and their kings, for their gods are smashed or sitting in Assyrian temples, and their kings are dead or sitting in Assyrian jails.

Once again he errs, because he places the God of Israel in the same category as those demons that were behind the idols of other pagan nations. The battle of words here is a battle for the minds and souls of the people. It is a battle of MENTAL ATTITUDE. Who will be stronger, the false confidence of the Assyrians in their gods, or the true faith of the Jewish people in the Lord Jehovah God?

**Psalm 62:5.** "My soul, wait only upon the Lord. My expectation is only of Him."

**Verses 14 – 19.** Rabshakeh has this time delivered his message both aloud to the wall, but also he has hand delivered a letter for Hezekiah the king. Hezekiah does the right thing with the letter. He takes it and spreads it out before the Lord in the temple. Hezekiah's prayer is a model for correct request for deliverance. It begins by reflecting upon the reality of the person and power of the Lord God over all the earth. Truly powerful prayer begins by reflecting on who God is, not what our problems are! Hezekiah begins by affirming aloud that there is one God and that is the Lord, and that he is placing himself totally in the hands of God for a solution to the challenge he faces. He recognises that this challenge is directly against the Lord by the Assyrians and he expects the Lord to honour His own holy name.

Hezekiah remembers that the king of Assyria is telling the truth about what he has done to other nations and their gods, but he also reminds the Lord that he knows that He is Lord of all lords and King of all kings, and that He is the only Creator and Saviour God over the heavens and the earth. He sees and speaks aloud the truth about idolatry; for these "gods" were nothing other than fakes. They were backed by demons which were clearly inferior to the demons behind the Assyrian gods, but they are all just weak and powerless when compared to the true God over all. Psalms 115:4-11, Isaiah 37:19-20, 44:9-23, Jeremiah 10:6-13. Hezekiah's prayer for deliverance is backed by his desire that the Lord's glory will be seen by all.

**Verses 20 – 22.** As Hezekiah has been praying in the temple, Isaiah has been praying in his house, and the Lord gives the prophet the answer for the king. Isaiah either himself heads for the temple to deliver the message, or sends a servant with a letter containing the Lord's answer to the king. Why does not Isaiah personally approach the king through this time? We are not told. It may be that Hezekiah has fallen out with the prophet over the Egyptian Alliance he tried to get established, and has banned the prophet from approaching him. It may be that the prophet is ill, or that the prophet is simply avoiding a public meeting for some security reason, as assassination was always a real possibility. This is an intriguing point, but we have no definitive answer. It is a reminder that prophets do not have to be present with the person to whom their prophecy is directed. The prophet has a message to deliver, and it can be by letter, or in person; it is the content that matters not the delivery mechanism.

The king is told that the Lord has heard his prayer and answered it already. Remind your self of the principles of successful prayer and see here a model for powerful prayer. This prayer of the king has been perfectly in accord with the will of the Lord and so he receives a positive answer to his desire and his petition. The word of the Lord for Sennacherib is a strong word of insult and rebuke. The weakest member of the population in the city will rebuke the arrogance of the Assyrian king. The youngest and most vulnerable virgin daughter of the city will rebuke the evil of the king. The very young girls who this evil king enjoyed raping and murdering after taking cities will be the ones to rebuke his evil.

The evil king is reminded that he has not insulted any petty demon behind a fake god, but he has raised his voice against the King of all kings and the Lord of all lords; he has insulted the only true God. Psalms 74:18-23, Isaiah 14:12-27. Assyria itself is to be judged, and within 100 years of this event the city of Nineveh will be rubble, and their Empire such a distant memory that for two thousand years none will even know their name. It is only in the 1800s, when the first archaeologists excavate Nineveh that this empire was re-discovered. Their destruction in the years 612 – 608 BC was so thorough that they were wiped from the pages of ancient history until their city was excavated and their libraries found in the rubble.

**Verses 23 – 26.** The words of the king of Assyria have insulted the Lord and they will all be required of him personally, and the attitude behind them will be judged later with the fall of their empire when it has played its part in the plan of God. They have been used by God as an agent of discipline, but they have lifted themselves up beyond their assigned place, and the extent of their malicious evil has opened them to judgement. The army outside the walls of Jerusalem is an evil group of men and they will pay very soon for the great evils they have done to Jewish captives over the previous months. These men have boasted that they are mightier than the greatest trees, and more powerful than any enemies, and that their armies drink the rivers dry, but all their boasting will be silenced by the direct judgement of God.

**Verses 27 – 30.** The first phrase here is still used in threats ("I know where you live!") but the Lord's use of this phrase is very sinister indeed, for it tells Sennacherib that there is no escape from Him. Sennacherib is told that the Lord knows his movements, his going in and out of his palace and his temples, and the Lord knows his hatred of the Lord God and God's people. The Lord's word to this man is that he is predictable, and that this fact will be used by his assassins to eliminate him when the time is right. The Lord has felt his rage and is going to use it against him, and he will draw him into the trap of death by his very rage against God the Lord. The Lord will place a hook in his nose and draw him to his death in his own most sacred and secure place. The Assyrians used hooks to draw their enemies to their deaths and the Lord uses the very example of what he does to describe what will happen to him. He will be drawn back from Judah to his own land even though that is not what he wants to do.

The sign to the Jewish people that Sennacherib's death is certain, is that they will be delivered and will eat the fruit of the devastated land in the next year without sowing food, for it is too late to do that this year. The second year will also be a time of hunting and gathering and cleaning up, and the people will live off things that grow themselves from the devastated lands. In the third year the normal cycles of agriculture will begin again, and they will have normal crops, and their vineyards will be back in full production again. The remnant that survives this siege will take root in the land again and they will prosper in the land and multiply. Of the total population of Judah of probably over a million people less that 100,000 will survive, but in a hundred years the population will be back to over a million again. They will prosper because the Lord will deliver them. Another greater recovery will be experienced in the years after the Babylonian captivity, when

only around 4600 people survive the sieges and live. Jeremiah 52:28-30. By the days of the Lord the Jewish population around the Mediterranean and in Babylon and further east was over 4 million.

**Verses 31 – 34.** It is from Jerusalem itself that the remnant will emerge to repopulate the land, and they will not just survive, but be blessed mightily by the Lord, in the midst of political control and dominance by Assyria. It is the “zeal of the Lord” that will accomplish this. It is the zeal of the Lord that we need to seek in our own lives today, for if the power of the living God pours through us, then all that He wants fulfilled through us will be. Let us seek the power of God, and be clean vessels for that power to flow through. The prophet then passes on prophetic detail that places his prophecy firmly in the zone of godly word, for it is absolutely falsifiable.

The test of falsifiability is the main test for any prophetic word. If a prophetic utterance cannot be falsified then it is not specific enough to meet the criteria for a biblically sound prophetic word. Notice how specific Isaiah is in his prophetic word. If one Assyrian soldier fires an arrow into the city then the prophet is false. If one siege engine fires a stone into the city the prophet is proved false. If one defensive wall, or siege rampart is built, then he is false. The Lord’s promise is firm, that Sennacherib will not enter this city, but the way he came that way will he flee back home.

**Verses 35 – 37.** The very next night the Angel of the Lord went through the enemy camp and killed every man in the camp, so that by dawn the entire camp was full of corpses. Sennacherib and a few of his top men are left alive and they flee for their lives back home without their army. It was a plague of some sort that is visited upon the soldiers, as was visited upon Egypt in the Exodus. Exodus 12:29ff. The later Greek historian Herodotus tells the story of an Assyrian Army that is decimated by a plague of mice carrying the pneumonic plague, and that story may refer to this incident.

Whatever the cause, the soldiers are all dead over a night, and the king flees for his life back to his palace and prays in the temple of his gods. It is there that two of his own sons find him one day and murder him. They flee to the north, and his smartest third son takes charge. This son, Esarhaddon, will be one of the great rulers of the “Evil Empire”. Isaiah’s prophetic word is proved correct. The nation is delivered, and the great enemy of God and Judah dies in his own temple. Esarhaddon dealt with Judah as a client kingdom and Hezekiah and especially his son became tribute payers again. Judah will remain under tribute to Assyria until its fall in 612 BC and they will prosper under the evil empire. Spiritual realities are always more important than political ones!

## **PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. Have we taken personal responsibility for our own errors of judgement and sins? Have we taken personal responsibility for our playing with evils that we ought to have shunned? Have we taken personal responsibility for the sin and evils of our nation and have we brought all this before the Lord in prayer? Let us take the demand for revival seriously and bring our prayers before the Lord for ourselves and our nation. Let us pray now about this. “Lord let the revival begin in our own hearts; let us love the plan, the person, the work of the Lord, and let us seek your will for us and do it! We ask this in the name of Jesus the Christ, the King of all kings and Lord of all lords.”

2. Have we spread out the letters of testing before the Lord? If we have received a challenge to faith, have we laid it out before the Lord and gathered the family around us to pray for and over it? This action of Hezekiah here is what is required now in our own lives today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hezekiah had failed the Lord in seeking Egyptian help, and he had miscalculated in his rebellion, but even this grave error (which cost him 90% of his kingdom) did not end his life and purpose. Through the prayer of confession he is restored and the remnant of his nation is saved. Let us sit with our failures, and having understood our errors, let us confess them and seek the Lord’s path through the consequences of them. If we are alive, then the Lord still has a purpose for our life.

3. There is a daily, and at times hourly, battle for the minds of mankind. The enemy seeks to undermine and destroy our ability to fight and stand for the Lord, and the Lord seeks our faith and trust in Him. Let us feed upon the Word of God and rest upon His promises, walk in the power of the Spirit, and so win that battle today. Let us walk in God’s power only, for that alone will accomplish the work that God seeks done.

4. God doesn’t need vast numbers, for the smallest remnant can be used to re-seed a work and bring great spiritual prosperity. What the Lord needs is obedient servants, not large battalions of people who are not 100% committed. We have large and busy churches, but their busy-ness is not necessarily an indication of great spiritual work. Let us not be fooled by activity, but be looking for spiritual fruit in the lives of those who are ‘active’. Remember, termites are active, but also very destructive!

## **REFLECTION UPON THE GIFT OF PROPHECY AND THE ROLE OF THE PROPHET**

1. The gift of prophecy and the office of the prophet are distinguished in Scripture. In the Old Testament there were those who had the office of prophet, and served in an official capacity within the worship system of Israel but there were also those who at times were given the gift of prophecy to give a special prophecy even though they were not full time prophets. Elijah was a man with the office and the gift, where-as David had the gift at times but not the office.

2. The roles of the person with the office of prophet were many and varied:

(a) – Aaron was a preacher Exodus 7:1

(b) – In Nehemiah’s time the prophet-preacher had a role to exegete the Word of God clearly so that the people would know the truth. Nehemiah 6:7, Hosea 6:5.

- (c) – As revivalists they were to call people to repentance. Judges 6:7-12, Zechariah 7:7-12.
- (d) – They were to oppose apostasy so that those who were likely to be misled by a false teacher would have no excuse. 1 Kings 18:36-39, 40, 2 Chronicles 25:15 Ezekiel 2:5, 2 Kings 20:11.
- (e) – They were encouragers of the people. Ezra 5:2.
- (f) – They were sometimes song/worship leaders for the people. 1 Samuel 10:5.
- (g) – They led in prayer at worship. 2 Chronicles 32:20.
- (h) – They were the advisers to the kings and they were associated with coronations. 1 Samuel 10:1, 1 Kings 11:28, 29, 2 Kings 9:1-6, 2 Chronicles 12:5, 2 Chronicles 12:6, 15:2-7.
- (i) – They were spiritual advisers or seers for the kings; they "saw" the immediate future and so were able to advise the kings of the right decisions. 1 Samuel 9:9, 2 Samuel 24:11, 1 Chronicles 21:9, 24:29, 2 Chronicles 19:2, 33:18, 2 Kings 17:13, Isaiah 29:10,
- (j) – They were fore-tellers of significant future events. 2 Samuel 7:5-16, Amos 9:11, Isaiah 9:6,7, Isaiah 53, Ezekiel 34:22ff, Micah 5:2, Daniel 9:26, Zechariah 13:8, Joel, Zechariah 14, and many more.
- (k) – God intended them to be the shepherds and vine-dressers of the nation. As such they were to be the type of Christ who is referred to in the Old Testament as "the great prophet". Deuteronomy 18:15-19, Zechariah 13:5,6, Matthew 21:11, Luke 7:16, 8:18-20, 24:19,23-26, John 7:40,41.

3. The Methodology of the prophets. There was no "set" formula for the prophets to follow, but certain things were established as "tests" for the people to be sure the prophet was genuine.

- (a) – The prophet had to have a spiritual life witness that was like Moses. Deuteronomy 34:10-12.
- (b) – God spoke to the prophets by dreams and visions. God spoke to Moses face to face but he was an exception. Numbers 12:6-7.
- (c) – The prophet had to be totally confident of his message, as he was judged by God if there was any falsehood in it. 1Kings 22:13,14, 2 Kings 5:8.
- (d) – There were to be no secret prophecies, everything was to be open and clear, so that all the people might be warned of God. Jeremiah 23:25-29.
- (e) – The prophet had to be specific in his message and had to be obeyed literally. 2Ki 5:10-19 note especially verse 13.

4. There were always false prophets; in fact the great prophets of the Old Testament were always outnumbered by false prophets in their own day. Jeremiah 2:8, Ezekiel 13:1-23.

Our Lord warned us that there will always be false prophets about. Matthew 7:15-23.

Note The Lord's Words here in that the personal walk of the prophet is to be paid attention to:-

No spiritual fruit in their life = no truth in their words.

God allows the false prophets to operate without immediate judgement upon them, so that believers are always presented with an obedience test, to see whether we will obey the Scriptures or follow our own lusts to judgement.

False prophets will abound at times of poor Bible teaching. Weeds only grow in poorly cared for soil. Hosea 4:5,6, 9:7,8.

5. Tests that believers must apply when confronting a person claiming the gift of prophecy.

- (a) – The words of the prophet will never contradict the Word of God. Jeremiah 23:33-36, 2 Peter 2:1-3, 1Cor 14:32.
- (b) – The prophet will never call people away from genuine worship of God. Deuteronomy 13:1-5.
- (c) – The prophet will always be specific and the prophecy will be able to be tested. Deut 18:20-22, Jeremiah 28:9.
- (d) – Any prophet who asked for money was to be treated as false. Jeremiah 8:10.
- (e) – Any prophet who was a drunkard was to be treated as false. Micah 2:11.
- (f) – Any unconfessed sin of envy, jealousy, strife, etc in their life, they were false! Jeremiah 23:11.
- (g) – If they were found only in groups they were probably false, as God's prophets were men alone. 1Ki 22:5-8, 18:22.
- (h) – Does the prophecy accord with Scripture (this is more than just not contradict)? 1 Corinthians 14:37,38, 2Kings 23:2.

## NOTES

**CHAPTER 20****INTRODUCTION**

The sickness of Hezekiah occurs around the time of the first major Assyrian invasion from which he escapes by paying the enemy to go away. This places it in the years 715-712 BC, but our writer is frustratingly vague about the specific time. Was it before, during, or after the payment of the ransom? We do not know. Specifics about this would help us understand this king a little more, but if the historian is Jeremiah, he is writing 130 years later and may have been vague himself about the details, or they were so well known that he didn't think he needed to say more. Was his illness a discipline of the Lord related to the rebellion against Assyria, or was the rebellion so badly timed because he was ill and not thinking straight? We are not told these things and must wait until heaven for the answers.

Hezekiah's reign is from around 727 BC through until around 698 BC. We must be wary of specific dates to the year, as the lunar years of the Jewish calendar of this period makes specificity difficult. He does not survive the final victory over Sennacherib, around 701 BC, by very much himself, and his son Manasseh succeeds him on the throne at a very young age, and will reign for 55 years. Much of the middle years of this reign will be in total paganism. Parallel passages are 2 Chronicles 32:24ff, Isaiah 38 – 39. The Isaiah passage is the most full and worth reading before you study this present chapter.

As we will later see in our history, Manasseh will be saved towards the end of his reign by the extreme situations the Lord places him within, but not before he has murdered Isaiah, the very man who brought the message of deliverance to his father and his nation. Like the murder of the prophet Zechariah at the hands of King Joash, the very young man that Zechariah's father had saved alive from the slaughter of Queen Athaliah, this next king repeats the evil, and underlines the truth of the martyr Stephen's words to the Sanhedrin so many centuries later. 2 Chronicles 24:18-22, Acts 7:51-60. It is these things, and the final great evil of the death of the Messiah Yeshua, that will be refreshed to the minds of the Jewish people when they think upon their history during Yom Kippur at the turning point of the Great Tribulation period. Zechariah 10:10-14.

Hezekiah has started well in his reign, but at this point of weakness, with death closing in on him, and then again after his healing, he makes a series of errors of judgement. He is under great pressure and we can forgive him, and the Lord does, but the Lord also judges him for all this. As we read this chapter we must reflect upon our own lives in this regard. It is human to err, and under great pressure it is quite normal to fail and fall into temptations, but the Lord will not forgive these unless we face them as sin, and without any excuses being made, we confess them thoroughly. We may be forgiven, but the consequences of our errors may become judgment to us. Psalm 103:10-18.

There are no excuses before God for failure! We are never placed in any situation in this life that there is not a way through in the grace and power of God. Failure is always the result of walking in our own strength rather than God's readily available power. Through the filling of the Holy Spirit there is always a way through every testing circumstance, and our challenge is always, whatever the pressure, to look to Jesus and walk in the power of the Spirit. 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Thessalonians 3:3, 1 Peter 5:7-9, 2 Peter 2:9.

**2 KINGS 20:1-21**

**1** In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live. **2** Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying, **3** I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. **4** And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, **5** Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD. **6** And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. **7** And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs. And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered. **8** And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What shall be the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the LORD the third day? **9** And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees? **10** And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees. **11** And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the LORD: and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz. **12** At that time Berodachbaladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. **13** And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and shewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not. **14** Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, even from Babylon. **15** And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them. **16** And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD. **17** Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid

up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. 18 And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. 19 Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good is the word of the LORD which thou hast spoken. And he said, Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days? 20 And the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and all his might, and how he made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 21 And Hezekiah slept with his fathers: and Manasseh his son reigned in his stead.

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 – 3.** I have been used by the Lord to deliver this specific message of Isaiah to four of my friends over the last seven years. Each had been told by well meaning but totally false enthusiastic Pentecostal prophets, that they would live and prosper, but the Lord gave me immediately another message. I had to speak with each, quietly and sensitively, and tell them that their illness was for death and not for life, and that their entry into heaven was not a bad thing, but the Lord's time for them to join Him.

In each case my friends passed away in a relaxed state, in the Lord's promises of eternal life, and their families were not disturbed by the false prophecies that had been received about their living on. As a result of this, another Christian friend of mine, jokes with me that he will never ask me to pray for him if he is ill! I need to hasten to add, that the Lord has used me to pray for the sick and those prayed for have lived, amongst whom were those who were not expected to live by their doctors. Like Isaiah I have learned to listen and wait upon the Lord – this is an absolute requirement for dynamic Christian leadership.

When I am asked to pray for the sick I listen to the Lord, and that is the challenge for all who are asked to pray for the sick. When we pray for health for a loved one, friend, or church associate, at prayer time, we are tasked by the Lord to LISTEN to His voice before we spring into action and pray for their health. There will be one illness that will kill us all; that is all except the last rapture generation. Let us be biblical in our prayers for health and wellness with those who come for prayer, for one illness is the one that will see that person into heaven, and our prayers must reflect truth, not wishful thinking. If a person is to die then praying with passion for their life will only distress all their friends and family when they die. Let us listen as we pray for the sick! Isaiah listens and he is a little blunt here with what the Lord tells him concerning Hezekiah!

Most of us facing this situation would be a little more diplomatic and sensitive, but Isaiah has the truth to tell, and he is not troubled by the niceties of politics or modern psychology. This king will prove himself a fool and a self centred one at that. Isaiah must be blunt or Hezekiah won't get it! The king's later words indicate that he is frustratingly self centred and more than a little irritating, and so I can excuse Isaiah for Hezekiah appears to waffle as badly as Polonius in Shakespeare's Hamlet! The king is a waffler and so Isaiah really lays the truth out in simple words for him. The king hears his words and is shocked, but takes his shock to the right place; the throne of God, and he prays.

If we are to die, then it is vital that we "set our house in order", with a simple will that does not cause distress and chaos for those who are left behind. I have had to pick up the carnage from those who believed false prophets that they would live and died unready, both emotionally and legally. These misled people left their families a legacy of chaos and financial and emotional ruin! False prophets cannot now be stoned to death, and I for one regret that! Those who have prophesied life when the person was to die have created chaos and destroyed faith.

Having picked up the pieces, in one case after an entire family had left the true faith because of such false prophecies, I hate those who blaspheme the Lord's holy name by saying, "Thus saith the Lord", when they are simply expressing their own well meaning nonsense! Remember, false prophets are to be exposed and silenced whenever we find them in our churches. In Isaiah we see the burden of a true prophet of the Lord. They are not showy, nor dramatic, don't speak in King James language, but are plain in their speech and direct in their prophetic words.

Hezekiah does the right thing here, and I have a weird and powerful feeling as I read these words of his here. In 1986 I was gassed in an exercise in the Armed Forces of New Zealand. It was the result of an idiot colleague, and an error of judgement on his behalf, but I was the officer in charge, and I had to be the last man leaving the affected area where the smoke bombs had been ignited. I was able to stagger on in work for nearly a year before my Immune System collapsed as a result of the Sulphur and Phosphorus that had burned my lungs. Three years later I got back to work! I was told to go away and die quietly by my helpful chest physician and he gave me a very large bottle of steroid medication to assist me on the way. I was delivered only by believing prayer, not by medicine. James 5:14-15.

Before that time I had gasped and wheezed my way through many dark months expecting to die. I prayed Hezekiah's prayer, and I meant it, as I faced my bedroom wall. I then had a stupid Pentecostal "friend" enter my room one day and invite me to confess my sins, for he believed in his false theology, that to suffer and die this horribly, I must have done a great deal of sin. I would have indeed sinned greatly with his murder had I been able to reach him that day! I couldn't reach him, or any stones, to stone him to death, and so he lived to haunt another place! Sadly I couldn't silence him permanently! I know the feelings of this king Hezekiah, and they are powerful and deep indeed; beyond the reckoning of healthy and strong men. I know also of his joy at being healed, and I can see how he foolishly made the mistake he makes with the Babylonian embassy.

It is all too easy to criticize this king, but he faces things that few of us face, and he failed. Let us be careful lest we fail as he did! I look back upon my own time before and after my supernatural healing and I give thanks to the power and grace and mercy of God, and I thank Him most for his forgiveness of my own foolishness before and after those terrible days. I did not sin a fatal sin as Hezekiah did, but I could have, and the grace of God was strong to keep me safe through those days, and I thank Him alone. When men have plumbed the depths and then been raised to the heavens in joy, they can lose their discernment. I thank God for his grace and the Holy Spirit's voice that kept me.

**Verses 4 – 6.** Having delivered his message Isaiah doesn't stand around and make small talk or crack jokes! I am always amazed at God's servants who make small talk and make jokes to "warm up" their congregations. We are not called to entertain, but to deliver truth and leave men with the choice to do something godly with that truth! Hezekiah's prayer is fervent and appropriate, and the Lord hears his prayer, both its petition and its desire. In all situations it is right and proper to pray and cast ourselves upon the Lord, seeking his path through.

The Lord stops Isaiah half way across the courtyard and he returns to speak with the king again and tell him that his prayers have been answered and he will live another fifteen years. He is also given a sign of this reality (because he asks for one) and an action to do immediately to express his very weak faith. The sun dial will go backwards 10 degrees. This is impossible given that it means the sun goes backwards; so a miracle is involved here. He is told that the Lord will defend the city of Jerusalem for David's sake, and it will not fall to the Assyrians. This observation indicates to me that this event occurs around the year 712 BC during the first invasion when Hezekiah has to pay the Assyrians off, and that ties in with his death around 698 BC.

**Verses 7 – 11.** The prophet is also given specific instructions from the Lord to place some figs upon the cancerous boil (or other infectious lesion) that has erupted onto the surface of Hezekiah's skin in some area(s) of his body. Figs were used as a healing and drawing agent for infectious boils, but the prophet has made it clear that the Lord alone is the healer, not the figs. The Lord also uses at times an action on the part of the healed person to involve them in the process, but the healing is from the Lord, not the action taken. John 9:1ff. The action here is to assist the faith of the person, not assist the healing. So don't buy figs for boils, unless you want to eat the figs.

The movement of the sundial backwards was a foolish thing to ask for by Hezekiah. Why does this man need any sign at all except the reality of his healing? It is a sign of this man's weakness, for asking for signs is always a dangerous and foolish thing, and will never lead to any good thing. Sadly this man will not bring his young son up to follow righteousness, and the boy born during this time of grace will be Manasseh, and he will murder the great prophet Isaiah! It is amazing that the king, who has reigned for over 14 years by this point has no sons at this time. It may be he had sons, but that they were lost as hostages, or casualties in the battles, to the king of Assyria after his invasion of 715 – 712 BC.

There is a great deal that has gone on behind the scenes here that our writer is silent upon and may explain why Hezekiah is so annoyingly weak, after such a great start in his reign. Hezekiah asks for a miracle when simply seeing and feeling his recovery will be all the evidence he needs. Having been this ill myself, I can make this observation without anyone accusing me of being a theoretician! I am not being harsh but applying what I knew through prayer as I walked through a very dark three years of extreme suffering. There is something about this king that indicates his faith is ruined by his self-centeredness. He may have taken his sickness as a personal affront from God to him.

Something is happening here that does not reflect well on the king and the writer doesn't want us to feel too badly towards him, because he is a good man at heart. Keep remembering the promises of Psalm 103:10-18. All this may also explain why later Isaiah is hesitant to personally approach this king. Our writer wants to make him look as good as he can make him, for he was a good man; but this "little" request for a miracle which has no real purpose is the indication of his weakness and the coming doom of his family and nation. Jesus words in Matthew 16:1-4 come to mind. Beware of seeking miracles; just be obedient and let the real miracle of a transformed life be your source of strength.

**Verse 12 – 15.** Around this time the Babylonian aristocracy is under the heel of Assyrian power, but they were always looking for the chance to rebel. Several rebellions at Babylon occurred and were put down with Assyrian ferocity. The king mentioned here will have a descendent 90 years later who will be successful. In 624 BC the Babylonians do throw off the Assyrian yoke finally and for good. By 612 they put together a triple alliance with the Medes and Scythians and they destroyed Nineveh. The young general and crown prince of Babylon who will achieve this feat is Nebuchadnezzar.

The king of Babylon in Hezekiah's day is no independent king, but a vassal of the Assyrians, and he is looking for an ally in rebellion, so his visit is a danger to Hezekiah after buying off the Assyrians from their recent assault. Hezekiah is impressed with the fact that the crown prince of Babylon would travel so far to see if he was fully recovered, and rather than seeing this for the cunning political visit it was, he became impressed with himself and made a fatal error of judgement for all such meetings were spied upon by the Assyrians, and the Babylonian motivation is not pure.

The crown prince of Babylon was visiting to see what strength he had after such an assault that he had survived from Sennacherib, and how much wealth and power he had left. It was a spying visit, and had its eye to the future. The Babylonians are interested in Babylon, not in Judah or its king. Hezekiah gets impressed by his high ranking visitor and forgets that the only one he is to be impressed by is God. Let this be a warning to us all, for we also can start to believe our own publicity machine if we are not careful.

We are to be impressed by the Lord only, never by any man who the worms will eat! Hezekiah shows him everything, the defences, the armour stores, and the stored wealth that has escaped the Assyrian's eyes. It is arrogant foolishness and will have devastating consequences for all this man sees his descendent will take into Babylon. Isaiah hears of the visit and possibly thinking that the easily impressed and newly healed (and emotional) ruler will go too far, goes to the king to see what he has said and done. He is too late; Hezekiah has shown the Babylonians everything.

**Verses 16 – 21.** The old prophet then prophesies the Babylonian captivity, foretelling the foolish king that his descendents will all go to Babylon and there they will serve the descendents of the king he has tried to impress. Hezekiah's words betray his self centred nature and the heart of his weakness. Read them again and be amazed at this man's pathetic nature. He did well early in his reign, but he sought peace and prosperity in his own day and did not have a longer term viewpoint. Isaiah's words are not "good" in any shape or form, but to this selfish man they are, for he will have peace, he thinks. The truth is he will not have peace, and the next time will be even closer than the last. He will not live to enjoy any peace, but will die within a few years of his next deliverance.

The next time he faces Sennacherib is the great siege of Jerusalem, and as we have seen, in that war he loses 90% at least of all his people and his cities. This man is short sighted indeed and does not see the spiritual dimension of events, and so does not follow through on his early reforms and revival. The spiritual momentum he began is lost by the mid-point of his reign. His civil engineering works are again mentioned and they are indeed a marvel, but he was a flawed man, and his end opens the doors for spiritual and political disaster.

### **PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. All sickness is not "unto death" but at least one will be for each of us. Let us be careful therefore when we are asked to pray for the sick, for we must listen to the Lord regarding what the message is for each we pray for. For some the prayer needs to be focused upon their need to set their heart, lives and affairs in order, for they go to be with the Lord, but for others we are to confidently pray for healing in Jesus name believing that the Lord is the God who does heal. If we are sure of the Lord's will we are to pray for healing, but if not, we are to be prayerful. Once again, prayers for the sick remind us that the Christian life is not a formula and process driven thing, but a "WALK" with the Lord and a listening to the Holy Spirit.

2. When the Lord lifts us up, let us be humble and quiet in our walk, never giving way to arrogance and the stupidity that flows from that. It is not how we begin but how we end that is the real test of our lives. The ancient Greeks had a saying; "Call no man happy until he is dead". By that they meant that the end of the man really tells you whether he was happy or not.

3. Prophetic truth is always specific and truthful. False prophets are to be named and shamed by the pastor of the local church. Those who have spoken falsely are to be silenced lest they offend and mislead the weak. Beware of prophecy hunters, and miracle seekers, for both groups are weak in faith and emotional in their commitments. The Lord seeks for stable faith that lasts the distance, not emotional nonsense that evaporates under pressure. Let us urge our people onwards in real spiritual growth.

### **NOTES**

**CHAPTER 21****INTRODUCTION**

The great drama of mankind's walk upon the earth centres in the daily exercise of our free will. We make our own choices and must face the consequences of those choices. We can have the best opportunities to advance in positive directions and yet man can turn from good to evil on a whim and destroy the lives of all who matter to him. The choices we make in this life set us up for eternity, yet so many appear to ignore the eternal reality and live as if there is no tomorrow, only the temporary pleasure of today.

Manasseh grows up in the palace of his father as a favoured son. Did older brothers die, or was he the sole survivor due to illness or warfare? We simply do not know about other siblings that may have made better kings, but this man becomes king at the young age of twelve and very quickly rejects the godly faith of his father and turns to the paganism of his grand-father Ahaz, and the evil Ahab of Israel.

There was a strong anti-Jehovah faction in Judah, and it numbered many priests and false prophets amongst its ranks. These people did not want the austere and demanding faith of Moses, but the more pleasant to the sensuous worship of the pagan gods. They blamed Jehovah for the invasions and destruction in the land, not seeing that their own idolatry had brought such judgement, exactly as the Lord Jehovah had told Moses it would. Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 26-29.

These people argued for an alliance with Egypt and other pagan nations against Assyria, and they were prepared to accept the pagan gods of these nations as their allies also. Isaiah 28:7-14, 30:9ff. Their argument was based on human logic and was persuasive within ten years of the deliverance of the nation under Isaiah. They argued that Hezekiah had turned from paganism back to Jehovah and challenged the young king to think, what had he gained by this? He had been struck by Jehovah with a terminal illness after only 13-14 years of rule, then healed, only to die still young in his fifties, not even seeing his son reach full manhood. They avoided discussion of the king's weaknesses, and blamed God for his suffering and judgment.

The enemies of the Lord argued that the cost of serving Jehovah was too high, and that it was more relaxing and safer to join the majority of mankind, and to serve the many gods. They ignored the reality of the ANGELIC CONFLICT, and opted for surrender to satanic forces to win peace in their time. What they said was correct in a way, for by giving way to Satan they had peace from his forces, but the cost was far higher than they wanted to admit, or were finally prepared to face.

Many tired saints have been swayed by this logic of paganism, for to stand for the Lord is to be a lightning conductor for evil attack at times; almost a magnet for trouble! The active, Holy Spirit filled believer, is at the centre of a fire storm of enemy action, but in the power of the Spirit we are as safe as we can be upon this earth. Anything short however of total obedience to the Lord places us in danger, and it is this constant state of obedient vigilance that is wearing on many, and they look for relaxation. The devil certainly offers the temptation of the "easy way", but there is no easy way that leads in any other direction than down hill! Matthew 7:13-23.

Manasseh is a man who illustrates the cost of the "big easy". He opts for the apparently safe route of paganism, for the majority of people support it, and he has little opposition to his plans, except from the old prophet Isaiah, and he is quickly silenced by cruel and sadistic execution. The early reign of Manasseh appears to prove that evil is triumphant and that all is lost for Judah, and yet the remnant of faith still exists in the darkest hour and revival comes again.

**2 KINGS 21:1-26**

**1** Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hephzibah. **2** And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel. **3** For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. **4** And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD said, In Jerusalem will I put my name. **5** And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. **6** And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. **7** And he set a graven image of the grove that he had made in the house, of which the LORD said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever: **8** Neither will I make the feet of Israel move any more out of the land which I gave their fathers; only if they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them. **9** But they hearkened not: and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the children of Israel. **10** And the LORD spake by his servants the prophets, saying, **11** Because Manasseh king of Judah hath done these abominations, and hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did, which were before him, and hath made Judah also to sin with his idols: **12** Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle. **13** And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab: and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth

a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down. 14 And I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies; 15 Because they have done that which was evil in my sight, and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt, even unto this day. 16 Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the LORD. 17 Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and all that he did, and his sin that he sinned, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 18 And Manasseh slept with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzza: and Amon his son reigned in his stead. 19 Amon was twenty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Meshullemeth, the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah. 20 And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh did. 21 And he walked in all the way that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them: 22 And he forsook the LORD God of his fathers, and walked not in the way of the LORD. 23 And the servants of Amon conspired against him, and slew the king in his own house. 24 And the people of the land slew all them that had conspired against king Amon; and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead. 25 Now the rest of the acts of Amon which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 26 And he was buried in his sepulchre in the garden of Uzza: and Josiah his son reigned in his stead

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 – 3.** Isaiah will use Manasseh's mother's name in one of his prophetic words to bring hope to the nation from the midst of the wickedness they plunged into. Isaiah 62:1-5. This may mean his mother is a believer, or it may simply be a rebuke to the entire royal family, that are so well named, and yet do not live up to their names. This man is given long life and when we see his reign of 55 years we can think that it is good to be evil, for the Lord gives you a long life to repent! That is the simple verdict of many, and even today we have a saying that goes back to these days, which says, "Only the good die young".

This saying is neither right nor wrong; for both good and evil people die both old and young, for all die when their time upon the earth is up, and the Lord alone decides that. This man lives long because he is part of the plan of God that is leading to the sifting of the volition of his people and he becomes the means of judgement for them. It is easy to be a pagan under Manasseh and hard to be a genuine believer for the very temple is polluted again, but the godly persist, and that is the Lord's call to His people. We are to stand for Him in troubled times, and not pay heed to the opinions of men.

All that his father Hezekiah had destroyed, this man rebuilt. It was a conscious and thorough return to paganism that affected every area of religious life. The old god idols had been destroyed in the reforms twenty nine years before, so he had new gods made and built new temples and "groves" (circles of columns/pillars in the centre of which were pagan incense altars) everywhere. He rebuilt the hill high places in the provincial areas and thus secured the country pagans, and he filled the Temple of Solomon with the pagan altars of the Canaanite gods and so filled the desires of the city pagans.

He served the gods of the pagan pantheon, and worshipped the sun, moon and stars, rather than their creator. Many brave prophets stood against him and prophesied the truth to him and paid with their lives. Verses 10-11, 16. Leviticus 18:24-30, Deuteronomy 4:14-24, 12:30-32, 17:2-5. Instead of execution of the pagans, there was execution of the godly under this king, and so before his own conversion there are many martyrs made. He institutes a reign of terror that is worse than the evils of Queen Athaliah. 2 Kings 11.

**Verses 4 – 8.** The ultimate evil was to follow the evil queen Athaliah and his grand-father Ahaz, and place altars to the gods in the very temple of Solomon itself. His evil advisors argued that this was correct, for when these evil people did these things they had peace and prosperity, and of course the evil ones did have this for a time! Evil does pay for a time! Do not ever argue that evil people don't have more fun, for they often do, and their fun may last a long time, and their celebration over the righteous may last a life time. The devil does pay his wages well, but the Lord settles the final account, and it is the regrets of Hell itself. Luke 16:19-31.

The story of the Rich man and Lazarus the beggar is told by the Lord to underline this point, for at times the righteous do suffer long and their road through life is hard. Luke 16:19-31. The writer makes it clear that the Lord's promise to bless the Temple of Solomon and the City of David rested upon the on-going obedience of the people to the Lord's Word and godly worship. The promises of God rested upon a conditional covenant with the people; they would hold the land only as long as they honoured the God of the land.

Manasseh was determined to insult and abuse the God of Israel, and he even places altars to the gods of the pagans in the two courts of the temple itself. He left the main altar functioning in the Mosaic tradition, but he placed the pagan altars alongside the real one. It was a "World Council of Churches" type religious compromise that was instituted here, not the total abolition of the Mosaic worship of Israel. The Word of God was however "lost", or rather we should say, some nameless saint hid the books of Moses in the Temple, where they would be found under the revival of Josiah many years later. The preaching of the Word was stopped however, for the enemy will allow people to worship truly in association with falsehood, but he will not encourage or allow (if he has the power) the teaching of the Word of God.

If there was any pagan evil that could be done then Manasseh practised it, even to child sacrifice later in his life. He opened the door to witchcraft and wizardry and allowed every form of pagan excitement to prosper, when all such

practises were to be punishable by death. Deuteronomy 18:9-22. The ultimate event was the setting up of a graven image (a bronze idol of the sexualised gods of fertility) in a circle of columns (a "grove") in the Temple court itself. This was a horrific insult to God and to all believers in the nation, and the writer makes it clear, that this action above all others, and the people's acceptance of it, would lead to the eventual end of the kingdom.

**Verses 9 – 15.** The writer makes it clear, from his perspective just after the Babylonian exile has begun, that the majority of the people were whole heartedly supportive of the pagan revival. Few voices were raised against it and they were drowned in a sea of blood. The people were "seduced" by their king, but they were culpable for their decision making. They were willing participants in the unholy but pleasurable religions of the pagan nations.

We must be careful of paganism even today. When General William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, said that "the devil should not have all the best music", he was right, but there is a line that must not be crossed. We can utilise worldly tunes and even lyrics at times, but when our worship resembles the pagan's drug soaked rock festivals then we are in the wrong place spiritually.

Manasseh led the people into more and more evil, and it was hard for the people to stand against the king when he led the worship, but to deliver themselves from God's judgement they needed to absent themselves from this evil. Many did stand against him and some of these did survive to see the revival of Josiah. It is important to remember that the writer is giving us an overview of the majority's actions, and there were always that small group that continued to stand for the Lord. They were unknown to the evil leaders, but always known to God. Malachi 3:16-18.

The Lord was not silent in the land, and a number of prophets arose and spoke the truth to counter the majority voice of the false prophets. Isaiah isn't mentioned here because he is martyred early in Manasseh's reign, as the false prophets take their revenge upon their enemy. The man who saved the nation in 701 BC is murdered by 690BC. The godly prophets are specific in their condemnation of the king, and they compare him to the Ammonites before them whom the Lord judged. These prophets begin to prophecy specifically of the coming judgement of exile upon the nation of Judah, and they compare its fate to that of Samaria. The nature of the judgement is going to be as severe as the sin has been that will lead to it.

These words are sobering indeed, but they were ignored by the pagans, for all they saw was pleasantness and plenty. They saw the financial recovery after the days of Hezekiah, and their peace treaties with Assyria gave them a false sense of security. The image used of Jerusalem is of the cleansing of a vessel by turning it upside down to get the liquid cleansing agent out. It is the message of thorough and final judgement of the evils that have brought Jerusalem and its temple to ruin. The survivors of the Assyrian conquest were meant to be a remnant of grace who would serve the Lord in the beauty of holiness, but they turned from the one who saved them and served other gods until there was nothing left to do but remove them from the land itself. 2 Chronicles 36:15-16.

**Verses 16 – 18.** We are not told who the victims of his murderous rampages were, but the expectation from the writer's words is that they included the prophets of the Lord and any who stood against his paganism. Many martyrs are included in the words of Hebrews 11:35-40. We are reminded that we all have a time into which we have been born and a task that is specific to our path through our life. We are all called to walk a different path through this life, and so let us walk with focused power the path the Lord has called us to walk, whether it is to death as a martyr or an old age of service. Let us serve the Lord and speak the truth and leave the consequences of our obedience with the Lord who called us.

This man is buried in his own garden, not the tomb of David and the other kings. He was a nature worshipper and wanted his grave in amongst the trees and flower beds he loved. How alike this is to the great persecutor of the early Church, the Emperor Diocletian. The great Emperor launched the last and worst persecution against the church when more died and were imprisoned than ever before, and yet he was a man who loved nature and loved nothing other than to spend time in his garden growing cabbages!

Do not be fooled by a man's urbane or natural interests, for they are no guide to his policy towards God's people. I like asking people if they would trust and admire a man who loved children and animals, and actually established a society to protect animals and had a life long hatred of those who injured animals. I then ask them if they would like him more if he was a vegetarian and actively evangelical as a non-smoker. Most would say that such a person would be a good citizen and probably a nice person, and yet I have described Adolf Hitler!

Manasseh appears to have experienced a saving grace moment in his later life. 2 Chronicles 33:10-17. In these verses we read that he was personally captured by the Assyrians and in captivity in their jail he repented of his evils and his many sins. He was restored and cleaned up the temple to the point where sacrifices were offered properly again. If this man could be saved, then there is certainly hope for all! The writer of the Chronicles certainly records that he was a transformed man in his last years and knew the Lord then. The murderer of the prophets came to the place where he could face the prospect of going to be with them in heaven! There is hope for all men.

Once again we are faced with the frustration of not being able to read the many other books of the period in which were written the fuller records of Manasseh's reign. 2 Chronicles 33:17-19. Many books recorded the words of the prophets and seers who warned him and these books were a testimony of truth in dark times. Many questions are left to be answered in heaven, where both this man and those he murdered in his paganism are together worshipping God without anger or upset! He lost eternal reward, but found salvation, and probably serves the martyrs in heaven.....

**Verses 19 – 26.** Amon has been brought up in a household where paganism was dominant, and the later change of his father may have been very brief before his death. The clean up of the temple was certainly not thorough, as Josiah required as much time to clean up the temple as Hezekiah had done and more besides. Amon aggressively followed the gods of his father's paganism rather than the Lord God. It looks like he embraced the Assyrian policies of his father and accepted their gods wholeheartedly. We can often be baffled by the rejection of an evil son of his father, but at times an evil son can reject his father's salvation, preferring his robust paganism to the contemplative praying father who may appear weak to him after the early years.

In his case the Lord acts quickly, for there is no hope of repentance with Amon, and the revival is only able to be launched with his removal. It is the Lord's plan and these men sit on the throne at the will of God alone. They forget this to their peril. Amon lasts two years before he offends his own court and he is murdered by men even more evil than he is. There is a revulsion against the murder of Amon, even though he was evil, and the people rise up to deal with his murderers and all are caught and slain. It was clearly a deep and powerful conspiracy with many powerful men involved, but the people act and Josiah is chosen from the sons of Amon to rule as king.

Josiah is a very young boy, but he is a believer, with a believing mother, and it may be that the people's choice reflects their hunger for a spiritual path through the dangers of the end of the Assyrian period. Amon is buried in the same garden as Manasseh was and Josiah takes the throne and the scene is set for the last great, but all too temporary revival to begin. The Assyrian period begins with Isaiah's ministry and death, and it ends with Jeremiah's early ministry. By the time of Jeremiah's exile to Egypt Assyria has been in the dust of history for thirty years.

### **PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. The great temptations of older age are those to relax and rest, when the Lord is calling us forward to more exertion and struggle. We live upon this earth to serve, and so any holiday times are to be seized upon and used to the full, but then the loins are to be girded with the armour of the Holy Spirit, and we are to head into battle again. Retirement is in heaven, and until then we are to work the work the Lord has given us in His power, and under His direction.
2. This world is a furnace, and we are called to walk through it and burn away the evil and sinful behaviours that tie us to it and focus our hearts and minds upon the Lord alone. This world is a testing place, not a resting place. It is not our final destination, but a proving ground for greater things. The life and times of Manasseh are times like our own and we are challenged to stand like the godly prophets did, unto death, for the Lord's way in the presence of the enemy. Psalms 23:1-5.
3. Let us not give up praying for revival and for the salvation of all men. John 16:8-11. There is hope while men live that they can be transformed. The Lord controls the destiny of each of us and our job is to forget about where and when we are to die, but to focus upon living as He has called us to live, that we might fulfil His plan for us. Let us remember Manasseh and remind ourselves if we serve under such a man, that the Lord has His Josiah ready to take the helm if the prayers of the people request it. Let us keep praying and working for revival.

### **REFLECTION UPON OUR OBEDIENCE**

1. Obedience is better than offerings (1 Samuel 15:22; Proverbs 21:3; 28:9). If we are not in God's will, any "worship" we offer is unacceptable.
2. Obedience is something you have to learn. The basic training in obedience has to start in childhood. As it says in (Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16) "Honour your father and your mother." (Proverbs 4:3,4; 22:6; 29:15-17; Hebrews 5:8)
3. Teaching your child obedience is an act of love (Proverbs 3:12; 19:18; 23:13-14).
4. We have to obey those who are in authority over us (Exodus 20:12; 22:28; Leviticus 19:3; Deuteronomy 5:16; Romans 13:1-5; Ephesians 6:1-5; Colossians 3:18-22; Titus 3:1).
5. Those in authority have been put in that position by God (Romans 13:1).
6. Obedience to those in authority is obedience to God (Proverbs 24:21; Ephesians 6:7; Colossians 3:23-24; Romans 13:5).
7. Disobedience to those in authority is disobedience to God (Romans 1:30; 13:2).
8. But when we are ordered to do something that is against God's Will we have to disobey (Acts 4:19; 5:40-42).
9. The fifth commandment (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16) is the only commandment with a promise (Proverbs 10:17; Ephesians 6:1-3). Social life in a society is only possible when the people in it have learned to obey.
10. If this commandment is ignored, if the authority of the family is denied or not exercised, society will quickly slide into anarchy (Isaiah 3:12; Proverbs 29:21; 30:21-23; Romans 1:30).

**We are to be called an “OVERCOMER”**

1. Definition of an overcomer - "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:4,5). It is seen that an overcomer is a believer and we become overcomers at the point of salvation.
2. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." - believers will live with God in heaven forever. (Revelation 2:7)
3. "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death" - believers will not be subject to the lake of fire. (Revelation 2:11)
4. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." - believers are accepted by God on the basis of His provision. (Revelation 2:17)
5. "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star." - believers will rule over the nations and will be honoured. (Revelation 2:26-28)
6. "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." - believers are justified and sanctified by the death of our Lord and their names are permanently in the book of the living. (Revelation 3:5)
7. "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name." - believers will have access to the Holy Places of God and will eternally be identified with Jesus Christ. (Revelation 3:12)
8. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." - believers will reign with the Lord Jesus Christ (Revelation 3:21)

**NOTES**

**CHAPTER 22****INTRODUCTION**

Josiah at the tender age of eight years of age comes to the throne after the crushing of the coup of the courtiers against his father Amon. He comes to a crown that is delivered to him by the common people who have risen up to slay the murderers. They recognise him as a son of David, but he has received the throne from the people, and such a throne is often unsettled, with the young king often a pawn in the hands of equally dangerous men to the previous murderers.

Often men like Josiah, after receiving a throne this way will later stamp their authority by acts of violence against those who placed them there, to make sure they do not remove them later. This man however has a believing heart and a determination to follow his great grand-father Hezekiah in truth rather than the last two generations in their lies and evil. He is also kept by the Lord, and those who guard him in the early years bring him up in the love of the Lord and obedience to His Word.

He begins to rebuild the damaged and polluted temple in his eighteenth year (at around age 26 years), but before that he has worked with the priesthood and he encourages the reform of the religious worship of his land. When the money has built up he begins the work to restore the temple for its last years of service. It is important that the temple does function properly in the last days of Judah so that the people have the opportunity to see the truth portrayed by the Levitical sacrifices clearly before the Babylonians come.

In just the same way the Lord cleanses the second Temple to ensure it functions to accurately portray the sacrifices which speak of His person and work. In both cases the cleansing of the Temples occurs around forty years before they are destroyed. They are cleansed to operate only for the generation of grace until the Lord's judgement falls. The Lord's last warning to his people is the word of salvation – the person and work of Jesus of whom the sacrifices all speak.

This last reforming king receives the message from the Lord that all the reform he seeks to bring has come too late for the nation, but that he will die in spiritual peace of heart and soul. He will be spared by death before seeing this evil unfold. This chapter is the beginning of the end of the story of the nation of Judah. They have followed after paganism and the consequence of that is judgement by God. The revival will be short and lack power and depth, for the people are determined to remain pagan, and they "go along with" their king, but not with their heart and soul, and so his death ends it.

It is a sad principle of Bible doctrine to hear and understand, but it is a central one; that the day comes when it is too late to bring lasting revival, for judgement is all that the Lord can bring. The great sadness described in this chapter begins just under sixty years before the destruction of Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar's armies, and records the cleansing of the temple forty years before the destruction. The last generation will be without excuse, for they have their last good king as a mentor and they have the temple cleansed and functioning, but they will ignore the truth of both.

The Gospel stories record the events that cover the same basic time frame before the fall of Jerusalem that second awful time to the Roman Armies in 70AD. We need to reflect upon this awful truth as we enter this chapter; a people can go too far into evil to be brought back. Let us begin this chapter in prayer for our own nations that they might be brought back before they go down the path of death as the Jewish State did twice.

**2 KINGS 22:1-20**

**1** Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath. **2** And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left. **3** And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, that the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of the LORD, saying, **4** Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people: **5** And let them deliver it into the hand of the doers of the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD: and let them give it to the doers of the work which is in the house of the LORD, to repair the breaches of the house, **6** Unto carpenters, and builders, and masons, and to buy timber and hewn stone to repair the house. **7** Howbeit there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully. **8** And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. **9** And Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again, and said, Thy servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of them that do the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD. **10** And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king. **11** And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes. **12** And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Michaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying, **13** Go ye, enquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us. **14** So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the

wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they communed with her. 15 And she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me, 16 Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read: 17 Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched. 18 But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard; 19 Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD. 20 Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 – 2.** Josiah is protected by the Lord here, for his father's evil could have led to the extermination of the entire royal household. He lives by the grace of God ministered through the goodness of some courtiers, and as a young boy of eight years of age he is crowned king. The men mentioned as key courtiers in this chapter are likely the ones who protected him through the early years of danger. Josiah will be spiritual, and he will be brave in battle, but the Lord's words over him indicate he is a doomed man, for no matter how much he does he cannot stop the rot in his nation now.

After nearly sixty years of decline the general population that saved him from the murderers of his father, are brave and want what is right, but spiritually they are corrupt and will keep following their mixed paganism. Josiah will lead a great revival, but it will not save his nation from destruction. It is not because he does not do enough spiritually, but that the vast majority of his people will not consistently, wholeheartedly, and totally respond to the Word of the Lord. Deuteronomy 5:29, 33, 17:11-20. Sit with this truth for a moment and feel its sadness, but then reflect on the purposes of the plan of God in the midst of this. Sit also with the responsibility spiritual people have in the midst of this sort of fatal spiritual compromise, for that is our role today.

When the nation cannot be saved as a whole, there are still individuals who can be, and these people will be the spiritual remnant of grace who will rebuild the nation in godliness. Amongst these men whose names we know are two great prophets; Ezekiel and Daniel. The third great man is the older prophet Jeremiah who ministers to Josiah throughout his reign and into the reigns of the last kings. Jeremiah is known as the "weeping prophet" because he went through the great destruction and carnage of the end of Jerusalem. Josiah's early death in battle at Megiddo, though tragic for his nation, spared him the great sadness that Jeremiah faced as a godly man watching his godless Jewish extended family go down in judgement.

Those who are being saved in this period will tend to be saved by being deported early, and those who are "spared" deportation will be the ones judged. Daniel is an example of this. Daniel is only a young child when the Temple is rebuilt and purified again for godly service, (around 623 BC) but he grows in the grace and knowledge of the Lord through his life. He and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, at around age eighteen, all enter Babylonian Captivity in 605 BC and serve the Lord there. Daniel 1-3. Refer to Commentaries on the first three chapters of Daniel, and also on the entire book of Jeremiah, as these spiritually cover the events we are about to study in summary form.

Once again note that Josiah's mother is mentioned prominently in the record here. It is another reminder to mothers that their influence is vital in the spiritual life of their children. They set up a pattern of behaviour and belief that can be the foundation of blessing through life, or the unstable ground of their children's destruction. In this day fathers did not necessarily exercise much involvement in their children's early life at all, but the mothers faith set an example that was either worthy to be followed and respected, or was treated with contempt. Through our history of Israel and Judah we have seen the legacy of good and bad maternal example. Let us preach this truth strongly in our churches today, for godly mothers are the stability foundation of the spirituality of every nation.

In my professional practise I have just today dealt with a case where a mother led her fourteen year old son into sexual experiences through a local promiscuous older girl, and destroyed the young boy's life and focus. Mothers can lead their sons into evil or good; let us encourage mothers to be good before the Lord, and not lead their sons into evils that are destructive. We will also see below that the old Prophetess Huldah is a key spiritual figure in the land for good also, and so we see that the public ministry role of women in revival is at times as significant as their private prayer warrior role.

Notice the testimony regarding this king; he did not deviate from the path of God either one way or the other. There are equal dangers to spirituality from both legalism and licentiousness. It is important to understand both tendencies of carnal mankind, for some err in legalism, and it is equally dangerous to immorality. Satan doesn't mind what he gets his slaves addicted to as long as he keeps them from the truth of God's Word and genuine life change.

**Verses 3 – 6.** The Temple had been operating for the first eighteen years of Josiah's reign in a dilapidated state. I believe that the idols will have all been removed by this time, in fact within weeks of Manasseh's release from Assyrian captivity he had cleaned out the Temple itself of the idols, just as Hezekiah, his father, had done eighty years before. 2 Chronicles 33:10-17. Amon his son restored some of these and worshipped them for two years, and that tells

us that Manasseh had not destroyed them as Hezekiah had, and so after Josiah takes the throne they are removed again, but it appears from later events, that they were not destroyed, but stored, for they re-emerge under Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin.

Sadly also, the people still persisted in worship on the high places, although they used the name Jehovah as they worshipped in these places. 2 Chronicles 33:18-23. Religion is the Devil's main tool to distract men from truth, and this worship at the high places was the main tool Satan used to destroy these people. They used the Lord's name but the people's hearts were far from Him. Isaiah 29:13-14, Matthew 15:1-11. The final generation of the second temple will do exactly the same as their ancestors, and so on the same day each time the building will burn.

**Isaiah 29:13-16.** *"13. Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:  
14. Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.  
15. Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?  
16. Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?"*

**Verses 7 – 10.** The money collected for the work cannot have been from the box placed by Joash for this task many decades before, as under the reign of Manasseh and Amon the temple was given over to idolatry for many years and the state of it was almost as bad as after Athaliah's evils. I believe that once Amon was dead the temple was cleaned out and started to function again properly, even in its state of disrepair, and that meant the redemption money for the first born was collected again from Israelites bringing their sacrifices after the birth of their first born.

Silver redemption money (Numbers 3:11-13, 18:12-19) had been collected for eighteen years of his reign before Josiah asks the High Priest to total the money and dedicate it to the workmen who can repair the wood and stone work of the Temple. He does not want to run out of money for the project and so waits until there is enough to complete the entire job. The rebuilding work is done with this redemption money, and that is right and proper given the significance of the work. This same offering will be brought to the second Temple by Mary and Joseph after the birth of Jesus. Luke 2:22-40.

Once again, as in the days of Joash and Hezekiah, the common workers who do the building and masonry work on the Temple are proven faithful workers and no close accounting needs to be done to check their work. They are faithful and dependable. What a testimony this is, and what a rebuke to today's business ethics! Over-regulation will not make dishonest or greedy people honest, only the Holy Spirit, or strong personal morality, makes people honest.

You will meet some wonderful unbelievers who are honest in all their ways and rebuke believers by their consistent morality. Honesty for believers however is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, and any person claiming to be a believer who is dishonest, is a fraudster! Matthew 7:16. It is a reminder that even in the midst of the paganism of the reigns of Manasseh and Amon there are those unbelievers who hold to philosophical morality, and those believers who serve the Lord and have the Spiritual fruit of honesty.

There was a full copy of the Mosaic Law always kept in the Temple, and one was supposed to be in the palace, but it looks as if in the dark days of Manasseh and Amon's reign that the copies got down to ONE only! This last copy of God's holy Word is found by Hilkiah in the Temple during the clean up, and he reports the find to Shaphan the Scribe (Minister of the Interior). Shaphan the Scribe reads the entire Law of Moses before even speaking with the king about what he has found. He will be excited beyond words, but he thinks about the meaning and significance of what they have found and approaches the king with prayerful thought and deliberation.

Firstly he reports the work progress on the rebuild of the dilapidated Temple structure (it is now over 300 years old). He then reports the finding of the book, but doesn't identify it as the Law of Moses. He then reads it to the king and lets the book speak for itself. Read through again Leviticus 26, and then Deuteronomy 17:14-20, and the chapters 28-30. Think about the impact of these words upon the 26 year old Josiah, for he now knew why his father and grand-father had been judged. He realises how close he has come to disaster.

**Verses 11 – 13.** Josiah's spirit is shown by his response to the Lord's Word. As he hears the words of Moses he hears the Word of God directly into his heart and his grief is overwhelming. He tears his clothes in grief and sadness at what he sees has occurred. He recognises the fourth cycle of discipline is already upon his land and he rightly fears for the future. He immediately sees that the entire nation stands in great peril due to the sins of their forefathers, and the slackness of their own generation in worshipping the Lord as Moses had directed.

He sees that the Lord's judgement has been upon them for some time due to the disobedience of the people. He may even see that the discipline goes back to Hezekiah's day and that their time has run out. He begins the revival that will lead to the salvation of many, by confessing the sins of their fathers and their own slackness. This readiness to see the sins of those who went before us as well as our own sins appears to be a pre-requisite to revival in this time period, and perhaps in our own also.

**Verses 14 – 17.** The spiritual leaders of the nation all work together and they do not let any sexism get in the way. Men of this day often undervalued women, but these men understand that the Lord has given the prophetess Huldah the gift of seer and they value her, and consult her. Jeremiah is also active around this time, but he is a young man, and he also apparently values this woman. Let all who think that women cannot serve the Lord, or give guidance to men take note of this woman's work, for she directs the men what to do, and delivers the very words of God to them. Her words are not pleasant words, for a prophet only is required to speak when the people have ignored the words of the scriptures.

To be a prophet is not a "happy-clappy" role! Those who rejoice in the gift of prophecy do not have the gift, for to have this gift is to carry the burden of the Lord's warning to His people at times. I have been given the responsibility to carry the prophetic office on five occasions, and on four of them I was tasked to tell believers that they were to die, when all their Pentecostal friends were telling them they would live. This is not a gift to seek, unless you are ready to tell the Lord's truth to all, even though your heart breaks with the message.

Prophetic gifting is a serious thing. This is a gift that is a burden, and borne by those who have learned to walk with the Lord through many hard years of testing. Do not pray for this gift, for to bear it you need to walk as Huldah walked, and serve with truth those who may not want to receive the truth. God's Word through Huldah is the word of judgement; the people of Judah have followed the people of Israel and have burned incense to the foreign gods, even while worshipping the Lord and the Lord has noticed and has decided that the nation has gone too far and will be judged.

There is now no remedy, the judgement will come upon the nation, yet the revival that Josiah will lead will have an impact, and lead to the salvation of many before the judgement. We often believe that unless the entire nation is delivered we have failed, but the Lord is doing things that we cannot often understand. While people are alive there is hope for them and the Lord may be working out things that we cannot see, even when things are heading steadily down hill.

**Verses 18 – 20.** The Lord has seen the heart and the deeds of this king, and even though he will die as a young man he will die in peace. Now some would argue that Huldah got this message wrong, for he dies of wounds after a battle that he loses. He dies however at peace, even though it is with an arrow through him. We all have to leave this planet one way or another, and this man was to die as the result of a war wound, gained in a battle that he couldn't win. He died with some honour, and he was at peace as he died. It doesn't matter the means of our death, but it does matter that the state of our mind in our death is peaceful. Death is going to be with the Lord, and not to be seen as a failure or a loss.

This man knows he has done all he could to bring his people back, but he also knows they will not come back to the truth. He dies content that he has done all he was called to do, and that is all we are called to do. It is not the results that men assess that God judges us for, but our faithfulness to His calling over our life. It is a hard thing to deliver this sort of word to a king, who traditionally was only given good news.

The men of Josiah's court deliver him the truth and they relax in the Lord, and so does their king. They will all die as a result of the evil that is loose in their nation, but they will all do what they can to turn it around. This is our call; to serve the Lord in whatever way we can, and do whatever we can to bring people to confront the truth. If they will not do so, then the burden of their judgement is with them, but we must tell the truth. Read carefully the following texts. Jeremiah 1:16-19, 2:13, Ezekiel 3:4-22. As I wrote these words I felt a wave of sadness and of joy, for these were the very verses that the Lord used to call me to ministry on February the 19th 1976.

## **PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. God keeps us and brings us to the place where we can serve. Let us begin our service for the Lord by praising the Lord for what He has done in bringing us to this point. We have been kept alive and well to this point to serve the Lord. Let us do it with thankfulness and real focus upon buying up every day's opportunity. Psalms 90:10-15, Ephesians 5:16.
2. Josiah takes time to plan the rebuild of the old Temple. He ensures there is money there before he starts, so there is no embarrassment in a half finished job. He then briefs the High Priest carefully and gets the best people to do the work. He takes personal responsibility for the evil people who went before him and he confesses their sins and his own. He feels what sin has done and that pain he feels opens the door to blessing. Let us be ready to sit long enough with the horror of what our ancestors have done to open the door of forgiveness and blessing for our generation.
3. Let us preach strongly the importance of parents giving good spiritual guidance. Parents bring their children closer to heaven or closer to hell by their examples. Let us encourage parents to fulfil their responsibility before the Lord and bring their children closer to the Lord. Ephesians 5:18-29, Colossians 3:16-21. Notice that I have included the verses before the direct orders to parents, for they set the scene for the later orders. Read these and meditate upon them, and teach them to your people, for the Lord holds us responsible for these things.
4. Do not focus upon numbers, for the Lord is working His purposes out with those who respond to His words, not with the majority. Focus upon the people who have positive volition to the Word of the Lord for they will be the "shakers and movers" of their generation. Let us serve the Lord with focused power.

**DYING GRACE**

1. We are all here upon the earth as in a “strange country”; we are strangers and pilgrims upon the earth, and are not meant to be too comfortable here. Philippians 3:12-17, Hebrews 11:13, 1 Peter 2:11.
2. Death is the strangest thing we confront on this earth; the weirdness of being here one minute, alive, alert and warm, then a second later, dead, cooling and inert. Death is meant to appear strange to us, for it is the evidence before us that we are not permanent inhabitants here, but simply playing out a part as we pass through. This is not a place we are meant to get attached to.
3. The death of believers is a precious thing to the God who has given his life to save us from the judgement of sin and death. 1 Samuel 26:21, 2 Kings 1:13-14, Psalms 49:8, 72:14, 116:15, 1 Peter 1:7, 2:4. Refer Grace.
4. We all must die, but that is not the end. 2 Timothy 4:7-8, Hebrews 11:13. The mature believers facing death see through it, to the other side where they meet with the Lord face to face. 1 Corinthians 13:12, 2 Corinthians 5:6-10.
5. Dying grace is provided to all believers who are looking to their Lord as they die, for his perfect provision for each of us from eternity past has everything we need provided in advance of our life, let alone our death itself. There are no surprises to God, and all things we face have provision for them there to be claimed by faith. 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Thessalonians 3:3, 2 Peter 2:9, Jude 24-25.

**CHAPTER 23**

**INTRODUCTION**

As we studied chapter 21 I had observed sadly, that the reforms of the religious system did not go far enough after Manasseh’s conversion, and we see in this chapter that they did not go far enough even under Josiah. He did his very best, but the spiritual response of the people was simply not there with any depth. Jesus parable of the “Sower and the Seed” is a good introduction to this chapter before us. Matthew 13:3ff, Mark 4:3ff, Luke 8:5ff.

We must always remember that Satan does not sleep, and his demons do not rest from their counter-attacks upon the Gospel’s work. Sadly most believers do not realise just how tenacious Satan is, nor do they realise how guarded they need to be, and nor do they recognize that the lack of passionate service for the Lord will open the door to defeat over time for all who play with truth rather than be gripped by truth.

Josiah is the best of the kings since David, but he shared his ancestor’s weakness; he still maintained a harem, and his sons will follow evil rather than good. The influences for good that his mother instilled in him, he and his wives are unable to instil in their sons. He reforms the religious system of Judah and the remnant of Israel, but it is too late for the nation as a whole. The people obey their king, and as we will see, they remove, but do not destroy all the idols, destroy their groves, and the old high places, but very quickly these sites of evil re-enter daily use again after Josiah’s death. Josiah’s death is, according to our writer, a merciful death in battle, and yet the nation spiral’s down hill after it, and we look and we wonder at it.

There are questions we all have for the Lord regarding the timing of the deaths of good people, and this man’s final battle and his death is a mystery to me as I will explain below. Theologically I understand his death and can see that for him it is a good end, but I shake my head at the nation of Judah of this time. The dangers were so obvious, and the massive political changes occurring around them were so great, that I look at them and wonder why they didn’t see what the Lord was doing. I can see that the Lord takes him in a way that has honour in it, but I wonder why he could not have supported Jeremiah more, and sustained the revival a little longer, and just stayed out of power politics.

The answer is found to my questions in the volition of the people of Judah. By the time of Josiah’s death, around 610 BC, the people had received all the opportunities they needed to be saved, and not enough had taken those opportunities to save the nation. More time was not the issue for Judah, for they had run out of time, and not enough had or would respond before their end. The “Salt Principle” did not apply for this generation of the nation of Judah because they had so deeply rejected God’s Word and His Way. By Josiah’s day, the nation had already set its path, and it was an idolatrous path. Only a few could be saved, and that would be by fire. Jude 22-25.

## 2 KINGS 23:1-37

1 And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem. 2 And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD. 3 And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant. 4 And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Bethel. 5 And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven. 6 And he brought out the grove from the house of the LORD, without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people. 7 And he brake down the houses of the sodomites, that were by the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the grove. 8 And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba, and brake down the high places of the gates that were in the entering in of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were on a man's left hand at the gate of the city. 9 Nevertheless the priests of the high places came not up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren. 10 And he defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech. 11 And he took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entering in of the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathanmelech the chamberlain, which was in the suburbs, and burned the chariots of the sun with fire. 12 And the altars that were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, did the king beat down, and brake them down from thence, and cast the dust of them into the brook Kidron. 13 And the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon, did the king defile. 14 And he brake in pieces the images, and cut down the groves, and filled their places with the bones of men. 15 Moreover the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he brake down, and burned the high place, and stamped it small to powder, and burned the grove. 16 And as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that were there in the mount, and sent, and took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burned them upon the altar, and polluted it, according to the word of the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words. 17 Then he said, What title is that that I see? And the men of the city told him, It is the sepulchre of the man of God, which came from Judah, and proclaimed these things that thou hast done against the altar of Bethel. 18 And he said, Let him alone; let no man move his bones. So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet that came out of Samaria. 19 And all the houses also of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the Lord to anger, Josiah took away, and did to them according to all the acts that he had done in Bethel. 20 And he slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars, and burned men's bones upon them, and returned to Jerusalem. 21 And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the passover unto the LORD your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant. 22 Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah; 23 But in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, wherein this passover was holden to the LORD in Jerusalem. 24 Moreover the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD. 25 And like unto him was there no king before him, that 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; neither after him arose there any like him. 26 Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. 27 And the LORD said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there. 28 Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 29 In his days Pharaohnechoh king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates: and king Josiah went against him; and he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him. 30 And his servants carried him in a chariot dead from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own sepulchre. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and anointed him, and made him king in his father's stead. 31 Jehoahaz was twenty and three years old when he began to reign; and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. 32 And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done. 33 And Pharaohnechoh put him in bands at Riblah in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem; and put the land to a tribute of an hundred talents of silver, and a talent of gold. 34 And Pharaohnechoh made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the room of Josiah his father, and turned his name to Jehoiakim, and took Jehoahaz away: and he came to Egypt, and died there. 35

**And Jehoiakim gave the silver and the gold to Pharaoh; but he taxed the land to give the money according to the commandment of Pharaoh: he exacted the silver and the gold of the people of the land, of every one according to his taxation, to give it unto Pharaohnechoh. 36 Jehoiakim was twenty and five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Zebudah, the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah. 37 And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.**

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 – 3.** The king takes the spiritual and political initiative and calls all the leadership of the nation together. The meeting is called for in the right location; they gather in the Temple and there the Word of God is read aloud for all the leadership to hear its demands upon them. The exact timing of these events is not clear, as the Chronicler records that these events occur in Josiah's eighth year as king, when he is sixteen, and that the Temple rebuild begins afterwards, in his eighteenth year. We cannot be sure of exact sequences at this distance, as both the writers are summarising events, not giving us full chronologies.

The meeting occurs, and that is the important fact to grasp. Josiah takes action and the conviction of the Lord is upon the crowd of leaders. The king reads standing beside one of the great pillars, by the steps of Solomon's Temple. 1 Kings 7:15ff. I suspect he read from the book of Deuteronomy, but we are not told here. Josiah is sincere and he is true of heart. He loves and fears the Lord and he understands the importance of obedience to the Lord's Word to secure blessing for the land and people. He sets the example and makes a solemn covenant with the Lord to obey the Mosaic Law. He demands of the people that they also join him in this covenant, and they are obedient to their king.

The "revival" begins by political directive, and on the surface it will be successful, but the hearts of the people are not passionately engaged in it. They do what is right, but they are not totally committed to what is right. People can be deeply convicted of sin, and feel great sorrow and anxiety regarding it, and yet not follow through to their salvation. We see this in the meeting of Paul with King Agrippa and the Roman Governors. Acts 26. This "revival" is an example of how politically led spiritual initiatives nearly always fail over time.

These people lived in climactic times, with the end of the Assyrian Empire occurring through the last years of Josiah's reign, and the establishment of the Babylonian Empire to replace it. It was a time when Judah needed to be 100% clear as to the foreign policy to follow and the Lord spoke through Jeremiah the prophet regarding this. The great mystery to me is why Josiah went out to fight with Necho, Pharaoh of Egypt, rather than pulling all his people back behind their walled cities and waiting for the outcome of the great contest between the two surviving empires of the day.

Nineveh had already fallen; why didn't he wait for the result of the next battle? Judah was not a power player, and nor was it meant to be. What drove this man to stake all he had upon a battle he didn't have to fight? Now, we know from our writer already that God's hand was in all this and that the right result occurs, but the human drama and decision making here is intriguing. Let us get an overview of the great events of history that occur through this time. This death is a challenge to our decision making, for we often fight battles we have no business being involved in, and we need the spiritual discernment to know when to stay home and when to "take the field".

There was no more important time in Judah's history to stop, pray, and seek the Lord's face for discernment before any actions were taken. There was no time in the history of Judah when the Lord provided more prophetic voices than he did through these tumultuous days. Notice below the number of biblical prophets who speak into this situation, whose work later enters the canon of scripture. It was a time where a wrong move was always going to be fatal for Josiah and Judah.

Josiah makes a fatal error and loses his kingdom and his life, but even then, the Lord's hand is upon events, for the nation is beyond redemption now, and only a remnant can be saved from its midst. Josiah will die after opening wide the door of salvation for at least thirteen years for his people. (All dates below are of necessity at this time distance, and with conflicting solar and lunar calendars, approximate only.)

## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSIAH – THE LAST GOOD KING OF JUDAH

641 BC Josiah receives the throne as a young boy of 8 years old.

633 BC He begins his religious reforms (2 Chronicles 34:3-7) at age 16 years. **Zephaniah** writes his prophetic word from the Lord to back Josiah's early reforms.

626 BC Nabopolassar of Babylon casts off the yoke of Assyria and establishes the Babylonian State again. He establishes alliances with Media and the Scythians over the next five years to try to control and then destroy Assyrian power fully and finally. His young son Nebuchadnezzar is trained in his army through this time, and takes charge of it by 615 BC.

626 BC **Habakkuk** writes his prophetic word down, and **Jeremiah** begins his ministry in earnest to deliver the last warning to the people to repent and embrace the religious revival.

623 BC Josiah begins the rebuild and reformation of the Temple of Solomon itself. The formal revival of dedicated and pure worship begins. He calls the people to fully commit to the way of Moses and leads them in a public affirmation of the Mosaic faith. The final cleansing of the Temple occurs and the great Passover is held.

612 BC Nineveh falls to the combined forces of Babylon and Media, with Scythian cavalry in support. One Assyrian Army escapes to Haran and holds out there until 608 BC. In light of the fall of Nineveh Egypt begins to plot to create a “balance of power” that will suit Egyptian aims.

610 BC Egypt tries to support the last Assyrians against the Babylonians. Pharaoh Necho is trying to maintain a balance of power and keep the Babylonians well to the north, using the remaining Assyrians as his buffer state. He establishes his occupation force at Carchemish to hold the Babylonians at bay.

610 BC Josiah meets Necho on the way to support the last Assyrians and fights him on the plain of Megiddo where Josiah is killed and his army dispersed. His oldest son is made king, but is quickly captured by the Egyptians and deported to die in jail in Egypt, and another son (a weaker and more pliable one to Egyptian wishes) is made king by the Egyptians, and given the name Jehoiakim by them.

608 BC The last Assyrians fall at Haran to the combined Babylonian and Scythian forces. The Egyptian forces at Carchemish can only look on. Necho hears of the disaster at Haran and prepares for a great “show down” between himself and the rising power of Babylon. He builds his Army for two years before moving north in force.

605 BC The Egyptian relief army arrives in the Fertile Crescent and fights the great battle of Carchemish at mid-Summer of that year against the Babylonians led by Nebuchadnezzar. They settle who will rule the Middle East. The Egyptians are well beaten and the survivors flee back to their country.

605 BC Nabopolassar dies and Nebuchadnezzar formally takes the throne. Having consolidated power at home he quickly heads south to neutralise any further threat from Egypt, and as part of that plan he takes Jerusalem. He settles Jehoiakim (Son of Josiah) upon the throne, but now as his vassal king, and deports all the young princes and leaders of Judah to Babylon to train them as Babylonians to be the administrators for his Empire. Daniel and his friends enter Babylon at this time. Daniel chapter 1.

597 BC After a stupid rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar Jerusalem falls for a second time, and this time he takes all the artisans, army officers, tradesmen, and their families into Babylonian captivity as workers on the irrigation projects of the city. Ezekiel is taken in this captivity group. All the intelligent and educated classes of people have now been removed from Judah. Jehoiakim had died during the siege and his son Jehoiachin was made king, but he is deposed and taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar, and an uncle, Zedekiah, is made king under Babylonian authority.

586 BC Jerusalem falls for a third and final time, after the last and most foolish rebellion of all. There are only 745 survivors from this rebellion in the entire nation! Jeremiah 52:30. The Jewish people are reduced to a few thousand and are now in Babylonian captivity.

536 BC Cyrus the Great of Media-Persia takes control of the Babylonian Empire and begins to consolidate a new Empire. Daniel remains as Governor of Babylon, and so is able to protect the Jewish captives there. Daniel 9ff.

535 BC Cyrus publishes an edict that allows the Jews to return to their homeland. The first exiles return to rebuild the Temple under Zerubbabel and Joshua the High Priest, and in the next century the walls of Jerusalem are rebuilt under Nehemiah. Ezra and Nehemiah report events through this time period, with the prophets of those days, Haggai, and Zechariah as the encouragers of the Lord to the people.

**Verses 4 – 7.**

It is in these verses that we realise the extent of the idolatry over the centuries and the limited nature of the previous cleaning up processes in the Temple. Many things associated with paganism had been kept and incorporated into the Temple for general worship because they were associated with great people. Some of Solomon’s religious compromise sites had been kept because they were his, and previous kings had simply tried to worship the Lord within them.

Josiah sees that there is no way a pagan site can be “spiritualised” if any elements of the old paganism are left within it. He does what Joash and Hezekiah had not done; he destroys every vestige of the paganism and compromise religions of the past. He fully cleanses out every item associated with the compromised faith of their fathers, and ensures that even the store houses where precious metal objects had been stored as bullion, are also cleaned out, and everything even used once in a pagan ritual is destroyed.

Notice the specific sites and items the writer describes. It is most logical that he actually saw these things. I can see no other explanation for the specifics, with actual directions as to where a place was, on the right or the left. This has all the hall mark indicators of an eye witness and strengthens my view that Jeremiah is the author of the books of Kings and that they are sent, by the hand of his servant Baruch, to the exiles in Babylon. It was there that Ezekiel begins the more formal priestly record which are our books of Chronicles. This is probably completed, or takes its final form at the hands of Ezra who has access to the surviving records that were carried into Babylon and are released under Cyrus.

This is why many argue that Chronicles gives a better guide to chronology than Kings, as Ezra especially has access to actual written accounts of events and can study other records as well. Jeremiah is writing a didactic (Doctrine teaching) history and he is selecting events and actions that illustrate his theological points. Now let me remind you, that all this is

speculation, but the speculations of the liberal 'scholars' are equally guess work. We simply don't know these things, so don't waste time and effort trying to identify facts that are well beyond us, but be assured that it is godly men who gather this information for spiritual teaching purposes.

Notice that the king instructs that the pagan site ashes from Jerusalem are to be gathered and taken to Bethel, where Jeroboam set up the first pagan altar after the split of the kingdom. This altar will be reserved for special treatment because it was the start of the evils that destroyed the northern kingdom. The high places and the Levites and other "priests" who served in them are also specifically targeted. The ashes of some of the high place structures are scattered on the graves that have been set up around them by their dead devotees.

Josiah is not deliberately defiling a cemetery of godly people, but defiling the cemetery of the pagan Jews who served other gods and were buried proclaiming their allegiance to them. No message of support of the gods was to be allowed to survive, be it with the living or the dead proclaiming lies. All was to be destroyed. Nothing was to be left that might easily lead people back into evils that would destroy them more thoroughly.

The "HOUSE OF THE SODOMITES" that was just beside the Temple is a baffling reference, but can only mean that Jewish homosexuals had established themselves in a large mansion by the Temple and ran a religious fabric business from there, and employed women to sew curtains and veils for the pagan groves. These groves, as mentioned above in a previous chapter, were circles of pillars, or trees, in the midst of which was an idol or space for the sexualised worship that was at its heart.

This is the first indication that homosexual acts had occurred in the pagan "worship" in the Temple under Amon. It may be a clue as to why he was risen up against so quickly, and may account for his rejection by the people, and their acceptance of the reforms of Josiah. The offence of homosexual acts in the very Temple of Solomon had scandalised the people who had done almost everything else. Homosexuality has been a part of much of pagan religion since the earliest days, and statues and figurines showing homosexual intercourse have been found in many sites in Israel in association with pagan temples.

Do not be misled by so called "modern" views of acceptance towards homosexuals, for their sexual practise has been at the heart of satanic religion since the beginning, and the Bible is clear that all sexual perversity is wrong before God. There is nothing "modern" about the full acceptance of homosexuality, nor the preaching of it as a legitimate sexual option. The Bible is clear that it is not legitimate at all, and that its acceptance and promulgation is a sign of total degeneracy in any nation. It is not however to be magnified ahead of all other sexual sins, but seen as it is, as a sin and an evil.

**Verses 8 – 10.** Many of the Levites and Cohen's (priesthood) had joined in the high place worship through the previous 90 years since Hezekiah's reforms. Paganism has always paid a good salary, and even today we see the banking fraudsters of America taking great payments and "bonuses" for bankrupting their banks. Evil has always paid the best wages, and believers have just got to get used to that! Many believers have been staggered and shocked at the excesses of the bankers in the early years of this century leading to the collapse of the American banking system, but that is only because they had not heeded the Lord's words. John 2:24-25.

Bluntly put, any believer who knows the Bible does not trust people! They know what is in mankind! We are ordered directly not to trust people who call themselves ministers of God, but to test them for the character traits and behaviours that prove they are indeed Holy Spirit filled and controlled, for only such people may be trusted. Testing for fruit is required by the Lord for every believer, and if the fruit of the Holy Spirit is not clearly visible, then a person is never to be trusted with anything in the church. Matthew 7:13ff, 1 Timothy 3:1ff, 2 Timothy 3:1ff, Titus 1:7ff, 1 John 4:1ff.

These priests, who are recalled to Jerusalem, had compromised themselves, and were all recalled to live close to the Temple to be under supervision. Those who had compromised themselves with paganism were not allowed to serve at the altar of Solomon's Temple. They will serve in other capacities, but all will rebel shortly after Josiah's death and return to the paganism they loved and preferred. All is done to give these evil men no excuse, and they had plenty of time and godly mentoring but rejected it until it was too late.

Once again we confront the questions of some about all this "reform" of Josiah, for the heart of the majority of the people and priesthood was not behind Josiah. That was not a concern to the Lord, for the reform achieved its purpose, which was around twelve years of pure worship and the absence of the previously dominant pagan evil. God's purpose was that all the people could actually see the truth clearly, and so were without excuse when they returned to their paganism later. The reform could not recover these people to the faith of their godly ancestors, but it could give them no excuse for their bad choices. At times we cannot lead a person to the Lord, but we are to give the Gospel message anyway, for our role is to ensure they are without excuse before the Great White Throne. Ezekiel 3:17-27.

**Verses 11 – 14.** The paganism of the day was clearly very ornate and grand in its ceremonies from the descriptions in these verses. The writer clearly saw this event given his very specific description. The beautiful chariot of the sun is smashed and burned with fire and the horses used to pull it are taken away for other purposes. Key leaders of the nation under previous kings are mentioned by name as the men who supported these synchronistic religions. These men tried to have all the apparent religious "culture" of their neighbours while still having the Temple of Solomon operating as a sort of "good luck charm". It was as if they believed that as long as the sacrifices were being offered that they could do anything else that they liked. Jeremiah 7:1-15. They wanted to appear "cultured" and modern and tolerant

but all they became was deluded pagans ready for divine judgement. Is this where the modern churches are headed also?

The additional altars in the Temple were still there when the reforms begin, which means for at least eight years, and possibly eighteen years of Josiah's reign, Hilkiah the High Priest had offered sacrifices on the true altar with the others still there. For up to eighteen years the High Priest had been walking past ornate pagan altars in the Temple Court every day! Solomon had built pagan altars on the hills around Jerusalem, and these had escaped the attention of previous reformers, but Josiah attacked and destroyed them all. He ground their statues and masonry into powder and cast it into the stream to be carried away down to the coast.

He took the cemeteries of the pagan Jews apart, and defiled them, removing the bones of the dead pagans, and using them to defile the pagan altars. To us this is an awful act of desecration to the dead, but it was approved by God, who will judge these dead in eternal fire. Revelation 20:11-15. We get too precious, (and stupid), in our behaviours towards those who are evil, both dead and living. No respect is to be shown to evil at all, and the evil dead are to be evil spoken of, lest people think they were good and follow them to Hell!

I have seen apparently Christian ministers speaking well of evil men and women at funerals, and establishing a mythic history of their life, when the truth would have saved those hearing their lies from following their evil examples. We must as far as possible tell the truth in love, but we must tell the truth, and at times it will have to be blunt to save the lost. Pastors, let us be truthful and not political. Let us pluck burning brands from the fire, not make people comfortable close to the fire with lies and deception. Jude 22-23.

**Verses 15 – 18.** Josiah did not stop at the nation of Judah but went north to the still desolate, but gradually re-settled lands of Israel, and visited the seat of their idolatry and the source of the evils that destroyed them. The altar and high place of Bethel remained apparently a focal point for worship, even for the people of Josiah's day, one hundred years after the northern tribes had gone into captivity for their evils. Clearly Jewish people had been regularly heading north to this cultic site for rituals, as the structures there were operational.

The Assyrians would have thoroughly destroyed the site of Beth-El in 720 BC (Hosea 10:5-6) and so its operation and danger to the southern kingdom of Judah in the 620s is a testimony to the tenacity of paganism and satanic religion generally. The enemy is always seeking to mislead people back into the ancient pagan ways. Josiah was especially destructive towards this site, for he saw what the Golden Calf worship had done to the ten northern tribes. There were so few survivors of these tribes because of their evil, and he knew that his own people were under a similar cloud. He hated satanic religion, and all believers are challenged to share his mental attitude. He would have wept to know just how few of his own people would survive because they went back to this satanic evil nonsense.

There are people living in Bethel at this time, and they may be the survivors of the northern tribes, or the people later called the Samaritans, or even men of Judah and Benjamin who have moved north into the empty open spaces. These people mentioned here are probably families of survivors from earlier times for they know the areas history and the story of the prophet from Judah who was conned into staying there and died because of his disobedience to the Lord. The burning of the bones of the pagans buried by the pagan site was prophesied by this prophet many years before, and Josiah fulfilled this prophetic word. 1 Kings 12:26-32.

When Josiah hears of the story of the old prophet and his words, he ensures that the only graves on the hillside not destroyed are the graves of the two prophets. This casts a very interesting light upon the actual identity of the other prophet however, for the fact that he was buried on this hillside tells us that he was likely a prophet of the grove, not a genuine prophet of the Lord at all. The true prophet ended up in his grave, by a pagan site, because of his disobedience. Let us remember the nature of Satan and his servants; he is a liar, and his servants will often be pretending to be believers at times. 2 Corinthians 11:14.

**Verses 19 – 26.** There were worship temples/buildings again upon many of the high places of the northern kingdom area. Empty land had clearly been refilled by people over 100 years and the old destroyed sites had been rebuilt and many were operating again. Each pagan site was destroyed by Josiah and wherever he met pagan priests who were serving the gods instead of the Lord he executed them on the spot, and then he defiled their altars by burning their bodies on their own altars. Now once again we confront actions by Josiah that are shocking to many today, yet the tolerance of the very evils of idolatry led to the destruction of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. He made it hard for his people to be pagan, and so those who did go that way were without excuse for the judgment that would come upon them.

Josiah hated the things that would destroy his people over time as they destroyed the people of the north. He hated them, and he took dramatic and ruthlessly violent action against them, but that was minor to what would be done by the Babylonians later because of these evils. Josiah saw what this evil meant, and he saw where it would lead. Let us be challenged by Josiah, not condemn him for his ruthlessness, for he did everything he could to save his people from the disaster he saw their evil idolatry would bring. Sadly the impact of Manasseh's early evils still deeply permeated Judah and the area of old Israel. Idolatry had the hearts of the people. Josiah did everything he could, but the people's hearts were sold out to the evil that Manasseh had set loose, and so the Lord's anger was still hot towards His rebellious people.

**Verses 27 – 30.** The Lord's determination was set by this time. The people will have twelve years to repent, and some will turn to the truth, but not enough to save the nation. Even amongst the deportees the majority will resist the words of Ezekiel for nearly twenty years before they break down and repent of the evils that have led to the destruction of the city and Temple at Jerusalem. After this study read Commentaries on Jeremiah and Ezekiel before moving on to study Ezra and Nehemiah.

Josiah's error of judgement in fighting Necho is now simply stated. His reasons for this rash act are not given, but Necho's words are given, for he knew the battle was unnecessary. It was Josiah's time to die, and so he moves into a battle to achieve the purposes of God. He has done his work and his people are left without any excuse for the consequences of their evil decisions that will unfold around them. Those who die with him are also destined to die at that time. All is in God's hands. None die one second before the time they are assigned to die. We are all in the Lord's hands in these matters. Jeremiah 9:16, 14:12-18, 15:1-9, 21:7-9.

**Verses 31 – 37.** Jehoahaz is a tragic and flawed figure; a crown prince who inherits his father's throne in the worst possible moment, with a great defeat of his army just having robbed him of the opportunity to defend his nation, and the great powers to the north unsettled. He lasts only three months, and apparently went north to Riblah to meet with Necho, who simply imprisoned him, and sent him to Egypt until his death, looted the treasury of the Temple, and then placed his dumber younger brother on the throne to replace him.

Do not feel any sorrow for this man, for he did evil, not good, and he paid the price for that, as will each of his other relatives who wear the crown through the final twenty years life of the nation. These men are nominally kings, but under the power and authority of the dominant powers, and they forget that at the cost of their lives, as each will discover. It is both idolatry and pride that unhinges the last members of the family of David and Solomon, and permanently costs them the crown of Judah. Let us be people WALKING AND LIVING IN THE LIGHT, not stumbling in the darkness as these men did.

The last king of Judah, the evil Zedekiah, will die without living male heirs, for he will see them all slain before he himself has his eyes put out and is taken into captivity. 2 Kings 25:7. The king before him, Jeconiah, will go into captivity in 597 BC, and because of his evil heart will be cursed by God. The Lord makes it clear that no son of his will ever sit upon the throne of David forever. 2 Kings 24:8-15, 25:27-30, Jeremiah 22:30.

His descendent will be Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus. This is a major reason for the significance of the VIRGIN BIRTH for had Jesus been the natural son of Joseph he would have been disqualified from being the King of the Jews, but as the son of Mary he was qualified, for she came down a different line. The men who follow after Josiah could be called, "The Three Fools", for fools they were in their idolatry and pride.

### **PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. The people of Judah had every opportunity to respond to the Lord and obey His Word, but they failed to do so with thoroughness. They went along with reform and did what their king ordered, but they were most content to relax back into compromise religion as soon as the opportunity returned to do so. The good seed of Revival was sown by the king, and the prophets Huldah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah, and by others who served the Lord like Hilkiyah, but there were simply not enough good men and women to save the nation. Those who could be saved to restart the nation were deported to Babylon where they could lead (Daniel and Ezekiel) or participate in the genuine revival that will go deep enough there to restore the people. This people would not go deep into the Word in their land, so they lost their land. Let us be very concerned for our lands today, for we also are in danger of disaster if we do not go deep in our study of the Word, worship of the Lord, and service of the Lord.

2. At times evangelism will be apparently unsuccessful, for none, or very few, will be saved. The truth may be that such evangelism may not be "unsuccessful" at all. Do not focus upon numbers, for the purposes of God are not worked out by numbers, but by individuals who do what they are called to do. At times our faithful witness will do nothing other than provide the grounds of condemnation for others. This appears to be a very negative role to fulfil in the plan, but if you are called to do that, then do it with all your heart, for that is your path. You are in good company, but sad company. Huldah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and many others through these years were called to this ministry! Let us do what the Lord calls us to do and not be concerned or distracted by the apparent results.

3. Let us not follow the trite nonsense sayings of the pagans who follow the father of lies. It is not wrong to "speak ill of the dead". If the dead were evil then let us call them so, lest others follow after their evil, and so go to Hell itself. Let us be men and women of honesty and integrity, not politicians of convenience. Let us hate satanic religion as Josiah did, and treat it with the contempt it deserves. Let us beware of the "wiles of the Devil", for he is a liar and his people will pretend to be true prophets at times, as well as at times pushing homosexuality from the other extreme end of the religious spectrum.

Satan is ultimately flexible in his operation; all he seeks is to distract the true servant of the Lord from the truth into evil and sin. He doesn't care which evils we enter, (either religious or immoral) as long as we are away from God's path for our life. Let us be careful in our preaching to ensure that people are not ignorant of Satan's devices. 1 Corinthians 10:1ff, 12:1ff, 2 Corinthians 1:8, 2:11. Do we see evil for just how bad it truly is, or have we been misled by years of political indoctrination for "tolerance" to underestimate the destructive power of evil?

**REFLECTION UPON SALT**

1. Salt is a preserver and speaks of eternal life.
2. Salt is a seasoner and speaks of the richness of life designed by God for every believer.
3. Salt is the antithesis of leaven. Leaven corrupts, salt preserves.
4. The believer on earth is the salt of the earth in Matthew 5:13. Salt is an unseen preserver.
5. Since believers living in nations are often the reason for the preservation of the nations, when people turn away from God, nations are destroyed.
6. The salt of the covenant - when a contract was drawn up in the ancient world both parties ate salt to seal the contract. The eating of salt depicts receiving salvation.
7. In the ancient world, if your guest ate salt with you, you guaranteed to protect him from harm while he was with you.

**HOMOSEXUALITY**

1. The Bible tells us that homosexuality is not a form of immaturity, an aspect of normal human development, or the product of certain kinds of experience or the result of genetic factors. It is a learned and chosen activity.
2. It is not a condition; it is an act. It is not a sickness, it is a sin. (Leviticus 18:22; 20:3; Deuteronomy 23:17; 1 Timothy 1:10; 1 Corinthians 6:9; Revelation 22:15).
3. It is the culminating sexual practice of a culminating apostasy and hostility towards God. It is an act against God and therefore against nature (Romans 1:21-30). It is the "burned out" product of rebellion (verse 27).
4. In the Bible, homosexuals are even called "dogs", that is, they have placed themselves outside of the human race by this behaviour (Deuteronomy 23:18; Revelation 22:15).
5. It was the main defiling sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, hence the word 'sodomy' (Genesis 19:5).
6. Being the product of rebellion and apostasy, it is not surprising that we see this activity (together with prostitution) as a religious practice in pagan worship in Canaan.
7. God's patience allowed them four generations, from Abraham to Joshua. Then His judgement came (Genesis 15:16; Leviticus 18:24-28).
8. The failure of Israel to execute God's judgement fully became their own judgement (Judges 2:2,3; 19:22,25; Leviticus 18:28; 1 Kings 14-24; 15:12; 2 Kings 23:7).
9. Lesbianism is a manifestation of the same evil as the masculine form, but the Mosaic Law reserved the penalty of death for man. It is a ground for divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1). Why not death for lesbianism? When women reject men as their sexual partners it is nearly always because of some prior abusive actions by evil men. Man has greater authority before God and, with that, a greater responsibility and greater guilt. (Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15:22).
10. Counselling:

By calling homosexuality a disease or an inherited genetic defect, we deprive the homosexual of all hope. It is a sin that can be forgiven in Christ, and through the working of the Holy Spirit the old, sinful way of life can be abandoned and a new one established and many were saved and transformed in the early church. (Isaiah 1:18; 1 John 1:7; 1 Corinthians 6:9,11).

God's answer to all forms of sexual immorality is in (1 Corinthians 7:1-9).

**WALKING AND LIVING IN THE LIGHT**

1. Light is a metaphor of God's manifestation in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and his work - John 1:4, 8:12, 9:5, 12:46.
2. The Lord's coming was prophesied in Isaiah 49:6 cf. Acts 13:47.
3. Light was seen in the darkness of the world - Matthew 4:16, Luke 2:32.
4. The Lord brought life and light to the gospel - 2 Timothy 1:10.

5. We as believers are light bearers - Matthew 5:14-16, or sons of the light - John 12:36. The Lord is to be seen in us.
6. We are children of the light - 1 Thessalonians 5:5, 1 Peter 2:9, Ephesians 5:8, John 11:9,10.
7. Doctrine is the light of the soul - 1 Peter 1:19.
8. Satan is an angel of light and the distorter of the truth - 2 Corinthians 11:14.
9. Satan's strategy is to outshine the true light with his own false gospel - 2 Corinthians 4:3-6.
10. The Lord's resurrection body was composed of light - Matthew 17:2.

### **THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST**

1. Jesus Christ had to be born of a virgin to fulfil prophecy. (Isaiah 7:1 4)
2. Jesus had to be born of a virgin to confirm and avoid the curse of Coniah. (Jeremiah 22:28-30)
  - a) Coniah was a believer but an evil king at the time of the Babylonian captivity.
  - b) Coniah is also in the direct line of Christ in Joseph's lineage from David (Matthew 1:6, 1:11, 1:16) through Solomon. This is the kingly line.
  - c) Mary was also in the direct line of Christ from David (Luke 3:23, Luke 3:31) through Nathan. In Luke 3:23 Joseph is the son-in-law of Heli, Mary's father.
  - d) Both lines, Solomon's and Nathan's meet in the person of Jesus Christ but by the virgin birth Coniah's line is cut off as Joseph is the legal but not natural father of Jesus Christ.
3. Jesus had to be born of a virgin to not have the sin nature of Adam. The sin nature of man comes down through the male. (1 Timothy 2:14)
  - a) Adam, as the head, was responsible for his wife.
  - b) Eve was deceived and sinned.
  - c) Adam made deliberate choice.
4. In order to be the God-Man Jesus had to be conceived of the Holy Spirit to Mary.
5. The virgin birth is therefore critical especially in the doctrine of Redemption, Imputation and Propitiation. NO virgin birth = NO salvation.

**CHAPTER 24****INTRODUCTION**

The final days of the Northern Kingdom of Israel saw a succession of what I called then "gangster kings". 2 Kings 15-16. These were men who killed each other and anyone else who got in the way of their plans for more power and influence. They were Israelites but they were given over to lust for sex, wealth, and power, and did not see their coming fate at the hands of Assyria. It was obvious to the entire Middle Eastern world that Assyria was the dominant power and would destroy them, and yet they arrogantly played power politics with the giant and paid the price with their people.

One hundred years have past and the southern kingdom ends the same way; with deluded fools believing they are more powerful and wonderful than the evidence indicates they are! Babylon will crush the south with the same force and violence that the north was crushed by Assyria. Both great empires will be judged for the violence with which they did this, but Judah will pay as dearly as Israel did for their same sin of idolatry and satanic arrogance.

The four men who follow Josiah are unworthy of him and their ancestor David. Romans 9:1-8. They have all the worst characteristics of the later Solomon, and they have none of his redeeming features. 1 Kings 11. One will even cut up the very words of God which the prophet Jeremiah will deliver to him by the hands of his servant Baruch! Jeremiah 36:14-26.

Each of these last four nominal kings (indeed vassal kings) of Judah needed to do, was open their eyes and realise "the facts of life" for them, and they would have prospered. These facts were clear, and all with eyes to see could understand them, but these four men (Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah) failed to comprehend the reality of politics in their day. They failed to see that the Babylonians were supreme and would only be unseated by the greater Medio-Persian Empire later. They were militarily supreme and their Empire was led by a unique genius, who was an expert in many of the ancient arts.

Nebuchadnezzar was a truly remarkable man, with intelligence, wit, charm, and ruthlessly precise reasoning powers. He would become a believer in the one true God through the testimony of Daniel to him, and he was God's anointed leader to bring peace to the Middle East, just as Cyrus the Great would be later. Daniel 4:1-18, 34ff. The last kings of Judah, in contrast, were small brained despots, and petty minded, thinking of their own pleasures rather than facing the political and spiritual realities they confronted. They would not see the words of Jeremiah as God's final warning, but referred to him as a traitor when he called for cooperation with, and obedience to Babylon.

These petty kings of this beaten nation needed to make their peace with the really powerful king and stop their arrogant pretence at the independent exercise of their powers. They simply needed to be a member of the great Empire that Nebuchadnezzar had established, and they and Judah would have prospered. They were not prepared to go along with the Babylonians however, nor forgo their idolatry, and through their religious and political pride, they destroyed their nation, and led directly to the death of possibly a million or more people.

Every city in their land was destroyed and the entire land was left desolate for over fifty years. It would be a seventy year captivity from the first deportation of Daniel and the others in 606/605 BC until the edict of Cyrus was actioned and the Exiles returned in 535 BC. The Temple and city of Jerusalem would be destroyed finally in 586 BC, and it would not be until 516/515 BC that the Temple was completed and the first Passover held there by the Exiles who had returned. Ezra 6:14-22. There were therefore two time periods of 70 years by which the Babylonian Captivity could be measured.

It was God's verdict upon them that decreed a seventy year period to reflect their disobedience through the centuries. Jeremiah revealed it and Daniel later explained it and recorded his words for future generations. Jeremiah 25:11-14, 29:10-14, Daniel 9:1-2. The Lord also revealed to Daniel that the entire future history of Judah, and the coming of the Messiah, the true and last King, would also be tied to another time period involving "seventy" units of time. Daniel 9:24-28.

The precise nature of this prophetic "clock" would begin to tick away in the days of Nehemiah, who would rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. It was the rebuilding of the walls that would start the final clock for Israel's prophetic life as a nation. It is so precise, that in the very year and day that he was expected, Jesus the Messiah rode into Jerusalem! The book written by Sir Robert Anderson, "The Coming Prince", explains this chapter of Daniel and does the calculations involved in it.

**2 KINGS 24:1-20**

**1 In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years: then he turned and rebelled against him. 2 And the LORD sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servants the prophets. 3 Surely at the commandment of the LORD came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; 4 And also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the LORD would not pardon. 5 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 6 So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers: and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead. 7 And the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land: for the**

king of Babylon had taken from the river of Egypt unto the river Euphrates all that pertained to the king of Egypt. 8 Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. And his mother's name was Nehushta, the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. 9 And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done. 10 At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. 11 And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, and his servants did besiege it. 12 And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers: and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign. 13 And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, as the LORD had said. 14 And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land. 15 And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king's mother, and the king's wives, and his officers, and the mighty of the land, those carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. 16 And all the men of might, even seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand, all that were strong and apt for war, even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon. 17 And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his father's brother king in his stead, and changed his name to Zedekiah. 18 Zedekiah was twenty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. 19 And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. 20 For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 – 4.** The son of Josiah, Jehoahaz, who took over after the defeat at the battle of Megiddo lasted barely three months before Pharaoh Necho seized him at Riblah and deposed him in favour of his younger and more pliable brother. The verdict over this young man was still however that he “did evil”, so whatever he was up to in that three months it was fatally flawed. 2 Kings 23:32. It is of interest that Necho played religious politics with Judah and renamed the new king, from his given name by Josiah of Eliakim, to Jehoiakim. The meaning is the same, “God will raise up”, but the name chosen by Pharaoh magnifies the name Jehovah, whereas the name he was given by his father used the more generic word for God, “El”.

It is as if the pharaoh is being used by God to draw attention to the name Jehovah, and the need of the people to walk in the fear of the Lord, and be obedient to Him alone, and not just have a casual attitude towards a generic concept of God. Many people believe in God, but their faith does not change them and make them his servants. Remember the words of James, the devils believe in God, and they tremble at that truth. The challenge to us is what do we do with our belief in God? All these foolish people believed in God, but their belief was not saving faith! We know this because of their actions. Matthew 7:13-23, James 1:22, 2:19-26.

How can a king only rule three months and yet “do evil”? Given his father's recent death, what would be expected? He ought to have sought the prophet's advice and entered the Temple in sackcloth and ashes, with true humility, and prayerfully sought the guidance of Jehovah of Israel. It was not difficult to follow the example of his father, and yet he immediately heads in the opposite direction. Perhaps it was the fatal error of his father in fighting Necho, (possibly with some false prophetic encouragement), that turned him against the prophets and the Temple.

He certainly sought no godly advice, but went after the pagan gods whose groves his father had destroyed. The speed of his apostasy is startling, and indicates the corrupt nature of the harem he grew up within, and the tenacity of the old paganism amongst many in the palace. Many in Judah apparently blamed the defeat of Josiah on his rejection of their many gods, and blamed Jehovah for the defeat. This alone explains the speed and foolishness of the total fall into apostasy that we see after the days of Josiah.

Jehoahaz was determined and independent in his thinking, and so of no use to pharaoh, who wanted a weaker and more carnal man to do what he was told. In Jehoiakim he finds such a man, and he certainly was a carnal man. Read a Commentary on Jeremiah chapters 22 and following, and see the messages that the prophet gave directly to these next evil men. In the great time of national crisis and danger they devoted their time to corruption, and the carnal enjoyment of their own self centred pleasures. They failed to be pastors to their people, but abused and used them shamefully, and finally they led them down the path of death. Jeremiah 23:1-12.

In the midst of the words of judgement are however the words of hope. The Messiah is coming! Jeremiah 23:5-6. Those saved from all this carnage will be saved however, only by being taken into captivity. Jeremiah 24:1-10. The salvation of some would lead to their being taken into Babylon, for it was there, away from the carnality and religious corruption of Jerusalem, that the Lord would rebuild the people, and through the ministry of Ezekiel, bring them to repentance and permanent rejection of idolatry. When the exiles returned to Judah and rebuilt their nation, idolatry would never again be a problem for these people.

Jehoiakim only served Nebuchadnezzar for three years after he had re-installed him on the throne, having defeated Egypt. Jehoahaz would die in Egypt according to the prophetic words of Jeremiah, and the land was not to weep for him. Jeremiah 22:10-12. These words of the prophet were harsh, and the expectation of the re-capture and restoration of Jehoahaz may have been strong for some, but the prophet spells out God's rejection of him. No rescue mission is to be

launched to bring him back; he is to be left to rot in an Egyptian jail and die there. Of the four last kings only Jehoiakim will die in his bed, although his body doesn't have "rest". Each of the others will die in jail, and it may be that their long stretch behind bars was God's only way of bringing them to salvation. In Jehoiachin's case at least that would appear to be the case, after over 30 years in jail!

Jehoahaz's fate is a warning to the next three men who will wear the vassal king's crown, but each will ignore it. The problem with pride, when it gets hold of a man or woman, is that the person so blinded, believes foolishness and rejects facts. Pride makes people think they are "special" in some way, and will escape the fate of those they consider "lesser beings". They lift themselves up, and the result is they have that much further to fall! Nebuchadnezzar has his hands full at the time Jehoiakim decides to rebel and this is apparently what makes him think he can get away with it. He believes that Nebuchadnezzar may be defeated in his battles in the far north against the Medes and the others, and uses this distracted time to re-establish Judah's national freedom.

Jehoiakim is a nationalist, and calls people to join him for patriotic reasons. Nationalism is bone fide as a Divine Institution, but when the Lord has placed a nation under another for a reason, then freedom is not the cry, OBEDIENCE is the command! Let us beware of flag waving enthusiasm when we are under the discipline of the Lord and need to be submissive, not assertive. There is a time to fight, and a time to be quiet. We are to take the Lord's orders, not go off on our own path to apparent glory. Proverbs 14:12, 16:25.

Nebuchadnezzar understood the greed of men and how to play one weak State off against another, before he at his leisure destroyed and enslaved them all. He understood the dynamics of the wild tribal groupings also, and he was a good student of history. He knew that the Jewish State had centuries of hatred built up with the Moabites, the Ammonites, and the Syrians. These groups were smart enough to know that the Babylonians were the power to be dealt with and they had made their peace with Nebuchadnezzar, as they previously did with Assyria. Nebuchadnezzar simply encourages them to raid and pillage the lands of Judah to keep Jehoiakim busy, and kill his soldiers, until he has time to deal with Judah personally.

Jehoiakim faces constant attacks by bands of the enemy "Chaldeans". These were the tribal Arabs of the deserts between Babylon and Judah – speakers of the Aramaic language. The Moabites and Ammonites, and the Syrians join in, and it is "open season" on Jews. The murder and carnage through these next years would have been terrible, yet in turn, each of these three kings keep enjoying the pleasures of the harem, and killing all those who raise any voice against their injustices. Jeremiah 2:34, 9:13-16. This king and the next "fill Jerusalem" with the blood of those who oppose them. The prophets of God of the day raise their voices against the evils, and many are killed, and Jeremiah is arrested and jailed at various times through the next years. Jeremiah 25:1-12, 26:1-15, 17-24, 32:26-35.

**Verses 5 – 12.** The speed with which the historian glosses over Jehoiakim's reign is a surprise until you remember that there were other books available in his day, and also, if this is Jeremiah, then he has recorded a great deal about this man's hatred of himself and of God in his own prophetic work. This foolish king dies during the second siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar's army. His son takes over and after three months of fun in the harem he finally is convinced by his mother to go out and surrender to the Babylonians, and so he saves the city and the intelligent members of the population, who are all taken into captivity. 2 Chronicles 36:5-10.

It is here that we read an apparently contradictory message about the fate of Jehoiakim. He dies during the siege, and is buried, and his son Jehoiachin surrenders three months later. The writer also records that Jehoiakim is bound by iron chains and taken off to Babylon. It appears the body of this foolish king was disinterred, bound in chains and dragged behind the Babylonian army back to Babylon until the body fell apart. Then the bones would be left to be trampled by his own people as they marched into captivity, and then kicked into a ditch somewhere on the road. This was a common practise in the ancient world, where death did not hinder vengeance upon rebels. The symbolism was clear; do not mess with the Babylonians!

Jehoiachin is only eighteen when he receives the crown in the besieged city of Jerusalem, and he does what his father has done; he serves the pagan gods, and throws himself into the joys of sex and wealth, rather than facing the reality of an army outside his gates! It is staggering, but this young man does not deal with political reality, but buries himself in his harem until his mother finally breaks through to him and tells him to surrender. His mother takes three months to break through his pleasure seeking to get him to face the facts. He has a long time to regret his evil. He will spend 30 years in jail to pay for the three months of carnal pleasure.

The Egyptians are a spent force by this point, but they will try to fight the Babylonians. Their defeat at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar at the battle of Carchemish was a thorough one and Egypt does not recover its full strength again as a great power again. The Egyptians will try to raise the siege of Jerusalem in the final days, but it will be a futile attempt and the weak Egyptian Army is easily beaten again by the Babylonian Army. Jeremiah 37:1-10, 46:1ff.

Jeremiah warns the people consistently against having any hope in the strength of Egypt, but even the survivors of the final siege ignore his words and flee there. Jeremiah tells them that Nebuchadnezzar will follow them and set up his conquerors throne in the very place they seek refuge, and from that place he will take them to Babylon. Jeremiah 42-44. Jehoiachin will pay for his three month delay in surrendering by being bound himself and taken into captivity, not as a slave, but as a royal prisoner. He will be in jail in Babylon from the age of eighteen, right through until he is 54 years of age.

Nebuchadnezzar reigns for 44 years, and it is not until his death that Jehoiachin is released from jail and joins the new king at his table as an honoured guest, although still under house arrest. He is in a hard jail for 34 years! It is a long time to regret his short time in power and paganism, but he does repent. 2 Kings 25:27ff. He is only eighteen, beneath the biblical age of accountability for ordinary people, Numbers 14:26-31, but clearly the Lord held him responsible for his sins and the evil he did in this short time in power. Great power and opportunity means we have great responsibilities to follow the Lord closely. Luke 12:48.

**Verses 13 – 16.** A great deal of the ancient treasures of the Temple had been secreted away from other conquerors, even going back to the days of Solomon. Given the number of sackings of the city and the amount of gold and silver taken by previous kings these words are incredible, but they are very specific. It appears that a considerable amount of the original treasures of Solomon's Temple had been hidden within the Temple itself until this second taking of the city by Nebuchadnezzar. Previous foreign kings had not been as thorough as this man was, and he discovers the secret hiding places that possibly even the priests were no longer aware of.

These things he finds and removes to Babylon may have been treasures hidden to protect them from the first invasion by Pharaoh Shishak. 1 Kings 14:25-26. Shishak seized all the golden shields of Solomon, but the golden Temple vessels appear to have escaped his attention. These vessels recorded here will be taken to Babylon and are kept intact there. They are all returned by Cyrus the Great in 535 BC when the exiles return to Jerusalem in order for the Temple services to restart and have all that is needed. Ezra 1:7-11. This treasure may possibly be the same as that seized by the Romans in 70 AD. It was later taken to the Vandal's capital city in the south of France in the fifth century, and there it probably remains. It may yet turn up again to enter the service of a third temple on the site of Mt Zion.

Nebuchadnezzar removes all the people who are capable of leading a successful rebellion, and removes them to Babylon where they will be placed as workers on his architectural projects. They will be building or repairing canals, aqueducts, and possibly large buildings. The only people left in the land are the poor and a few administrators to co-ordinate them. The new king is left with stupid people around him and with a very strong message; serve Babylon, pay your taxes, or you all will die!

The actual figures of those going into captivity differ in this account when compared to Jeremiah's words. Jeremiah 52:24-30. My suspicion is that Jeremiah's lower figures are the numbers from Jerusalem only, but the figures here (possibly in excess of 10,000) include all the people from other places around the land as well as Jerusalem. Up to 7000 of the best army officers alone are removed to ensure the army that is left is weak and leaderless, and over 1000 artisans are also removed for their skills to be used by the Babylonians, but even more, for their skills at building defences to be removed from Judah. There are no really intelligent and able people left in the land, just those who think they are!

**Verses 17 – 20.** Nebuchadnezzar was cunning, but his cunning let him down with the choice of Mattaniah, the younger brother of Josiah. He is renamed with a godly name for his new task. From Mattaniah (meaning – "the gift of Jah"), he is renamed Zedekiah (meaning – "the right of Jah"). What is Nebuchadnezzar's reason in this renaming? Is he saying to the people that it is the right of the Lord Jehovah to remove these kings when He wills? Is he reminding them that they exist solely by the right of the Lord Jehovah? This is certainly what his general later says to Jeremiah after the burning of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. Jeremiah 40:1-3.

This man Zedekiah was also a young man (only 21 years old) but he was more evil than either of the sons of Josiah, or the grand-son, chosen to date. He was a totally self centred and weak willed man, and he proved himself incapable of strong action when confronted with the truth. Jeremiah pleaded with this man again and again. Jeremiah's words to him were blunt indeed, but he was paralysed by fear of his own officers and he never repented until it was too late. Jeremiah 21:1-10, 32:1-5, 27-35, 34:2-5, 37:16-21, 38:14-28.

False prophets abounded in this day, the actions of one being described in Jeremiah 28. They spoke great swelling words as if they were the real thing, but they were fakes, and they died with those they misled. This man Zedekiah even burns the very words of Jeremiah in his winter fire. Jeremiah 36:22ff. He reigns eleven years, the last two or three of this under siege.

## **PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. Jesus words, "Ye shall know them by their fruit", haunt these last chapters of Kings. It is the fruit of a life that truly demonstrates the heart of that life, not any words the people say at their religious services. God seeks obedience in the quiet times of life, and He seeks our heart's love and response to His demands upon us. God makes demands, and we must get used to bowing our knee to His demands. Let us preach obedience and submission every week we preach, for if we don't, we have missed something in our text!

2. Is there idolatry in our life even today? We may not worship at an idol shrine, but do we lust after the things we see in glossy magazines, and desire to have them? Do we worship our houses, our cars, our powerful jobs, and our social and community roles? Let us lay all we have and are before the Lord God Jehovah today, and take up our tasks upon this planet, "as unto the Lord" alone.

3. Nationalism is bone fide, but it is no excuse for disobedience to the Lord. If we are under discipline, then the thing we need to do as a nation, and as individuals within it, is learn obedience and practise submission to the Lord. That

means we seek the Lord's face in all we do and walk humbly before Him, not seeking great feats to make ourselves look and feel good and powerful.

4. Great gifts, and great opportunities to use them for good, mean the recipient has great responsibility towards the Lord. We have received much from the Lord by way of spiritual giftings, and so the Lord holds us responsible for the use of all we have before Him. Let us serve as men and women who "fear the Lord", and know that He will ask us one day what we have done with what we received at His hands.

### **DANIEL'S 70 WEEKS**

1. Scripture:- Daniel 9:24-27

"Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity and to bring in everlasting righteousness and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. " (Daniel 9:24)

2. What is a week? In the ancient world both Greek and Latin philosophers knew the week, as the week of years. In this system one week equals 7 years. Thus seventy weeks equal  $70 \times 7$  years = 490 years.

3. What Type of Year? The year used in scripture of Daniel's time was the Jewish year which Abraham had preserved from his Chaldean home. Abraham's year was the lunar year and consisted of 360 days. The period stated then is  $70 \times 7 \times 360$  days giving a total of 176 400 days.

4. Who are Involved? 'Thy people, thy holy city' refer to the Jews and Jerusalem or Judea. We therefore have a period of 490 years involving the Jews and Jerusalem.

5. When Does this Period End?

a) In the second half of verse 24 the end of the period is given by six separate events:

i) to finish the transgression - the start of the Millennium at the 2nd advent.

ii) make an end to sins - perfect environment starts at the 2nd advent and continues for a thousand years. (Romans 8:19-21)

iii) make reconciliation - since AD 70 the Jews have been dispersed amongst the nations, they will continue to be dispersed until Jesus Christ calls them back to their land at the 2nd advent.

iv) bring in everlasting righteousness - the millennium starts a period of everlasting righteousness with the reign of Christ, this everlasting righteousness continues into the eternal future. This period starts at the 2nd advent.

v) to seal up the vision and prophecy - the 2nd advent fulfils the Abrahamic, Palestinian and Davidic covenant and this prophecy.

vi) to anoint the most Holy - at the 2nd advent Jesus is anointed King of Israel.

b) The terminal point in all six statements can therefore be said to be the 2nd advent of the Lord Jesus Christ or the midnight hour of (Matthew 25:6). We thus have a period from (Daniel 9:24) of 490 Jewish years each having 360 days terminating at the 2nd Advent.

c) In the next three verses the period of 70 weeks is carefully divided into three sections.

d) "Know therefore and understand that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks (49 years) and three score and two weeks (434 years):the streets shall be built again, and the wall even in troubled times. " (Daniel 9:25)

e) We have therefore three periods into which the 70 weeks is split - 7 weeks + 62 weeks leaving a balance of 1 week. Expressed in years we have 49 years + 434 years + 7 years.

6. What is the Starting Point?

a) There were three edicts issued by Persian princes dating after the time of Daniel and relating to the Jews returning to their homeland, they were:-

i) The edict of Cyrus in 538 BC to rebuild the house of the Lord (Temple) (Ezra 1).

ii) The edict of Darius in 520 BC to rebuild the temple which is found in (Ezra 6) Darius' edict was to confirm Cyrus' previous order, the temple works having been stopped after the death of Cyrus.

iii) The edict of Artaxerxes Longimanus to rebuild Jerusalem in 445 BC (Nehemiah 2)

b) Inspection of Daniel 9:25 shows that the critical commandment which starts the 70 weeks clock ticking was the order to rebuild Jerusalem not the temple. The correct order was the edict of Artaxerxes in 445 BC. The practice of Persian Kings was to issue such orders on their New Years day, the 1st of the month of Nisan. Using the services of the Astronomer Royal in London, Sir Robert Anderson, was able to determine that the 1st Nisan of 445 BC occurred on 14th March 445 BC. We therefore have the following date:-

c) 14th March 445 BC -- 490 years -- 2nd Advent

d) It also states that Jerusalem will be rebuilt with its walls completed after 49 years (7 weeks) in difficult circumstances. There is considerable biblical evidence that Jerusalem was rebuilt under very difficult circumstances.

e) "And after three score and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for Himself. " (Daniel 9:26a)

7. Who is the Messiah? - Jesus Christ!

In Luke's gospel on entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, just prior to his crucifixion, the crowd welcomed Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah (Luke 19:38) this being the only time when he was so called by the mass of the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

8. When was He "cut off"?

According to (Luke 3:1) Jesus Christ was baptised in the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar. As his ministry was three years in length, the entry into Jerusalem occurred in the 18th year of Tiberius. Searches of literature including, 'The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire' by Gibbon, has shown that Tiberius became Caesar in 14 AD Entrance into Jerusalem was therefore on Palm Sunday 32 AD Again by computation the date of Palm Sunday 32 AD was 10th Nisan or 6th April AD 32, the crucifixion occurring on 9th April AD 32.

9. If this is correct, we should find correlation between the 483 Jewish years to the cutting off of the Messiah and the time between 14th March 445 BC and 6th April AD 32. The time between these two dates is 476 years and 24 days. Total number of days are therefore as follows:-

476 years x 365 days = 173,740

14/3 to 6/4 = 24

Leap years = 116

TOTAL = 173,880 days.

Jewish time: 483 x 360 = 173,880 days

10. Our scale now shows:-

14th March 445 BC -- 483 years -- 6th April 32 AD

11. The following questions now arise:

Has the second advent of Jesus Christ occurred? - No.

Is it longer than 7 years since Jesus Christ rode into Jerusalem? - Yes.

Therefore there must be a gap between the 69th week and the 70th week.

445 BC -- 483 years -- 32 AD -- GAP -- 7 years -- 2nd Advent

12. This gap has been filled in God's view of history by the church age. (see topic of Intercalation).

The 70th week which is 7 years in length therefore starts at the end of the church age - at the Rapture. These 7 years of the 70th week are the worst 7 years in the history of man - the tribulation.

13. CONCLUSION The course of this 70th week is denoted in (Daniel 9:26b, 27).

a) "and the people of the prince (the dictator of the Revived Roman Empire) that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary, and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and until the end of the war, desolations are determined.

b) And he (the dictator) shall confirm the covenant (mutual defence pact) with the many (the Jews) for one week (7 years) and in the midst of the week (3 1/2 years) he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, (this refers to the erection of a statue in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, see Revelation 13:11-15). even until the consummation (the 2nd advent) and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate (the dictator will be judged and cast into hell, see Revelation 19:20)."

c) We thus have Daniel's 70 weeks divided as shown:-

d) 445 BC -- 483 years -- 32 AD -- CHURCH -- unspecified period of time -- RAPTURE -- 7 years -- 2nd Advent

## **SUBMISSION**

1. This means to humble oneself in willing service to another, with the connotation that it is for your good. Genesis 16:9, 1 Peter 5:6, Hebrews 13:17.

2. We must fully surrender ourselves to God. James 4:7, Romans 12:1-2 As the Lord made himself obedient unto death so must we. Philippians 2:18.

3. We are, in Christ to submit ourselves each to the other within the church. This involves putting the spiritual needs of others ahead of any personal interests. Ephesians 5:21.

4. Within the church, believers are to submit to the teaching authority of the pastor as he preaches from the Word. Hebrews 13:17, 1 Corinthians 16:6, 1 Peter 5:5.

5. A wife is to submit herself to her own husband within their marriage. This involves respect for him as her spiritual leader and protector. Ephesians 5:22, Colossians 3:18, Titus 2:4 -5.
6. Children also are to submit in love to their parents' authority under God. Colossians 3:20.
7. All believers are to be in submission to the laws of their land, unless those laws violate the clear command of God. Romans 13:1, 2, Matthew 22:21, 1 Peter 2:13-17, exception example, Acts 4:15-20, 5:40-42.
8. Workers are to be under authority of their employers and their managers. Colossians 3:22-25, Ephesians 6:5-8, Titus 2:9, 10, 1 Peter 2:18-24.
9. Those in authority have a special responsibility to treat those under them with care and respect. Colossians 4:1

## **NOTES**

## **CHAPTER 25**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter covers the final foolish acts of the doomed monarchy of Judah. These sons of David and Solomon have all their weaknesses and few of their strengths. The great campaign of Nebuchadnezzar briefly referred to here involves not only Judah, but also a general revolt of the city-states of the Phoenicians, in Egypt, and northern Syria. Nebuchadnezzar has used the forces of other nations to harass Zedekiah for a few years before moving his main armies south, but when he does he moves quickly and establishes the main siege of Jerusalem, but his campaign base is well to the north at Riblah by the time the city falls. The entire campaign in Judah takes two full years before the city of Jerusalem falls. By this time all the other cities of the land are reduced to smoking ruins, and when the Babylonians finally establish a government of occupation, it must be based in Mizpeh, as the only secure walled city still standing reasonably intact.

The determined resistance of the Jewish people in all these battles is heroic, but totally wrong. God's hand is against them in all they do against Nebuchadnezzar, for he is God's instrument, and resistance to him places the government and people of Judah against God. Even the survivors rebel against the will of the Lord and after the murder of the Jewish governor of the land, they flee to Egypt with the prophet Jeremiah as their prisoner. Jeremiah chapters 40-44. They will all be judged there when Nebuchadnezzar defeats the Egyptians within fifteen years of defeating and destroying Judah. The Jewish people's acceptance and worship of foreign gods instead of JHWH of Israel has sealed their doom. They cannot win and their judgement is established as being a seventy year time frame.

As we saw in the last chapter this seventy year time frame runs two ways; politically and religiously. The political captivity runs from 605 – 535 BC; from the first fall of the city to the return of the Exiles. The religious captivity runs from 586 – 516 BC; from the destruction of Solomon's Temple to the completion of the rebuilding of the Temple by Zerubbabel. It is this temple, much rebuilt later by Herod the Great, that is the one that the Lord Jesus enters in his earthly ministry. Sadly the Jewish people reject their Messiah, and so forty years after his execution at the hands of their overlords the Romans, they lose their second temple to the Roman Legions in 70 AD.

The period of forty years of grace and judgement occurs in the time frame of the ministry of Jeremiah, as it occurred in the Exodus period, and just as it later occurs in the early church age. The Lord's final warnings to Judah begin in earnest in 626 BC and the Temple is destroyed in 586 BC. As we read the sad account of the people's suicidal rush to destruction through their idolatry and pride, let us reflect upon the same characteristics that lead to their total destruction twice, for this Old Sin Nature tendency remains Satan's main tool to destroy men even today. Self centred Pride certainly goes before any fall!

**2 KINGS 25:1-30**

1 And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against it round about. 2 And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. 3 And on the ninth day of the fourth month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land. 4 And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king's garden: (now the Chaldees were against the city round about:) and the king went the way toward the plain. 5 And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him. 6 So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him. 7 And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon. 8 And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which is the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem: 9 And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire. 10 And all the army of the Chaldees, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about. 11 Now the rest of the people that were left in the city, and the fugitives that fell away to the king of Babylon, with the remnant of the multitude, did Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carry away. 12 But the captain of the guard left of the poor of the the land to be vinedressers and husbandmen. 13 And the pillars of brass that were in the house of the LORD, and the bases, and the brasen sea that was in the house of the LORD, did the Chaldees break in pieces, and carried the brass of them to Babylon. 14 And the pots, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the spoons, and all the vessels of brass wherewith they ministered, took they away. 15 And the firepans, and the bowls, and such things as were of gold, in gold, and of silver, in silver, the captain of the guard took away. 16 The two pillars, one sea, and the bases which Solomon had made for the house of the LORD; the brass of all these vessels was without weight. 17 The height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits, and the chapter upon it was brass: and the height of the chapter three cubits; and the wreathen work, and pomegranates upon the chapter round about, all of brass: and like unto these had the second pillar with wreathen work. 18 And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, and Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the door: 19 And out of the city he took an officer that was set over the men of war, and five men of them that were in the king's presence, which were found in the city, and the principal scribe of the host, which mustered the people of the land, and threescore men of the people of the land that were found in the city: 20 And Nebuzaradan captain of the guard took these, and brought them to the king of Babylon to Riblah: 21 And the king of Babylon smote them, and slew them at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was carried away out of their land. 22 And as for the people that remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, even over them he made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, ruler. 23 And when all the captains of the armies, they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah governor, there came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, even Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan the son of Careah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah the son of a Maachathite, they and their men. 24 And Gedaliah sware to them, and to their men, and said unto them, Fear not to be the servants of the Chaldees: dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon; and it shall be well with you. 25 But it came to pass in the seventh month, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the seed royal, came, and ten men with him, and smote Gedaliah, that he died, and the Jews and the Chaldees that were with him at Mizpah. 26 And all the people, both small and great, and the captains of the armies, arose, and came to Egypt: for they were afraid of the Chaldees. 27 And it came to pass in the seven and thirtieth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, that Evilmerodach king of Babylon in the year that he began to reign did lift up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison; 28 And he spake kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon; 29 And changed his prison garments: and he did eat bread continually before him all the days of his life. 30 And his allowance was a continual allowance given him of the king, a daily rate for every day, all the days of his life.

**REFLECTIONS**

**Verses 1 – 7.** These verses are a summary only of vast events. The Chronicles account is fuller, and the chapters of Jeremiah that cover this period give the most complete history we have that has survived. This great two or more year campaign of Nebuchadnezzar would fill several thousand page volumes if fully told! Read through Jeremiah chapters 32-43 for the most complete account of the tragedy of these last three years. The horrors of the siege must have been terrible in themselves, for only around 700 people survive of the entire population of Jerusalem! Having got to this point the few survivors in the land itself are then further decimated by the murders perpetrated by Ishmael that lead to the flight of the last of the aristocracy that has survived until then.

Nebuchadnezzar has captured and defeated totally the greatest city of the ancient world, the city of Nineveh, and left it in such ruins that none would even know its name within two hundred years of this time. For Zedekiah to think that he could successfully rebel against Nebuchadnezzar was stupidity of the worst sort, and in this he was supported by his dumb nobles, who he believed would kill him if he didn't rebel and fight. He was also controlled by his desire not to look like a fool in his rebellion with those that had joined the Babylonians. Jeremiah 38:19-27.

There was a suicidal determination to rebel on the part of the nobles who were left in the land. It appears that the only good and intelligent people were in captivity after the second taking of the city in 597 BC, and all those left as rulers in the land, were stupid and pride filled men. It is amazing how the Lord used the great king of Babylon to teach the pride filled men of Judah, and then he dealt with the great king's own pride. Read his testimony in Daniel 4:28-37.

Nebuchadnezzar arrives at the city and places his siege works in place. He built forts and walls to enclose the city and ensure his men were safe from any sallies from the city, and that none could leave it without being captured. There is to be no escape this third time. He had taken the city once in 605 BC quickly, once in 597 BC after a siege of several months, and each time he left the city intact, but he will show no mercy this third time.

The final months of the siege betray just how unprepared the city was to withstand a great siege, for no bread was available in the city at all, and death by starvation and disease was rampant inside the walls. The walls themselves were broken down by the catapults and battering rams of the Babylonians and the Jewish king and his guard fled as the enemy poured in on the final day. Jeremiah 39:1-5, 52:1-9. Zedekiah's cowardice leads to his defeat and his capture alive, and he sees all his sons executed, so that his line is extinguished, and then he has his eyes put out and is taken blind and in chains to die in a Babylon jail. Jeremiah 39:6-7, 52:8-11.

Zedekiah hoped to flee across the Jordan and escape into Edom or Moab, but he is caught by the cavalry of the Babylonians, probably Scythians. Ezekiel had foreseen this while a captive in Babylon. Ezekiel 12:3ff. The fact that his people were starving to death, but Zedekiah had kept his soldiers and horses well fed and was himself ready to flee in good health and strength tell us just how self centred and selfish this man was. He was ready to sacrifice everything and everyone, except his own life, and that of his sons. His readiness "to fight to the last peasant" but keep himself safe indicates the fatal character weakness of this stupid and carnal man. He had received every warning and good piece of advice God could have sent his way through Jeremiah. Jeremiah 32:1-5, 34:1-5, 38:17-23.

He is caught and taken directly, with his sons, senior officers, and guard, straight to Riblah. He does not see the city again, nor his wives or daughters. The girls will live; spared by Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah 43:6. This shows the grace of Nebuchadnezzar, for most conquering kings gave the daughters of their foes to their men for sport or wives. Nebuchadnezzar is focused upon God's will in this matter, and while his men will be fierce, and too destructive at times, (and Babylon will pay dearly for this - Jeremiah 50-51), he will be a tool of God's judgement where he is able to control things, and his senior general understands God's nature and plan also. Jeremiah 39:11-15, 40:1-6.

**Verses 8 – 12.** The city fell on the ninth day of the fourth month (at some point in late July). The starving survivors who were not killed were placed in a camp outside the city and fed until the seventh day of the fifth month, when the final instructions arrived at the desolate city as to what to do with it. They would have been fed well through this month time frame to ensure they were fit enough to make the journey back to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar's chief of staff arrived in Jerusalem that day in mid August with the plan for the destruction of the Temple and the city. On that day the orders were issued. Great fires were prepared in every house of the city, every palace, and in the Temple itself, and the city was set on fire from one end to the other.

The process of preparation for the destruction of the city, and its final total ruin, may have taken three days, as Jeremiah records the start day, or the final day, as the tenth day of the fifth month. Jeremiah 52:12-14. The fire was allowed to do its work for some time as it would weaken walls and lead to the collapse of most buildings. Once the fire had done its work the entire Babylonian Army moved into the city and targeted the surviving walls and broke them down, pushing the walls outwards into the valleys. Nehemiah 2:11-15. It is always easier to push walls outwards, as they are designed to resist forward pressure, and the ground slopes away in front of them. By pushing the walls out into the valleys they made it easier for themselves and also created a slightly easier job for the rebuilding, as lifting cranes/engines could be built at the top of the hills by Nehemiah to drag these stones back up and replace them close to their original positions in the rebuilt walls.

**Verses 13 – 17.** The author of the books of Kings had described these very pillars at the start of his history, and now he tells their fate. 1 Kings 7:15ff. Jeremiah mentions even more in his account. Jeremiah 52:17-23. The great casting works of Solomon and Hiram's smiths is either separated into its pieces, or cut into pieces, and taken into Babylon. These great pillars are possibly disassembled and then re-assembled in Babylon in one of their temples. Verse seventeen reads as if the pillars are carefully taken apart into their "kit set" elements, and then taken off to Babylon.

Recycling of such pieces and specific architectural items was a common practise. The greatest example of this, which can still be seen in our present world, is in the great church (now mosque) of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul (the Old Eastern Roman Empire capital of Constantinople). In this great church are the pillars looted from many of the greatest pagan temples of the ancient world, including the marble pillars of the great temple of Diana of the Ephesians. In that great surviving relic of the ancient world you can see elements of the building that go back nearly three thousand years from all areas of the Eastern Mediterranean world.

Every item that had survived in the Temple from the siege was gathered and catalogued and taken into Babylonian captivity. This tell us that the seizure of Jerusalem was a careful affair, and totally unlike the sack of Nineveh twenty six years before, that had been total carnage and an open field day of pillage for the troops involved. In Nineveh the men just grabbed anything and anyone they wanted and carried them off to their camps. The capture of Jerusalem was clearly a very different and very ordered attack, and clearly was under very careful orders from Nebuchadnezzar.

Jeremiah was specifically rescued by the key commando unit of the Babylonian Army, and the city was not burned until the orders of Nebuchadnezzar were personally received. Jeremiah 39:13-18.

Even in this time of destruction the Lord's hand was over His people to ensure that things were done carefully, and every item within the Temple's storehouse was carried into Babylonian captivity, from where it would be later returned. Ezra 1:7-11. What happened to the last items from Moses Tabernacle that were stored above the Holy of Holies? 1 Kings Chapters 6, 8. It is likely that the gold and silver items from the old Tabernacle were part of the overall loot, but the wood and the fabric of the old tent would have been probably used to light the fires in the Temple.

The gold covered wood would have been burned carefully to extract the gold from it. The Babylonians were thorough and careful, and several million dollars worth of gold had been used in the tabernacle items and in the Temple itself. Anything remaining from previous sackings and lootings for tribute would have been removed so that only the flammable wood and fabric was left.

**Verses 18 – 21.** The surviving men of the king's cabinet were all rounded up. They were all men who had advised Zedekiah regarding the war and were all active in keeping the war going against the Babylonians. These men have their day to fear the king of Babylon's wrath and be executed one by one. Everyone that was active in their rebellion, or had been in a position of power and not spoken up was executed. Jeremiah and his key friends were all rescued alive, and taken into captivity, or placed under the care of Gedaliah at Mizpeh.

The executed men were the great opponents of Jeremiah throughout his prophetic ministry. They all had received grace from God and been delivered twice from death (605 and 597 sieges) at the hands of Babylonian power, and had each promised before the Lord to serve the king of Babylon. They had broken their oath and so they died. They argued they were patriots, but they had stood against God's men and God's will and so they lost the battles and then they lost their lives. They had enjoyed themselves as princes for eleven years and now they must pay the price. There is always a day of reckoning for all dodgy dealings, and especially for the evils that cost others their savings or their lives. The fraudsters and tyrants of today must face this same principle. Numbers 32:23, Galatians 6:7-8.

**Verses 22 – 24.** The fate of Gedaliah is sad, but he was foolish, and did not take the warnings he was given by the men who were first to gather to him. The war leaders who have escaped the Babylonian Armies are commando forces who have been operating using guerrilla tactics in the hill country. They see him as a turn coat and the traitor, but most are ready to work with him as he is their only hope of pardon and life in the land until the rest of the people are granted the opportunity to return. Jeremiah has prophesied already that it will be a seventy year captivity, but those left in the land prove to be as unwilling to listen to the prophet of God as the carnal Zedekiah had been.

Gedaliah has the Babylonian government's approval to grant amnesty in the land and he does so, but having done this he ought to have taken strong precautions against further murderous actions by these tough warriors. He fails in his military "duty to care" of those under his power, and opens himself and them all to the murders that are perpetrated upon them all.

**Verses 25 – 26.** The murders of the people are glossed quickly over here. Read through the Commentary on Jeremiah 41:1-18, as there the full story is told. Eleven evil Jewish men murder all the Babylonians and every other Jewish male amongst the people at Mizpeh. They then murder nearly an entire group of pilgrims, and only stop with the last ten because they claim to have gold hidden that they can tell the evil men about. This proves the carnal evil of Ishmael, and his flight to the Ammonites proves his lack of patriotism as a Jew and demonstrates fully and finally his carnal evil heart.

It is a sad commentary on the total lack of preparation on the part of Gedaliah for evil actions amongst his surviving brethren. He expected the best from his people, and all who do so express foolishness! Read carefully and prayerfully the words of John about our Lord's attitude on this matter. John 2:23-25. Notice that the Lord Jesus did not trust people, for he knew the heart of man! All mature believers do not trust people for they know the reality of the Old Sin Nature. Also read Jeremiah 17:9.

There are many people in this present world who are sold out to evil, and to fail to take care against such people is criminal stupidity and negligence, and the loss of your goods or the lives of your loved ones will be the result of such stupidity. We are to lock our doors, and go armed at times in some places, for we ought to know the dangers, and to fail to accept them is to end up in the disaster Gedaliah faced. Luke 11:21, 22:35-36, 49-51, 2 Corinthians 2:11. There is a time to strike down evil men, and there is a time to give them the Gospel and even bring healing to them, and the mature believer is tasked with heeding the inner voice of the Holy Spirit that they might know which path to follow in each situation they walk into.

From the description by Jeremiah, well over one hundred innocent people were murdered by these eleven evil men. This shows an incredible lack of military readiness on the part of Gedaliah's people. This carnage should not have occurred if Gedaliah had taken precautions about ensuring all who entered Mizpeh were disarmed at the gate, and that his men always outnumbered all visitors, but the well meaning foolish old man was not wise in the evils of men enough to save the lives of his people. John 2:24-25.

**Verses 27 – 30.** The history of the books of the Kings ends with the lifting up of Jehoiachin to sit at the new Babylonian king's table in his palace for the rest of his life. Nebuchadnezzar ensured that all who rebelled against him

remained in prison until his death, but the new king, called Evil-Merodach here, reduced his prison sentence to simple confinement in the palace, where he died many years later. He may have then been able to see his grown up children, and grand-children, and hear of the revival of Ezekiel, and certainly meet and eat with Daniel.

Daniel may have worked behind the scenes to secure his release from jail after Nebuchadnezzar's death, and I believe Daniel has ensured he has stayed in good health through the thirty seven years of jail. Without special assistance a man would not have survived such a time in jail in the ancient world. His grand-son Zerubbabel will become the leader of the exiles when they return in 535BC. This man combines the two lines that lead back to David, and is the direct ancestor of both Mary and Joseph. Matthew 1:12-13, Luke 3:27.

### **PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. Nationalism is bone fide, and patriotism is a normal and good concept, but it has biblical limits. When our nation is under judgement due to persistent patterns of sin and evil, believers are to be very wary of throwing themselves into "patriotic causes" if they are an expression of rebellion against God's revealed will. The true prophets had made it very clear through forty years that Babylon was not to be fought against, but most ignored these "inconvenient" prophetic revelations. Jeremiah was called a traitor and at times genuine believers may appear that way to their neighbours for we cannot support our own nation when it stands for something that is evil. Let us be spiritually discerning in the political matters that we must face in these evil days.

2. Pride goes before any fall from grace, and pride certainly causes men to move away from God's Grace. The battle of history is the battle for the minds of people. It centres in the Old Sin Nature of each person. Will man follow after pride and self centeredness, or will man acknowledge their creator and serve the Lord their God with all their heart and with all their strength. Let us make this issue clear to all we meet today, for it remains the central issue of each age of history.

3. How clearly do you understand the evil of man? Have you accepted the Lord's verdict upon men, or do you still cling to the liberal notions of the goodness of all people? Some people are sold out to evil and you must recognise this or you will see the innocent abused and murdered before your eyes. Let us preach the truth pastors about the nature of evil so that the innocent are protected by the wisdom of mature believers, not made the victims of well meaning stupidity like the people under Gedaliah's care.

### **REFLECTION UPON GRACE**

1. Grace is all that God is free to do for man on the basis of the cross. Therefore Grace is unmerited favour from God.

2. Grace depends on the character of God therefore Grace depends on who and what God is. Grace is what God can do for man and still be true to his own character.

3. The believer must recognise the difference between legalism and grace. Legalism is man's work intruding upon the plan of God.

4. The greatest thing God can do for the saved person is to make him exactly like His Son Jesus Christ. This is accomplished in three stages of sanctification.

5. Positional Sanctification: At Salvation every believer enters into union with Christ. (Hebrews 1:2) Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father and is therefore superior to all angels in his humanity. At the point of salvation we are entered into union with Christ thus we are positionally higher than angels. We are positionally seated with Christ at God's right hand.

6. Experiential Sanctification: During the Christian's life on the earth the time spent under the power of the Holy Spirit. During this time we produce the character of God in our lives - gold, silver, precious stones. (1 Corinthians 3:12-15)

7. Ultimate Sanctification: When the believer receives a resurrection body he loses the sin nature and all human good. At this point the believer is physically superior to all angels. He remains in this perfect state eternally.

8. All believers have tasted of Grace at least once (1 Peter 2:3). This refers to the point of Salvation at which the believer receives at least 34 things which he did not earn or deserve. (Ephesians 2:8, 9) Disorientation to grace is the believer's greatest occupational hazard in his Christian life. (Galatians 5:4, Hebrews 12:15)

9. The divine attitude to grace is expressed in (Isaiah 30:18, 19) God is constantly waiting to pour out his blessing on all believers in the Christian life.

10. Grace in salvation is expressed in many ways. It is always the same - believing in Jesus Christ (Psalm 103:8-12, Romans 3:23-4, Romans 4:4, 5:20, Ephesians 2:8, 9)

11. There are many ways in which the Christian life expresses GRACE:

- a) Prayer (Hebrews 4:16)
  - b) Suffering (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10)
  - c) Growth (2 Peter 3:18)
  - d) Stability (1 Peter 5:12)
  - e) Lifestyle (Hebrews 12:28, 2 Corinthians 1:12)
  - f) Production of Divine Good (1 Corinthians 15:10, 2 Corinthians 6:1)
12. Grace is the correct attitude in relation to giving. (2 Corinthians 8 & 9)
13. Grace is the only means of coping with suffering in the Christian life. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10) Through Grace God is able to bless the believer in the midst of the pressures and adversities of life. (1 Peter 1:6,7)
14. Implications of grace:
- a) God is perfect, his plan is perfect.
  - b) A perfect plan can only originate from a perfect God.
  - c) If man could do anything in the plan of God the plan would no longer be perfect.
  - d) A plan is no stronger than its weakest link. Grace therefore excludes all human merit, all human ability.
  - e) Legalism, human works is the enemy of Grace.
  - f) The works of human righteousness have therefore no place in the plan of God. (Isaiah 64:6)