

SECOND CHRONICLES

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Introduction:

J. Sidlow Baxter, in *EXPLORE THE BOOK*, states about Second Chronicles: "As to the unifying idea or emphasis, all who have studied and written on these two books of the Chronicles are unanimous in observing the prominence given to the temple and matters connected with it." Quoting one of his sources, Baxter writes: "While much contained in the Books of Kings is repeated or restated in the Chronicles, much is omitted because foreign to the author's purpose. But whatever bears on the *temple*, its preservation and restoration, the purity of its worship, the regularity and orderliness of its services; whatever makes idolatrous rites or relics hateful, or lifts God to His true throne in the hearts of the people, is here emphasized."

The Pulpit Commentary introduces Second Chronicles with the following: "The Second Book of Chronicles is occupied with the reign, works, and career of Solomon, and with the history of the separate kingdom of Judah, omitting altogether the connected history of that of Israel. It goes down to the memorable proclamation of Cyrus, which authorized the return of the captives and sanctioned the rebuilding of the temple. This book embraces the third and fourth divisions of the whole work, once entitled in its unity Chronicles, according to the very obvious fourfold arrangement of it, observed by so many expositors of this historical portion of the Old Testament. The *third* division, occupied with the reign of Solomon, fills 2 Chronicles 1-9. And the *fourth* division, occupied with the history of the successive reigns of the separate kingdom of Judah, fills 2 Chronicles 10- 36:21."

Finally, the more modern *Contemporary English Version* states, by way of introduction: "Second Chronicles continues the history of Israel that was begun in 1 Chronicles. This book repeats information and many stories that are in 1 and 2 Kings, but from a slightly different viewpoint.

The book of 2 Chronicles begins with the rule of King Solomon, then tells the history of the two separate kingdoms of Judah and Israel down to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

King Solomon is honored as the ideal king of Israel. The first part of 2 Chronicles (1-9) includes events from his rule, especially the building and dedication of the temple in Jerusalem and the beginning of worship there.

The second part of the book (10-36) begins with the rebellion of the northern tribes of Israel and the division of the country into two separate kingdoms, Judah in the south and Israel in the north. This part of 2 Chronicles is the history of Judah down to the time of Jerusalem's fall and destruction. Unlike 2 Kings, the book of 2 Chronicles includes very little information about the northern kingdom. According to 2 Chronicles, the people of Israel were sinful and turned their backs on the LORD, and so their history did not deserve to be told.

Second Chronicles, like 1 Chronicles, is very concerned that the LORD be worshiped in the proper way. Hezekiah and Josiah are two of the most respected kings in Judah, because they were always faithful to the LORD and did many things to see that he was properly worshiped and that his Law was obeyed.

This book tells how Jerusalem was destroyed and the people of Judah were led away as prisoners to Babylonia. But the book concludes with hope for the Jews. King Cyrus of Persia lets them return to Judah, and he promises: The LORD God will watch over any of his people who want to go back to Judah. (36:23b).”

Title of the book:

In the Hebrew Bible First and Second Chronicles and were presented as a single book. The Hebrew title for both books was *diverê ha-yāmîn*, “the words of the days.”

Characteristics of 2 Chronicles:

The Pictorial Bible Dictionary writes about the Chronicles: “Chronicles contains no statement about its own authorship or date. The last event it records is the decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C., which permitted the Jews to return from their Babylonian captivity (II Chron. 36:22); and its genealogies extend to approximately 500 B.C., as far, that is, as to Pelatiah and Jeshaiiah (I Chron. 3:21), two grandsons of Zerubbabel, the prince who led in the return from exile. The language, however, and the contents of Chronicles closely parallel that of the book of Ezra, which continues the history of the Jews from the decree of Cyrus down to 457 B.C. Both documents are marked by lists and genealogies, by an interest in priestly ritual, and by devotion to the law of Moses. The closing verses, moreover, of Chronicles (II 36:22-23) are repeated as the opening verses of Ezra (1:1-3a). Ancient Hebrew tradition and the modern scholarship ... therefore unite in suggesting that Ezra may have been the author of both volumes. His complete work would then have been finished some time around 450 B.C.”

The first nine chapters cover the life and reign of King Solomon, ending with his death, stating: “Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years. Then he rested with his fathers and was buried in the city of David his father. And Rehoboam his son succeeded him as king.”¹

Outline:

With some adaptations, we follow the outline given by *The Tyndale Bible Commentary*:

- A. SOLOMON’S KINGDOM – 1:1 – 9:31
 - I. Solomon prepares for the temple (1:1 – 2:18)
 - i. Solomon’s splendor (1:1-17)
 - a. Solomon’s kingdom established (1:1)
 - b. Solomon’s worship (1:2-6)
 - c. Solomon’s wisdom (1:7-13)
 - d. Solomon’s wealth (1:14-17)
 - ii. Solomon’s preparations (2:1-18)
 - a. Building instructions (2:1)
 - b. Census of laborers (2:2)
 - c. Solomon’s letter to Hiram (2:3-10)
 - d. Hiram’s letter to Solomon (2:11-16)

¹ II Chron. 9:30-31

- e. Census of non-Israelite laborers (2:17-18)
- II. Solomon builds the temple (3:1 – 5:1)
 - a. Beginning to build the temple (3:1-2)
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 - c. The golden temple (3:4b-13)
 - d. The veil (3:14)
 - e. The Temple equipment (4:1-22)
 - i. The bronze altar (4:1)
 - ii. The Sea (4:2-6, 10)
 - iii. The ten gold lampstands and ten tables (4:7-8)
 - iv. The courtyards (4:9)
 - v. Bronze work (4:11b-18)
 - vi. Gold objects (4:19-22)
 - a. Completion of the temple (5:1)
- III. Solomon dedicates the temple (5:2 – 7:22)
 - a. The ark and the cloud (5:2-14)
 - i. Solomon assembles all Israel (5:2-3)
 - ii. The ark's final journey (5:4-6)
 - iii. The ark's final resting-place (5:7-10)
 - iv. God's glory and Israel's praise (5:11-14)
 - b. Solomon's praise and prayer (6:1-42)
 - i. Solomon responds to God's glory (6:1-2)
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 - c. God's answer to prayer (7:1-22)
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- IV. Solomon completes the temple (8:1-16)
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 - i. Solomon and the king of Tyre (8:17-18; 9:10-11)
 - ii. Solomon and the queen of Sheba (9:1-9, 12)
 - b. Solomon's wisdom, fame and fortune (9:13-28)
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 - c. Concluding formula for Solomon (9:29-31)
- B. THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH (10:1 – 36:23)
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 - i. Rehoboam's abortive coronation plans (10:1-5)
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- b. Rehoboam's strength (11:1-23)
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 - c. Rehoboam's repentance (12:1-12)
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 - v. Concluding formula (13:22 – 14:1)
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 - iii. Asa obeys a prophet's word (15:1-8)
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 - b. Jehoshaphat, Ahab and the prophets (18:1 – 19:3)
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 - ii. The prophets and the war (18:4-27)
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 - c. Jehoshaphat's legal reforms (19:4-11)
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 - iv. Judah believes (20:20-26)
 - v. Jerusalem rejoices (20:27-30)
 - e. Concluding formula (20:31-21:1)
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 - ii. God punishes Jehoram (21:8-20)
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 - ii. Ahaziah's downfall and death (22:5-9)
- c. Athaliah (22:10-12)
- V. Three declining kings (23:1-26:23)
 - a. Joash (23:1 – 24:27)
 - i. Joash's accession under Jehoiada's leadership (23:1-21)
 - ii. Joash's faithfulness while Jehoiada lives (24:1-16)
 - iii. Joash's apostasy after Jehoiada's death (24:17-27)
 - b. Amaziah (25:1 – 26:2)
 - i. Amaziah's strength (25:1-4)
 - ii. War against Edom (25:5-16)
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 - iv. Amaziah's end (25:25 – 26:2)
 - c. Uzziah (26:3-23)
 - i. Uzziah seeks God and is successful (26:3-15)
 - ii. Uzziah's pride and downfall (26:16-23)
- VI. Three alternating kings (27:1-33:33)
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 - i. Jotham's contrast with his father (27:1-2)
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 - v. Reorganizing tithes and offerings (31:2-21)
 - d. God saves Judah through Hezekiah's faith (32:1-33)
 - i. Hezekiah defends (32:1-8)
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- b. Amon is unrepentant (33:21-25)
- c. Josiah (34:1 – 36:1)
 - i. Josiah seeks God faithfully (34:1-7)
 - ii. Josiah repents over God’s word (34:8:33)
 - iii. Josiah’s death (35:1-19)
- VIII. Four kings and the end of the kingdom (36:2-20)
 - a. The fall of Jehoahaz (36:2-4)
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- IX. Beginning to rebuild God’s house (36:21-23)

A. SOLOMON’S KINGDOM – 1:1 – 9:31

I. Solomon prepares for the temple (1:1 – 2:18)

- i. Solomon’s splendor (1:1-17)
 - a. Solomon’s kingdom established (1:1)

1:1 - *Solomon son of David established himself firmly over his kingdom, for the LORD his God was with him and made him exceedingly great.*

The Hebrew text of v. 1 reads literally: “And Solomon the son of David was strengthened in his kingdom, and Yahweh his Elohim [was] with him and magnified him exceedingly.” The Hebrew word, rendered “strengthened” is *chazaq*, which literally means “to fasten,” or “to seize.” We find the word for the first time in the Old Testament in the story of Lot’s flight from Sodom, where we read: “When he hesitated, the men *grasped* his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them.”²

“Made him great” is the rendering of the single Hebrew word *gadal*, which can be rendered: “to make large.” The first time that word is used is in God’s blessing of Abraham, in which He says: “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will *make* your name *great*, and you will be a blessing.”³

The obvious intent of the author is to depict Solomon as the greatest king Israel ever had. The forty years of his reign are considered to be Israel’s golden age. In a sense they were, but in another sense they were not. The fact that the country split into two separate states after his death strongly suggests that some of Solomon’s gold may have been fools’ gold. After Solomon’s death the people came to his son Rehoboam and said: “Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you.”⁴ That does not sound as a glowing testimony about Solomon’s reign.

Yet, the Chronicler’s statement is that Solomon was Israel’s great king, maybe his greatest. But his greatness was not his own. It was God who made him “exceedingly great.”

² Gen. 19:16

³ Gen. 12:2

⁴ 2 Chron. 10:4

There is a sense in which Solomon foreshadows the Messiah. We read about Solomon's birth: "Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and lay with her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The LORD loved him; and because the LORD loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah."⁵ A footnote at that verse states: "Jedidiah means loved by the LORD." At Jesus' baptism, the Father's voice from heaven called: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."⁶

But it is obvious that the whole of Solomon's life was not a perfect example of what the Messiah would be.

One of Solomon's first acts was to seek the LORD. He intended to set an example and wanted all of Israel to follow him in this.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "This chapter presents a rather different introduction to the reign of Solomon than do the books of Kings. Instead of the prolonged account of Solomon's accession (1 Ki. 1-2), which may have a possible allusion in verse 1, the reader is brought immediately to an account of Solomon's wisdom and wealth. It is almost a commentary in 1 Kings 10:23. Apart from a brief introduction underlining how the blessings of David's reign continued under Solomon, the main part of the chapter falls into two parts, both of which are based on separate passages from Kings: (a) Solomon's gift of wisdom (vv. 2-13); (b) Solomon's wealth (vv. 14-17).

Two threads connect these apparently independent subjects. The first is that both wisdom and wealth are gifts of God. This is made abundantly clear by God's answer to Solomon's prayer (vv/ 11-12), for which David's prayer (*cf.* 1 Ch. 29:10-16) was more than adequate preparation. The second is the temple, indicated by the fact that this chapter is followed immediately by the preparations for building the temple. The temple offers the primary example of Solomon's exercise of wisdom and the most significant use of his wealth."

b. Solomon's worship (1:2-6)

2 Then Solomon spoke to all Israel — to the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, to the judges and to all the leaders in Israel, the heads of families—

3 and Solomon and the whole assembly went to the high place at Gibeon, for God's Tent of Meeting was there, which Moses the LORD's servant had made in the desert.

4 Now David had brought up the ark of God from Kiriath Jearim to the place he had prepared for it, because he had pitched a tent for it in Jerusalem.

5 But the bronze altar that Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made was in Gibeon in front of the tabernacle of the LORD; so Solomon and the assembly inquired of him there.

6 Solomon went up to the bronze altar before the LORD in the Tent of Meeting and offered a thousand burnt offerings on it.

⁵ 2 Sam. 12:24, 25

⁶ Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22

We understand from these verses that there was no single place where worship of God could be held. While Israel traveled through the desert, the tabernacle was the only place to commune with God and all the furniture of the tabernacle was subservient to this. Somehow, during Saul's reign the whole system had fallen apart. The tabernacle was at one place, the ark at another and the burn offering altar still somewhere else.

The Wycliffe Commentary observes about the place of congregation, which was Gibeon: "This city was seven miles northwest of Jerusalem. By Solomon's time, Gibeon, with the tabernacle of ... the LORD (1 Chr 16:39), and Jerusalem, with the ark of God (II Chr 1:4), were the only legitimate places for divine sacrifice. ... Other high places, even if used in the name of Israel's God Jehovah (*Yahweh*), were contaminated with Baal worship and were under God's ban (Num 33:52, Deut 12:2). Solomon's sin began, in fact, with his recognition of the high places, plural (1 Kgs 3:3)."

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "The gathering at *Gibeon* is described quite differently from the record in 1 King 3:4ff. Whereas the earlier version speaks only of Solomon's personal relationship with God, here *all Israel* (cf. 1 Ch. 29:23, 24, 25) or *the whole assembly* (cf. v. 5) is involved with him. This is typical of the Chronicler, who constantly emphasizes the people's unity under their leader (cf. 1 Ch. 13:1-6; 15:25-29). The event has become a public enterprise, as if to encourage ordinary people of future generation that they too would receive a response from God when they sought him through his temple (cf. 2 Ch. 6:21-40; 7:13-16). Most of the officials listen in verse 2 also occur at 1 Chronicles 28:1, stressing continuity with David, and, though mention of *the judges* is slightly unexpected, they too had a continuing role in Israel (cf. 1 26:29; 2 Ch. 19:8-11). 'Gave an order' (v. 2, GNB) is preferable to the usual but misleadingly mid spoke to (NIV, etc.)."

We understand from the information in v. 2 that Solomon convoked the whole nation by calling together the representatives of the various branches, military and civil. They were the ones accompanying him to Gibeon.

The tabernacle of Moses still existed. But in Solomon's day that tent was about 400 years old and much of the glory of the olden days must have faded. Also the tabernacle no longer contained the Ark of the Covenant, representing the presence of God. The main reason for Solomon to have the gathering at Gibeon must have been the presence of the bronze altar on which sacrifices could be made.

Although we read that Solomon offered the sacrifices, most Bible scholars assume that the priests performed the actual duties in Solomon's name. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "The first instance of the burnt offering is ... Genesis 8:20, and thereafter in the same book ... Genesis 15:9, 17; 22:2, 7, 13. It was manifestly the chiefest of the eucharistic kind of sacrifices, and for manifest reasons also was preceded by a 'sin' offering (... Exodus 29:36-38; ... Leviticus 8:14, etc.). ... The extraordinary number of the burnt offerings on this and some similar occasions may well excite our wonder (... Numbers 7:3, 17; 1 Kings 8. 64; ... 2 Chronicles 4:1 compared with ... 2 Chronicles 7:7. ...). The priests, of course, performed the sacrifices at the command of Solomon."

Although we are given the impression that the whole ceremony was performed in one day, it is hard to believe that one day was enough to bring such an enormous number of sacrifices. That means that we cannot know at which night God spoke to Solomon, as is recorded in vv. 7-12.

c. Solomon's wisdom (1:7-13)

7 That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

8 Solomon answered God, "You have shown great kindness to David my father and have made me king in his place.

9 Now, LORD God, let your promise to my father David be confirmed, for you have made me king over a people who are as numerous as the dust of the earth.

10 Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

11 God said to Solomon, "Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, riches or honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king,

12 therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, riches and honor, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have."

13 Then Solomon went to Jerusalem from the high place at Gibeon, from before the Tent of Meeting. And he reigned over Israel.

Since, as we observed, it seems unlikely that Solomon could have offered one thousand sacrifices in one day, we cannot determine which night God appeared to Solomon.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "There is no mention here that it came via a 'dream' (1 Kgs 3:5, 15), though this omission is as likely to be the result of Chronicles' abbreviation of the earlier account as for any more sinister reason.... The whole passage again underlines the importance of prayer for the exercise of leadership, notably as here, in the political arena. Chronicles' account is an abbreviated version of 1 Kings 3:5-14, omitting material that can be found elsewhere in Chronicles in order to concentrate on the absolute necessity of wisdom to fulfill the purposes of God.

God initiates the conversation with an extraordinary invitation, 'Ask what you would like me to give you' (v. 7. JB). There is nothing quite like it anywhere in the Old Testament, though there are certain parallels in some of the royal psalms (Pss. 2:8; 20:4; 21:2, 4), and in Isaiah's provocation to Ahaz (Is. 7:11)."

We could say that God offered Solomon a coronation present. God's offer is one of the most amazing things imaginable. God is the ultimate authority in the universe. Any king on earth rules by His grace. Solomon's reign on earth was a shadow of a heavenly reality. God wanted Solomon to understand this.

It is not unusual for king's subjects to bring presents to their monarch, especially on the day of his coronation. It is highly unusual, however, that the One who is the King of kings, would come and offer a present as if He were one of his subjects. Jesus makes the extraordinary statement: "My Father will honor the one who serves me."⁷ We could say that God here offers to wash Solomon's feet.

Solomon shows a depth of understanding that is unusual for a young man. It takes wisdom to know that wisdom is needed.

In his answer to God, Solomon mentions that God had shown "great kindness" to his father, David. The Hebrew word for "kindness" is *checed*, which can also be rendered "mercy,"

⁷ John 12:26

as in “But I, by your great *mercy*, will come into your house; in reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple.”⁸ It can also mean “love,” as in “Surely goodness and *love* will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”⁹

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “Solomon asks God for two things (a) that God would confirm his *promise* made to David (v. 9), and (b) that he might receive *wisdom and knowledge* (v. 10). The first request, which is just as important as the second, looks backwards to David’s prayer (*cf.* Heb. *yē’amēn*, ‘be confirmed,’ in 1 Ch. 17:23, 24 and here) and forward to the temple’s completion (2 Ch. 6:17). God’s promise will be fulfilled only when the second house of 1 Chronicles 17, *viz.* the temple, is completed. The second request, for *wisdom and knowledge*, is briefer than in 1 King 3:9 (NRSV, RSV, ‘an understanding mind ... able to discern between good and evil’). The differences, however, are more superficial than substantial. The ‘mind’ (lit. ‘heart’) is the seat of the intellect, will, and conscience in Hebrew thought, while the Old Testament concept of wisdom is moral and spiritual as well as intellectual. ‘Wisdom’ and ‘understanding’ are frequently paralleled in the Old Testament (*e.g.* Pr. 2:2, 3:13, 19; 4:5), and, although the word for knowledge is mainly post-exilic, it is closely associated with wisdom as exemplified by Daniel and his friends (Dn. 1:4, 17). Israelite wisdom is also practical, which is why Solomon asks that he might *lead* and *govern* his people by it (v. 10; *cf.* Pr. 8:15-16). The first expression, literally, ‘to go out and go in before this people’ (*cf.* RSV), is unusually military in character (*cf.* 1 Ch. 11:2) but can be used of leadership generally (*cf.* Dt. 31:2), and the second, literally, ‘to judge,’ is often used with the sense, ‘to govern, rule,’ in the historical books, including Judges.”

Our understanding of “wisdom” is the ability to apply knowledge in a practical and efficient manner.

Although this is not specifically stated here, we understand that this conversation between God and Solomon took place while Solomon was asleep. In the parallel passage in 1 Kings, we read: “At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, ‘Ask for whatever you want me to give you.’”¹⁰ This shows that Solomon felt the need for wisdom sub-consciously.

God did not have to ask Solomon what his real wish was. The omniscient God knows what is within us, even those things we are not aware of ourselves. This conversation was not for God’s benefit, but for Solomon’s. David expressed this in one of his psalms: “O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts I from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.”¹¹

⁸ Ps. 5:7

⁹ Ps. 23:6

¹⁰ I Kings 3:5

¹¹ Ps. 139:1-4

God reacted to Solomon's request with, what we would call in human terms, amazement. He says, you could have asked for wealth, riches or honor, for the death of your enemies, and for a long life, but you chose something more important than all of these. This note of amazement is a complement for Solomon. Wisdom shows itself in the recognition of priorities. Solomon knew what the most important thing in life is and that was what he asked for. Solomon did what Jesus would later advise us all to do: Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."¹² "All these things" in Solomon's case would consist in "wealth, riches and honor," in such an unparalleled way that it would set Solomon apart in world history.

The question is whether riches can always be considered to be a blessing. The Scottish writer George MacDonald once said: "Do you believe, God can punish someone by making him rich? I believe he can!" Solomon was so rich that it became proverbial. In a way his wealth would become one of the reasons for his failure. But we would run ahead of our subject if we would look into that now and here.

Waking up from his dream Solomon went from Gibeon to Jerusalem. He went from the place of the altar to the place of the ark. In the parallel passage in First Kings we read: "He returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the LORD's covenant and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings."¹³

d. Solomon's wealth (1:14-17)

14 Solomon accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem.

15 The king made silver and gold as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills.

16 Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from Kue—the royal merchants purchased them from Kue.

17 They imported a chariot from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty. They also exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and of the Arameans.

Moses had written in the constitution for the king, whenever Israel would be reorganized into a kingdom: "The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the LORD has told you, 'You are not to go back that way again.' He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees."¹⁴

¹² Matt. 6:33

¹³ I Kings 3:15

¹⁴ Deut. 17:16-19

Solomon appears to have broken everyone of these laws as soon as he ascended the throne.

There is a discrepancy between the record in First Kings and the one here. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* states: "In 2 Chron 9:25, instead of forty thousand stalls, we read four thousand; and even this number might be quite sufficient to hold horses for twelve thousand horsemen; for stalls and stables may be here synonymous. In 1 Kings 10:26 it is said he had one thousand four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen; and this is the reading in 2 Chron 1:14. In 2 Chron 9:25, already quoted, instead of forty thousand stalls for horses, the Septuagint has *tessares chiliades theleiai hippoi*, four thousand mares; and in this place the whole verse is omitted both by the Syriac and Arabic. In the Targum of Rabbi Joseph on this book we have *arba meah*, four hundred, instead of the four thousand in Chronicles, and the forty thousand in the text. From this collation of parallel places we may rest satisfied that there is a corruption in the numbers somewhere; and as a sort of medium, we may take for the whole four thousand stalls, one thousand four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen."

Yet, *The Tyndale Commentary* writes: "This paragraph has greater significance than it appears. Though it has been taken over almost unchanged from Kings, it has been moved to quite a different position (1 Ki. 10:26-29), and is repeated with amendments at 2 Chronicles 9:25-28. Its main purpose is to show that God has kept his word about Solomon's wealth (especially v. 15), but also to demonstrate that this wealth was partly prepared for the temple (*cf.* 2:1)."

The Wycliffe Commentary comments on v. 14: "The existence of Solomon's chariot cities (9:25) has been remarkably confirmed by archaeology. The excavation of Megiddo, southeast of Mount Carmel, has revealed one extensive stone stable capable of housing about four hundred horses."

The Pulpit Commentary adds: "The chariot was no institution of Israel (so ... Deuteronomy 20:1), neither of their earliest ancestors, nor of those more proximate. The earliest occasions of the mention of it (... Genesis 41:43; 46:29; 50:9) are in connection with Egypt, and almost all subsequent occasions for a long stretch of time show it in connection with some foreign nation, till we read (... 2 Samuel 8:4; ... 1 Chronicles 18:4) of David 'reserving horses' un-shoed 'for a hundred chariots,' apparently also 'reserved' out of the very much larger number which he had taken in battle from Hadadezer King of Zobah. The very genius of the character of God's people, a *pilgrim-genius*, as well as their long-time *pilgrim-life*, quite accounts for the 'chariot,' though it be a war-chariot, having never ranked among their treasures (... Deuteronomy 17:16; ... 1 Samuel 8:11). Now, however, Solomon thinks it the time to make it a feature of the nation's power and splendor. He gives the large order for fourteen hundred chariots apparently to Egypt (ver. 17; also ch. 9:28), the appropriate number of horses to which would be probably four thousand (... 2 Chronicles 9:25; comp. ... 1 Kings 4:26, where note the corrupt numeral forty thousand, 10:26). Solomon's fourteen hundred chariots were probably intended to exceed the numbers of the Egyptian king (... 2 Chronicles 12:3; comp. ... 2 Chronicles 14:6), of Hadadezer's (... 2 Samuel 8:4; ... 1 Chronicles 18:4), and of the Syrians (... 2 Samuel 10:18). But, on the other hand, see ... 1 Samuel 13:5 and ... 1 Chronicles 19:7, unless, as seems very probable, the numerals in these places are again incorrect."

The Tyndale Commentary furthermore states: "Solomon's wealth is measured by the strength of his armaments (v. 14), and the wide availability of precious metals and luxury items

such as *cedar*. Its primary source was trade, of which that in *horses* and *chariots* was a prime example.”

II Solomon’s preparations (2:1-18)

a. Building instructions (2:1)

1. Solomon gave orders to build a temple for the Name of the LORD and a royal palace for himself.

The instructions to build a temple for the LORD originated with David. Evidently, the orders to build were given to the various groups of laborers who had to prepare the material. The stones were available in Israel, but the wood had to come from Tyre. We read in First Kings that Solomon contacted King Hiram and made arrangements for cedar and pine wood to be supplied.¹⁵

The royal palace was a separate project, which took longer to build than the temple.

Easton’s Bible Dictionary states about the preparations for the construction of the temple: “In all these preparatory undertakings a space of about three years was occupied; and now the process of the erection of the great building began, under the direction of skilled Phoenician builders and workmen, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign, 480 years after the Exodus (1 Kings 6; 2 Chron 3:1). Many thousands of laborers and skilled artisans were employed in the work. Stones prepared in the quarries underneath the city (1 Kings 5:17,18) of huge dimension ... were gradually placed on the massive walls, and closely fitted together without any mortar between, till the whole structure was completed. No sound of hammer or axe or any tool of iron was heard as the structure arose (6:7). ‘Like some tall palm the noiseless fabric sprang.’”

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “With gifts of wisdom and wealth provided (ch. 1), Solomon is enable to build the *temple* and the *royal palace*. The temple is *for the Name of the LORD* (also v. 4), a phrase naturally associated with Deuteronomy. God’s name represented his whole being, which would be present and resident at the temple (*cf.* Dt. 12:5, 11; 16:2, 11; 18:6-7). One could ‘call on the name of the LORD’ at any time (*e.g.* 1 Ki. 8:29, 41-44), in the confidence that prayers would be heard and answered. The Chronicler makes only passing mention of Solomon’s palace (2:12; 7:11; 8:1; 9:11), clearly expecting his readers to know where fuller details were to be found (1 Ki. 7:1-12). The palace is always linked with the temple in Chronicles, presumably because together they represented the establishing of David’s dynasty (*cf.* 1 Ch. 17:10-14; 28:2-7).”

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “In the Hebrew text this verse stands as the last of ch. 1. *Determined*. The Hebrew word is the ordinary word for ‘said;’ as, *e.g.*, in the expression of such frequent occurrence, ‘The LORD said.’ Its natural equivalent here might be, he *gave the word*, or *issued the command*, for the building of a house. *For the Name of the LORD*; better, to *the Name of the LORD* (... 1 Kings 5:3; or in Hebrew text, 5:18; ... 1 Chronicles 22:7). The expression, ‘the Name of the LORD,’ is of very early date (... Genesis 4:26). A name named upon a person at the first purported as far as possible to mark his *nature*, either its *tout ensemble* or some striking attribute of it. Hence the changed name, sometimes of Divine interposition (... Genesis 17:5, 15; 32:28; 35:10); and much more noticeably the alterations of the Divine Name, to serve and to

¹⁵ I King 5:1-10

mark the progressive development of the revelation of God to man (... Genesis 17:1; ... Exodus 3:14; 6:3; 34:14). So the *Name of the LORD* stands ever — monogram most sacred — for himself. *A house for his kingdom; i.e. a royal residence for Solomon himself.* This is more clearly expressed as, ‘in his own house’ (... 2 Chronicles 7:11; 8:1; ... 1 Kings 9:10, 15). The description of this house for himself is given in ... 1 Kings 7:1-13. But no parallel account exists in Chronicles.”

b. Census of laborers (2:2)

2 He conscripted seventy thousand men as carriers and eighty thousand as stonecutters in the hills and thirty-six hundred as foremen over them.

“Conscripted” is the translation of the Hebrew word *caphar*, which can be rendered “to mark” or “to count.” We find the word first used in God’s suggestion to Abraham to count the stars. We read in Genesis: “He took him outside and said, ‘Look up at the heavens and *count* the stars — if indeed you can *count* them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’”¹⁶

But in modern English “conscript” has more the sense of “to draft,” like people being called to serve in the army. Solomon’s laborers may not have had any choice in being employed in the king’s service.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “These were a slave labor force of non-Israelites living in Canaan, who had already been assembled by David (v. 17; 8:7-10, *cf.* 1 Ch. 22:2, 15-16). The number of *thirty-six hundred* foremen differs from 1 Kings 5:16 (3,300), but the LXX of Kings is quite insecure here, and Chronicles may preserve the better reading.”

Geneva Notes suggests that it “is to be understood of all sorts of officers and overseers: for else the chief officers were but 3300 as in 1 Kings 5:16.”

c. *Solomon’s letter to Hiram (2:3-10).*

3 Solomon sent this message to Hiram king of Tyre: "Send me cedar logs as you did for my father David when you sent him cedar to build a palace to live in.

4 Now I am about to build a temple for the Name of the LORD my God and to dedicate it to him for burning fragrant incense before him, for setting out the consecrated bread regularly, and for making burnt offerings every morning and evening and on Sabbaths and New Moons and at the appointed feasts of the LORD our God. This is a lasting ordinance for Israel.

5 "The temple I am going to build will be great, because our God is greater than all other gods.

6 But who is able to build a temple for him, since the heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain him? Who then am I to build a temple for him, except as a place to burn sacrifices before him?

¹⁶ Gen. 15:5

7 "Send me, therefore, a man skilled to work in gold and silver, bronze and iron, and in purple, crimson and blue yarn, and experienced in the art of engraving, to work in Judah and Jerusalem with my skilled craftsmen, whom my father David provided.

8 "Send me also cedar, pine and algum logs from Lebanon, for I know that your men are skilled in cutting timber there. My men will work with yours

9 to provide me with plenty of lumber, because the temple I build must be large and magnificent.

10 I will give your servants, the woodsmen who cut the timber, twenty thousand cors of ground wheat, twenty thousand cors of barley, twenty thousand baths of wine and twenty thousand baths of olive oil."

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "This letter centers on two requests, marked by the repeated *send me*, for a skilled craftsman (v. 7) and more timber (vv. 8-10). By way of encouragement, Solomon simply asks Hiram to continue the kindness he had previously shown to David (v. 3), and reminds him that the project is for God's glory rather than Solomon's (vv. 4-6).

The relationship between Solomon and *Hiram* is probably based on a parity treaty between equals (*cf.* 1 Ki. 5:12), rather than one where Solomon was the superior party. While it is true that by omitting Hiram's initial greeting (1 Ki. 5:1) and with Hiram addressing Solomon as 'my LORD' (v. 15), Solomon might seem to be taking the initiative, he certainly did not have things his own way. His opening is distinctly tentative, and he is not in full control of the financial arrangements (*cf.* vv. 15-16; 1 Ki. 5:9-11)....

Both Solomon and Hiram hark back repeatedly to *David* (vv. 3, 7, 12, 14). This is not just a reminder of Hiram's earlier treaty with him (*cf.* 1 Ch. 14:1; 22:4), but a hint that Solomon's plans will fulfill God's promise to David. Further, several details of the Mosaic law are specifically fulfilled (vv. 4-5)."

We don't know what Hiram's religious beliefs were. It could be that some traces of the knowledge of YHWH had been preserved in Phoenicia. Solomon may have tried to insert some "evangelism" in his message to Hiram. That would account for the mention of some of the sacrifices and celebration of certain special days. Also the reference to YHWH as being "greater than all other gods" would fit that idea.

The Pulpit Commentary observes about vv. 5 and 6: "The contents of these verses beg some special observation, in the first place, as having been judged by the writer of Chronicles matter desirable to be retained and put in his work. To find a place for *this* subject amid his careful selection, and rejection in many cases, of the matter at his command, is certainly a decision in harmony with his general design in this work. Then, again, they may be remarked on as spoken to another king, who, whether it were to be expected or not, was, it is plain, a sympathizing hearer of the piety and religious resolution of Solomon (ver. 12). This is one of the touches of history that does not diminish our regret that we do not know more of Hiram. He was no 'proselyte,' but he had the sympathy of a convert to the religion of the Jew. Perhaps the simplest and most natural explanation may just be the truest, that Hiram for some long time had seen 'the rising' kingdom, and alike in David and Solomon in turn, 'the coming' men. He had been more calmly and deliberately impressed than the Queen of Sheba afterwards, but not less effectually and operatively impressed. And once more the passage is noteworthy for the utterances of Solomon in themselves. As parenthetically testifying to a powerful man, who could be a powerful helper of Solomon's enterprise, his outburst of explanation, and of ardent religious

purpose, and of humble godly awe, is natural. But that he should call the temple he purposed to build ‘so great,’ as we cannot put it down either to intentional exaggeration or to sober historic fact, must the rather be honestly set down to such considerations as these, viz. that in point of fact, neither David nor Solomon were ‘travelled men,’ as Joseph and Moses, for instance. Their measures of greatness were largely dependent upon the existing material and furnishing of their own little country. And further, Solomon speaks of the temple as great very probably from the point of view of its simple religious uses ... as the place of sacrifice in especial rather than as a place, for instance, of vast congregations and vast processions. Then, too, as compared with the tabernacle, it would loom ‘great,’ whether for size or for its enduring material. Meantime, though Solomon does indeed use the words (ver. 5), ‘The house ... is great,’ yet, throwing on the words the light of the remaining clause of the verse, and of David’s words in ... 1 Chronicles 29:1, it is not very certain that the main thing present to his mind was *not* the size, but rather the *character* of the house, and the solemn character of the *enterprise* itself (... 1 Kings 8:27; ... 2 Chronicles 6:18).”

Again, we must bear in mind that this text was probably written for the benefit of people who had returned from captivity and who had never seen the temple. It was meant to remind them of their sacred history so that they would not lose the sense of their identity.

The purpose of the letter is stated in v. 7 where Solomon asks for an expert to oversee certain parts of the work.

The Tyndale Commentary states: “Solomon’s first request, for a leading draftsman, does not appear in the earlier form of this letter (1 Ki. 5:3-6; but *cf.* 1 Ki. 7:13-14). It highlights the necessity of wisdom for building the temple (*skilled*, twice here is lit. ‘wise’ in Heb.), and strengthens the temple’s link with Moses’ Tent (or ‘tabernacle’). The leading craftsmen for the Tent, Bezalel and his assistant Oholiab, were both similarly skilled in a range of abilities (*cf.* Ex. 31:1-6; 35:30 – 36:2). Kings and Chronicles, however, differ in their description of the necessary skills, for whereas in 1 Kings 7:13-47 Hiram-Abi (there called Hiram) is a worker in bronze, here he has many skills (vv. 7 and 13-14; *cf.* 2 Ch. 3:15 – 4:18). But even though verses 7 and 14 seem to have Bezalel and Oholiab consciously in mind, a range of talents was required for the temple (*cf.* 2 Ch. 3:4-14, especially v. 14), and it is certainly not impossible for Hiram-abi to have supplied them. The Chronicler’s influence is also traceable in a unique Aramaic form of the word for purple (the usual Heb. form is in 2:13; 3:14), a probable Persian loanword for *crimson*, and the common post-exilic phrase *Judah and Jerusalem*.”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary observes: “Masons and carpenters were not asked for: those whom David had obtained (1 Chron 14:1) were probably still remaining in Jerusalem, and had instructed others: but he required a master of works - a person capable, like Bezaleel (Ex 35:31), of superintending and directing every department; because, as the division of labor was at that time little known or observed, an overseer had to be possessed of very versatile talents and experience.”

Besides a request for labor, Solomon also asks for certain kinds of wood that were unavailable, or in short supply in Israel. *The Tyndale Commentary* observes about this: “*Algum* wood (‘juniper,’ GNB) is unknown, though it is probably cognate with Akkadian *elamukku* and Ugaritic *almg* and grown in northern Syria. One Ugaritic text even quotes it in a list of trees exported from Lebanon, though according to 1 Ki. 10:11-12 (‘almug’), it was an import from Ophir. For most Israelites, of course, all the timber was simply of foreign origin, like the silver and gold (*cf.* 2 Ch. 1:16-17), so that ultimately the temple would be *magnificent* (v. 9, NIV, GNB; ‘wonderful,’ NRSV,RSV, REB, NEB) ‘in the sight of all the nations’ (1 Ch.22:5).”

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “These trees are called *algum* in the three passages of Chronicles in which the tree is mentioned, viz. here and ... 2 Chronicles 9:10, 11, but in the three passages of Kings, *almug*, viz. ... 1 Kings 10:11, 12b. As we read in ... 1 Kings 10:11; ... 2 Chronicles 9:10, 11, that they were exports from Ophir, we are arrested by the expression, ‘out of Lebanon,’ here. If they were accessible in Lebanon, it is not on the face of it to be supposed they would be ordered from such a distance as Ophir. Lastly, there is very great difference of opinion as to what the tree was in itself.”

It appears that payment of the Syrian workmen would be in wheat, barley, wine and olive oil. The weight of the grain is given in “cors,” and of the liquids in “baths.” Footnotes in the NIV state about the cors: “That is, probably about 125,000 bushels,” and about the liquids: “That is, probably about 115,000 gallons.”

d. *Hiram’s letter to Solomon (2:11-16).*

11 Hiram king of Tyre replied by letter to Solomon: "Because the LORD loves his people, he has made you their king."

12 And Hiram added: "Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who made heaven and earth! He has given King David a wise son, endowed with intelligence and discernment, who will build a temple for the LORD and a palace for himself."

13 "I am sending you Hiram-Abi, a man of great skill,

14 whose mother was from Dan and whose father was from Tyre. He is trained to work in gold and silver, bronze and iron, stone and wood, and with purple and blue and crimson yarn and fine linen. He is experienced in all kinds of engraving and can execute any design given to him. He will work with your craftsmen and with those of my LORD, David your father.

15 "Now let my LORD send his servants the wheat and barley and the olive oil and wine he promised,

16 and we will cut all the logs from Lebanon that you need and will float them in rafts by sea down to Joppa. You can then take them up to Jerusalem."

Hiram’s reply to Solomon is amazing in its recognition of who God is. The text of the letter uses the Hebrew names Yahweh Elohim. That may be a translation by the editor of Chronicles, but we assume that Hiram used them in the original script.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments: “This language is no decisive evidence that Hiram was a worshipper of the true God, as he might use it only on the polytheistic principle of acknowledging Yahweh as the God of the Hebrews At the same time, it must be mentioned that they were accustomed, doubtless from a spirit of religion, to join the name of God to their own, conformably to the genius of the Hebrews.”

The Pulpit Commentary states: “This verse and the following are also testimony to the indirect influences on surrounding nations of the knowledge of the one true Creator-God and Ruler-God, that was domiciled by special revelation and oracle (... Romans 3:2) with Israel. Where nations near were bitter foes, they often feared Israel’s God, whereas now they were friends they could summon to their lips the highest of the outbursts of praise, not to say of adoration. The very noteworthy sympathy of Hiram with Israel may have owed something to his personal predilection for David (... 1 Kings 5:1). And *this* again is convincing testimony to the worth and usefulness of individual character which here influenced the destiny of two whole nations.”

The animistic tribe among which we worked as missionaries in Papua, Indonesia, had a basic knowledge of God, whom they recognized as the Creator. They did, however, not worship Him.

Finally, *The Tyndale Commentary* writes: “It is perhaps surprising that Hiram acknowledges so clearly and enthusiastically the temple project as the will of Israel’s God. It could appear excessive even for a friendly Gentile ruler to affirm Solomon’s accession as a consequence of Yahweh’s covenant *love*, Yahweh as the creator of all things, and Solomon’s wisdom, ‘intelligence and understanding’ (v. 12 NEB) as gifts from Yahweh. But theological declarations of this kind are not unknown in the Old Testament (*cf.* Dn. 4:34-35; 6:26-27), and do not necessarily imply conversion to Yahwism. In Chronicles they occur at significant points (*cf.* 2 Ch. 9:5-8; 36:22-23), with this passage having a direct parallel in a speech by the Queen of Sheba (*cf.* Solomon’s wisdom in 2:12 and 9:5-7; Yahweh’s love in making Solomon king in 2:11 and 9:8; the blessing of Yahweh in 2:12 and 9:8). Both Hiram and the Queen of Sheba confirm Yahweh’s supreme authority to *build the temple* (v. 12). The temple then did not become a house of prayer for all nations by accident. The nations even played a part in its construction!”

The man King Hiram sent Solomon for the work on the temple construction is named Hiram-Abi. He was half-Jewish on his mother’s side; his father being Tyrian.

In First Kings¹⁷ the mother is identified as a member of the tribe of Naphtali, not Dan. It is not clear whether the king of Tyre was confused or the editor. The important part is that Hiram was highly qualified to do the work in metal, wood and textile.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “Hiram responds to Solomon’s first request by sending *Hiram-Abi* (NIV, NRSV, RSV, JB; called ‘Hiram’ in Ki.), who had the added advantage of Israelite parentage. Variations on a person’s name are not unknown in the Old Testament (*cf.* Jehoiachin/Coniah/Jeconiah; Joshua is formerly called Hoshea), but modern scholars frequently understand the ‘-abi’ suffix as meaning ‘master’ (lit. ‘father’; *cf.* Gn. 45:8; Jdg. 17:10) and so prefer ‘master Hiram’ (NEB, *cf.* GNB). This is possible, but it lacks clear analogies. Although the name of Bezalel’s assistant Oholiab may well explain Chronicle’s preference for the form Hiram-Abi ..., it is doubtful whether Oholiab’s name can be explained in this way. Another link between Hiram-Abi and Oholiab is that their mothers both came from *Dan*. Although 1 Kings 7:14 states that Hiram-Abi’s mother is of the tribe of Naphtali, ancestry from more than one tribe cannot have been uncommon, either because of contrasting geographical and genealogical links or as a result of the lineage of earlier generations (*cf.* Samuel as Ephraimite and Levite). Hiram-Abi’s chief qualification, however, is that he is literally, ‘a wise man who knows understanding’ (v. 13), who will work with ‘your wise men’ (v. 14), *i.e.* *your craftsmen*. In God’s providence, the appropriate wisdom or skill has been supplied through a foreign architect as well as through God’s chosen king.”

We gather from vv. 15 and 16 that Hiram wanted payment up front. There would be no logs before a payment of barley, wheat, olive oil and wine was received. The cut logs would be floated as rafts on the water of the Mediterranean and delivered at Joppa. From there, Solomon’s men would have to take over and transport them to Jerusalem.

Evidently, a special road was constructed for the purpose. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: “The road between Joppa and Jerusalem, now called Wady Suleiman, ‘the valley of Solomon.’ ... most probably received its name from having been

¹⁷ I Kings 7:13

constructed or improved by that monarch for the transport of the timber which Hiram forwarded for the erection and furniture of the temple.”

The Pulpit Commentary observes about Joppa: “This was one of the most ancient of towns, and is referred to by Pliny ... Its name (Joppa, ‘beauty’) is said to have been justified by the beautiful groves in its neighborhood. It is mentioned [in] ... Joshua 19:46 as Japho,¹⁸ where also we learn the circumstances under which the Dan tribe were possessed of it. It is remarkable that it is not mentioned again till our present verse, not even in the parallel (... 1 Kings 5:9). But it appears again in ... Ezra 3:7; ... Jonah 1:3, and in several places in the Acts of the Apostles. The modern name of it is *Jaffa*, and it is not reputed as a good port now. It was distant from Jerusalem some thirty-four miles. The carriage of the timber [along] this road-journey is nowhere described in detail, nor is the exact spot of the coast west of Lebanon mentioned where the floats were made, and thence dispatched.”

e. *Census of non-Israelite laborers (2:17-18).*

17 Solomon took a census of all the aliens who were in Israel, after the census his father David had taken; and they were found to be 153,600.

18 He assigned 70,000 of them to be carriers and 80,000 to be stonecutters in the hills, with 3,600 foremen over them to keep the people working.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “This paragraph is the source of the information already given in verse 2 (*cf.* 1 Ki. 5:15-16). Here, however, these workers are clearly aliens (‘foreigners,’ GNB) who were counted after David’s *census*. While 1 Chronicles 22:2 may be in mind, that event is not described as a census, and the ill-fated incident of 1 Chronicles 21 is probably meant. More interesting is Chronicles’ attempt to clarify the rather confused identity of Solomon’s workforce in 1 King 5:13-18. The earlier passage seems to include temporary gangs of 30,300 Israelites under Adoniram as well as 153,000 permanent but unidentified slaves. Here, however, only the latter group is mentioned and identified as non-Israelite. At the risk of oversimplifying a complex problem, they are probably the same group as in 1 Kings 9:20-21 (= 2 Ch. 8:7-8), while the embittered tribes who confronted Rehoboam (1 Ki. 12 = 2 Ch. 10) are more likely to have suffered under Adoniram (*cf.* 2 Ch. 10:18). It was normal in the ancient world to enslave subject peoples, but for Israelites to fall into any form of slavery, especially at the hands of their own people, denied the very freedom for which they had been redeemed. While therefore, the Chronicler does not ignore the heavy price Israelites paid for Solomon’s success, he concentrates here on the submission of the non-Israelites in Canaan as a sign of Israel’s full occupation of the land and that preparation for the temple were now complete (*cf.* 3:1).”

G. Solomon builds the temple (3:1 – 5:1)

i. Beginning to build the temple (3:1-2)

1 Then Solomon began to build the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to his father David. It was on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, the place provided by David.

¹⁸

KJV

2 He began building on the second day of the second month in the fourth year of his reign.

In introducing this section, *The Tyndale Commentary* writes: “Finally the point is reached where Solomon began to build the temple (v. 1). It is a little surprising, then, that after all the preparations (which really began as far back as 1 Ch. 17:1, 4, 12), Chronicles’ account of the temple’s construction is actually much briefer than in Kings. Seventy-seven verses in 1 Kings 6-7 (omitting the account of the royal palace, 7:1-12) have been condensed into forty verses in 2 Chronicles 3:1-5:1. Since the Chronicler then goes on to devote more space to the opening ceremonies (chs. 5-7) than to the building work, it is clear that his real concern is with the temple’s meaning rather than its architectural details. In other words, the temple will be complete not when the last stone is in place but when God takes up residence.”

In the Hebrew text of v. 1, the temple of the LORD is literally described as *bayit Yahweh*, “the house of the LORD.” *The Tyndale Commentary* observes: “Special note is made of the fact that Solomon began to build (the same verb begins both verses in Hebrew; cf. also Ezr. 3:8; 5:2).”

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary states: “The statements as to the place where the temple was built (v. 1) are found here only. Mount Moriah is manifestly the mountain in the land of Moriah where Abraham was to have sacrificed his son Isaac (Gen 22:2), which had received the name *hamowriyah* i.e., ‘the appearance of Yahweh,’ from that event. It is the mountain which lies to the north-east of Zion, now called Haram after the most sacred mosque of the Mohammedans, which is built there.”

It is true that at present a mosque, entitled “Dome of the Rock” occupies that place on the ancient temple square, where originally the burnt offering altar of Solomon’s temple must have stood. The mosque is built around a large rock, which was supposedly the rock on which Abraham almost sacrificed Isaac. The Muslim tradition states that it was Ishmael, who was the intended sacrifice.

ii. The ground-plan and porch (3:3-4a)

3 The foundation Solomon laid for building the temple of God was sixty cubits long and twenty cubits wide (using the cubit of the old standard).

4 The portico at the front of the temple was twenty cubits long across the width of the building and twenty cubits high.

Besides giving the information about the measurements in cubits of the temple foundation, the Chronicler explains that the reference is to the old cubit, not to the cubit in use among the Israelites after their return from captivity. That may have been helpful to Chronicler’s original readers; it is not of much help to us.

Easton’s Bible Dictionary states: “It is difficult to determine the exact length of this measure, from the uncertainty whether it included the entire length from the elbow to the tip of the longest finger, or only from the elbow to the root of the hand at the wrist. The probability is that the longer was the original cubit. The common computation as to the length of the cubit makes it 20.24 inches for the ordinary cubit, and 21.888 inches for the sacred one. This is the same as the Egyptian measurements.”

The New Living Translation puts it in more understandable terms for us by reading: “These are the dimensions Solomon used for the foundation of the Temple of God (using the old

standard of measurement). It was 90 feet long and 30 feet wide.” In two separate footnotes, that version states: “The ‘old standard of measurement’ was a cubit equal to 18 inches The new standard was a cubit of approximately 21 inches.... And: “Hebrew 60 cubits [27.6 meters] long and 20 cubits [9.2 meters] wide.”

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary comments on the reference to the “old standard”: “It is supposed that the first measure means the cubit used in the time of Moses, contra-distinguished from that used in Babylon, and which the Israelites used after their return from captivity; and, as the books of Chronicles were written after the captivity, it was necessary for the writer to make this remark, lest it should be thought that the measurement was by the Babylonian cubit, which was a palm, or one-sixth shorter than the cubit of Moses.”

The Tyndale Commentary explains: “Verse 3 describes the ground plan (*foundations*, NIV, REB, NEB), rather than the measurements alone ..., or the actual digging of foundations. By omitting almost all height measurements in Kings (*cf.* vv. 3, 4, 10 and 1 Ki. 6:2, 20, 23), the Chronicler shows his interest in the temple’s basic layout rather than its over-all shape. It measured 60 x 20 cubits (or 26.67m x 8.89m) by the *cubit of the old standard*, which by the Chronicler’s time had been replaced by one that was longer by a handbreadth (Ezk. 40:5; 43:13). The temple therefore was not particularly large and was smaller than many church buildings today.

The temple was entered through a porch or ‘vestibule’ (v. 4, NRSV, RSV, REB, NEB; *portico*, NIV; ‘entrance room,’ GNB). The measurements given are additional to those for the main building, though the Hebrew text seems to be defective on three counts. First, the relationship between the porch and the temple is unclear because MT has become corrupted. The simplest solution is to include ‘house’/‘temple’ with LXX in the first phrase, so reading, ‘The porch which was at the front of the temple ... was twenty cubits long’ (*cf.* NIV, REB, NEB). Secondly, the lack of any width measurement in MT makes it impossible to be sure of the shape of the porch. It may well have been a square, ‘twenty cubits long corresponding to the width of the temple’ ..., or possibly a rectangle twenty cubits long by ten cubits wide (*cf.* 1 Ki. 6:3), though some have understood its width to be twenty cubit and its height unknown (*cf.* GNB). Thirdly, its height measurement should read *twenty cubits high* (NIV, REB, NEB), as against a literal translation of MT, ‘and its height 120.’ The concept of a tower (GNB, NRSV, RSV, JB) may reflect the kind of design which was later used for Herod’s temple, whose porch was 100 cubits high.”

iii. The golden temple (3:4b-13)

13b He overlaid the inside with pure gold.

5 He paneled the main hall with pine and covered it with fine gold and decorated it with palm tree and chain designs.

6 He adorned the temple with precious stones. And the gold he used was gold of Parvaim.

7 He overlaid the ceiling beams, doorframes, walls and doors of the temple with gold, and he carved cherubim on the walls.

8 He built the Most Holy Place, its length corresponding to the width of the temple — twenty cubits long and twenty cubits wide. He overlaid the inside with six hundred talents of fine gold.

9 The gold nails weighed fifty shekels. He also overlaid the upper parts with gold.

10 In the Most Holy Place he made a pair of sculptured cherubim and overlaid them with gold.

11 The total wingspan of the cherubim was twenty cubits. One wing of the first cherub was five cubits long and touched the temple wall, while its other wing, also five cubits long, touched the wing of the other cherub.

12 Similarly one wing of the second cherub was five cubits long and touched the other temple wall, and its other wing, also five cubits long, touched the wing of the first cherub.

13 The wings of these cherubim extended twenty cubits. They stood on their feet, facing the main hall.

We read that the portico, which was obviously the entrance to the temple, was overlaid with gold. This probably means that the walls were gold-plated. The Hebrew verb used is *tsaphah*, which is mainly used in connection with the temple and the tabernacle. The word is used for the first time in reference to the ark.¹⁹ *The Tyndale Commentary* states that the word is “a generalization for inlay as well as overlay.” It is obvious that, in connection with the temple building it means the latter.

The Hebrew word for “porch” is *uwlam*, which is used in Scripture almost exclusively in connection with the temple, both for Solomon’s temple and the temple Ezekiel describes in his vision.²⁰

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “In addition to *gold* (vv. 5, 6, 7), the main hall (vv. 5-7; ‘nave,’ NRSV, RSV; ‘main room,’ GNB) was decorated with *cypress, palms and chains* (v. 5), *precious stones* (v. 6; cf. 1 Ch. 29:2), and *carved cherubim* (v. 7). Overall, it was to be a place of beauty (v. 6, JB) and majesty, fit for the presence of the King of kings. The palms (= the tree of life?) and the cherubim may symbolize that through the temple lay the way back to the ideal conditions of the Garden of Eden (cf. Gn. 3:22, 24; Ezk. 31:2-9). *Parvaim* (v. 6) is unknown, though, according to a tenth-century AD Arab historian, it was a gold-mine in north-east Arabia called *el-farwain*. Alternatively, it may be one of several terms in this context for high-quality gold (‘pure gold,’ v. 4; ‘good gold,’ vv. 5, 8; ‘*sāgûr* [red?] gold,’ 4:20, 22; ‘solid gold,’ 4:21).”

The suggestion that the palm tree would represent the Tree of Life sound a little strange. Palm trees are high and in order to pick its fruit one have to climb up. For Eve to climb such a tree in order to eat the forbidden fruit seems unlikely.

V. 8 deals with the Holy of Holies. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on the amount of gold used for the covering of the walls and probably the floor and ceiling also: “It is impossible to assert with any accuracy the money value intended here. Six hundred talents of gold is an amazing proportion of the yearly revenue of 666 talents of gold, spoken of in ... 1 Kings 10:14. This latter amount is worth, in [one Bible scholar’s] estimate, about three million and three quarters of our money, but in [another’s] estimate nearer double that! The Hebrew, Phoenician, and Assyrian unit of weight is the same, and one quite different from the Egyptian. The *silver* talent (Hebrew, *ciccar*,) contained 60 manehs, each maneh being equal to 50 shekels, and a shekel being worth 220 grains; *i.e.* there were 3000 shekels, or 660,000 grains, in such talent. But the *gold* talent contained 100 manehs, the maneh 100 shekels, and the shekel 132 grains, making this gold talent the equivalent of 10,000 shekels, or 1,320,000 grains. The ‘holy shekel,’ or ‘shekel of the sanctuary,’ could be either of gold or silver (... Exodus 38:4, 5).”

¹⁹ Ex. 25:10, 11

²⁰ Ezek. 40, 41

The Holy of Holies was the most important place, both in the tabernacle and in the temple. It was the place where the ark stood. It was the throne room of God on earth. It was the place where the blood was sprinkled on the Day of Atonement.

The Tyndale Commentary writes about the Holy of Holies: “The Most Holy Place or ‘Holy of Holies’ (vv. 8-13) was a secret room, largely hidden from human view, where Israel’s sins were forgiven on the basis of the covenant symbolized by the ark (*cf.* 2 Ch. 5:7-10). It was actually a complete cube (*cf.* 1 Ki. 6:20), symbolizing the perfection of its design as well as its purpose. It glittered with six hundred talents of gold (v. 8) and a further fifty shekels for nails (v. 9), as well as the golden cherubim (v. 10-15). Neither the 600 talents nor the nails occur in 1 Kings 6, and both are probably included for symbolic reasons. The former was the price of the temple site (1 Ch. 21:25). It was probably regarded as David’s contribution towards the provision of atonement for others, even though he could not atone for his own sins (*cf.* 1 Ch. 21:25; 28:11). The nails recall the hooks on which hung the Tent’s veil (Ex. 26:32, 37). The small amount of gold, about twenty ounces, was probably used for gold leaf. ‘Upper chambers’ (v. 9, NRSV, RSV, REB, NEB) are not mentioned directly elsewhere, though, as the height of the Most Holy Place was only twenty cubits as against thirty cubits for the building, it is often thought that there may have been a room above and/or below. Less plausibly, the associated side rooms may be meant (*cf.* 1 Ki. 6:5-6, 8-10).

The *cherubim* (vv. 10-13) receive special attention, although the information is much abbreviated from 1 Kings 6:23-28. They represent angelic beings who live in God’s own presence. (*cf.* Ezk. 10:2ff.), and their wings reaching from one wall to another symbolized how completely they protected the ark (*cf.* 1 Ch. 28:18; 2 Ch. 5:7-8).

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary sets the value of the gold used for overlaying the temple rooms at \$22,000,000 and the worth of the nails at \$640. And that was calculated on the basis of the price of gold in 1962, which is the date the commentary first appeared in print.

About the size of the cherubim, with a total wingspread of twenty cubits, five cubits for the size of each wing, *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “This, like all the preceding cubit measurements of the temple foundations and heights, and with all the succeeding cherubim measurements, is the exact double of that observed by Moses (... Exodus 37:6-9). The *height* of the cherubim, ten cubits, not mentioned in our text, is given in the parallel (... 1 Kings 6:26).”

iv. The veil (3:14)

14 He made the curtain of blue, purple and crimson yarn and fine linen, with cherubim worked into it.

This veil is the curtain that separated the Holy from the Holy of Holies. The Tyndale Commentary comments: “Only here does the Old Testament mention the temple ‘veil’ (RSV, REB, NEB, JB) or *curtain* (NIV, GNB, NRSV). The tent of course had a veil (Ex. 26:31; 36:35), but 1 Kings 6:31-32 speaks only of door carved like the rest of the main hall. The existence of a veil in Solomon’s temple, however, may be supported by the presence of one in Herod’s temple (Mt. 27:51 = Mk. 15:38 – Lk. 23:45). Two further factors lead in the same direction. Firstly, Hebrew *pārōket* actually means ‘divider, barrier’ (a separate word is used for ‘curtains’), and cognate words in related languages are used in association with various types of obstacle. Secondly, the Chronicler clearly believed that Solomon’s temple had both veil and doors (*cf.* 2 Ch. 4:22), as was also the case in Herod’s temple The Chronicler was interested in the veil

because of its continuity with the Tent, but for Christians the tearing of the veil when Jesus dies (Mt. 27:51, *etc.*) supersedes all other associations.”

v. The pillars (3:15-17)

15 *In the front of the temple he made two pillars, which [together] were thirty-five cubits long, each with a capital on top measuring five cubits.*

16 *He made interwoven chains and put them on top of the pillars. He also made a hundred pomegranates and attached them to the chains.*

17 *He erected the pillars in the front of the temple, one to the south and one to the north. The one to the south he named Jakin and the one to the north Boaz.*

There is a lack of agreement among Bible scholars about the size of the cubit. The NLT puts the height at 27 feet; TLB at 52 ½ feet. Both versions agree, however, about the size of the capital on top of the pillars, as being 7 ½ feet. If this were the only disagreement among Bible scholars, we would have little to complain!

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “According to 1 King 7:13ff., the *two pillars* in front of the temple head the list of bronze objects made by Hiram-abi (= Hiram, 1 Ki. 7:13; *cf.* 2 Ch. 2:13). Confirmation of this is found in the Chronicler’s inclusion of the decorated pillars in his summary of the architect’s work (2 Ch. 4:11-13). The full list of bronze work occurs in 3:15 – 4:18.

Evidence from other sanctuaries suggests the pillars were probably free-standing, but there is no certainty about their origin of function. Their names (v. 17) Jakin (= ‘he establishes’?) and Boaz (= ‘strength is in him’?) suggest the theme of confirming. This might be linked with the idea that Yahweh’s covenant was confirmed through the temple, or with Solomon’s efforts in setting up the temple. Either is a more probable explanation than reading these as names from David’s ancestry (*cf.* Nu. 26:12; 1 Ch. 24:17; Ruth 4:13-22) or as hangovers from Canaanite religions.”

The Pulpit Commentary writes about the pillars: “The height of these pillars is attested in three places to have been 18 cubits (... 1 Kings 7:15; ... 2 Kings 25:17; ... Jeremiah 52:21). Some therefore think that the height given in our text describes rather the distance of the one pillar from the other, which would be just 35 cubits, if they stood at the extreme points of the line of the porch front; since the wings on each side (5 cubits for the lowest chamber, and 2.5 cubits for the thickness of the walls) would make up this amount. It is further noticed with this explanation that their height (18 cubits) with the chapiters (5 cubits) added, would bring them to the same height as the porch, and that their ornamentation agrees with that of the porch (... 1 Kings 7:19). All this may be the case. Yet considering other indications of uncertainty about our text, and the fact that the characters *yod kheth* (18) are easily superseded by *lamed he* (35), it is perhaps likelier that we have here simply a clerical error. The parallel place tells us that these pillars and the chapiters were cast of brass; that ‘a line [... 1 Kings 7:15; ... Jeremiah 52:41] of twelve cubits [not seven] did compass either of them about;’ that the ornamentation of each chapter was ‘a net of checker-work, and a wreath of chain-work;’ that upon the five cubits of chapter there was another ‘four cubits of lily-work,’ etc. If this last feature apply to the two pillars, and not (as some think) to the porch only, the pillars would reach a height of 27 cubits, and if it be supposed that they stood on some stone or other superstructure, it may still be that our

‘thirty-five cubits’ has its meaning. Meantime the passage in Jeremiah (... Jeremiah 52:41) tells us that the pillars were hollow, and that the thickness of the metal was ‘four fingers.’”

vi. The temple equipment (4:1-22)

In a general introduction to the following, more detailed description of the temple furniture, *The Tyndale Commentary* observes: “Although the Chronicler has derived most of his material from Kings, ultimately it probably comes from as many as three different temple records. This is the most likely explanation of the lack of consistency between the summaries and the main report, which Chronicles seems to have made no attempt to harmonize in all details. Some items are described twice but in different ways (*cf.* v.18 and 3:16), while others, such as the stands (v. 14), the golden altar (v. 19) and the door (v. 22), are included for the first time in the summaries. Since the Chronicler concentrates on the overall impression created by the gold and bronze as symbols of God’s presence among his people, he omits detailed description of the stands (1 Ki. 7:27-37), but adds features which speak both of God’s presence and of a place for his people (vv. 6b-9).

This section lists eight different items of temple equipment, each sub-section beginning with *he made* (vv. 1, 2, 6, 7, 8a, 9, 11a; Heb. *wayya’as*). The most important are as follows:

a. *The bronze altar (4:1)*

1 He made a bronze altar twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide and ten cubits high.

A footnote in the NIV states about the measurements: “That is, about 30 feet (about 9 meters) long and wide, and about 15 feet (about 4.5 meters) high.” *The Tyndale Commentary* observes: “This was the large stepped altar (8.89 x 4.445 m) which stood outside in the temple courtyard in front of the temple entrance (*cf.* 6:12; Ex. 40:6, Ezk. 43:13-17). Apparently it simply replaced the much smaller version (*cf.* Ex. 27:1) at Gibeon where Solomon worshipped (1:5-6).”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments: “Steps must have been necessary for ascending so elevated an altar, but the use of these could be no longer forbidden (Ex 20:26) after the introduction of an official costume for the priests (Ex 28:42). It measured 35 feet by 35, and in height 17 ½ feet. The thickness of the metal used for this altar is nowhere given; but supposing it to have been 3 inches, the whole weight of the metal would not be under 200 tons It was larger than the altar in the old tabernacle (Ex 27:1), but was itself destined to be supplanted in the second temple by one twice its dimensions. The smaller of the one described by Ezekiel (Ezek 43:13-17) may be explained by supposing it to relate to the brazen part; the larger in this passage to the whole rock or stonework.”

Obviously, the size of an altar is determined by the number of sacrifices expected to be made on it.

The Pulpit Commentary adds: “This in worthier material superseded the temporary altar of the tabernacle (... Exodus 27:1, 2), made of shittim wood, and its dimensions five cubits long and broad and three cubits high. Large as was the present altar of brass as compared with the altar that preceded, it fell far short of the requirements of the grand day of dedication (... 1 Kings 8:64). No statement of the making of this altar occurs in the parallel. The place of it would be between vers. 22 and 23 of 1 Kings 7. But that Solomon made it is stated in ... 1 Kings 9:25, and other references to its presence are found in ... 1 Kings 8:22, 54, 64, etc. The position given to

the altar is referred to alike in ... 1 Kings 8:22 and ... 2 Chronicles 6:12, 13, as in the court of the temple.”

It must be observed that the altar is the first item mentioned in the list of furniture that leads to the ark, which symbolized the presence of God. In New Testament terms, we could say that the way to the throne of God begins at the cross. Without the sacrifice of Christ there would be no possibility of fellowship with the Father.

b. The Sea (4:2-6, 10).

2 He made the Sea of cast metal, circular in shape, measuring ten cubits from rim to rim and five cubits high. It took a line of thirty cubits to measure around it.

3 Below the rim, figures of bulls encircled it — ten to a cubit. The bulls were cast in two rows in one piece with the Sea.

4 The Sea stood on twelve bulls, three facing north, three facing west, three facing south and three facing east. The Sea rested on top of them, and their hindquarters were toward the center.

5 It was a handbreadth in thickness, and its rim was like the rim of a cup, like a lily blossom. It held three thousand baths.

6 He then made ten basins for washing and placed five on the south side and five on the north. In them the things to be used for the burnt offerings were rinsed, but the Sea was to be used by the priests for washing.

10 He placed the Sea on the south side, at the southeast corner.

The Hebrew word, rendered “sea” is *yam*, which in most cases refers to a large body of water, such as the Mediterranean. The first time the word is used is in the verse: “God called the dry ground ‘land,’ and the gathered waters he called ‘seas.’”²¹

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “This strangely named object was actually a large water ‘tank’ (GNB), placed just inside the *south-east corner* (v. 10) of the temple. Its nearest equivalent in the Tent was the basin (or laver) which stood between the bronze altar and the Tent entrance (Ex. 30:18-21). Both were to be *used by the priests for washing* (2 Ch. 4:6; cf. Ex. 30:19-21). ... It is most natural to interpret its name on the basis of its size and its function. Priests who did not wash to make themselves clean would die (Ex. 30:20), and a spiritual washing is equally essential for Christians (cf. Jn. 13:10; 15:3; Heb. 10:22). The *basins* (v. 6; ‘lavenders,’ RSV) were also used for washing, but for those ‘parts of the animals’ given as a burnt offering (GNB; cf. Ex. 29:17; Lv. 1:9, 13; Ezk. 40:38) rather than for utensils (cf. NRSV, RSV).

The Sea stood on *twelve* bulls (v. 4), and was decorated with literally, ‘something like bulls’ (v. 3), which REB, NEB, RSV translate as a rare word for ‘gourds’ (from 1 Ki. 7:24). ... The symbolism of flora and fauna in the temple may either indicate God’s sovereignty over the created order or be another allusion to the harmony of all created things in God’s presence as in the Garden of Eden (cf. 3:5). The capacity of three thousand baths (v. 5 is apparently based on a

²¹ Gen. 1:10

cylindrical shape, as against ‘two thousands baths’ of 1 Kings 7:26 which assumes a hemisphere.”

A footnote in the NIV gives the measurements in “baths” as 7 ½ feet for the height and 45 feet for the circumference.

The NIV reads about the basis of the basin: “The bulls were cast in two rows in one piece with the Sea.” The Hebrew text reads literally: “Two rows of oxen were cast, when it was cast.” That gives us the impression that the basin and the bulls that supported it were cast as one whole unit, which would make it a most remarkable project. The Hebrew verb used is *muwtsaqah*, meaning “to pour out.” The only other place where the same verb is used is in one of Zechariah’s visions, where we read: “Then the angel who talked with me returned and wakened me, as a man is wakened from his sleep. He asked me, ‘What do you see?’ I answered, ‘I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven *channels* to the lights.’”²² In that context the bowls were separate items placed on the arms of the lampstand. We may, therefore, assume that the oxen were made separately, which makes more sense.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary refers to the parallel passage in 1 Kings 7:23-26, stating that in that passage the Hebrew word is rendered “knops” occur instead of “oxen.” The commentary states: “It is generally supposed that the rows of ornamental knops were in the form of ox-heads.”

c. Ten gold lampstands and ten tables (4:7-8).

7 He made ten gold lampstands according to the specifications for them and placed them in the temple, five on the south side and five on the north.

8 He made ten tables and placed them in the temple, five on the south side and five on the north. He also made a hundred gold sprinkling bowls.

Instead of the single lampstand that lit up the Holy Place in the tabernacle, the temple’s Holy Place was furnished with ten lampstands. The larger size of the room probably required more light. We are told that the lampstands were made “according to specifications.” The Hebrew word used here is *mishpat*, which literally means “a verdict.” We find the same word used in the context of Israel in the desert, where the water that was found proved to be unfit for drinking. We read: “Then Moses cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the LORD made a *decree* and a law for them, and there he tested them.”²³

We assume that the specifications were included in the revelation God had given to David regarding the plan for the building of the temple.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “Solomon’s temple was also better equipped than the Tent in the case of the light and bread. Whereas the Tent had a single seven-branched candlestick and one table for the ‘showbread’ (cf. Ex. 25:23-40), the temple had ten of each, though the

²² Zech. 4:1, 2

²³ Ex. 15:25

lamps were possibly of a different shape. Although the purpose of the tables is not given here, the regular practice of referring to tables for the bread in the same context as the lampstands suggests that these were for the 'Bread of the Presence' rather than to support the lamps (*cf.* 1 Ch. 9:32; 28:16; 2 Ch. 4:19-20; 13:11; also Ex. 25:23-40; 40:4, 22-25). This conclusion is valid even though Chronicles sometimes refers to only one table (2 Ch. 13:11; 29:18). While one table may indeed have been used at other times, the mention of 'each table' in 1 Chronicles 28:16 seems decisive for the period of David and Solomon.

The light and the bread both speak of God's continuing presence with his people, a special emphasis in Chronicles (vv. 7-8 are not in Ki.). Even in times of darkness and poverty, God remained the source of light and food for his people (*cf.* Dt. 8:3; Ps. 36:8-9; Jn. 6:35; 8:12)."

The Pulpit Commentary states about the candlesticks: "The only allusion to these in the parallel is found later on in part of the forty-ninth verse of 1 Kings 7. *According to their form.* This expression, though so vague, might point to the fact that the form of the old candlestick of the tabernacle was adhered to (... Exodus 25:31). But considering the recurrence of the same words (ver. 20), there can be no doubt that the phrase is identical in its meaning with the use found in such passages as ... Leviticus 5:10; 9:16, and means 'according to the prescribed ordinance.'"

About the tables, *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "These tables also (the use of which is given in ver. 19) are not mentioned, so far as their making is concerned, in the parallel, except in its summary, ver. 48 (*cf.* 1 Kings 7.), where furthermore only one table, called 'the table' (... Exodus 25:23), is specified, with which agrees our ... 2 Chronicles 29:18. It is hard to explain this variation of statement. It is at least an arbitrary and forced explanation to suppose that ten tables constituted the furniture in question, while only one was used at a time. [Some Bible scholars] think that the analogy of the ten candlesticks points to the existence of ten tables. The question, however, is, where is the call for, or where are the indications of any analogy?"

An hundred basins of gold. The Hebrew word employed here, and translated 'basins,' is *mizraq*, as also vers. 11, 22, *infra*; and ... 1 Kings 7:40, 45, 50; ... Exodus 27:3; 38:3; ... Numbers 4:14; but it is represented as well by the English translation 'bowls' in ... 1 Chronicles 28:17; ... 2 Kings 25:15; ... Numbers 7:13, 19, etc. The 'pots,' however, of our vers. 11, 16 has for its Hebrew *ciyr*. It were well if, in names such as these, at any rate, an absolute uniformity of version were observed in the translation, for the benefit of the English reader, to say nothing of the saving of wasted time for the student and scholar. These *basins*, or *bowls*, were to receive and hold the blood of the slain victims, about to be sprinkled for purification (see ... Exodus 24:6-8, where the word '*aggan*' is used; 29:12, 10, 20, 21; ... Leviticus 1:5, and *passion*; ... Hebrews 9:18-20; see also ... Exodus 38:3; ... Numbers 4:14,) The Hebrew word '*aggani*, whether appearing in our version as 'basin' or 'bowl,' occurs thirty-two times, sixteen in association exactly similar with the present (*viz.* ... Exodus 27:3; 38:3; ... Numbers 4:14; ... 1 Kings 7:40, 45, 50; ... 2 Kings 12:13; 25:15; ... 1 Chronicles 28:17; ... 2 Chronicles 4:8, 11, 22; ... Nehemiah 7:70; ... Jeremiah 52:18, 19; ... Zechariah 14:20), fourteen as *silver bowls* in the time of the tabernacle for the meat offering of 'fine flour mingled with oil' (*viz.* ... Numbers 7:13, 19, 25, 31, 37, 43, 49, 55, 61, 67, 73, 79, 84, 85), and the remaining two in an entirely general application (... Amos 6:6; ... Zechariah 9:15). It is evident, therefore, that the '*aggan*' was not the only vessel used for holding the blood of purification, nor was it exclusively reserved to this use.

d. The courtyards (4:9).

9 He made the courtyard of the priests, and the large court and the doors for the court, and overlaid the doors with bronze.

The Hebrew word used for “court” is *chatser*, which in some context is rendered as “settlement,” as in the verse: “These were the sons of Ishmael, and these are the names of the twelve tribal rulers according to their settlements and camps,”²⁴ and in another context with “courtyards,” as in: “And the LORD did what Moses asked. The frogs died in the houses, in the courtyards and in the fields.”²⁵

The Tyndale Commentary states about the courtyards: “It may seem strange for these to be included, but a courtyard is part of the pattern of the Tent (*cf.* Ex. 27:9-19) and of the instructions in 1 Chronicles 28:12. The verse anticipates 6:13, confirming that the temple was for all Israel, not just the priests and Levites. The division into the two courts is already mentioned briefly in 1 Kings 6:36; 7:9, 12, though the rare word for the large court (NIV, NRSV, RSV; ‘precinct,’ REB, NEB; *cf.* also 2 Ch. 6:13; 20:5) is found only in post-exilic passages. A priests’ court, *i.e.* an inner court, is found in e.g. Ezekiel 40:44-47; 44:17-19, 27.”

e. Bronze work (4:11b-18).

**11 So Hiram finished the work he had undertaken for King Solomon in the temple of God:
12 the two pillars; the two bowl-shaped capitals on top of the pillars; the two sets of network decorating the two bowl-shaped capitals on top of the pillars;
13 the four hundred pomegranates for the two sets of network (two rows of pomegranates for each network, decorating the bowl-shaped capitals on top of the pillars);
14 the stands with their basins;
15 the Sea and the twelve bulls under it;
16 the pots, shovels, meat forks and all related articles. All the objects that Hiram-Abi made for King Solomon for the temple of the LORD were of polished bronze.
17 The king had them cast in clay molds in the plain of the Jordan between Succoth and Zarethan.
18 All these things that Solomon made amounted to so much that the weight of the bronze was not determined.**

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “Two summaries of the temple equipment are included, one for the *bronze* (or ‘copper,’ NEB) work (vv. 11b-18) and one for the *gold* (vv. 19-22). Together they emphasize the temple’s lavish decoration, including the ‘great quantities’ of bronze (v. 18, NRSV, RSV, *cf.* REB, NEB), but the differences in metals are also significant. They illustrate the principle of gradation, whereby the costlier metal represents a greater degree

²⁴ Gen. 25:16

²⁵ Ex. 8:13

of holiness. Thus, the bronze objects are all associated with the temple entrance, but the gold is reserved for the interior.

In the first list, the *pillars* and their decorations (vv. 12-13) partially repeat 3:15-17, the *Sea* and the smaller articles (vv. 15-16) resume 4:10-11, while the *stands* (NIV, NRSV, RSV; ‘trolleys,’ REB, NEB; ‘carts, GNB) for the basins (v. 14) are described in 1 Kings 7:27-37. The bronze was *Huram-Abi*’s work (v. 16; cf. v. 11 and 2:13-14), which was carried out in ‘earthen foundries’ (v. 17 Myers, cf. REB, NEB; *clay moulds*, NIV, cf. NRSV, RSV) in the Jordan Valley. The actual location of Solomon’s copper mines is less certain, though the traditional site at Timna in the far south is not entirely excluded.”

Polished bronze is the translation of the Hebrew words *n^achoshet maaruwq*, literally meaning “bright brass.” In modern English bronze is an alloy of copper and zinc. It seems doubtful that such a mixture of metals was used for the making of articles used in the temple.

The observation that the weight of bronze used was not determined showed that the Bible is basically not interested in statistics.

f. Gold objects (4:19-22).

19 Solomon also made all the furnishings that were in God's temple: the golden altar; the tables on which was the bread of the Presence;

20 the lampstands of pure gold with their lamps, to burn in front of the inner sanctuary as prescribed;

21 the gold floral work and lamps and tongs (they were solid gold);

22 the pure gold wick trimmers, sprinkling bowls, dishes and censers; and the gold doors of the temple: the inner doors to the Most Holy Place and the doors of the main hall.

The Tyndale Commentary states: “The *gold doors* (v. 22) are mention for the first time..., while reference is made to the *golden incense altar* (v. 19a) and the *tables* and *lampstands* (vv. 19b-20) at 1 Chronicles 28:18 and 2 Chronicles 4:7-8 respectively. The actual phrase *bread of the Presence* (v. 19) occurs only here in Chronicles (other expressions are found in 1 Ch. 9:23; 23:29; 2 Ch. 2:4; 13:11; 29:18). It is particularly associated with the Tent (Ex. 25:30; 35:13; 39:36; cf. 1 Sa. 21:7), and is especially meaningful in a passage anticipating the reality of God’s glorious presence (5:13-14).”

“Bread of the Presence” is the rendering of two Hebrew words *lechem panyim*, which literally means “food of the face.” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states about the term: “In 2 Chron 2:4 it is spoken of as the ‘continual showbread,’ because it was to be before Yahweh ‘always’ (Ex 25:30).”

The Hebrew word for “inner sanctuary” is *debiyr*, which is used almost exclusively in Kings and Chronicles to describe the Holy of Holies. In the original instructions given to Moses the words for Holy of Holies are *qodesh haqaadashiyim*. The only exception is in one of David’s psalms, where David prays: “Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your *Most Holy Place*.”²⁶

²⁶ Ps. 28:2

The KJV uses the word *oracle* for the Holy of Holies. *Webster* defines oracle as: “A place where divine utterances were supposed to be given.”

God had said to Moses that He would speak from above the cover of the ark that was placed in the Holy of Holies. We read: “There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.”²⁷ That would explain why that name “oracle” would be used for the place where the ark stood.

vii. Completion of the temple (5:1)

1 When all the work Solomon had done for the temple of the LORD was finished, he brought in the things his father David had dedicated — the silver and gold and all the furnishings — and he placed them in the treasuries of God's temple.

The Tyndale Commentary states: “The two summary lists lead naturally into this final statement, which confirms that the temple was a joint enterprise between *David* and *Solomon*. David had several times *dedicated* material for the temple (*cf.* 1 Ch. 17:8, 11; 26:26-27), following the practice of Joshua (*cf.* Jos. 6:24). He had also prepared for the treasuries, both in terms of their Levitical personnel (1 Ch. 26:20-28; *cf.* 9:26) and their construction as upper and side rooms of the temple (*cf.* 1 Ki. 6:5ff.; 2 Ch. 3:9; 1 Ch. 9:26). So the great achievement was *finished* (contrast ‘began’ 3:1, 2), ready for the very special opening ceremony (chs. 5-7).”

H. Solomon dedicates the temple (5:2 – 7:22)

i. The ark and the cloud (5:2-14)

a. Solomon assembles all Israel (5:2-3).

2 Then Solomon summoned to Jerusalem the elders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families, to bring up the ark of the LORD's covenant from Zion, the City of David.

3 And all the men of Israel came together to the king at the time of the festival in the seventh month.

In a general introduction to these chapters, *The Tyndale Commentary* states: “With the temple preparations which David began as far back as 1 chronicles 22:2 now completed (5:1), the story of the building of the temple reaches its climax. The account occupies three chapters, 5:2 – 7:22, and is in three phases: (a) the ark and the cloud of God’s presence occupy the temple (5:2-14); (b) Solomon gives praise to God and prays to him (6:1-42); (c) God responds with fire and a message of hope (7:1-22).

The Chronicler has made a number of brief but important additions to the comparable material in Kings (*e.g.* 5:11b-13a; 7:12b-15). This expansion contrasts with the treatment of the building work (chs. 3-4) where the earlier account was reduced by almost 50%, confirming that

²⁷ Ex. 25:22

the Chronicler's real interest is in what the temple signifies. These chapters therefore are not so much about the temple of God as the God to whom the temple belongs. There is no better illustration of this than 5:13c-14, where the priests are unable to carry out their expected duties because of the overwhelming effect of God's glorious presence. In other words, as soon as the temple is opened for business, all the carefully planned ceremonies and services have to be suspended because God takes over the entire building for himself. The temple is to be for God's glory, not for that of human beings....

Chapter 5 sets the scene by concentrating on the final act of furnishing the temple, i.e., the *ark's* installation in the Most Holy Place (vv. 4-10). Like the *cloud* which subsequently fills the temple (vv. 13c-14), the ark symbolizes God's presence, so that the chapter describes God taking up residence at the center of the people's life. The ark also speaks of the *covenant* God made with Israel at the exodus (vv. 7-10) – in fact, 'ark of the covenant' is a specially favored phrase in Chronicles. In the context, it refers particularly to God's commitment to Israel, an emphasis which would have been especially appreciated by the Chronicler's original readers. Even though, in their time, the ark had long disappeared and their own temple was but a shadow of Solomon's glory, this was a reminder that the God represented by these symbols had certainly not abandoned them. Indeed, they could be equally aware of his presence by engaging in praise and worship led by the Levites' musical ministry (vv. 11-14)."

In order to transport the ark from its place of storage to the temple, where it would be placed in the Holy of Holies, Solomon convoked all the leaders of the people as well as the bulk of the nation as a whole. The list mentions "the elders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families."

The "elders," (Hebrew: *zaqen*) may have been people who occupied a high position in Solomon's government. But the word usually refers to age. The "heads," (Hebrew: *ro'sh*) may have been high ranking military. The "fathers" (Hebrew: *'ab*) probably refers to heads of families.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "Comparing the language of this and the following verse with that used on the occasion of David's bringing up of the ark to Zion, found in ... 2 Samuel 6:1; 1 Chronicles 13. and 15., some have thought that a considerable difference of tone is perceptible, and that indication is given of the intention, or at any rate a feeling, even if more or less unconscious, on the part of Solomon, that times were ripe for a demonstration, that should partake less of the enthusiasm of the mass, so far as his own summons might be concerned, and more of the form and dignity of the chief and representative men of the nation. This view can hardly be pressed. The very word 'wherefore' in ver. 3 goes far to discredit it. And any difference that may be apparent in the language is far more probably and easily attributable to the old cause of the narrower, though intenser, interest of the writer of Chronicles."

The celebration of the temple consecration took place in the seventh month, which, according to I Kings, was the month of Ethanim.²⁸ It coincided with the feast of tabernacles.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia states about this feast: "The Feast of Tabernacles is at once the general harvest festival, *chagh he-`aciph*, and the anniversary of the beginnings of the wanderings in the wilderness (Ex 23:16; Lev 23:33 ff; Deut 16:13-15). The

²⁸ I Kings 8:2

Eighth Day of Assembly immediately following the last day of Tabernacles (Lev 23:36; Num 29:35 ff; John 7:37) and closing the long cycle of Tishri festivals seems to have been merely a final day of rejoicing before the pilgrims returned to their homes.”

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “Since the temple was completed in the eighth month, almost certainly in the previous year (*cf.* 1 Ki. 6:38), an extensive period leading up to the opening ceremony is implied in addition to all the other preparations. Why no reference is made to the Day of Atonement, which should have taken place five days before (*cf.* Lev. 23:27, 34), is not clear, especially given the circumstances which gave rise to the temple (1 Ch. 21) and the emphasis on forgiveness in chapters 6-7. Probably it was either not properly observed throughout the pre-exilic period, or hardly observed at all. Those who first returned from exile celebrated the dedication of the altar at Tabernacles as well (Ezr. 3:4), presumably to underline their continuity with Solomon’s temple.”

b. The ark’s final journey (5:4-6).

***4 When all the elders of Israel had arrived, the Levites took up the ark,
5 and they brought up the ark and the Tent of Meeting and all the sacred furnishings in it. The priests, who were Levites, carried them up;
6 and King Solomon and the entire assembly of Israel that had gathered about him were before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and cattle that they could not be recorded or counted.***

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “The functions of the Levites (v. 4) and the priests (v. 5; *cf.* v. 7) are differentiated in contrast to 1 Kings 8:3-4. Since it was the Levites’ special responsibility to carry the ark (*cf.* Nu. 4:15; 1 Ch. 15:14-15), their final action in doing so is specifically mentioned before they take up their temple-based ministries (vv. 12-13). That the ‘levitical priests’ (JB, *cf.* NIV) assisted them in bringing the *Tent of Meeting* and all its *sacred furnishings* (v. 5) is not surprising if this is the Tent from Gibeon (*cf.* 1 Ch. 16:39; 2 Ch. 1:3). The priests had been based there, while the ark in Jerusalem had been cared for only by Levites (1 Ch. 16:37-42).”

When the ark was built in the desert, the responsibility for carrying it was entrusted particularly to the Kohathites, one of the Levitical clans. We read in Numbers: “The leader of the families of the Kohathite clans was Elizaphan son of Uzziel. They were responsible for the care of the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the articles of the sanctuary used in ministering, the curtain, and everything related to their use.”²⁹

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “The function of the *Levites* (v. 4) and the *priests* (v. 5; *cf.* v. 7) are differentiated in contrast to 1 Kings 8:3-4. Since it was the Levites’ special responsibility to carry the ark (*cf.* Nu. 4:15; 1 Ch. 15:14-15), their final action in doing so is specifically mentioned before they take up their temple-based ministries (vv. 12-13). That the ‘levitical priests’ (JB, *cf.* NIV) assisted them in bringing the *Tent of Meeting* and all its *sacred furnishings* (v. 5) is not surprising if this is the Tent from Gibeon (*cf.* 1 Ch. 16:39; 2 Ch. 1:3).

²⁹ Num. 3:30, 31

The priests had been based there, while the ark in Jerusalem had been cared for only by the Levites (1 Ch. 16:37-42).

Several features indicate that this was Moses' Tent rather than David's (for the latter, *cf.* 1 Ch. 16:1). 'Tent of Meeting' is not used in Kings and Chronicles for any other tent, mention of the holy vessels or furnishings stresses the continuity between Tent and temple ..., and the united presence of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun (v. 12) alongside the priests confirms the merging of personnel from Gibeon and Jerusalem. Though it may seem surprising that the end of such an important item as Moses' Tent is mentioned only in passing, in reality it was now redundant and unlikely to be in the first-class state of repair. The ark, by contrast, had an ongoing role, even though it was only a symbol of something greater.

The last act of the people ('the whole congregation,' REB, NEB), before the ark disappeared for ever from their view was to offer sacrifice (v. 6). While this may have been a thank-offering that the journey had taken place without mishap (*cf.* 1 Ch. 13:9-13; 15:26), it was also an appropriate act of devotion to God for all that the ark represented. The extravagance of the offering was typical of Solomon (*cf.* 7:4; 7), far exceeding the size of David's comparable sacrifice (1 Ch. 15:26)."

There was, of course no truth in the point that the number of sacrificial animals could not be counted, but the statement intends to communicate the super-abundance of the sacrifices brought, which expressed the overwhelming gratitude of king and people toward God, who had brought them, as a nation, to this point in their history.

c. The ark's final resting-place (5:7-10).

7 The priests then brought the ark of the LORD's covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim.

8 The cherubim spread their wings over the place of the ark and covered the ark and its carrying poles.

9 These poles were so long that their ends, extending from the ark, could be seen from in front of the inner sanctuary, but not from outside the Holy Place; and they are still there today.

10 There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt.

The reason for the priests taking over the carrying of the ark into the Holy of Holies was that the Levites were not allowed to enter that place. Actually it was only the high priest who could do that, but it would have been impossible for one man to carry the ark.

On the other hand, the reason for the severe restriction for entering the most holy place was the presence of the ark. Without the ark, the Holy of Holies would not be a holy place at all.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "The tempo of this section slows right down. The only action is contained in the initial verb *brought*, the rest being a description of the ark's surroundings. Four features are mentioned: (a) the ark is located in the *Most Holy Place* (v. 7), also called the *inner sanctuary* (*cf.* 3:8-14); (b) it is completely covered by the *cherubim* (vv. 7b-8; *cf.* 3:10-13); (c) the ends of the carrying *poles* were visible outside the veil, though not outside the temple (v. 9) – this rather quaint note was only for the benefit of priests and Levites, since only they could enter the temple; and (d) it contained the *two tablets* of the *covenant*, i.e. the ten commandments, symbolizing God's permanent commitment to Israel (v. 10). This is a rare mention in Chronicles of the Sinai covenant, but it is clear nevertheless that the exodus from

Egypt forms the foundation of God's promises about the temple and Davidic kingship (*cf.* 1 Ch. 17:5, 21). That same divine grace joined not only Solomon's and the Chronicler's generations to God's past promises, but in the same way links today's reader to Christ through the new covenant."

The Pulpit Commentary writes about the position of the cherubim and the position of the carrying poles: "Their situation was by the west wall of the oracle (... 1 Kings 6:16). *They drew out*; *i.e.* the staves projected. A similar intransitive occurs in ... Exodus 20:12. *Were seen from the ark*. The words, "from the ark," are here probably by disposition, and should follow the words, *the staves projected*; while the parallel tells us what should be in their place here, namely, 'from the holy place' (... 1 Kings 8:8). The confusion and omission will merely lie with some copyists, for five manuscripts show the words 'from the holy place.' *There it is unto this day*. The parallel (... 1 Kings 8:8) reads, '*there they are unto this day*,' *i.e.* the staves. In either case, whether the ark or the staves were spoken of, the memorandum is exceedingly interesting and noteworthy, as a patent bare copy of an old record dating before the destruction of the temple, on the part of whether the writer of Kings or Chronicles. Plainly the historian touches ground, and shows us that *we* do also; for it is evident that, far from cunningly devised fable, he has before him in either case an *original* document."

V. 10 tells us that there was nothing inside the ark except the two tablets of the Ten Commandments that Moses had deposited. *Geneva Notes* observes: "For Aaron's rod and manna were taken from there before it was brought to this place." Probably the manna had disintegrated over the centuries and could no longer serve as proof of God's provision for the Israelites during their dessert crossing.

d. God's glory and Israel's praise (5:11-14).

11 The priests then withdrew from the Holy Place. All the priests who were there had consecrated themselves, regardless of their divisions.

12 All the Levites who were musicians — Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and their sons and relatives — stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets.

13 The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the LORD. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their voices in praise to the LORD and sang: "He is good; his love endures forever." Then the temple of the LORD was filled with a cloud,

14 and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God.

The dedication of the temple was accompanied by a huge service of praise and adoration which culminated in a demonstration of God's own physical presence, in the form of a cloud of glory that filled the temple.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "With only minor disruption to the syntax, the Chronicler has inserted a long paragraph into a simple sentence in 1 Kings 8:10, 'When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place [v. 11a here], the cloud filled the temple of the LORD [v. 13c here]'. The addition gives to further reasons why the cloud of glory filled the temple. The *priests, en masse* and apparently with some enthusiasm (*regardless of their divisions*), had consecrated themselves (v. 11b; *cf.* 1 Ch. 15:12, 14; 2 Ch. 23:6; 26:18; 29:5ff.). Then a united orchestra and

chorus of *Levites* from Gibeon (*Heman* and *Jeduthun*) and Jerusalem (*Asaph*), together with 120 *priests* praise God for his goodness and love (e.g. Pss. 107:1; 118:1; 136:1; cf. 2 Ch. 7:3, Ezr. 3:11). Priests and Levites were indicating through their unity, commitment, and praise their desire to worship God, and the Chronicler clearly intends this to be seen as an example to be followed. When God's people set themselves apart for him to express heartfelt worship and praise, God will surely respond with some sign of his presence. ...

While blowing *trumpets* (v. 13) was the only musical activity in which the priests engaged (cf. 1 Ch. 15:24, 28), the Levites' musical service was their major function once the ark was installed (cf. 1 Ch. 6:31-32; 23:30-31; 25:1-31). In this way, they verbalized Israel's praise in God's very presence. Their position east ... of the altar (v. 12), i.e. between the great bronze altar in the courtyard and the temple door, demonstrated their unity with the people and their closeness to God. *Fine linen* seems to have been their special clothing, since it is mentioned in connection with the Levites only here and in 1 Chronicles 15:27. Their unity is underlined by a double expression, in unison and as with one voice (13a).

The quotation from the Psalms (v. 13b) encapsulates in a sentence what the entire temple project was about, that over the years since God's first promise to David (1 Ch. 17:12), God's faithful love (Heb. *hesed*) had ensured the project's success. Underlying the temple was the person of God. *He* is good. That is why he responds to Israel's worship with what later Jews called the *shekinah* glory (vv. 13c-14). Both in the case of the *cloud* and the *glory* filling the temple, the associations with Moses are very close (especially Ex. 40:34-35). Clouds are a particularly rich biblical symbol of God's presence (e.g. Ex. 13:31-32; Dn. 7:13; Acts 1:9), emphasizing his mystery and majesty. The temple cloud could never belong to humankind, not even to the priests who, though they had sanctified themselves, now found it quite impossible to carry out any of their prescribed tasks."

The phrase "His mercy endures forever" is the rendering of two Hebrew words *owlam chesed*, (forever His mercy).

ii. Solomon's praise and prayer (6:1-42)

a. Solomon responds to God's glory (6:1-2).

**1 Then Solomon said, "The LORD has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud;
2 I have built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever."**

The Tyndale Commentary states: "Now that God has taken up residence in his house, Solomon responds in praise and prayer. His words fall into three parts: (a) prayer of response to the cloud of God's glory (vv. 1-2); (b) testimony about God's faithfulness to David's house (vv. 3-11); (c) dedicatory prayer for the temple (vv. 12-42).

The first two sections look backwards, praising God for keeping two promises – to dwell with his people (vv. 1-2; cf. e.g. Es. 25:8, 29:44-46) and to establish Solomon and David's throne (vv. 3-11; cf. 1 Ch. 17:10-14; 22:6-13; 28:2-10). The third looks forward to the prayers to be offered in and towards the temple, examples of which are found in 2 Chronicles 10-36 (cf. e.g. vv. 24-25 with 2 Ch. 20:1-30 or vv. 36:39 with 2 Ch. 33:10-13). The theme of the temple as a house of thanksgiving and of intercession clearly occupies a central place within Chronicles.

This chapter forms a vital link between Chronicles' two major words from God. Its foundation is God's covenant promise to build David a house (1 Ch. 17:10-14), and its

development occurs in God's promise about the temple (2 Ch. 7:12-22). It therefore shows how prayer plays a key role in the unfolding of God's will for humankind."

About the opening words of Solomon's prayer, *The Tyndale Commentary* comments: "This brief statement, which is part testimony and part prayer, evokes a sense of wonder that the same God whose glory fills the temple (5:13-14) also dwells in 'thick darkness' (v. 1 NRSV, RSV, REB, NEB). This latter phrase is associated with the cloud of god's mysterious presence at Mount Sinai (Ex. 20:21; Dt. 5:22) and with his appearing on the Day of the LORD (Joel 2:2; Zp. 1:15). Solomon is amazed that this intangible, sovereign deity whose mystery is symbolized by the darkness of the windowless Holy of Holies now promises to *dwell* in this temple (v. 2). The theme of God's dual residence cascades through the chapter, without ever being logically resolved. It is enough to know that God lives on earth as well as in heaven. Even though the temple is 'exalted' (NRSV, RSV, KB; cf. REB, NEB), it cannot physically contain God any more than he can be confined by human philosophy. And yet anyone can approach him in prayer (vv. 18-40)."

When God revealed Himself to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai, there was a dark cloud on top of the mountain. We read: "The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was."³⁰

Describing God's presence in one of his psalms, David wrote: "He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him."³¹ And: "Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne."³² And yet, God Himself is pure light. The Apostle John writes about Him: "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."³³

b. Solomon's testimony to God's promise (6:3-11).

3 While the whole assembly of Israel was standing there, the king turned around and blessed them.

4 Then he said: "Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who with his hands has fulfilled what he promised with his mouth to my father David. For he said,

5 'Since the day I brought my people out of Egypt, I have not chosen a city in any tribe of Israel to have a temple built for my Name to be there, nor have I chosen anyone to be the leader over my people Israel.

6 But now I have chosen Jerusalem for my Name to be there, and I have chosen David to rule my people Israel.'

7 "My father David had it in his heart to build a temple for the Name of the LORD, the God of Israel.

³⁰ Ex. 20:21

³¹ Ps. 18:11

³² Ps. 97:2

³³ I John 1:5

8 *But the LORD said to my father David, 'Because it was in your heart to build a temple for my Name, you did well to have this in your heart.*

9 *Nevertheless, you are not the one to build the temple, but your son, who is your own flesh and blood — he is the one who will build the temple for my Name.'*

10 *"The LORD has kept the promise he made. I have succeeded David my father and now I sit on the throne of Israel, just as the LORD promised, and I have built the temple for the Name of the LORD, the God of Israel.*

11 *There I have placed the ark, in which is the covenant of the LORD that he made with the people of Israel."*

Solomon must have stood in front of the temple, facing the edifice when the cloud covered the building and made it impossible for the priests to continue their service. He now turned toward the people and pronounced a blessing upon them.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "Reading between the lines, this verse shows us that the face of Solomon had been turned to the symbol of God's presence, while he addressed to him the words of our second verse, since he now faces round to the assembly of the congregation. What words Solomon used in thus blessing *the whole congregation* are not given either here or in the parallel. The impression one takes is that the blessing was, in fact, wrapped up tacitly in all that Solomon recounts, when he said, *Blessed be the LORD God of Israel*, etc. (ver. 4). However, it is not impossible that, with the variation of the tense in ver. 59, the verses of ... 1 Kings 8:55 - 61 may contain the substance of it, if not itself."

The Tyndale Commentary states: "Even when Solomon *blessed* the people in his priestly role (v. 3; cf. 1 Ch. 16:2), he acted as the people's representative rather than one completely set apart for religious duties. He prayed as a sinner, as one of the people (cf. v. 36). This was supposed to be the people's temple (cf. Lk. 18:9-14), even though it sometimes became little more than a royal sanctuary (cf. 2 Ki. 18:10-18; 21:4-7).

Solomon gives thanks for the way God has made the recent sequence of events possible. He mentions three things: (a) that he succeeded David as king (v. 10), (b) that he has been enabled to build the temple (v. 10), and (c) that the *ark* has been placed in its proper home (v. 11). All this is in fulfillment of what God had said to David (vv. 4, 10) and of the covenant made in the exodus (vv. 5, 11).

The important notion of fulfillment is expressed through a series of anthropomorphisms. God has fulfilled with his *hands* (v. 4, cf. v. 15) what he promised with his *mouth* (vv. 4, 10; cf. v. 15). These phrases are typical of chapters 6-7, where various physical terms are attributed to God. As well as hand and mouth, his eyes (vv. 20, 40; cf. 7:15-16), his ears (v. 40; cf. 7:15), and even his heart (7:16) are said to be present in the temple. Though only Jesus is God incarnate, the temple was a clear sign that God in all his being was committed to living among his people. The mention of God's hands (lit. 'fulfilled with his hands') really means that God's actions have confirmed his words – it is as if God's unseen hands were active in all the human hands who contributed to the construction work (cf. 1 Ch. 29:16).

God fulfills (vv. 4, 10-11) what appear to be two prophecies (vv. 5-6, 8-9) given to David. In reality, these 'prophecies' are an amalgam of three earlier versions of the Davidic covenant *Since the day I brought my people out of Egypt* (v. 5) is based on 1 Chronicles 17:5, and the rest of verses 5-6 follow 1 Chronicles 28:4-6 closely. Verse 7 is based on 1 Chronicles 22:7; 28:3, the phrase *you are not the one to build the temple* (v. 9) has close parallels in 1 Chronicles 17:4; 22:8; 28:3, and 'your son who shall be born to you shall build the house for my

name' (v. 9, NRSV) should be compared with 1 Chronicles 17:11-12; 22:9-10; 28:6. Even the *throne of Israel* (v. 10; cf. 1 Ch. 28:5) and the *ark* (v. 11; cf. 1 Ch. 22:19; 28:3) have echoes in all three passages, so that this entire speech is shot through with the conviction that God's words have been fulfilled in every detail."

Moses had foretold that God would choose His own place of residence among the people of Israel. We read: "You are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go; there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. There, in the presence of the LORD your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the LORD your God has blessed you."³⁴

The place God chose for the temple turned out to be the threshing floor of Araunah, the Jebusite. David discovered that that would be the place when a plague broke out in Israel as punishment for David's decision to count the population. The angel of death was about to wipe out the population of Jerusalem, when David saw him standing on Araunah's threshing floor. After bringing a sacrifice at that place, David said: "The house of the LORD God is to be here, and also the altar of burnt offering for Israel."³⁵

Originally, the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments written on them, were placed beside the ark.³⁶ There was also a jar with manna that was placed before the ark.³⁷ But the manna would not have survived the centuries that had elapsed since the desert journey. Another item that was put beside the ark was Aaron's staff that had bloomed.³⁸ We are not told what happened to it in later years.

The Tyndale Commentary comments further on Solomon's speech: "Four emphases stand out in the speech. Firstly, the focus on God's choice in verses 5-6 is emphatic and unusual (it is paralleled in Ch. only in 1 Ch. 28:4-6). Here God's original choice of *David* and *Jerusalem* is in mind, rather than of Solomon as in 1 Chronicles 28. This specific link of chosen king and chosen city is rare in the Old Testament, being found mainly in the Psalms (*e.g.* Pss. 2:6-7; 78:67-72). The second emphasis is the rather surprising commendation for David's heartfelt desire to build the temple, in contrast to his previous disqualification because of his wars (v. 8; cf. 1 Ch. 22:8-9; 28:3). In fact, this is a complementary rather than contradictory statement. It confirms that David's disqualification was not due to sin, but because the concept of God's rest must be regarded as the unique and final stage in building the temple (*cf.* v. 41). David's motives actually set a pattern for others to follow, for a right attitude of heart is essential for any worship (vv. 14, 30; cf. 1 Ch. 29:17-19; Mk. 7:6). Thirdly, the temple was specifically associated with God's

³⁴ Deut. 12:5-7

³⁵ I Chron. 22:1

³⁶ Deut. 31:26

³⁷ Ex. 16:33, 34

³⁸ Num. 17:10

Name (vv. 5,6,7,8,9,10). This typically Deuteronomic idea fits well with the chapter's over-all sense of God's presence in earth and heaven, though here it extends to the idea of God's choice Finally, there are more frequent reminders than usual in Chronicles that the Sinai covenant underlies all that God is doing. As well as specific mentions in verses 5 and 11, references to the 'thick darkness' (v. 1, NRSV, RSV; *dark cloud*, NIV; cf. Ex. 20:21; Dt. 5:22), indicate that all who worship in the temple are indebted to God's mighty love and power demonstrated in the exodus. Unusually, the *covenant* (v. 11) is identified with the tablets of the ten commandments."

c. Solomon's dedicatory prayer (6:12-42).

12 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel and spread out his hands.

13 Now he had made a bronze platform, five cubits long, five cubits wide and three cubits high, and had placed it in the center of the outer court. He stood on the platform and then knelt down before the whole assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven.

14 He said: "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven or on earth — you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way.

15 You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it — as it is today.

16 "Now LORD, God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father the promises you made to him when you said, 'You shall never fail to have a man to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if only your sons are careful in all they do to walk before me according to my law, as you have done.'

17 And now, O LORD, God of Israel, let your word that you promised your servant David come true.

18 "But will God really dwell on earth with men? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!

19 Yet give attention to your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy, O LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence.

20 May your eyes be open toward this temple day and night, this place of which you said you would put your Name there. May you hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place.

21 Hear the supplications of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place; and when you hear, forgive.

22 "When a man wrongs his neighbor and is required to take an oath and he comes and swears the oath before your altar in this temple,

23 then hear from heaven and act. Judge between your servants, repaying the guilty by bringing down on his own head what he has done. Declare the innocent not guilty and so establish his innocence.

24 "When your people Israel have been defeated by an enemy because they have sinned against you and when they turn back and confess your name, praying and making supplication before you in this temple,

25 then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel and bring them back to the land you gave to them and their fathers.

26 "When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward this place and confess your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them,

27 then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live, and send rain on the land you gave your people for an inheritance.

28 "When famine or plague comes to the land, or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers, or when enemies besiege them in any of their cities, whatever disaster or disease may come,

29 and when a prayer or plea is made by any of your people Israel — each one aware of his afflictions and pains, and spreading out his hands toward this temple—

30 then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive, and deal with each man according to all he does, since you know his heart (for you alone know the hearts of men),

31 so that they will fear you and walk in your ways all the time they live in the land you gave our fathers.

32 "As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm — when he comes and prays toward this temple,

33 then hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name.

34 "When your people go to war against their enemies, wherever you send them, and when they pray to you toward this city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name,

35 then hear from heaven their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause.

36 "When they sin against you — for there is no one who does not sin — and you become angry with them and give them over to the enemy, who takes them captive to a land far away or near;

37 and if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captivity and say, 'We have sinned, we have done wrong and acted wickedly';

38 and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their captivity where they were taken, and pray toward the land you gave their fathers, toward the city you have chosen and toward the temple I have built for your Name;

39 then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their pleas, and uphold their cause. And forgive your people, who have sinned against you.

40 "Now, my God, may your eyes be open and your ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

41 "Now arise, O LORD God, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. May your priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation, may your saints rejoice in your goodness.

42 O LORD God, do not reject your anointed one. Remember the great love promised to David your servant."

The Pulpit Commentary observes about Solomon's position as he stood before the altar and prayed: "This means to say that Solomon stood (and afterwards knelt down) *eastward* of the altar indeed, but with his face to the temple and congregation. Although the voice of Solomon was raised in prayer to God, yet the prayer was to be that of the whole congregation and not of priestly proxy, and therefore of the whole congregation it must be heard. Ver. 13 — *A brazen scaffold*. The Hebrew word is *kiyowri*. The word occurs twenty-one times. It is translated, in the Authorized Version, 'laver' eighteen times, once 'pan' (... 1 Samuel 2:14), once 'hearth' (...

Zechariah 12:6), and once ‘scaffold,’ here. The meaning evidently is that the stand was in some sort basin-shaped.”

The Tyndale Commentary states: “Solomon turned towards the altar (v. 12), knelt down (v.13), and spread out his hands (vv. 12-13). These various postures for prayer and worship are attested throughout the Bible (for standing, Ne. 9:2; Rev. 7:9; for kneeling Ps. 95:6; Eph. 3:14; for lifting hands, Ps. 28:2; 1 Tim. 2:8). The altar as the place of sacrifice has an important if often overlooked role in the dedication ceremony (vv. 12, 23; 7:7, 9, 12; cf. 4:1). Verbal prayer is not necessarily superior to sacrifice, despite the comments of some Biblical worship includes the offering of physical gifts as well as prayer and praise (e.g. Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:15-16).

The exact nature of the structure on which Solomon stood (v. 13) is unclear, but was most probably a temporary *platform* or dais made specially for the occasion (cf. Ne. 8:4). The fact that its dimensions are identical to those of the Tent’s bronze altar (cf. Ex. 27:1; 38:1) is probably coincidental. Also, the suggestion ... that it is included as a means of diminishing Solomon’s priestly role in the light of Uzziah’s error (2 Ch. 26:16-20) seems unnecessary. The *altar* where Uzziah transgressed was the inner altar, whereas this was the altar of burnt offering outside where laymen could offer sacrifices (e.g. Lv. 4:22-24, 27-29). Further, the word for *court* (v. 13) is a rare term used in 2 Chronicles 4:9 for the outer court, and, with the Levites positioned between the altar and the temple (5:12) there is no way in which Solomon’s action could be regarded as parallel with Uzziah’s.

The prayer itself is in four main sections: (i) request for continuing fulfillment of the Davidic covenant (vv. 14-17); (ii) basic principles of intercession (vv. 18-21); (iii) Situations in which prayer might be offered (vv. 22-40); (iv) request for God’s continuing presence and power (vv. 41-42).”

Solomon addressed God as “LORD, God of Israel,” using the Hebrew words *Yahweh Elohim*. “There is no *Elohim* in the heaven or in the earth” “There is” is not in the Hebrew text. “Covenant of love” is the rendering of the Hebrew words *beriyth checed*. *Beriyth* is derived from a verb that literally means “to cut.” It refers to the custom of making an agreement between two parties by cutting an animal into pieces and letting both parties pass between the pieces, indicating that, if one of the parties fails to keep the agreement, he would become like one of the pieces of dead meat. When God made His covenant with Abraham, Abraham had a dream, in which he saw God, in the form of a smoking firepot with a blazing torch passing between the pieces.”³⁹ God took upon Himself all the obligations of the covenant. Abraham was the silent partner.

The Tyndale Commentary writes about Solomon’s “request for continuing fulfillment of the Davidic covenant”: “As with so many prayers in Scripture, Solomon begins with praise (vv. 14-15) before making any requests (vv. 16-17). The praise concentrates on two aspects of God’s nature, that he is unique (*there is no God like you in heaven or on earth*, v. 14a), and that he is faithful to his *covenant of love* with his obedient people (vv. 14b-15). Mention of the Davidic covenant seems to inspire repeated praise about God’s incomparability (1 Ch. 17:20; cf. 1 Ch. 16:25-26; 2 Ch. 2:5). Such praise arises from hearts committed to God (*wholeheartedly*, JB, NIV, v. 14), a repeated emphasis in this chapter (vv. 7, 8, 30; cf. 1 Ch. 29:17-19). *Now* (v. 16) introduces Solomon’s requests, that God’s *promises* to David’s line should continue to ‘be confirmed’ (v. 17, REB, NEB, NRSV, RSV; *come true*, NIV, GNB). David had made an

³⁹

Gen. 15:9-21

identical petition (1 Ch. 17:23-24), and both prayers indicate that God often looks for people to work with him in prayer rather than him fulfilling his purposes automatically (*cf.* ‘Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven’).”

The Hebrew text of v. 18 reads literally: “But in very deed will God dwell with men on earth?” In the parallel passage in I Kings, we read: “But will God really dwell on earth?”⁴⁰ The Hebrew word for “really” is *‘umnam*. We find it for the first time in Scripture in the verse: “Then the LORD said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I *really* have a child, now that I am old?’”⁴¹

Solomon’s concept of God’s greatness was basically correct. But God’s greatness reveals itself in the greatness of infinity as well as in microscopic smallness. David ponders these two aspects of God’s being in one of his psalms in which he states:

“O LORD, OUR LORD, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
 You have set your glory above the heavens.
 From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise
 because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.
 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
 the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
 what is man that you are mindful of him,
 the son of man that you care for him?
 You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
 and crowned him with glory and honor.
 You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
 you put everything under his feet:
 all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field,
 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
 all that swim the paths of the seas.
 O LORD, OUR LORD, how majestic is
 your name in all the earth!”⁴²

The phrase “You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings” could be translated: “You have made him almost divine.”

God made Himself small enough to be incarnated in a baby who would bear the Name Jesus. And He is small enough to take up residence in the heart of those who surrender their lives to Him. Jesus says: “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”⁴³

⁴⁰ I Kings 8:27

⁴¹ Gen. 18:13

⁴² Ps. 8

⁴³ Rev. 3:20

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “Solomon’s conception of the *infinite God* comes plainly to view here (...2 Chronicles 2:6; ... Deuteronomy 10:14; ... Psalm 139:5-12; 148:4; ... Isaiah 66:1; ... Acts 7:4-9; 17:24).”

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “A basic pattern for intercessory prayer follows in verses 19-21. Five essential elements of intercession are mentioned and several phrases are repeated throughout the chapter.

(a) The words for *prayer* are characterized by sincerity and urgency (‘supplication,’ vv.19, 21, 24, 35, 37, which is really a *plea for mercy*, as NIV in v.19; *cry*, v. 19; *call*, v. 33, RSV).

(b) God is called upon to have his *eyes* open (v. 20, 40) and especially to hear (vv. 19, 20, 21, 23, 25, 27, 30, 33, 35, 39, 40). This seems to be the central issue. If God hears, Solomon is content that prayer request will be properly dealt with (*cf.* 2 Ch. 7:12-16).

(c) The prayers to be offered in or towards this *house/place* (vv. 18, 20, 21, 22, 24, 26, 29, 32, 33, 34, 38, 40) come before God (v. 19) in his heavenly dwelling (vv. 21, 30, 33, 39). This is because God’s *Name* is on this temple (vv. 20, 34, 38; *cf.* vv. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 24, 26, 32, 33). To pray in or toward this temple is to pray to or in the name of God to whom it belongs, which is the Old Testament equivalent of prayer in the name of Jesus (*cf. e.g.* Jn. 14:13; Acts 2:21). The name here is a symbol of God’s presence and authority, and is a kind of seal upon the covenant promises signified by the temple.

(d) Prayers may be offered by individuals (vv. 19, 22), by *your people Israel* (vv. 21, 24, 25, 26, 29, 39) or even by *foreigners* (vv. 32-33). God is accessible to anyone who acknowledges Yahweh as *my God* (vv. 19, 40), as *God of Israel* (v. 14), or as having a *great name* (v. 32).

(e) To *forgive* sins is the purpose of most of these prayers (v. 21, 25, 27, 30, 39). This is not to diminish the importance of other types of prayers, such as for guidance, meditation, or adoration, but to draw attention to humanity’s basic need before God. Three observations may be made on this point. Firstly, the promise of forgiveness addresses the real need for setting up the temple, both in the case of David (1 Ch. 21) and of all Israel (*e.g.* 1 Ch. 5:25; 9:1; 2 Ch. 36:14). Secondly, every prayer of intercession is necessarily offered by sinners. Every petition must therefore be made on the basis of a sin-offering, which for Christians is the sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God. Thirdly, the fact that forgiveness is available in and through the temple shows that atonement is available through prayer and sacrifice together. Christ’s sin-offering on the cross affirms the fact of forgiveness, but it becomes accessible only as we pray.

Solomon’s prayer “Now arise, O LORD God, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might” refers to Moses’ words that he prayed when Israel travelled through the desert and the ark went before them. He said: “Rise up, O LORD! May your enemies be scattered; may your foes flee before you.” And whenever it came to rest, he said, “Return, O LORD, to the countless thousands of Israel.”⁴⁴

V. 42 reads literally in the Hebrew text: “Yahweh Elohim, turn not away your face of your anointed: remember the mercies of your servant David.” *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: “The words are equivalent in meaning to this: Do not reject my present petitions; do not send me from thy throne of grace dejected in countenance and disappointed in heart.”

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Num. 10:35, 36

Most Bible scholars interpret this in the sense of a request that God would not turn away His face from Solomon. *Barnes' Notes*, however, takes it to refer to Solomon, stating: “make him not to hide his face through shame at having his prayers rejected.”

The Tyndale Commentary observes about Solomon's request for God's continued presence and the way the author of Chronicles reports: “The most extensive changes from the original prayer occur right at the end (the same thing happened in 1 Ch. 16:8-30), suggesting that verses 41-42 were especially important for the Chronicler. A special feature is that whereas the rest of the chapter corresponds closely to its source in 1 Kings 8, these verses are a free adaptation from a quite different passage (Ps 132). Another variation is that this final prayer is based on God's covenant with David whereas 1 Kings 8:50b-53 is based on the Sinai covenant.

Solomon finally asks God to *arise ... and come to your resting place* (v. 41). Since these verses are almost certainly the Chronicler's own adaptation of the original psalm, this is a prayer asking God to do for his own generation what he had done for Solomon and those who worshipped in the first temple. He wants the God who appeared in cloud and glory (5:13-14; 7:1-3) to continue to reveal himself in ‘power’ (JB; GNB) or *might* (NIV, NRSV, RSV). Since the ark signified God's permanent rest in Israel (*your resting place*, cf. 1 Ch. 28:2), it was an appropriate symbol of that power, and even though the ark no longer existed in the Chronicler's day, it recalled a God who had promised never to forsake his people.

The request for God's presence leads to four further requests: (a) that the priests should be clothed with salvation (v. 41), *i.e.* that they should be fully committed to their God-given ministry of bringing salvation to Israel (cf. Is. 61:10); (b) that *the saints rejoice* in his *goodness* (v. 41). The ‘saints’ in the Old Testament are always God's people (Pss. 85:9; 148:14), who here are filled with joy (cf. Ps. 16:11); (c) that God's anointed ones (some Heb. MSS; *anointed one* EVV) are not *rejected* (v. 42; the plural probably refers to the Davidic kings as a group and priests together); (d) that God should *remember the love of/for David* (v. 42). It is difficult to be sure of the precise translation, but the objective genitive (NIV, JB, GNB, NRSV, RSV) is preferable for the following reasons: it is supported by the general context of the prayer, especially verses 11, 14-17; this appears to be the meaning in the phrase's only other occurrence in Isaiah 55:3; this is the sense of Psalm 132:11-12; and Chronicles usually refers to David in terms of God's promises to him. The subjective meaning (REB, NEB) cannot be supported from 2 Chronicles 32:32; 35:26, since these verses do not have the precise phrase *has^edê Dāvîd*, while the fact that verse 42b is loosely based on Psalm 132:1 does not mean that both verses have to say the same.”

A most likely interpretation of the term “anointed one” in Solomon's prayer is Solomon himself. He was anointed as king over Israel. The Hebrew word is *mashiyach*, from which the word *Messiah* is derived.

That word makes Solomon's prayer a prophecy about the coming of Christ as Savior of the world.

iii. God's answer to prayer (7:1-22)

a. God's fire and glory (7:1-3).

1 When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple.

2 The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it.

3 When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, "He is good; his love endures forever."

God's answer to Solomon's prayer was immediate and spectacular. It came in the form of a fire that lit the sacrifice on the burnt offering altar and consumed the sacrifice. The same had happened at the dedication of the tabernacle in the desert. We read in Leviticus: "Fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar."⁴⁵ At the same time the *Shekinah*, the glory of the LORD filled the temple. Actually, the Hebrew word used at this place is *kabowd*, which literally means "weight." Paul uses that Hebrew idiom in his epistle to the Corinthians, where we read in the KJV: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."⁴⁶ NIV renders this: "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."

The Tyndale Commentary states: "Chapter 7 is not only central to the message of Chronicles, but it is also one of the most important chapters in the Old Testament. It offers hope to any who call on the name of the LORD, even if they have incurred God's wrath, because God's desire is for full reconciliation. The over-all theme is encapsulated in a passage most of which is unique to Chronicles (vv. 12-16), and which contains one of the best-known verse in Chronicles (v. 14).

The chapter is in two parallel sections, both of which are about answered prayer. The genuineness of God's promise about forgiveness and healing (vv. 11-22) is confirmed and preceded by a very public and dramatic reply to Solomon's prayer (vv. 1-10; cf. 6:14-42). The wider context is also important, however. Verses 12b-22 are in the form of a direct message from God which must be read alongside God's earlier promise about David's dynasty and the temple (1 Ch. 17:3-15). Together, they form the foundation for the Chronicler's entire work, with the earlier passage providing a secure basis for God's invitation here. The account of the Divided Monarchy which follows (chapter 10-36) then demonstrated by actual examples how God answered prayer on the principles of verses 12-16 (e.g. 2 Ch. 20:1-30; 33:10-23).

The significance of such a message would have been easily understood in post-exile Israel. By presenting the temple as a place where right sacrifice and prayer could be accepted, an opening was being provided to exchange Israel's present bleak circumstances for a more positive future. It offered an opportunity to change the course of Israel's history. Sadly, the story of the post-exilic and intertestamental periods shows that this opportunity was largely ignored, despite the few who continued to look for the consolation of Israel (Lk. 2:25)."

The Tyndale Commentary states: "'As' (v. 1, REB) Solomon was finishing his prayer (6:14-42; rather than *when* he had finished as imply by most EVV), God responded by sending fire from heaven (vv. 1, 3). The fire was a tradition if unexpected sign of God's direct response to prayer (cf. 1 Ch. 21:26; 1 Ki. 18:38; Lv. 9:24), whose chief New Testament analogy is the tongues of fire on the day of Pentecost in response to the prayers of the early church (cf. Acts 1:14; 2:1-4). Here, however, it signifies the provision of atonement through the temple.

⁴⁵ Lev. 9:24

⁴⁶ II Cor. 4:17

While the fire descended, God's *glory* seems to have continued both to fill the temple (vv. 1-3; cf. 5:13-14) and to overflow it. It was seen *above the temple* as well as inside it, and was visible to *all the Israelites* (v. 3). The description of the scene includes some fairly obvious allusions to several Pentateuchal passages, such as Exodus 40:34-35 (glory), Leviticus 9:23-24 (fire), and Exodus 20:18; 24:10 (the people watching). Here as elsewhere in Chronicles, Moses' generation provided a model for the Chronicler."

When God's glory filled the temple, the priests were unable to carry out their prescribed duties. When there is a genuine encounter with God's glory, there isn't anything we can contribute. God makes it clear that He is here for our benefit; we are not there for His.

b. *Israel's sacrifice and praise (7:4-10).*

4 *Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD.*

5 *And King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand head of cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats. So the king and all the people dedicated the temple of God.*

6 *The priests took their positions, as did the Levites with the LORD's musical instruments, which King David had made for praising the LORD and which were used when he gave thanks, saying, "His love endures forever." Opposite the Levites, the priests blew their trumpets, and all the Israelites were standing.*

7 *Solomon consecrated the middle part of the courtyard in front of the temple of the LORD, and there he offered burnt offerings and the fat of the fellowship offerings, because the bronze altar he had made could not hold the burnt offerings, the grain offerings and the fat portions.*

8 *So Solomon observed the festival at that time for seven days, and all Israel with him — a vast assembly, people from Lebo Hamath to the Wadi of Egypt.*

9 *On the eighth day they held an assembly, for they had celebrated the dedication of the altar for seven days and the festival for seven days more.*

10 *On the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people to their homes, joyful and glad in heart for the good things the LORD had done for David and Solomon and for his people Israel.*

As a reaction to the manifestation of God's glory the people knelt with their faces on the ground and gave praise with the words: "He is good; his love endures forever." The Hebrew words used are *towb* (good), *l'olaam checed* (His mercy forever). That is a usual expression of praise.

Following this praise, king and people brought an extremely large number of sacrifices, consisting of twenty-two thousand cattle and one hundred twenty thousand sheep and goats. The number of sacrificial animal was so large that the bronze burn offering altar was too small. So Solomon consecrated part of the courtyard to burn the sacrifices.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary writes: "Solomon hallowed the middle of the court. On this extraordinary occasion, when a larger number of animals was offered than one altar and the usual place of rings to which the animals were bound would admit of, the whole space was taken in that was between the place of rings and the west end of the court to be used as a temporary place for additional altars. On that part of the spacious court holocausts were burning all round."

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "Large as the numbers of the *oxen and sheep* sacrificed, yet indications in the narrative roundabout do something to sustain them, as e.g. the

number of people who had come together; the fact that all the people are said to offer sacrifices; the fact that Solomon, because of the press for room (ver. 7), hallowed the *middle of the court*, *i.e.* probably the court itself, in order to find place for the ‘burnt offerings, meat offerings, and fat’ (ver. 7); further, the number of mouths of people that certainly would need filling, not only on one day, but on days more than one, while on the third day (... Leviticus 19:6) any part of a peace offering still left was to be destroyed by fire. Nevertheless, the thought of the scene of butchery is, to our modern imagination, amazing to the last degree. An assemblage of people in Jerusalem, all making also for its temple, of a hundred and twenty thousand people, and a minimum of another twenty-two thousand people, is startling; but add to these a *sheep* apiece for the former number, and an *ox* apiece for the latter (a computation itself necessarily under the mark), and allow several days to be covered by the killing and sacrificing, and one feels that the key and explanation of the present words of the Bible text in this very passage are scarcely in hand. The interesting note in the ‘Speaker’s Commentary’ on ... 1 Kings 8:63 scarcely assists us. Its instances of the ‘profusion’ of the ‘sacrifices of antiquity’ are altogether and immensely distanced by the narrative before us, not only in the number of victims, but in respect of the time in which the victims had to be dispatched and disposed of, and the place and space within which, if not the slaughtering, yet certainly the offering, had to be done.”

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “This experience of God’s presence led directly to great joy in worship, and Chronicles’ record of the occasion is illustrated by several typical themes. For example, mention of *the king and all the people* (vv. 4-5; *cf.* 1 Ch. 15:28; 2 Ch. 1:3) shows the people as a whole joining in worship. Secondly, *priests* and *Levites* took particular care of the musical side of worship (v. 6) as well as the *sacrifices* (vv. 4, 5, 7), notably through the priests’ use of *trumpets* (v. 6 is additional to the original: *cf.* 1 Ch. 15:24; 2 Ch. 5:12; 29:26). The intention was perhaps to encourage Chronicles’ readers to make more use of music in worship. The ‘help’ of the Levites in offering ‘praise’ is also noteworthy (REB, *cf.* NRSV, RSV; for ‘help,’ *cf.* 1 Ch. 12:17-22; 22:17; 2 Ch. 14:11). Thirdly, *David* and *Solomon*’s joint involvement in the temple project is indicated by a background comment on the musical instruments (v. 6; *cf.* the addition of ‘and Solomon’ in v.10 and *e.g.* 2 Ch. 1:4; 11:17). David’s provision of musical instruments is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 23:5 (*cf.* 2 Ch. 29:26-27). Finally, the ceremony demonstrates further continuity between the principles of worship in the Tent and the temple. The offering of large numbers of sacrifices (v. 4; *cf.* Nu. 7:87-88) and making the dedication of the altar a central feature of the ceremony (v. 9; *cf.* Ex. 29:44; Nu. 7:84, 88) are reflections of the Mosaic system of worship.”

c. *God’s promises (7:11-22).*

11 *When Solomon had finished the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of the LORD and in his own palace,*

12 *the LORD appeared to him at night and said: "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices.*

13 *"When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people,*

14 *if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

15 Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

16 I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.

17 "As for you, if you walk before me as David your father did, and do all I command, and observe my decrees and laws,

18 I will establish your royal throne, as I covenanted with David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a man to rule over Israel.'

19 "But if you turn away and forsake the decrees and commands I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them,

20 then I will uproot Israel from my land, which I have given them, and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. I will make it a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples.

21 And though this temple is now so imposing, all who pass by will be appalled and say, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?'

22 People will answer, 'Because they have forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers, who brought them out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them — that is why he brought all this disaster on them.'"

God's answer to Solomon's prayer of dedication of the temple came after an extended period of silence. We read that it wasn't until after Solomon had built his own palace that Solomon heard God speak to him again. According to I Kings, that was after a period of twenty years.⁴⁷

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "It appears that God spoke to Solomon after the royal palace as well as the temple was completed (v. 11), that is, thirteen years after the temple's dedication (cf. 1 Ki. 6:38 – 7:1; 9:10). The time gap is not important either here or in 1 Kings 9:1-9; both see this passage as an answer to Solomon's prayer (2 Ch. 6:14-42; cf. also the answer in 7:1-2). That God spoke to Solomon at night (v. 12) recalls a similar occasion at the previous sanctuary (2 Ch. 1:17). Combining the two passages demonstrates that God stimulates and answers prayers associated with the temple."

God told Solomon that He had chosen the place for the temple to be built. Moses had prophesied centuries before that God would do this. We read: "The LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling."⁴⁸ As we saw earlier, David discovered that the place where the temple was to be built was the threshing floor of Araunah. We read: "At that time, when David saw that the LORD had answered him on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, he offered sacrifices there. Then David said, 'The house of the LORD God is to be here, and also the altar of burnt offering for Israel.'"⁴⁹

The first answer was to Solomon's prayer for the sustenance of nation by providing them with bountiful harvests. Solomon had prayed: "When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward this place and confess

⁴⁷ I Kings 9:10

⁴⁸ Deut. 12:5

⁴⁹ I Chron 21:28; 22:1

your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live, and send rain on the land you gave your people for an inheritance. When famine or plague comes to the land, or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers, or when enemies besiege them in any of their cities, whatever disaster or disease may come, and when a prayer or plea is made by any of your people Israel — each one aware of his afflictions and pains, and spreading out his hands toward this temple—then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive, and deal with each man according to all he does ...”⁵⁰

V. 14 is probably the most important verse in the whole book of Second Chronicles: “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

God calls them “My people,” and He says that they are called by His Name. The Name of God in Israel is in the El, which is short for “Elohiym.” When Jacob wrestled with the angel at Peniel, God told him: “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.”⁵¹ Jacob won the battle because he confessed his sin and asked for forgiveness. We learn this from Hosea where we read: “He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor.”⁵² Victory with God consists in asking for forgiveness of sin and saying: “I am sorry!” Israel was born when Jacob confessed to be a sinner.

Jesus sent this message to the church in Philadelphia: “Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.”⁵³ And about those who are in heaven, John writes: “They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.”⁵⁴

The Hebrew word for “to humble” is *kana`*, which literally means “to bend the knee.” Interestingly, it also means “to vanquish,” as in the verse: “That day Moab *was made subject* to Israel, and the land had peace for eighty years.”⁵⁵

Humbling oneself before God will result in forgiveness of sin and in blessing, not only for the person, but for the land. When Adam sinned, God did not curse man but the ground on which he lived. He said to him: “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about

50 II Chron. 6:26-30

51 Gen. 32:28

52 Hos. 12:4

53 Rev. 3:12

54 Rev. 22:4

55 Judg. 3:30

which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ ‘Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.’⁵⁶

The Tyndale Commentary states about this section: “This paragraph reveals the heart of the book of Chronicles, and is actually Chronicles’ summary of the essential message of the Old Testament. It invites people to take advantage of the enormous and unexpected benefits God gives through prayer. Most of this great promise is unparalleled in 1 Kings 9, though closer examination reveals that verses 12b-16a have been inserted into 1 Kings 9:3 with a view to bringing out the emphasis of the earlier text much more clearly. This has been done by incorporating key words and phrases from elsewhere in Scripture. Some of the wording is closely based on Solomon’s dedicatory prayer, such as the various circumstances in which prayer might be offered (v. 13; cf. 2 Ch. 26, 28), turning as the appropriate mode of repentance (v. 14, cf. 2 Ch. 6:24, 26, 37) and God’s promise to hear and forgive (vv. 14-15; cf. 2 Ch. 6:25, 27, 30, 39, 40). Other phrases, however, are derived from elsewhere in the Old Testament, making God’s invitation securely founded in the law and the prophets. God’s promise to restore Israel to their land (v. 14), for example, is based partly on Leviticus 26:41 where it is addressed to those who humble themselves, and partly on, for example, Jeremiah 30:17; 33:6-7 where it is described as God’s healing. Leviticus 26:40-45 and Jeremiah 33:1-11 seem in fact to have been particularly significant for Chronicles, since they are also quoted in other passages dealing with restoration (cf. Je. 33:11 in 1 Ch. 16:34-36 and Lev. 26:34-35, 43 in 2 Ch. 36:21). These promises, therefore, are a natural fulfillment of God’s purposes throughout the Old Testament as well as a specific answer to Solomon’s prayer.

God’s promise is in three parts: (a) a summary of the disasters mentioned in Solomon’s prayer (v. 13); (b) God’s declared purpose to forgive and heal (v. 14); (c) God’s assurance of his attentiveness and nearness (v. 15-16).

(a) The description of the situations in which people might pray (v. 13) recognizes that such disasters can be sent by God. But it is also a clear indication that even when God is angry, the only effective way out is to turn to the same God for forgiveness (cf. 1 Ch. 21:13).

(b) Although God’s invitation is initially given to *my people* (v. 14), 6:32-33 has made it clear that anyone who acknowledges God’s name and authority may pray with the same confidence of a hearing. This passage is therefore consistent with others where the invitation is explicitly extended to ‘all who call on the name of the LORD ...’ (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:13; Zp. 3:9; 1 Cor. 1:2). ...

Then there follow four expressions summing up the right approach to be adopted in prayer. These expressions are best understood as four facets of one attitude, that sinners should seek God himself in humble repentance, rather than as four separate steps on a long road to forgiveness. Interestingly, from this point on in Chronicles, these expressions are often linked with repentance, a meaning which they did not generally have in previous chapters. Repentance has a new prominence from now on in Chronicles. This was not because Israel was becoming more sinful, but because the new temple represented a fresh basis for restoration and forgiveness.

The principles of restoration and the means by which it could be received are illustrated from now on through certain individuals, on the basis of verse 14. *Humble themselves*, for

⁵⁶ Gen. 3:17

example, is the key motif in the accounts of Rehoboam (2 Ch. 12:6, 7, 12), Hezekiah (30:11; 32:26), and Manasseh (2 Ch. 3:12, 19, 23); *pray* is used of a plea for repentance in 2 Chronicles 6:19ff.; 30:18; 32:20; 33:13 (*cf.* also 1 Ch. 4:10; 5:20; 21:26, where different verbs are found); *seek (my face)* occurs in contexts either of repentance or of general distress (2 Ch. 11:16; 15:4; 20:3-4), though elsewhere it can refer to a general attitude towards God (1 Ch. 16:10, 11; 2 Ch. 22:9; 26:5); and *turn*, one of the Old Testament's main words for 'repent,' is associated with the above phrases in 2 Chronicles 15:4; 30:6, 9; *cf.* also 36:13).

Humble repentance is a necessary stage in God's ultimate aim to *forgive* and *heal*. Another essential element in the process is God's promise to *hear* prayer. This is so important that an emphatic 'I' occurs in MT before *I will hear*, *i.e.* 'I will indeed hear.' It is clearly a direct answer to Solomon's own requests (*cf.* 6:19, 20, 21, 25, *etc.*), but the promise will also be explicitly fulfilled in 2 Chronicles 20:9; 30:20, 27; 33:13; 34:27. *Forgive* is the only one of these terms that does not occur later on, though it does not appear in Chronicles outside 2 Chronicles 6-7 either. The idea of forgiveness is expressed in other ways however, such as God's wrath not being poured out (2 Ch. 12:7; *cf.* 30:8), being found out by God (2 Ch. 15:2, 4, 15), God receiving an entreaty (2 Ch. 33:13, 19), and especially God's atoning or pardoning (2 Ch. 30:18). This last passage is particularly interesting, since it also contains the only other reference in Chronicles to God's healing (2 Ch. 30:20). Both 2 Chronicles 7:14 and 30:18-20 indicate that forgiveness and healing are part of the same work of God. This conclusion is confirmed by a careful examination of 2 Chronicles 30:18-20 and of the way the verb 'to heal' is used throughout the Old Testament. Firstly, 'healed the people' in 2 Chronicles 30:20 is God's answer to a prayer for pardon by those who set their hearts to seek God. Secondly, the promise to *heal their land* (v. 14) seems to be fulfilled in 2 Chronicles 30:20 by the phrase 'healed the people' (it is probably also an answer to 6:25, 27, 31, 38). Thirdly, healing throughout the Old Testament has a mixture of spiritual and physical applications. Sometimes healing is specifically equated with forgiveness (*e.g.* Ho. 14:4; Is. 53:5; 57:18-19; Ps. 41:5); at other times it relates to physical healing (*e.g.* Gn. 20:17; Nu. 13:20; 2 Ki. 20:5, 8). When it is applied to the land, as here, it can refer to bringing the exiles back to the Promised Land (Je. 30:17; 33:6-7) or restoring the land and its people to peace and security (Je. 33:6; Is. 57:19). 'Heal their land' may justly be described therefore as a comprehensive phrase for the restoration of all God's purposes for the people of Israel and for the Promised Land

(c) The promise of restoration is backed up by a remarkable statement about God's presence in the temple. As God again answers a specific request of Solomon's (*cf.* v. 15 with 6:20, 40), he affirms that not only his *ears* and *eyes*, but also his *Name* and even his *heart* are in some undefined way present in the temple. The idea of God having a heart is extremely rare in the Bible, and the only other explicit reference speaks of God suffering heart pains because of the evil of humanity (Gn. 6:6; *cf.* also Gn. 8:21; 1 Sa. 13:14; Acts 13:22). Since the heart expresses the innermost parts of a person or thing, God here offers to humankind his deepest inner being, and reveals a wounded heart. The glory of the mysterious cloud (vv. 1-3) becomes also the glory of what is in effect God's preparation for Jesus' incarnation. It is hard to think of a more intimate way to indicate God's nearness, or a greater encouragement to prayer."

iii. God confirms Solomon's royal throne (7:17-18).

17 "As for you, if you walk before me as David your father did, and do all I command, and observe my decrees and laws,

18 I will establish your royal throne, as I covenanted with David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a man to rule over Israel.'

We find in these verses another obvious reference to the coming of the Messiah. The angel said to Mary in announcing the birth of Christ: “The LORD God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”⁵⁷ Jesus inherited the right to the throne of Israel through the line of Solomon, via Joseph, His adoptive father, although His physical descent from David was not through Solomon, but through David’s son Nathan.⁵⁸

The Tyndale Commentary states: “God now reminds Solomon of the temple’s significance as a symbol of God’s commitment to the Davidic covenant. Prayer offered in the temple came before the God who had set David on his throne, and was in effect an appeal to God’s own kingdom (cf. e.g. 1 Ch. 17:14; 28:5; 29:23; 2 Ch. 9:8). This particular promise was a direct answer to Solomon’s prayer in 6:16-17. Note the closeness of the wording – the promise, ‘You shall never fail to have a man ... on the throne of Israel’ (6:16) is here confirmed as *You shall never fail to have a man to rule over Israel* (7:18). Two small changes in verse 18 (cf. 1 Ki. 9:5) underline God’s commitment to the dynasty. ‘As I promised’ has become *As I covenanted* ..., while a man to rule over Israel is a deliberate echo of the messianic promise of Micah 5:2. The point is not that Solomon should be viewed as a messianic figure, for verse 17 draws attention to his humanity and need of obedience. Rather, it was God, not man, who guaranteed the future of David’s line, and only he had the authority to answer Israel’s prayer.”

iv. God may reject this temple (7:19-22).

19 "But if you turn away and forsake the decrees and commands I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them,

20 then I will uproot Israel from my land, which I have given them, and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. I will make it a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples.

21 And though this temple is now so imposing, all who pass by will be appalled and say, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?'

22 People will answer, 'Because they have forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers, who brought them out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them — that is why he brought all this disaster on them.'"

This is one of the most remarkable parts of God’s answer to Solomon. It makes the division of Israel into the northern and Judean kingdoms, as well as the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity part of the warning that God gives to Solomon here. It was Solomon’s involvement with idolatry at the end of his life,⁵⁹ that caused the abolition of the northern kingdom and the Babylonian captivity for the southern.

⁵⁷ Luke 1:32-33

⁵⁸ See Matt. 1:6, 7, 16 and Luke 3:31

⁵⁹ See I Kings 11:4-13.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “The parallel (1 Kings 9:6) puts it, according to the Authorized Version, ‘If ye shall *at all* turn from following me,’ etc. which probably errs by excess. Much mercy, much forbearing, long-suffering, and slowness to anger, were sure to mark the Divine rule, nor would condemnation take effect, nor did it take effect, till the revolt of the people was a thorough revolt, as finally testifying itself in the crucifixion of Christ. The same Hebrew words for *a proverb and a byword among all nations* are found in verse 37.”

If, as is generally supposed, the Chronicler wrote these words upon the return of Israel’s remnant from Babylonian captivity, the obvious lesson was that the people would remember its history and learn from it. The main lesson learned from history, however, is that people don’t learn from history!

God’s warning to Solomon about the consequences of his sin was fulfilled in the days of Jeremiah, when the temple was destroyed at the order of King Nebuchadnezzar. We read: “On the tenth day of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, who served the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He set fire to the temple of the LORD, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down.”⁶⁰ Only two of the lower rows of stone of the temple wall were left, which presently form the basis of Jerusalem’s “Wailing Wall.”

I. Solomon completes the temple (8:1-16)

i. Solomon’s other building work (8:1-6)

1 At the end of twenty years, during which Solomon built the temple of the LORD and his own palace,

2 Solomon rebuilt the villages that Hiram had given him, and settled Israelites in them.

3 Solomon then went to Hamath Zobah and captured it.

4 He also built up Tadmor in the desert and all the store cities he had built in Hamath.

5 He rebuilt Upper Beth Horon and Lower Beth Horon as fortified cities, with walls and with gates and bars,

6 as well as Baalath and all his store cities, and all the cities for his chariots and for his horses-whatever he desired to build in Jerusalem, in Lebanon and throughout all the territory he ruled.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “The final section of Solomon’s reign (chs. 8-9) concentrates on the theme of praise for all that God has done for Solomon (see especially 9:8). This unit is clearly connected with the opening section about Solomon (2 Ch. 1-2), both of which deal with Solomon’s achievements and reputation. The chief difference is that whereas the earlier chapters describe Solomon’s preparations in response to God’s revelation at Gibeon, now that work is fulfilled. The real subject of chapters 8-9, therefore, is what God achieved through Solomon, rather than Solomon’s own achievements.

The details of chapter 8 concern people and buildings in Israel, while chapter 9 is about Solomon’s external reputation. Chapter 8 falls into three main categories:

vv. 1-6 Solomon’s building work

⁶⁰ Jer. 52:12-14

- vv. 7-11 Role of foreigners in Solomon's kingdom
- vv. 12-15 Temple ceremonies and personnel
- v. 16 Summary of Solomon's work

ii. Foreigners in Solomon's kingdom (8:7-11)

7 All the people left from the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites (these peoples were not Israelites),

8 that is, their descendants remaining in the land, whom the Israelites had not destroyed — these Solomon conscripted for his slave labor force, as it is to this day.

9 But Solomon did not make slaves of the Israelites for his work; they were his fighting men, commanders of his captains, and commanders of his chariots and charioteers.

10 They were also King Solomon's chief officials — two hundred and fifty officials supervising the men.

11 Solomon brought Pharaoh's daughter up from the City of David to the palace he had built for her, for he said, "My wife must not live in the palace of David king of Israel, because the places the ark of the LORD has entered are holy."

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on v. 7: "The descendants of the Canaanites who remained in the country were treated as war-prisoners, being obliged to 'pay tribute, or to serve as galley-slaves' (2 Chron. 2:18), while the Israelites were employed in no works but such as were of an honorable character."

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "These verses corresponding very nearly exactly with the parallel (... 1 Kings 9:20-23), betray how it was a thing never to be forgotten, if only as a fact, that the extermination of the old possessors of the land had not been entire; so that allusion to it is not omitted even by a post-Captivity compiler. The parallel charitably 'whom the children of Israel were not able to destroy utterly,' where our text shows with exacter fidelity, *whom the children of Israel consumed not*. The parallel also uses the words, 'levy a tribute of *bond-service*,' for our more ambiguous *make to pay tribute* (... Judges 3:1-7). In the words *until this day*, the copyist, shall we say, too slavish, is again detected (ver. 9). The 'levy' in ver. 21 of the parallel probably explains the suddenly mentioned similar language of its fifteenth verse, and again betrays the collected and copied nature of the historic material, the carefulness of sequence not being as observable in selections as might be desired. This distinction between the remnant of aliens and the people of Israel was manifestly that the *menial* and the laborious service was put on the former. Useful but familiar references to this whole subject are found in ... Judges 1:21-36; 3:1-5; ... 1 Chronicles 22:2; ... 1 Kings 5:13-18. For our *two hundred and fifty* (which gives the number of overseers over Israel only) the parallel reads, 'five hundred and fifty.' It will be remembered that an analogous difference occurs between our ... 2 Chronicles 2:18 and ... 1 Kings 5:16. Whether it were the determining reason or not in these two places, it is very imaginable that it would be of less importance in the ages of the post-Captivity analyst to dwell on the minutiae dwell on the minutiae of the different treatment of the aliens."

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on v. 11: "Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David. On his marriage with the Egyptian princess at the beginning of his reign, he assigned her a temporary abode in the city of David - i.e., Jerusalem-until a suitable palace for his wife had been erected. While that palace was in progress, he himself lodged in the palace of David, but he did not allow her to occupy it, because he felt that, she being a pagan proselyte, and having brought from her own country an

establishment of pagan maid-servants, there would have been an impropriety in her being domiciled in a mansion which was, or had been, hallowed by the reception of the ark. It seems she was received, on her arrival, into his mother's abode (Song 3:4; 8:2). There is in the valley of Jehoshaphat a monolith, ... situated at the north end of the village Kefr Silwan, which resembles in its architecture some of the tombs of Egypt, and still more a sepulchral monument It is partially isolated; the sides contract slightly, and are surmounted by a deep Egyptian cornice. [one archeologist's] conviction is, that this is the chapel where Solomon's Egyptian wife performed the sacred rites of her native country (*cf.* 1 Kings 7:8-12)."

iii. Temple ceremonies and personnel (8:12-15)

12 *On the altar of the LORD that he had built in front of the portico, Solomon sacrificed burnt offerings to the LORD,*

13 *according to the daily requirement for offerings commanded by Moses for Sabbaths, New Moons and the three annual feasts — the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles.*

14 *In keeping with the ordinance of his father David, he appointed the divisions of the priests for their duties, and the Levites to lead the praise and to assist the priests according to each day's requirement. He also appointed the gatekeepers by divisions for the various gates, because this was what David the man of God had ordered.*

15 *They did not deviate from the king's commands to the priests or to the Levites in any matter, including that of the treasuries.*

Vv. 12 and 13 inform us, without going into detail, that Solomon brought the daily sacrifices required by the Law of Moses. The daily sacrifice is described in Numbers, where we read: "This is the offering made by fire that you are to present to the LORD: two lambs a year old without defect, as a regular burnt offering each day. Prepare one lamb in the morning and the other at twilight, together with a grain offering of a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a quarter of a hin of oil from pressed olives. This is the regular burnt offering instituted at Mount Sinai as a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the LORD by fire. The accompanying drink offering is to be a quarter of a hin of fermented drink with each lamb. Pour out the drink offering to the LORD at the sanctuary. Prepare the second lamb at twilight, along with the same kind of grain offering and drink offering that you prepare in the morning. This is an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD."⁶¹

It is not clear whether Solomon brought those sacrifices personally, or whether the priest brought them as representative of the king. The general rule was that the person who brought the sacrifice slaughtered the animal and then handed it over to the priest to be put on the altar. It is not likely that the king would go to the temple twice a day and personally present the sacrifices. All the rituals were probably carried out in his name with the animals he sent. It is more likely that Solomon attended personally at the special occasion described, such as New Moon, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "In all this, Solomon is faithful to the commands of both *Moses* (v. 13) and *David* (vv. 14-15). The link with Moses is indicated by incorporating information from Deuteronomy 16:1-16 about the annual feasts. David is confirmed as a second

⁶¹ Num. 28:3-8

Moses (*cf.* 1 Ch. 15:15; 22:13; 2 Ch. 23:18), as Solomon carries out the instructions God revealed to David (*cf.* especially 1 Ch. 28:11-19; also 1 Ch. 23:31; 2 Ch. 2:3-4). The focus of the temple's regular ceremonies was the altar of burnt offerings (v. 13), where Israel daily offered praise and received forgiveness (*cf.* 1 Chr. 22:1; 2 Ch. 7:9).

Most of the older Bible scholars believe that “the king’s command,” mentioned in v. 15, is the command of David, not of Solomon.

iv. The temple completed (8:16)

16 All Solomon's work was carried out, from the day the foundation of the temple of the LORD was laid until its completion. So the temple of the LORD was finished.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “The final stage of the temple narrative is carefully unfolded, like each of the intervening ones (1 Ch. 29:6-9; 2 Ch. 2:1; 5:1; 7:8-10; *cf.* also 2 Ch. 29:35). Solomon’s work was summed up in the temple, and the following blessing (8:17-28) represent God’s bonuses given in answer to his opening prayer (2 Ch. 1:7-12). As with David, God shows his readiness to pour blessings on his people (*cf.* 1 Ch. 14-16).

J. Solomon’s splendor (8:17 – 19:31)

i. Solomon’s international relationships (8:17-9:12)

a. Solomon and the king of Tyre 8:17-18; 9:10-11).

17 Then Solomon went to Ezion Geber and Elath on the coast of Edom.

18 And Hiram sent him ships commanded by his own officers, men who knew the sea. These, with Solomon's men, sailed to Ophir and brought back four hundred and fifty talents of gold, which they delivered to King Solomon.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “Two striking examples of Solomon’s dealings with foreign rulers, one from the north and the other from the south, introduce a more general account of Solomon’s reputation among *the kings of the earth* (*cf.* v. 23)....

The text follows 1 Kings closely, with the one significant exception that it omits the extensive criticisms of Solomon in 1 King 11:1-40. The reason for this important change is not because the Chronicler saw Solomon as a paragon of unparalleled virtue and success, for it has been repeatedly shown that Chronicles’ readers were expected to be familiar with the basic story in King Mention of Ahijah (v. 29; *cf.* 1 Ki. 11:29-30) and Solomon’s unfortunate legacy (2 Ch. 10:1-15) clearly show that in the Chronicler’s view his glory was not untarnished.”

b. Solomon and the queen of Sheba (9:1-9, 12).

1 When the queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's fame, she came to Jerusalem to test him with hard questions. Arriving with a very great caravan — with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones — she came to Solomon and talked with him about all she had on her mind.

2 Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for him to explain to her.

3 When the queen of Sheba saw the wisdom of Solomon, as well as the palace he had built,

4 the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, the cupbearers in their robes and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the LORD, she was overwhelmed.

5 She said to the king, "The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true.

6 But I did not believe what they said until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half the greatness of your wisdom was told me; you have far exceeded the report I heard.

7 How happy your men must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom!

8 Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on his throne as king to rule for the LORD your God. Because of the love of your God for Israel and his desire to uphold them forever, he has made you king over them, to maintain justice and righteousness."

9 Then she gave the king 120 talents of gold, large quantities of spices, and precious stones. There had never been such spices as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

10 (The men of Hiram and the men of Solomon brought gold from Ophir; they also brought algumwood and precious stones.

12 King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired and asked for; he gave her more than she had brought to him. Then she left and returned with her retinue to her own country.

The Tyndale Commentary states: "There are some minor differences with the text of Kings in both paragraphs, which are often interpreted as the Chronicler misreading his source For example, Hiram sent ships in 2 Chronicles 8:18, whereas 1 Kings 9:26-27 says that Hiram sent sailors and that Solomon built the ships. However, the fact that in 1 Kings 9:27 Hiram's sailors were sent with the fleet confirms that even in the earlier version, the sailors did not travel unaccompanied. It is most likely that the materials were imported from Tyre and assembled by the Red Sea.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia writes about the queen of Sheba: "The two Old Testament accounts of the coming of the queen of Sheba ... to Solomon differ slightly from one another, and, of the two, that in 1 Kings is the older. (1) The words 'concerning the name of Yahweh' (1 Kings 10:1) are lacking in 2 Chronicles; while the Septuagint in 1 Kings has 'and the name of Yahweh,' apparently a correction of the Massoretic Text. (2) For 1 Kings 10:9, 'because Yahweh loved Israel for ever,' 2 Chron. 9:8 has 'because thy God loved Israel, to establish them for ever OQ; the Septuagint in 1 Kings has 'because Yahweh loved Israel, to establish it forever.' (3) In the last verse of each account we find another difference: 2 Chron. 9:12 says that Solomon gave to the queen all her desire, 'besides that which she had brought unto the king.' i.e. according to some, besides the equivalent of what she had brought to him; 1 Kings 10:13 margin has 'besides that which he gave her according to the hand of king Solomon,' i.e. besides gifts commensurate with his own wealth and power.

The narrative tells of the queen of Sheba, on hearing of Solomon's great wisdom, coming to test him with perplexing questions or riddles (compare Judg. 14:12). She brought presents to the king, and interviewed him: 'And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, and the house that he had built' (i.e. the palace, not the temple) as well as its arrangements, 'and his burnt-offering which he offered in the house of Yahweh (so read and translate with the Revised Version margin in 1 Kings 10:5, and also in 2 Chron. 9:4); there was no more spirit in her': the half of Solomon's wisdom had not been told her. 'Happy,' she said to

him, 'are thy wives (so read with Septuagint, Syriac and Old Latin versions), happy are these thy servants.' She then exchanged gifts with him and returned to her own land."

The Pulpit Commentary states on the name of the queen's country, Sheba: "This was the name of a descendant of Cush, a Hamite (... Genesis 10:7; ... 1 Chronicles 1:9); also a son of Jokshan.

Abraham's son by Keturah (... Genesis 25:3; ... 1 Chronicles 1:32). It is quite uncertain who of these constituted, or preponderated in, the country of Sheba here referred to. This is probably Saba, the capital of Yemen, an important province of Arabia, west of the Red Sea, north of the Indian Ocean, and extending upward nearly to Idumaea. The city was reputed splendid, the country wealthy, and long as the most southerly inhabited part of the world. If it were, as is believed, first occupied by Cushites it was afterwards peopled also by Joktanites and Kokahanites, as above. In addition- to the two celebrated allusions to it, ever memorable, see as other references,... Job 6:19, ... Psalm 72:10, 15, ... Isaiah 60:6; ... Jeremiah 6:20; Ezekiel 27:22, 23; 38:18; ... Matthew 12:42; Luke 11:31.... The hard questions consisted in riddles (... Judges 14:2) and enigmas and primitive casuistry, in which the Arabians found some considerable portion of their mental gymnastics. These, no doubt, bore some mild cousinly relationship to the proverbs and songs of Solomon, and his treasures of botanical and natural history facts (... 1 Kings 4:29-32). *Spices*, Hebrew *b^asaamiym*, here as also in the parallel. This word is used twenty-one times, and in a slightly varied form (as in the ninth verse of this same chapter) nine more times. It is almost always translated (Authorized Version) by this same word 'spice' or 'spices' (except ... Exodus 30:23; ... 2 Chronicles 16:14; ... Esther 2:12; ... Isaiah 3:24). There are other Hebrew words for 'spices,' such as *n^ako`t* (Genesis 37:25; 43:11), *b^asaamiym* (... Exodus 30:7), *haareqach* (Song of Solomon 8:2; ... Ezekiel 24:10); but the 'spice' or 'spices' designated by our present word, and the exact name or nature of which cannot be certainly pronounced upon, was in great request for domestic, ecclesiastical, funeral (... 2 Chronicles 16:14), and other purposes, and was a chief export from Arabia, Syria, and Persia. *Gold in abundance*. Of course, it was not necessary to suppose that the gold that came either now from Sheba, or even from Ophir, was obtained from the immediate region; as seen before, there may have been a special market or emporium for them there. *Precious stones*. These were used for sacred purposes, and for domestic and dress ornaments, and were graven upon in early times by the Hebrews. The chief of those mentioned in the Old Testament are the carbuncle, sardus, topaz (... Exodus 39:11; Ezekiel 28:13), agate, amethyst, ligure (Exodus 39:12), beryl, jasper, onyx (... Genesis 2:12; Exodus 39:6, 13; ... Ezekiel 28:13), ruby (... Job 28:18; ... Proverbs 3:15), chrysolite, chrysoprasus (Ezekiel 28:13). The precious stones which the queen brought are likely enough, however, to have comprised other varieties (including the pearl from the Persian Gulf), such as Pliny describes; and see in particular ... 1 Chronicles 29:2; ... Ezekiel 27:16; *All that was in her heart*. The expression simply means *all that she had so desired to get information upon, since she had heard of the fame of Solomon.*"

The report of the queen's visit ends with the statement: "King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired and asked for; he gave her more than she had brought to him." *The Tyndale Commentary* comments: "The story, which closely follows that in Kings, has undergone considerable expansion and embellishment in later versions, in comparison with which the Old Testament accounts are 'the briefest and most concise.' It is the legendary additions that speak of a union between the king and queen, based on a sexual understanding of the verb *came* (v. 2) and the phrase all she desired (v. 12). According to Jewish and Ethiopian traditions respectively, either Nebuchadnezzar or Menelik I, the founder of the Ethiopian dynasty, were born from their

union. The existence of a Sabeian queen in Solomon's day, however, is perfectly reasonable, given references in eight-century BC Assyrian texts to North Arabian queens, and to Sabeian rulers from c. 800 BC."

One of the last emperors of Abyssinia, Haile Selassie, who escaped when Mussolini's Fascists troops invaded his country before the outbreak of World War Two, claimed to be a descendant from King Solomon, by his union with the queen of Sheba. If that is true, the statement "King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired and asked for; he gave her more than she had brought to him" covers more than meets the eye. One of the reasons for the queen's visit to Solomon may have been that she wanted offspring to occupy her throne, which she could not have from any of her countrymen who were of a lower class than she was.

The Pulpit Commentary states: "The abstinence on the part of the queen in her mention of the LORD God of Israel, and of *the LORD thy God*, of any indication of a desire that he should become her God, is as suggestive as it is noticeable (compare Hiram's language in ... 2 Chronicles 2:12.)"

The Tyndale Commentary furthermore observes: "After the queen's arrival (v. 1), the biblical story concentrates on what the queen saw and heard (vv. 2-4), what she said (vv. 5-8), and what she did (v. 9). Her aim was to *test* Solomon with *hard questions* (v. 1). The latter is sometimes translated 'riddles,' and includes not only popular riddles (*cf.* Jdg. 14:12-18), but the difficult issues of Old Testament wisdom such as the meaning of life and death (Ps. 49:4) or God's unfathomable wonders (Ps. 78:2; 'hidden things,' NIV). The equivalent Greek word (*ainigma*) in the Septuagint occurs only once in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 13:12, where it is usually translated 'darkly, dimly,' typifying the way things are understood in life. Solomon's supernatural gift of wisdom (*cf.* 1 Cor. 12:8, however, enabled him to respond to all the queen's probings (v. 2). In addition to its intellectual and problem-solving qualities, this wisdom was also practical and religious. Its evidence could be seen in 'the house' (NEB, NRSV, RSV; palace, NIV, REB, GNB) that he had built (v. 3), and in his administration (v. 4). The house almost certainly refers to the temple, since the royal palace is always separately identified as such (*cf.* 2:1; 7:11; 8:1), whereas 'the house' on its own signifies the temple (*e.g.* 2:4, 9; 6:2, 9). Among the list of items illustrating Solomon's wisdom the reading burnt offerings (v. 4, NIV, NRSV, RSV, *cf.* GNB) is based only on the VSS and 1 Kings 10:5 (*cf.* 2 Ch. 5:6; 7:4-5, 7), MT reads 'upper chamber,' though most commentators prefer 'stairs, ascent,' involving a small emendation (*cf.* NIV ...)."

ii. Solomon's wisdom, fame and fortune (9:13-28)

a. Solomon's gold (9:13-21)

13 *The weight of the gold that Solomon received yearly was 666 talents,*

14 *not including the revenues brought in by merchants and traders. Also all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the land brought gold and silver to Solomon.*

15 *King Solomon made two hundred large shields of hammered gold; six hundred bekas of hammered gold went into each shield.*

16 *He also made three hundred small shields of hammered gold, with three hundred bekas of gold in each shield. The king put them in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon.*

17 *Then the king made a great throne inlaid with ivory and overlaid with pure gold.*

18 *The throne had six steps, and a footstool of gold was attached to it. On both sides of the seat were armrests, with a lion standing beside each of them.*

19 Twelve lions stood on the six steps, one at either end of each step. Nothing like it had ever been made for any other kingdom.

20 All King Solomon's goblets were gold, and all the household articles in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon were pure gold. Nothing was made of silver, because silver was considered of little value in Solomon's day.

21 The king had a fleet of trading ships manned by Hiram's men. Once every three years it returned, carrying gold, silver and ivory, and apes and baboons.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary observes about the amount of gold Solomon received on a yearly basis: “The sum named is equal to 3,646,350 British pounds sterling; and if we take the proportion of silver (2 Chron. 9:14), which is not taken into consideration, at 1 to 9, there would be about 2,000,000 pounds, making a yearly supply of neatly 6,000,000 pounds, being a vast amount for an infant effort in maritime commerce.” TNLT renders this: “Each year Solomon received about 25 tons of gold.”

Although it is difficult, with the changing of the price of gold on the present-day market, to determine the amount of US\$, it is obvious that Solomon ought to be considered a multi-millionaire, if not billionaire in his day. The statement of Solomon’s wealth, as expressed in terms of gold, would have made more sense to people who lived when the value of money was expressed in terms of the gold standard.

The Tyndale Commentary writes: “Solomon’s annual revenue of *gold* (vv. 13-14) seems extraordinary by modern standards, but, in the context of the ancient world, it was not out of place.

The total amount is not given, though the 666 *talents* (= approx. 22 tons) received annually probably derived from tribute and some trade. Special mention is made of the use of gold for large and small decorated *shields* (vv. 15-16; cf. 2 Ch. 12:9), an ivory *throne* (vv. 17-19), and various vessels (v. 20). The shields were deposited in the armory, that is, the *Palace of the Forest of Lebanon* (cf. Is. 22:8). The measure of gold used for the shields is not specified in MT, which normally means that the shekels are implied (so most EVV). NIV, though, has *bekas* or half-shekels, which attempts to harmonize with ‘three minas’ in 1 Kings 10:17. Since it is not always clear whether the mina was worth fifty or 100 shekels, however, caution is preferable. The unique *throne*, which was probably made of wood inlaid with *ivory*, had a golden *footstool* (v. 18), though 1 Kings 10:19 (MT) has ‘a rounded top’ or possibly ‘a calf’s head’ (LXX). The simplest solution to these discrepancies is to accept that Kings and Chronicles were drawing attention to different features of this special throne. *Kingdom* (v. 19) should probably be understood as ‘king,’ the abstract term being used for the concrete, as in 2 Chronicles 12:8. *Nothing was made of silver* (v. 20) is an additional phrase not in MT, and should be deleted. *Trading ships* (v. 21; cf. GNB) is a preferable translation to the more literal ‘the ships that went to Tarshish’ (JB; cf. NRSV, RSV, REB, NEB). By Tarshish, probably Tartessus in Spain, was simply meant a far-off place, just like ‘the Indies’ in the early days of European exploration (cf. 2 Ch. 20:37).”

b. Solomon’s international supremacy (9:22-28).

22 King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth.

23 All the kings of the earth sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart.

24 Year after year, everyone who came brought a gift — articles of silver and gold, and robes, weapons and spices, and horses and mules.

25 Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem.

26 He ruled over all the kings from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt.

27 The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore — fig trees in the foothills.

28 Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from all other countries.

No details are given about Solomon's international relationships. We read that his wisdom caught the attention of other potentates, who, like the queen of Sheba, came to visit him to hear his wisdom. Those visits contributed to Solomon's wealth as well as his fame, because no one came empty handed.

In a way, Solomon foreshadowed the Messiah. Yet, in Jesus' own words, Solomon was an imperfect image of the One to come. We read: "The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here."⁶²

In a sense, we, as members of the body of Christ, have inherited that wisdom. The Apostle Paul writes to the church in Colosse: "My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."⁶³

Solomon's imperfection is also demonstrated in his disobedience to the law of the kingdom. Moses stipulated what the king of Israel was allowed and what he was not. We read: "The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the LORD has told you, 'You are not to go back that way again.' He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left."⁶⁴ Not only do we have no record of Solomon acquiring a copy of the law and reading it daily, we do read that he did procure horses from Egypt and married many wives; the first one an Egyptian prince.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "The paragraph begins with *all the kings of the earth* (vv. 22, 23), is centered on *all the kings* (v. 26), and concludes with *all countries* (v. 28). It

⁶² Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31

⁶³ Col. 2:2, 3

⁶⁴ Deut. 17:16-20

summarizes various elements, with verses 25-28 including scattered statements from 1 Kings 4:21, 26. Such extensive fame was no accident, and was certainly regarded as one of God's covenant blessings for David's dynasty (*cf.* 1 Ch. 17:8). It was also enjoyed by other kings who remained faithful to the LORD (*e.g.* 1 Ch. 14:17; 2 Ch. 20:29; 26:8, 15).

Horses were as much a symbol of wealth in the ancient Near East as gold and ivory, and had been introduced into Israel only by Solomon's father. Comparison between the numbers of *stalls*, *horses*, and *chariots* in verse 25 with those in parallel passage (1 Ki. 4:26; 10:26; 2 Ch. 1:14) reveals some confusion in textual transmission. Though certainty is impossible, a reasonable solution is to think of 1,400 chariots (1 Ki. 10:26; 2 Ch. 1:14) and twelve thousand horses (NIV, REB, NEB; rather than 'horsemen,' RSV), on the analogy of the Ugaritic practice of three horses to a chariot, and allowing for breeding and training. In this context, *four thousand stalls* if preferable to the 'forty thousand' of 1 Kings 4:26 (MT, 5:6). There are two further examples in verses 25-26 where Chronicles has preserved a text superior to Kings. Kept (v. 25; 'stationed,' NRSV, RSV), is universally preferred to the equivalent defective verb in 1 Kings 10:26, while the word *to* before *the land of the Philistines* is omitted in 1 Kings 4:21."

The Pulpit Commentary states about *All the kings of the earth*: "i.e. of the lands of tributary sovereignties, from Euphrates to the borders of Egypt, and to the Philistines (... 1 Kings 4:21; also note ... Genesis 15:18; ... Exodus 23:31; ... Numbers 22:5; ... Joshua 1:4; ... 2 Samuel 10:16).

Every man his present; Hebrew, *minchah*; which word represent the treats, paid partly in money, partly in kind (... 2 Samuel 8:2; ... 2 Kings 17:3, 4; and the parallel). A rate year by year; Hebrew *shaanaah b^ashaanaah*; which might be rendered, 'a yearly thing.'"

iii. Concluding formula for Solomon (9:29-31)

29 *As for the other events of Solomon's reign, from beginning to end, are they not written in the records of Nathan the prophet, in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite and in the visions of Iddo the seer concerning Jeroboam son of Nebat?*

30 *Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years.*

31 *Then he rested with his fathers and was buried in the city of David his father. And Rehoboam his son succeeded him as king.*

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary concludes its comments on Solomon's reign with the observation: "Solomon undoubtedly carried the Hebrew kingdom to its highest pitch of worldly glory, and his completion of the grand work, the centralizing of the national worship at Jerusalem, where the natives went up three times a year, has given his name a prominent place in the history of the ancient church. But his reign had a disastrous influence upon the 'special people,' and the example of his deplorable idolatries, the connections he formed with foreign princes the commercial speculations he entered into, and the luxuries introduced into the land seem in a great measure to have altered and deteriorated the Jewish character."

The Tyndale Commentary adds: "*From beginning to end* ('from first to last,' JB, NRSV, RSV, REB, NEB) is a typical Chronicles expression not found in Kings (*cf.* 1 Ch. 29:29) most likely refer to Kings, (*cf.* 1 Ch. 29:29; 2 Ch. 12:15; 35:27). The prophetic sources (v. 29; *cf.* 1 Ch. 29:29) most likely refer to Kings, or possibly to prophetic collection within Kings. *Nathan's* contribution comes from 1 Kings 1:1-53, *Ahijah's* from 1 Kings 11:29-39, and *Iddo* is

traditionally regarded as the anonymous prophet in 1 Kings 13:1-10 (*cf.* 2 Ch. 12:15; 15:22). The Chronicler maintains his strong interest in the prophets, confirming that his account of Solomon is based on the words of God's spokesmen (*cf.* 2 Pet. 1:21)."

III. THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH (2 Ch. 10:1 – 36:23)

A. Rehoboam (10:1 – 12:16)

i. Israel separates from Judah 10:1-19)

a. Rehoboam's abortive coronation plans (10:1-5).

1 Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all the Israelites had gone there to make him king.

2 When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard this (he was in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), he returned from Egypt.

3 So they sent for Jeroboam, and he and all Israel went to Rehoboam and said to him:

4 "Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you."

5 Rehoboam answered, "Come back to me in three days." So the people went away.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "This chapter deals with the reasons for Israel's division after Solomon's death (*cf.* v. 19), setting the scene not only for the rest of Rehoboam's reign but for the rest of 2 Chronicles. The key phrase *turn of events* (v. 15; 'turn of affairs,' NRSV, RSV; 'to bring about,' GNB) translates a rare word in Hebrew which is to be interpreted alongside the related verb 'turn' in 1 Chronicles 10:14 (*cf.* 12:23). These two verses describe two great 'turning points, pivotal events which usher in new eras concerning the setting up and downfall of David's dynasty. The first era opens with the transfer of Saul's kingdom to David (1 Ch. 10:14) and results in the dynasty of David and Solomon (1 Ch. 10 – 2 Ch. 9). This incident introduces a much sadder story, beginning with the division of Solomon's kingdom and culminating in the collapse of Israel and its monarchy (2 Ch. 10-36)."

The Pulpit Commentary states about Rehoboam's going to Shechem: "This verse would have been far better placed last in the previous chapter, but now, left without note of time, it purports to tell us that (whereas by the last clause of the previous chapter 'Rehoboam reigned in his' father Solomon's 'stead,' and had been *presumably* accepted as his heir and successor in Jerusalem and all Judaea) Rehoboam, now somewhat later on, repairs to Shechem (the ancient capital, and the prized position of the high-spirited tribe of Ephraim) to receive some final recognition as king from 'all Israel.' ... *Rehoboam*. Solomon's son by Naarah; an Ammonite princess (... 1 Kings 14:21, 31). To his son Abijah, by his favorite wife Maachah, who was the third of the wives that belonged to the house of Jesse, he bequeathed the kingdom. Wanting any positive Scripture statement of the matter of Rehoboam going to Shechem, we believe ... that it was not a designed stroke of policy, with the view of conciliating or flattering Ephraim. *Shechem* [was] for many reasons one of the most interesting geographical names in all the Old Testament. It was the ancient capital, as Shiloh, near to it, was the ancient seat of the national worship. It was situated in Ephraim, with Ebal to the immediate north, and Gerizim to the immediate south. ... It was the half-way resting place, at the end of the second day journey, for travelers from Galilee to Jerusalem, and hence bore the name in later times, it is thought of Mabertha, or Marbatha. ... *All Israel*. No doubt this expression may mean even here the assemblage of the federated twelve tribes. Considering the immediate recurrence of the expression in ver. 3, it must be, however, that the Jeroboam party of the ten tribes (headed by the strong and self-conscious

Ephraimites) are especially in view; in point of fact, of course, all the twelve tribes were represented in the gather of ver. 1. There can be no division of opinion about this, though the meeting be represented as one demanded or occasioned by the attitude of Israel, in the lesser comprehension of the name....

We are told ... how Jeroboam, in his refuge-retreat in Egypt (... 1 Kings 11:26-40), 'heard' of Solomon's demise, and apparently ... heard of it in this wise, that 'they,' *i.e.* the 'all Israel' (of our first verse) 'had sent and called him.' Probably the growing sense of discontent and the rankling in those tribes that were not closely breathing the atmosphere of Jerusalem and the one home county, because of their burdens and taxation, and possibly also Ephraim's ancient and famed rivalry, knew instinctively that this hour of Solomon's death was the hour, if any, of their redemption. ... Solomon's death must have been an accomplished fact before they (whoever the 'they' were) sent to Egypt to Jeroboam, and that the sending and his returning or otherwise, at any rate his hearing and consequent returning, must have taken time.

The Tyndale Commentary states: "*Rehoboam* is met by a tribal delegation intent on negotiating the terms of the kingship rather than celebrating the fact of it (vv. 3-4), as he expected (v. 1). He therefore suggests a delay of *three days* (v. 5). That he is surprised shows him to be out touch with the real feelings of *all Israel* (vv. 1, 3). All twelve tribes are probably meant, since for Chronicles the ten northern tribes are just as much the covenant people....

The reference to *Jeroboam* raises some textual problems. The main reason is that the Greek text of 1 Kings 12:24 has a much longer account of Jeroboam's activities, though Chronicles' omission of Jeroboam's assumption of kingship in 1 Kings 12:20 is a complicating factor. However, the latter is left out because Chronicles is not concerned with the separate history of the northern kingdom. It is often alleged that 1 Kings 12:20 refers to Jeroboam's initial return from Egypt, and that the reference to him in 1 Kings 12:2-3a is a later insertion based on Chronicles If, however, 1 Kings 12:20 is seen as referring to Jeroboam's coronation rather than his initial return from Egypt, then the problem is greatly reduced. In that case, Jeroboam was indeed the leader of the northern tribes in the negotiations with Rehoboam As a 'man of rank' (JB) who had been in charge of Solomon's forced labor gangs from Israel (1 Ki 11:26-28), and as recipient of a prophecy in his favor (1 Ki. 11:29-39), he was well placed for this role.

The tribes' accusations against Solomon were serious. The phrases *harsh labor* (*cf.* Ex. 5:9; 6:9) and *heavy yoke* (*cf.* Ex. 6:6-7; Lv. 26:13) charge him with oppressing Israel as Pharaoh had done (contrast Mt. 11:29-30; Gal. 5:1). In no sense, therefore can Chronicles be said to exonerate Solomon as blameless ... especially as a further analogy between Zedekiah and the Pharaoh of the exodus is given as one of the reasons for the exile (*cf.* 2 Ch. 36:13). The specific complaints concerned taxation, forced labor, and a centralization policy which reduced the tribes' influence and authority. Nevertheless, the people still expected to make Rehoboam king – verse 4 is literally '*so that we may serve you.*'

b. Advice for Rehoboam (10:6-15).

6 Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon during his lifetime. "How would you advise me to answer these people?" he asked.

7 They replied, "If you will be kind to these people and please them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants."

8 But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him.

9 He asked them, "What is your advice? How should we answer these people who say to me, 'Lighten the yoke your father put on us'?"

10 The young men who had grown up with him replied, "Tell the people who have said to you, 'Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but make our yoke lighter'-tell them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's waist.

11 My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.'"

12 Three days later Jeroboam and all the people returned to Rehoboam, as the king had said, "Come back to me in three days."

13 The king answered them harshly. Rejecting the advice of the elders,

14 he followed the advice of the young men and said, "My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions."

15 So the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from God, to fulfill the word the LORD had spoken to Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah the Shilonite.

The first thing that strikes us in this section is the existence of a generational gap that resembles a modern day mentality in which younger people hold the older generation for unreliable and blame them for all the evils in the world. The famous expression "Don't trust anyone over thirty!" is, evidently, an age-old phenomenon.

Obviously, Rehoboam had two groups of people that made up his body of counselors, the one that had advised his father Solomon during his reign, and his own age-group.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "Seeking and following wise advice are seen as essential requirements of leadership. The same point is illustrated by David (1 Ch. 13:1-4), Jehoshaphat (2 Ch. 20:21), and Hezekiah (2 Ch. 30:2; 32:3), though Rehoboam's folly was matched by Amaziah (2 Ch. 25:16-17). Two contrasting pieces of advice are sought (vv. 6, 8a; both begin with 'took counsel,' RSV, *consulted*, NIV *etc.*), resulting in Solomon's heavy yoke (vv. 4, 9, 40, 11, 14) being replaced by more painful scorpions (vv. 11, 14, NIV, NRSV, RSV). The repetition clarifies the central issue, and also increases the feeling of oppression. Rehoboam's problem was not simply his youth, as illustrated by Solomon and other (1 Ch. 22:5; 29:1; Ecc. 4:13; Dan. 1:17-20), or the unavailability of advice. It was rather that he rejected (v. 8) the good advice and favored the bad, failing to seek the source of true wisdom (*cf.* 1 Ch. 1:10; Pr. 2:6; Jas. 1:5)."

The advice of the elders to Rehoboam was that he be "kind." The Hebrew word used is *towb*, meaning "good" in the widest sense of the word. It occurs for the first time in Scripture in the verse: "God saw that the light was good."⁶⁵

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "Rehoboam was now (... 1 Kings 14:21; ... 2 Chronicles 12:13; but *cf.* 13:7) forty-one years of age; he was just too old to find any excuse for inability to gauge either the experience, and value of it, of the 'old,' or the inexperience, and foolishness of it, of the immature human heart. According to the modern phrase, he was just ripe to have known and bethought himself of this. But all rashly Rehoboam casts the die. The sound

⁶⁵ Gen. 1:4

judgment, real knowledge, opportune and practical advice of the ‘old men,’ uttered evidently off so kind a tongue, should have been indeed now as good as an inheritance; yea, better too (... Ecclesiastes 7:11). The reading of the parallel is well worthy to be noted (... 1 Kings 11:7), with its manifestly pleasantly and skillfully worded antithesis, ‘If *thou this day* will be a servant to this people... then *they* will be thy servants *for ever*.’ Our words, however, have their own exquisite beauty about them, *If thou wilt be kind to this people, and please them, and speak good words to them*. One might fancy that Saul, and David, and Solomon, and angels themselves bended over the scene, and looked and listened and longed for wisdom and love and right to prevail. *The young men that had grown up with him*. While this expression throws light as above on that which speaks of Rehoboam’s *old men* counselors, it wakens the question how men of forty-one years of age can be called ‘young,’ as Rehoboam was not living in patriarchal aged times. And the question is emphasized by the language applied to Rehoboam in ... 2 Chronicles 13:7, where he is described as ‘young and tenderhearted,’ and unable, for want of strength of character and of knowledge, to ‘withstand vain men’ (as he surely shows too clearly now).”

The word used by the younger advisors: “My little finger is thicker than my father’s waist,” may be an idiom. It may have had a more vulgar meaning than we would attribute to it.

Actually, the word “finger” is not in the Hebrew text. We could read “my little ...,” making it more suggestive. *The Tyndale Commentary* states: “Rehoboam’s ‘little finger thing’ (a rare word usually translated little finger but possibly ‘penis,’ ...) is thicker than Solomon’s *waist* paraphrased by Tg. as ‘my weakness is stronger than my father’s might.’”

Obviously, Rehoboam did not see himself as the pretender to the throne of a theocracy, reigning “by the grace of God.” According to the advice given by the younger ones, he should present himself as an absolute monarch and a tyrant at that!

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on the disastrous developments: “The cause was of God. Rehoboam, in following an evil counsel, and the Hebrew people, is making a revolutionary movement, each acted as free agents, obeying their own will and passions. But God, who permitted the revolt of the northern tribes, intended it as a punishment of the house of David for Solomon’s apostasy. That event demonstrates the immediate superintendence of His providence over the revolutions of kingdoms; and thus it affords an instance, similar to many other striking instances that are found in Scripture, of divine predictions, uttered long before, being accomplished by the operation of human passions, and in the natural course of events.”

c. Division of Israel and Judah (10:16-19).

16 When all Israel saw that the king refused to listen to them, they answered the king:

"What share do we have in David, what part in Jesse's son? To your tents, O Israel!

Look after your own house, O David!" So all the Israelites went home.

17 But as for the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah, Rehoboam still ruled over them.

18 King Rehoboam sent out Adoniram, who was in charge of forced labor, but the Israelites stoned him to death. King Rehoboam, however, managed to get into his chariot and escape to Jerusalem.

19 So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “A series of small changes brings out the full extent of Israel’s division. Firstly, the would-be king was divided from the whole, nation, who are called ‘all Israel’ (v. 16c), NRSV, RSV, *etc.*). The second occurrence of this phrase in verse 16 is adapted from 1 Kings 12:16 (‘Israel’) to correspond with verses 1, 3, 16a. Secondly, the people’s unity is preserved by using the phrase *the Israelites* to describe both the inhabitants of the southern kingdom of *Judah* (v. 17; *cf.* also 11:3) and of the northern kingdom (v. 18; ‘people of Israel,’ in 1 Ki. 12:18). Thirdly, the real division is *between Israel and the house of David* (vv. 16, 19; note the repetition of [house of David]). Fourthly, Israel’s former unity is destroyed. The northern tribes’ traditional rallying call (v. 16; *cf.* 2 Sa. 20:1) is deliberately contrasted with the support all Israel had given to David (*cf.* the parallel between *David* and *Jesse’s son* here and in 1 Ch. 12:18). Fifthly, the addition of ‘each (of you)’ before ‘to your tents’ (v. 16, NRSV, RSV, *cf.* JB) invites every individual in the north to separate from David’s dynasty. A similar thought occurs in the phrase, ‘share in David’ (v. 16, NRSV, JB), implying that the northerners actually disinherited themselves from David’s family.”

Rehoboam tried to suppress the revolt of the northern tribes by sending Hadoram to suppress the trouble makers. His name is given as Hadoram. A footnote in the NIV states: “Hebrew Hadoram, a variant of Adoniram.” The fact that he chose the man who was in charge of the forced labor is another example of poor judgment on the part of the king. What was needed was reconciliation, not force. Hadoram lost his life in the effort. The people stoned him to death.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “Rehoboam must be supposed to have sent Hadoram either to make some ‘tribute’ summons, or try some arrangement respecting it, or respecting conciliatory steps. The reception he met warns Rehoboam to make the quickest escape possible, and no doubt opens his eyes fully to what he has done. It was the remnant of his delusive self-confidence to send this collector of taxes to those who had begged some remission of taxation.

The murder of Hadoram makes Rehoboam realize that his own life is in danger and he flees for his life.

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary comments: “A few soft words, and the removal of a part of the oppressive taxes, (for they said, Ease thou *somewhat* the grievous servitude,) would have secured this people to the state, and prevented the shedding of a sea of human blood, which was the consequence of the separation of this kingdom. Rehoboam was a fool; and through his folly he lost his kingdom.”

The Tyndale Commentary adds: “Rehoboam makes one pathetic effort to restore unity, perfectly illustrating the poverty of his policy. Knowing that the people’s tolerance had been exhausted by their experience of the *forced labor* system, it seems inconceivable that the sending of ‘Hadoram’ (also known as Adoram, 1 Ki. 12:18; *cf.* JB; Adoniram, 1 Ki. 4:6; 5:14; *cf.* NIV, GNB), one of Jeroboam successors, could end in anything but disaster. In the end, Rehoboam himself only just managed to escape, in ironic contrast to Jeroboam’s flight from Solomon (v. 2).”

We may expect that the fact that Rehoboam had to flee for his life cleared his head somewhat. As the expression states: “Nothing clears the head like a hanging!”

The Tyndale Commentary comments on the last verse of this chapter: “Israel’s *rebellion* is probably a neutral term describing the separation, but may possibly anticipate Jeroboam’s later idolatry and rebellion against Yahweh (1 Ki. 12:25-33). *To this day*, which is really based on the meaning in Kings, is one of the few instances which also applies to Chronicles’ time (also 1 Ch. 5:26, in contrast to *e.g.* 1 Ch. 17:5; 2 Ch. 8:8; 21:10).”

ii. Rehoboam's strength (11:1-23)

a. Peace between Israel and Judah (11:1-4).

1 *When Rehoboam arrived in Jerusalem, he mustered the house of Judah and Benjamin — a hundred and eighty thousand fighting men — to make war against Israel and to regain the kingdom for Rehoboam.*

2 *But this word of the LORD came to Shemaiah the man of God:*

3 *"Say to Rehoboam son of Solomon king of Judah and to all the Israelites in Judah and Benjamin,*

4 *'This is what the LORD says: Do not go up to fight against your brothers. Go home, every one of you, for this is my doing.'" So they obeyed the words of the LORD and turned back from marching against Jeroboam.*

The Pulpit Commentary introduces this chapter with: "The first four verses of this chapter would have been better placed as the conclusion of the previous chapter. They correspond with ... 1 Kings 12:21-24; and they tell how Rehoboam was restrained from making bad worse, in a hopeless attempt to recover the seceding ten tribes, by war that would have been as bloody as foredoomed to failure. 'The word of the LORD' to this intent came to the Prophet Shemaiah, and through him to Rehoboam. The remaining verses of the chapter are new matter, and belong to Chronicles alone. They tell how Rehoboam set to work to fortify his towns, or rather many of them (vers. 5-12); how he received priests and others from the kingdom of the ten tribes (vers. 13-17); and, last and worst, of the wives and concubines he took (vers. 18-23).

It seems natural that Rehoboam would make an effort to regain his losses by sending his army to the rebellious tribes in order to bring them back under his authority. He considered himself to be the king over all Israel, having inherited from his father the kingdom of twelve tribes.

It speaks in his favor that he paid attention the God's prophecy that was given to Shemaiah. That is an indication that the God of Israel played an important part in his life and that he considered himself to reign by the grace of God. This is also evident from the important place the temple worship played in Judah, which resulted in a rather massive migration of faithful believers who from the northern tribes.

The Tyndale Commentary states: "The account of *Rehoboam's* reign over the southern kingdom of Judah has been altered considerably from Kings. Chronicles' record is much longer (2 Ch. 11-12 as against 1 Ki. 12:1-4; 14:21-31), and has a different emphasis. In contrast to the presentation of Rehoboam as a man who 'did evil in the eyes of the LORD' (1 Ki. 14:22), his obedience and repentance feature prominently in Chronicles. This sounds like contrasting, perhaps deriving from Chronicles' greater interest in theology than in history ..., but that would be to misrepresent the Chronicler's distinctive approach.

The extra length testifies to Rehoboam's greater importance in Chronicles. This arises from two factors. The first concerns Rehoboam's relationship with the northern kingdom, which, as has already been noted in passing, is virtually excluded in Chronicles Whereas in Kings, Rehoboam's reign is no more than a supplement to Jeroboam and is one of the collection of kings whose reigns are briefly summarized (1 Ki. 14:21 – 16:34; ... here Rehoboam is considered in his own right. The second factor is that as the first king of Judah, Rehoboam is an example of God's dealing with David's whole dynasty. Several typical themes in Chronicles occur in chapter 11-12, mostly without parallel in Kings, including obedience to the prophetic

word (11:1-4), strengthening of the kingdom through building work (11:5-12), the activities of priests, Levites, and God-seekers (11:13-17), an expanding family (11:18-21), and humble repentance (12:5-12).”

About the breaking up of Israel into two separate kingdoms, The Tyndale Commentary comments: “This paragraph exemplifies Proverbs 16:89: ‘In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.’ Rehoboam’s response to the north’s secession shows more heavy-handedness (v. 1), but this time the prophet Shemaiah (*cf.* 2 Ch. 12:5, 7, 15) makes sure he does not have his own way (vv. 2-4). Where Rehoboam aimed to *regain* (v. 1 ‘win back,’ JB) the kingdom for himself, God had to remind him whose kingdom it really was (*this is my doing*, v. 4; *cf.* 10:15). ... God’s will was peace, even in a divided kingdom, whereas the natural human inclination was to ‘fight’ (NRSV, RSV, REB, NEB) to preserve the old order. This is actually the only instance where Rehoboam responds positively to God. Elsewhere he either acts under duress (12:5-6) or depends on the people’s spirituality (*cf. they obeyed ... turned back*; also v. 16).”

b. Judah fortified (11:5-12).

5 Rehoboam lived in Jerusalem and built up towns for defense in Judah:

6 Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa,

7 Beth Zur, Soco, Adullam,

8 Gath, Mareshah, Ziph,

9 Adoraim, Lachish, Azekah,

10 Zorah, Aijalon and Hebron. These were fortified cities in Judah and Benjamin.

11 He strengthened their defenses and put commanders in them, with supplies of food, olive oil and wine.

12 He put shields and spears in all the cities, and made them very strong. So Judah and Benjamin were his.

The initial impression we get from Rehoboam’s efforts to strengthen the defenses is that he feared attacks, from the northern tribes. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “These eight verses tell how Rehoboam, relieved of the responsibility of attempting to re-conquer the revolted, wisely betakes himself to strengthening and defending what was left to him. He builds fifteen ‘fenced cities,’ or ‘cities for defense,’ twelve of them south and west of Jerusalem, for fear of Egypt; he fortifies certain strongholds, officering them, provisioning them, and supplying to them and ‘every several city’ the necessary weapons of warfare and shields.”

The Tyndale Commentary states: “These fifteen fortified cities (vv. 6-10) did not defend the northern border with Israel, but the eastern, southern and western approaches. They are therefore associated with Shishak’s invasion from Egypt (12:2-11), and some at least must have been built in anticipation of that event (*cf.* 12:4). The fact that Shishak captured these towns and that they included only the Judean hills and the lowlands known as the Shephelah, a much smaller area than the Davidic-Solomonic empire, is one of several indications in this chapter that even Rehoboam’s blessings had serious problem. His restricted kingdom is called Judah and Benjamin (v. 10, 12; *cf.* vv. 1, 3, 23), reflecting post-exilic terminology with its ancient tribal associations rather than the pre-exilic political name (*cf.* 1 Ch. 9:3-9; 2 Ch. 15:2-9; 34:9).”

c. True worship maintained (11:13-17).

13 The priests and Levites from all their districts throughout Israel sided with him.

14 The Levites even abandoned their pasturelands and property, and came to Judah and Jerusalem because Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them as priests of the LORD.

15 And he appointed his own priests for the high places and for the goat and calf idols he had made.

16 Those from every tribe of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the LORD, the God of Israel, followed the Levites to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to the LORD, the God of their fathers.

17 They strengthened the kingdom of Judah and supported Rehoboam son of Solomon three years, walking in the ways of David and Solomon during this time.

The Levites had been given certain areas throughout Canaan, where they could settle and have some livestock. We read in the Law of Moses that God said: “Command the Israelites to give the Levites towns to live in from the inheritance the Israelites will possess. And give them pasturelands around the towns. Then they will have towns to live in and pasturelands for their cattle, flocks and all their other livestock. The pasturelands around the towns that you give the Levites will extend out fifteen hundred feet from the town wall. Outside the town, measure three thousand feet on the east side, three thousand on the south side, three thousand on the west and three thousand on the north, with the town in the center. They will have this area as pastureland for the towns. Six of the towns you give the Levites will be cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone may flee. In addition, give them forty-two other towns. In all you must give the Levites forty-eight towns, together with their pasturelands. The towns you give the Levites from the land the Israelites possess are to be given in proportion to the inheritance of each tribe: Take many towns from a tribe that has many, but few from one that has few.”⁶⁶

Several of these Levite cities were in the northern kingdom, ruled by Jeroboam, who had deviated from the true worship of Yahweh and diverted to idolatry. That made the Levites decide to migrate from the area which had historically been assigned to them, and move to the southern kingdom, to be able to serve in the temple of Jerusalem.

This set the right example for some of the Israelites from other tribes, whose heart was right with God, to leave their places of inheritance and move south also, in order to be able to worship Yahweh at the temple. It must be noted that for most of them this move was sacrificial and accompanied by great material loss. Leaving behind ancestral possession meant entering into a state of severe material poverty. Their mind was set on spiritual values, not on things of this earth.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “*Jeroboam’s* religious reforms, really based on Canaanite ideology with a superficial overlay of Yahwistic traditions, had serious consequences in the south as well as the north. The statement concerning the *priests and Levites* (vv. 13-15) goes beyond the earlier reference (1 Ki. 12:31; 13:33) by mentioning the Levites’ rejection and migration (v. 14), and the *goat idols* (v. 15) or ‘satyrs’ (RSV, REB mg., ‘demons’; REB, NEB, GNB). An important comment is also added about people *from every tribe of Israel* (v. 16) who came to Jerusalem to offer sacrificial worship.

⁶⁶ Num. 35:2-8

This section is significant for several reasons. It adds firstly an important historical note to what is known from Kings concerning Jeroboam's reign. Though some Levites moved south at considerable personal sacrifice (on the Levites' property, *cf.* 1 Ch. 6:54-80; 13:2; 2 Ch. 31:19), others simply *sided with* Rehoboam (v. 13) or travelled to worship at *Jerusalem* (16). Secondly, it highlights the leadership provided by the priests and especially the *Levites* (note that the laymen followed the Levites to Jerusalem, v. 16). This was probably intended to encourage the rather more different Levites of the Chronicler's day to offer spiritual leadership themselves. Thirdly, it stresses again the people's unity, with every tribe being represented. The Chronicler never lost sight of the ideal of Israelite unity, from the time when David was made king (*cf.* 1 Ch. 12:23-40), to other occasions when northerners rejoined for worship at the Jerusalem temple (*cf.* 2 Ch. 15:9; 30:11). Fourthly, the phrase *set their heart on seeking the LORD* (v. 16) underlines the inward aspect of biblical religion. The true kingdom is a gathered community ... of those whose way of life is to seek God, that is they continually seek his will for their lives (*cf. e.g.* 1 Ch. 13:3; 28:9; 2 Ch. 7:14; 15:4, 15). Such an attitude derives from a heart set towards God. This is distinctive expression in Chronicles, with both positive (1 Ch. 29:18; 2 Ch. 19:3; 30:19) and negative (2 Ch. 20:33) examples. Ironically, Rehoboam must be counted in the latter category (2 Ch. 12:14). A right attitude in worship is not sufficient, however, but must be expressed through physical sacrifice and in a particular place. ...

The problem, however, was that this glimpse of good things (*cf.* 2 Ch. 12:12) was sustained for only *three years* (v. 17). The pattern set by the united kingdom of *David and Solomon* (*cf.* 2 Ch. 7:10; 33:7) was soon abandoned (12:1-2). To 'walk in the way of' (NRSV, RSV; 'follow the example of,' REB. NEB, JB) seems to mean to keep the requirements of God's law (*cf.* 12:1) and worship God in his temple. This implies maintaining a loving attitude towards God (*cf.* Dt. 10:12; 11:22; 19:9; 30:16) rather than living a perfect life, and is applied primarily to the people."

d. The royal family extended (11:18-23).

18 Rehoboam married Mahalath, who was the daughter of David's son Jerimoth and of Abihail, the daughter of Jesse's son Eliab.

19 She bore him sons: Jeush, Shemariah and Zaham.

20 Then he married Maacah daughter of Absalom, who bore him Abijah, Attai, Ziza and Shelomith.

21 Rehoboam loved Maacah daughter of Absalom more than any of his other wives and concubines. In all, he had eighteen wives and sixty concubines, twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters.

22 Rehoboam appointed Abijah son of Maacah to be the chief prince among his brothers, in order to make him king.

23 He acted wisely, dispersing some of his sons throughout the districts of Judah and Benjamin, and to all the fortified cities. He gave them abundant provisions and took many wives for them.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "Rehoboam's growing family is the final symbol of blessing (*cf.* 1 Ch. 26:5; *cf.* 25:5) and of strength (2 Ch. 13:21). Again, however, there are signs that this was not an unmixed blessing. While Rehoboam's father's wives had led him astray (1 Ki. 11:3), his own preference for a later wife, *Maacah* (vv. 20-21; note 'After her,' v. 20, NRSV,

RSV, JB; *Then*, NIV), and the promotion of her son Abijah as his successor (vv. 22), directly contravened the Deuteronomic law (Dt. 21:15-17). ...

The paragraph concludes with a note about *Abijah* (v. 22). The fact that he is called *chief prince* ('head of the family,' JB) suggests a co-regency on the pattern of David and Solomon (1 Ch. 23:1). It also shows that the normal rules of primogeniture were overruled (*cf.* vv. 20-21). Possible opposition from other royal sons was partially countered by scattering them throughout the country (v. 23), though the policy was only made effective through the special favors of *abundant provisions* and *many wives*. The translation of verse 23 is difficult, but *he acted wisely* is preferable to 'he built' (JB), and he took many wives (NIV, *cf.* NRSV, RSV, REB, NEB) is superior to 'he consulted the many gods of his wives' (JB; though 'took' is an emendation for 'sought')."

The problem word in v. 23 is the Hebrew verb *biyn*, "discrete." The first time that word is used is in Joseph's advice to Pharaoh about measures to be taken in connection with the coming draught: "And now let Pharaoh look for a *discerning* and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt." Some translations use the word "discreet."

Another problem is the name of the son Rehoboam favored to be his successor. He is listed as Abijah son of Maacah. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "It is not quite clear whether Abihail were wife of Jerimoth and mother of Mahalath, or a second wife now mentioned of Rehoboam. The contents of the next verse not differencing the children there mentioned, and assigning her own to each wife of Rehoboam, if these were two wives of his, favors the former supposition (our Hebrew text being 'and she *bare*,' not 'which bare'). When it is said that Abihail was the daughter of *Eliab*, the meaning probably is, as again in ver. 20, granddaughter. (For Eliab, see ... 1 Samuel 16:6; 17:13; ... 1 Chronicles 2:13)."

iii. Rehoboam's repentance (12:1-12)

a. Attack by Shishak of Egypt (12:1-4).

1 After Rehoboam's position as king was established and he had become strong, he and all Israel with him abandoned the law of the LORD.

2 Because they had been unfaithful to the LORD, Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem in the fifth year of King Rehoboam.

3 With twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand horsemen and the innumerable troops of Libyans, Sukkites and Cushites that came with him from Egypt,

4 he captured the fortified cities of Judah and came as far as Jerusalem.

In a general introduction to this section, *The Tyndale Commentary* observes: "It is often said that Chronicles is kinder to Rehoboam than Kings in mentioning good things (*cf.* v. 12) which are not in the earlier account. However, the opposite conclusion may be more accurate, since Rehoboam remains condemned despite his repentance (v. 14)....

The main point, however, is to illustrate the effectiveness of Rehoboam's, particularly in the verses which are Chronicles' own contribution (vv. 5-8, 12). Some of Chronicles' most typical vocabulary can be found here, especially the contrast between *abandon* (vv. 1, 5) and *humbled* (vv. 6, 7, 12). These and other favorite terms such as law of the LORD (v. 1), *unfaithful* (v. 2), God's *wrath* (vv. 7, 12), *set his heart* and *seek the LORD* (v. 14), all confirm that Rehoboam is to be interpreted as a paradigm who presents the reader with a choice. One may go one's own way, recognizing that such attitudes divided a kingdom (ch. 10) and led to exile (ch. 36).

Alternatively, the way of humility and repentance is always available, with the temple (*cf.* v. 14) and the word of the prophets (vv. 5, 7-8) as constant reminders of God's offer of restoration. The key feature, then, is God's grace rather than Judah's repentance. His desire is for people to set their minds on him (*cf.* 11:16; 12:4) rather than be subject to human rulers (v. 8)....

Rehoboam's failure is described by two of Chronicles' typical phrases: *he abandoned the law of the LORD* (v. 1) and *was unfaithful to the LORD* (v. 2). Verse 1 probably summarizes 1 Ki. 14:22-24, especially as it is the only section of Kings' record of Rehoboam not directly mentioned in Chronicles. The parallel between abandoning the law and *abandoned me* (v. 5) stresses God's personal link with the law (*cf.* 6:16, where to follow the law is to walk before God; for the law's written form, *cf.* 2 Ch. 17:9; 25:4; 34:14-15). To abandon or forsake God, which is the opposite of seeking him (*cf.* v. 14; 1 Ch. 28:9; 2 Ch. 15:2), meant to reject the temple and worship other gods (*e.g.* 2 Ch. 7:19, 22; 2 Ch. 24:18; 34:25). The dangers of forsaking God's laws were potentially extremely serious, and verses 2-4 illustrate the effectiveness of the principles of 2 Chronicles 7:19-22, though the judgment of exile is held back because of God's mercy.

To be *unfaithful* (Heb. *ma'al*) to God is one of Chronicles' key terms (it never occurs in Samuel or Kings), and its regular occurrence shows Israel's constant estrangement from God. It appears at the turning-points of his work, such as the beginning and end of the genealogies (1 Ch. 2:5; 9:1), the beginning and end of the monarchies (1 Ch. 10:13; 2 Ch. 36:14), as well as being a typical feature of the Divided Monarchy (*e.g.* 2 Ch. 26:16, 18; 28:19, 22; 29:6, 19). It involves denying God the worship due to him, usually on a national scale, and is the primary reason given in Chronicles for the exile.

Rehoboam's unfaithfulness has two interesting analogies elsewhere in Chronicles. Firstly, the combination of his unfaithfulness (v. 2) with a failure to obey God's word (v. 1) or to seek God's will (v. 14), effectively makes him a second Saul (*cf.* 1 Ch. 10:13-14). Secondly, his pride in his own strength anticipates Uzziah's downfall (2 Ch. 26:16). Both parallels strengthen the typical nature of Rehoboam's sins.

The campaign of Pharaoh *Shishak*, or Shoshenq I (c. 945-924 BC), the first king of the twenty-second (Libyan) dynasty (vv. 2-4) seems to have been aimed primarily at Sheshonq's old ally Jeroboam (*cf.* 1 Ki. 11:40), and the biblical accounts are supported by a triumphal relief in the Amun temple at Karnack and a small stele fragment from Megiddo. The impression of an isolated show of strength in which Jerusalem was not captured is also reflected in the extra-biblical sources. The *Libyans* and *Sukkites* were from the western side of Egypt while the *Cushites* (NIV, REB, NEB; 'Ethiopians,' NRSV, RSV, JB; 'Sudanese,' GNB) were from the south. How many of the fortified cities in 11:5-10 were captured is unknown (v. 4), though Aijalon is listed in 11:10 and at Karnack."

It is obvious that the Egyptian threat ought to have ended in the capture and demolition of the city of Jerusalem. The fact that it did not is evidence of God's gracious protection.

The Matthew Henry's Commentary observes: "It was but in the fourth year of Rehoboam that they began to corrupt themselves, and in the fifth year the king of Egypt came up against them with a vast army, took the fenced cities of Judah, and came against Jerusalem, v. 2, 3, 4. This great calamity coming upon them so soon after they began to desert the worship of God, by a hand they had little reason to suspect (having had a great deal of friendly correspondence with Egypt in the last reign), and coming with so much violence that all the fenced cities of Judah, which Rehoboam had lately fortified and garrisoned and on which he relied much for the safety

of his kingdom, fell immediately into the hands of the enemy, without making any resistance, plainly showed that it was from the LORD, because they had transgressed against him.”

The Pulpit Commentary states: “Shishak ... became King of Egypt’s first of six kings who lasted in all a hundred and seventy years, of the twenty-second dynasty of Manetho, reigning in Bubastis. To him Jeroboam had fled for refuge from Solomon (... 1 Kings 11:40). ... Shishak’s invasion, therefore, in aid of Jeroboam, was ... B.C. 966. A representation of it exists in relief sculptured on the south external wall of the temple of Amun, at Karnak, Thebes; and, together with this, an elaborate list of countries, cities, tribes, conquered by Sheshenk or tributary to him, a hundred and thirty-three in number. Among these are some of the very fifteen fenced cities ... which Rehoboam built or fortified, viz. the three, Shoco, Adoraim, and Aijalon, while the erasure of fourteen names just where these are found accounts, no doubt, for the non-appearance of others of them. There are also the names of Levitical and Canaanite cities, situated in the kingdoms of the ten tribes, but belonging to the Levites who had been compelled to migrate into Judah.”

We are not told in what way Rehoboam and the people of Judah abandoned the LORD. The Hebrew verb used is *ʾazab*, which has the primary meaning of “to loosen.” It suggests permissiveness, rather than the commitment of gross sin or neglect. Ironically, the first time the verb is used is in the very positive context of marriage. We read in the verse: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”⁶⁷

Rehoboam’s attitude must have been modeled on his father’s permissiveness in following the heathen practices of the wives he married. Like Solomon, he considered himself too important to be subjected to the requirements of the law. That probably demonstrated itself, first of all, in neglecting to bring the required sacrifices and in obeying the law of Moses regarding the obligations of the king. The law stated: “When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.”⁶⁸ Neglecting worship of God usually begins with neglecting the reading of His Word.

Although the fortification of the cities of Judah was not sinful in itself, it may have demonstrated a lack of faith in God’s protection. Rehoboam may have come to the place where he felt he did not need God’s help; he was strong enough to protect himself. He had not learned his grandfather’s lesson. David wrote in some of his psalms: “But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head.” And: “The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Gen. 2:24

⁶⁸ Deut. 17:18-20

⁶⁹ Ps. 3:3; 18:2, 3

Fortunately, there was still a spark of faith left in Rehoboam's heart and in the heart of his people. The prophetic word of Shemaiah brought the nation back to a place of humility and trust.

b. Judah's humble repentance (12:5-12).

5 Then the prophet Shemaiah came to Rehoboam and to the leaders of Judah who had assembled in Jerusalem for fear of Shishak, and he said to them, "This is what the LORD says, 'You have abandoned me; therefore, I now abandon you to Shishak.'"

6 The leaders of Israel and the king humbled themselves and said, "The LORD is just."

7 When the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, this word of the LORD came to Shemaiah: "Since they have humbled themselves, I will not destroy them but will soon give them deliverance. My wrath will not be poured out on Jerusalem through Shishak."

8 They will, however, become subject to him, so that they may learn the difference between serving me and serving the kings of other lands."

9 When Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem, he carried off the treasures of the temple of the LORD and the treasures of the royal palace. He took everything, including the gold shields Solomon had made.

10 So King Rehoboam made bronze shields to replace them and assigned these to the commanders of the guard on duty at the entrance to the royal palace.

11 Whenever the king went to the LORD's temple, the guards went with him, bearing the shields, and afterward they returned them to the guardroom.

12 Because Rehoboam humbled himself, the LORD's anger turned from him, and he was not totally destroyed. Indeed, there was some good in Judah.

Almost any crisis, whether economic, natural or supernatural will bring people to call upon the LORD for help. The prophetic word stated that since Rehoboam and the people of Judah had ceased to trust the LORD and had abandoned His service, the LORD handed them over to the power of this heathen king. That led the people and the king to humble themselves and call upon the LORD.

God's answer was not a complete deliverance. He allowed Shishak to establish his power over Judah, which meant that they would have to pay a regular tribute to him. The most amazing part, however, is that God permitted this heathen king to carry away the treasures of the temple in Jerusalem.

There is a deep spiritual lesson in this event. The temple and its treasures exemplified the presence of God and His glory. Shishak's temple robbery became an image of the crucifixion. God allowed Himself to be robbed and humiliated.

The Tyndale Commentary comments on Shishak's carrying off of the gold shields Solomon had made: "Shishak is bought off with a single payment of tribute (v. 10), which meant replacing the *gold shields* (cf. 2 Ch. 9:16) by bronze ones and installing a new security system (v. 11). In addition to the guards, the shields were kept in a special room – the Hebrew word is unique but has the sense of inner room."

Those shields had probably been used by Solomon's bodyguard which carried them when Solomon went to the temple. They were representative of the glory of his reign.

The fact that Shishak took the gold shields must have become common knowledge. Shishak would not have taken them in secret. It is unlikely that the replacement with bronze shields became publicly known. Rehoboam, probably, wanted to give the impression that he was wealthy enough to replace them with other gold shields. He did not want to admit openly that the glory was gone. He kept up the outward appearance. In this he preceded the Pharisees of Jesus' day, who demonstrated piety without their heart being surrendered to God.

The Biblical Illustrator makes the following application: "The downward grade: -- See how deterioration follows all character that goes down in its religious aspects. This deterioration marks the whole progress of human development. Is it not so with regard to all personal service? How ardent we once were! How devoted to the house of God, how punctual in attendance, how zealous in worship! How we longed for the hour of praise to double itself, that we might have long intercourse with the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost! Now how soon we become uneasy, how we long to be released, how patience becomes sensitive, and yields in angry surrender because too much tried! You never bring gold for brass when you leave God. The prodigal never brings any treasure back with him. When men go away intellectually from the Bible they bring back brass for gold. When they leave the Bible morally they bring back brass for gold. When they leave sympathetically they bring back artifice for inspiration, mechanics for vital communion."

The Pulpit Commentary observes about this replacement: "A most humbling reversal of the glowing promise afterwards given, 'For brass I will bring gold' (... Isaiah 9:17)."

Rehoboam duplicated Saul's attitude when Samuel read him the riot act after he had disobeyed God's command to completely destroy Amalek. Saul confessed his sin in private, but he asked Samuel to go with him, so he would not be publicly disgraced.⁷⁰

Rehoboam's disposition and that of the nation as a whole would bring all of Judah to the brink of annihilation. It was the first step on the way to the Babylonian captivity.

The Tyndale Commentary concludes its remarks about this section with: "Verse 12 is best seen as a summary of the whole of Rehoboam's reign, with the first sentence referring to verses 5-11, and the (lit.) 'good things' looking back to chapter 11. The latter phrase is difficult to translate and interpret. NIV's *some good* is as good an attempt as any, and though the phrase refers in 2 Chronicles 19:3 to reformation and renewal of worship, the context here suggests a wider meaning."

The Hebrew text of v. 12 reads literally: "And when he humbled himself, the wrath of the LORD turned from him that He would not destroy [him] altogether: and also in Judah things went well."

iv. Concluding formulae (12:13-16)

13 King Rehoboam established himself firmly in Jerusalem and continued as king. He was forty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel in which to put his Name. His mother's name was Naamah; she was an Ammonite.

⁷⁰ See I Sam. 15:30.

14 He did evil because he had not set his heart on seeking the LORD.

15 As for the events of Rehoboam's reign, from beginning to end, are they not written in the records of Shemaiah the prophet and of Iddo the seer that deal with genealogies? There was continual warfare between Rehoboam and Jeroboam.

16 Rehoboam rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David. And Abijah his son succeeded him as king.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “This paragraph combines the opening and concluding formulae in 1 Kings 14:21-22, 29-31. The dates of his seventeen year reign are variously given as 937-921 ..., 931/30-913 ... and 922-915 BC ..., depending on textual decisions. *Established himself firmly* (v. 13; lit. ‘made himself strong’) combines the first two verbs in verse 1, and probably refers to the over-all length of his reign. ...

The statement that God *had chosen* Jerusalem (*cf.* 1 Ki. 14:21), and mention of God’s *Name* are linked by the temple (*cf.* 2 Ch. 6:5-6, 34, 38; 7:12, 16 33:7). They may also provide a backcloth to Rehoboam’s humility, for the temple existed to encourage humble repentance (*cf.* 2 Ch. 7:14). In contrast, the final comment on Rehoboam heightens Kings negative assessment. Where 1 Kings 14:22 has ‘Judah did evil,’ Chronicles makes him personally responsible, and adds, ‘he did not set his heart to seek the LORD’ (NRSV, RSV). ‘Seeking God’ in Chronicles describes one’s over-all attitude, and contrasts Rehoboam with Asa (2 Ch. 26:4-5), Hezekiah (2 Ch. 30:19; 31:21), and Josiah (2 Ch. 34:3), though Amaziah is a fellow unbeliever (2 Ch. 25:15, 20).

The concluding formula follows 1 Kings more closely, though with several small changes. It emphasizes the prophetic character of the Chronicler’s sources (instead of ‘the annals of the kings of Judah,’ 1 Ki. 14:29), on which the Chronicler may well have drawn directly, at least for information about *Shemaiah* (2 Ch. 11:2-4; 12:5, 7-8; for *Iddo*, *cf.* 2 Ch. 9:29). Another addition, though omitted in many EVV, is a reference to some kind of genealogical record (*cf.* NIV). While this may have something to do with the Levites (*cf.* JB ...) it seems more likely to refer to the context of the prophetic sources. Though the Chronicler leaves out a second statement about Rehoboam’s Ammonite mother (1 Ki. 14:31; *cf.* v. 13) presumable for stylistic reasons, his omission of Rehoboam’s burial ‘with his fathers’ (1 Ki. 14:31) may reflect a negative judgment.”

B. Abijah and Asa (13:1 – 16:14)

i. Abijah (13:1-14:1)

a. Introductory formula (13:1-2a).

1. In the eighteenth year of the reign of Jeroboam, Abijah became king of Judah, 2 and he reigned in Jerusalem three years.

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The career of *Abijah* begins and ends with this chapter, the twenty-one verses of which are paralleled by only eight in ... 1 Kings 15:1-8. The difference is caused by the fact that the writer of Kings only mentions that there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam, while the writer of Chronicles, besides giving particulars of the war, rehearses the splendid, dramatic, rhetorical address and appeal of Abijah on Mount Zemaraim to the people of the ten tribes.”

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “This account of *Abijah* is strikingly different from that in 1 Kings, where this king is known as Abijam. Chronicles’ version is three times as long,

but more importantly, seems to contradict Kings' assessment. Where the latter concludes the 'he committed all the sins his father had done before him' (1 Ki. 15:3), to the Chronicler he is a faithful ruler to whom God grants a miraculous victory. Why the discrepancy?

The differences are actually the result of the Chronicler's distinctive purpose and methods, and are not irreconcilable. The Chronicler's primary interest is in the development of God's plan rather than the personal life or spiritual orientation of individual kings. Abijah is less important for his own sake than for what God did through him, which is why chapter 13 concentrates almost entirely on a single incident concerning *the kingdom of the LORD* (cf. v. 8). It is clear that the Chronicler is not unaware of Abijah's failings, though as with Solomon, the details emerge in the record of his successor rather than in his own reign (2 Ch. 14:3-5; 15:8, 16-17). These failings, however, did not disqualify Israel from experiencing God's deliverance, and as with Rehoboam (chs. 11-12), God responded to sinners who trusted God (cf. v. 18). The crucial point concerns God's purposes for the Davidic kingship and Aaronic priesthood, in contrast to Jeroboam's kingdom which made no pretence to be orthodox. The Chronicler was therefore not rewriting history, but showing that imperfect people who expressed faith (13:15, 18) towards God could have hope. The significance of this would not be lost on the Chronicler's contemporaries who needed every encouragement to exercise with, which for them was a rare commodity (e.g. Ezr. 8:22-23, 31; Ne. 1:11; 2:20; 6:15-16). ...

Abijah has a much higher profile in Chronicles because, like Rehoboam, his reign highlights several special emphases of chapters 10-36. Abijah's speech (vv. 4-12) is parallel in style and content to one by Hezekiah (2 Ch. 29:5-11; cf. 30:6-9). The latter, for example, confirms that the standard of faithfulness set by Abijah was continued in the latter years of Judah's kingship. Both speeches also have a stabilizing effect, Abijah's following the catastrophe of the division, Hezekiah's after the fall of Samaria and the disastrous reign of Ahaz (ch. 28). Both crises also involve civil war, with defeat here for Israel and in the eight century for Judah. Both nations in their turn fail God, and both speeches point to God-centered worship at the sole ground of future hope."

b. Civil war between Judah and Israel (13:2b-19).

2b His mother's name was Maacah, a daughter of Uriel of Gibeah. There was war between Abijah and Jeroboam.

3 Abijah went into battle with a force of four hundred thousand able fighting men, and Jeroboam drew up a battle line against him with eight hundred thousand able troops.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary states about Abijah's mother: "She is called Michaiah, the daughter of Uriel, 2 Chron. 13:2. For this the Targum gives the following reason: 'Abijah reigned three years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Michaiah, daughter of Uriel of Gibeath. She is the same as Michah, the daughter of Absalom; but, because she was an upright woman, her name was changed into the more excellent name Michaiah, and her father's name into that of Uriel of Gibeath, that the name of Absalom might not be remembered.'"

The Pulpit Commentary writes: "As before noted (... 2 Chronicles 11:20), and as in the parallel (... Kings 15:2), this name is one with 'Maachah, daughter of Absalom' (parallel, *Abishalom*). The different alphabetic characters may be attributed to error, and that error the error of transcription merely. As in our note (... 2 Chronicles 11:20), the word 'daughter,' as in many similar cases, stands for granddaughter. Thus the father of Maachah was Uriel of Gibeah, and her mother Tamar, daughter of Absalom. Josephus ... proffers us this connecting link of

explanation. On the other hand, Rabbi Joseph's Targum on Chronicles says that Uriel means Absalom, but was a name used to avoid the use of Absalom. We have no clue as to which out of many Gibeahs is here intended. The Hebrew word *Gibeah* signifies a hill with round top, and hence would easily give name to many places."

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "The only event in Abijah's reign which Chronicles records is the war with Jeroboam (*cf.* v. 2b). The latter was probably the aggressor, judging By Abijah's rather defensive speech (*cf.* v. 8) and by Jeroboam's attack (vv. 13-14). If this is correct, this is Jeroboam's attempt to reunite the kingdoms. However, since both he and Rehoboam before him are rebuffed by God (*cf.* 11:1-4), it is clearly not yet God's time for reunification. The location at Zemaraim in Ephraim (v. 4) is usually linked with a Benjamin place of the same name near Mount Ephraim (Jos. 18:22), probably Ras et-Tahumeh on the mountain's southern side. The troop numbers (v. 3) are not to be understood literally and show Judah outnumbering two to one."

i. Abijah's speech (13:4-12).

4 Abijah stood on Mount Zemaraim, in the hill country of Ephraim, and said, "Jeroboam and all Israel, listen to me!

5 Don't you know that the LORD, the God of Israel, has given the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants forever by a covenant of salt?

6 Yet Jeroboam son of Nebat, an official of Solomon son of David, rebelled against his master.

7 Some worthless scoundrels gathered around him and opposed Rehoboam son of Solomon when he was young and indecisive and not strong enough to resist them.

8 "And now you plan to resist the kingdom of the LORD, which is in the hands of David's descendants. You are indeed a vast army and have with you the golden calves that Jeroboam made to be your gods.

9 But didn't you drive out the priests of the LORD, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and make priests of your own as the peoples of other lands do? Whoever comes to consecrate himself with a young bull and seven rams may become a priest of what are not gods.

10 "As for us, the LORD is our God, and we have not forsaken him. The priests who serve the LORD are sons of Aaron, and the Levites assist them.

11 Every morning and evening they present burnt offerings and fragrant incense to the LORD. They set out the bread on the ceremonially clean table and light the lamps on the gold lampstand every evening. We are observing the requirements of the LORD our God. But you have forsaken him.

12 God is with us; he is our leader. His priests with their trumpets will sound the battle cry against you. Men of Israel, do not fight against the LORD, the God of your fathers, for you will not succeed."

The Tyndale Commentary divides Abijah's sermon into three points, calling them (a) Kingship (13:5-8a), (b) Worship (13:8b-12a), and (c) Appeal (13:12b).

There is much in Abijah's speech that is correct, but some important features are not mentioned. One of them is the fact that the division of Israel into two states was an act of God in punishment for Solomon's sins of idolatry. When Israel decided to separate from Judah and Rehoboam tried to regain power over the break-away tribes, God told him by the prophetic word

of Shemaiah “Do not go up to fight against your brothers. Go home, every one of you, for this is my doing.”⁷¹

The Tyndale Commentary introduces Abijah’s speech with the following: “Abijah’s ‘sermon on the mount’ ... dominates this section. Though unexpected in terms of military strategy, it is typical of the speeches and prayers which occur at key points in Chronicles. The present form reflects the Chronicler’s language and interests, though hints of Abijah’s own outlook also appear (vv. 7, 10-11). It is addressed primarily to the people of Israel (vv. 4, 12; Jeroboam is referred to in the third person, vv. 6, 8), though they seem to be fully identified with their king.”

Although God had made a promise to David about the succession of his children to the throne of Israel, it had not been an unconditional promise. In David’s own words, God had said: “If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.”⁷² The unconditional part of God’s promise pertained to the coming of the Messiah.

Abijah called God’s promise to David “a covenant of salt.” That is a literal rendering of the Hebrew words *beriyth melach*. The first time the expression is used in Scripture is in connection with certain sacrifices, the meat of which was given to the priests and Levites for their consumption. We read: “Whatever is set aside from the holy offerings the Israelites present to the LORD I give to you and your sons and daughters as your regular share. It is an everlasting covenant of salt before the LORD for both you and your offspring.”⁷³

The Pulpit Commentary comments on Abijah’s speech: “The idea of Abijah in this religious harangue, addressed or supposed to be addressed to the kingdom of the ten tribes, was good, and the execution was spirited. While, however, he preaches well to others, there are not wanting signs that he can blind himself as to some failure of practice on his own part. The points of the argument running through his harangue are correct, skillfully chosen, and well and religiously thrust home on the heart of his supposed audience. The practical trust of himself and his army are testified to in vers. 14, 15, and abundantly rewarded. This sequel-practical trust is the best credential of the sincerity of his foregoing appeal and harangue.

With the thrice repeated ‘for ever’ of what we call ... 2 Samuel 7:13-16, and the very emphatic language of the fifteenth verse in that passage, in the memory of Abijah, no one can say he was not justified by the letter and to the letter in what he now says. At the same time, how is it that Abijah does not in all fairness quote the matter of ... 2 Chronicles 6:16 *last* clause, and of its parallel ..., 1 Kings 8:25 *last* clause, and of ... Psalm 89:28-37; 132:12?

Covenant of salt (see ... Leviticus 2:13; ... Numbers 18:19; ... Ezekiel 43:24; ... Mark 9:49). The use of salt was ordered first for the meal offerings, which, consisting mainly of flour, did not need it as an antiseptic; afterwards it was ordered for ‘all’ offerings, including the ‘burnt offering:’ as surely as leaven was proscribed, salt was prescribed (... Leviticus 2:11).

⁷¹ II Chron. 11:4

⁷² I Kings 2:4

⁷³ Num. 18:19

‘The covenant of salt’ meant the imperishableness and irrevocableness of the engagement made between the two parties to the covenant. The widespread and deeply significant use of it among other and heathen nations is remarkable indeed, and is attested by Pliny ... Some think it a sufficient explanation of the text, ‘covenant of salt,’ that, especially in the East, solemn engagements and vows were often recognized and strengthened by hospitalities, as shown to guests, and of these salt was an indispensable element. It is true that some of the ancient indications and descriptions of friendship and close friendships turned on phrases (similar ones, indeed, still existing) into which the word ‘salt’ entered, but that these phrases arose from the fact that salt was so general a constituent of human food seems insufficient explanation, where we can find one of a more direct and more directly religious, or, as the case might be (*e.g.* with heathen sacrifices), superstitious birth. Religion and superstition between them have been the most world-wide, incalculable, and untraceable originators and disseminators of half the possible phrases of human language!”

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “Abijah makes two charges against Israel, that they have rejected God’s gifts of David’s dynasty and temple. He, on the other hand, has been faithful. He acknowledges that the dynasty is given *for ever* (1 Ch. 17:12, 14) as a *covenant of salt* (v. 5), a metaphor for permanence based on Numbers 18:19. It is also associated with the *kingdom of the LORD* (v. 8), an idea also reflected in verse 5, literally, ‘... gave the kingdom/kingship to David over Israel...’. This is a familiar theme in Chronicles (*e.g.* 1 Ch. 17:14; 28:5; 29:23; 2 Ch. 9:8), though surprising here in view of Abijah’s idolatry (1 Ki. 15:3). A distinction is made between the two kingdoms, however, for God’s kingdom was still under his authority, and was in the hands of David’s family rather than those of an individual. A distinction is made between the two kingdoms, however, for God’s kingdom was still under his authority, and was in the *hands* of David’s family rather than those of an individual.

Jeroboam, however, has rebelled against his master, *i.e.* Solomon (v. 6; the idea is taken from 1 Ki. 11:26-27), against Rehoboam (v. 7; *cf.* 2 Ch. 10), and intends to do the same with Abijah (v. 8). Abijah’s defense of his father Rehoboam (v. 7) seems somewhat exaggerated in view of chapter 10, though the political device of presenting the facts in the best possible light is familiar enough! Though Rehoboam was indeed inexperienced and weak-willed (young and irresolute,’ NRSV, RSV), at forty-one he was fully responsible for his folly (*cf.* 12:13). An ironic wordplay sums up Jeroboam – though Rehoboam could not resist him (v. 7), he could resist God (v. 8; *cf.* NIV, JB, GNB; ‘withstand,’ NRSV, RSV)....

The second charge concerns God’s purposes for the temple, and focuses on the nature of God, priesthood and sacrifice. Firstly, Israel’s gods are not *gods* (v. 9), an allusion to the *golden calves* of Hosea 8:6. As in ancient Near East custom, these were apparently carried with the army as a protective charm (v. 8b). Secondly, Israel’s *priests* are unqualified and the Aaronite priests and the Aaronite priests and Levites have been dismissed (vv. 9-10; *cf.* 11:15). Thirdly, only the pattern of worship at Jerusalem is acceptable to the LORD, for Israel’s fertility cults were polytheistic and idolatrous (v. 11; *cf.* 1 Ki. 12:26-33). These regular sacrifices, celebrated daily apart from the weekly replacement of *bread*, are a typical emphasis in Chronicles. They are the ‘charge’ (v. 11, NRSV, RSV, REB, NEB; *requirements*, NIV; but not ‘ritual,’ JB) of the LORD, a summarizing word for cultic duties (1 Ch. 9:27; 23:32; 2 Ch. 35:2), and show that the temple was being put to proper use (*cf.* 1 Ch. 23:29-31; 2 Ch. 2:4; 4:7; 8:12-15).

Abijah’s defense, expressed in a somewhat self-satisfied manner, is simple: *we have not forsaken him, ... but you have forsaken him, ...* (vv. 10-11). This is extremely serious, for God would forsake those who forsook him (1 Ch. 28:9; 2 Ch. 15:2; 24:20; *cf.* 2 Ch. 12:1, 5), whereas

Judah could say, *God is with us* (v. 12). Though the division remained God's will (10:15; 11:4), Jeroboam's failure to acknowledge the legitimacy of Abijah's kingship and of the Jerusalem cultus meant that his kingdom was no longer approved by God. It was fundamentally flawed, and offered no hope for any future Israel....

Abijah concludes with an appeal, *Do not fight against the LORD ... for you will not succeed*. It is the focal point of Abijah's argument, and resembles a sermon text, as in other speeches where the text often comes at the end. It contains two important themes, both of which are developed in 2 Chronicles 20:1-30, the centerpiece of the Divided Monarchy. The first, which has its origin in Exodus, is that it is futile to oppose God, for he fights his own battles (*cf.* 1 Ch. 5:22; 2 Ch. 11:4; 20:27; 32:8; *cf.* Ex. 14:14; Dt. 20:4; Acts 5:39). The second is that one can succeed only with God's help as illustrated positively (*e.g.* 1Ch. 29:23; 2 Ch. 14:6; 20:20; as illustrated positively (*e.g.* 1 Ch. 29:23; 2 Ch. 14:6; 20:20; 26:5) and negatively (*e.g.* 2 Ch. 24:20)."

As noted above, the missing point in Abijah's speech is that fact that the division had been God-ordained and was a punishment for the sins of his grandfather Solomon and his father Rehoboam.

Jeroboam had received the kingdom, consisting of the ten northern tribes from God, just as much as Abijah had received the southern tribes by divine authority. But it was, obviously, never God's intent that this division would lead to a civil war.

Our text doesn't specifically mention who is the aggressor. Abijah's speech would not make much sense if he had started the offense.

ii. Battle report (13:13-19).

13 Now Jeroboam had sent troops around to the rear, so that while he was in front of Judah the ambush was behind them.

14 Judah turned and saw that they were being attacked at both front and rear. Then they cried out to the LORD. The priests blew their trumpets

15 and the men of Judah raised the battle cry. At the sound of their battle cry, God routed Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah.

16 The Israelites fled before Judah, and God delivered them into their hands.

17 Abijah and his men inflicted heavy losses on them, so that there were five hundred thousand casualties among Israel's able men.

18 The men of Israel were subdued on that occasion, and the men of Judah were victorious because they relied on the LORD, the God of their fathers.

19 Abijah pursued Jeroboam and took from him the towns of Bethel, Jeshanah and Ephron, with their surrounding villages.

The Pulpit Commentary comments briefly on this war: "These verses purport to tell how Jeroboam, with all his vastly preponderating numbers (ver. 3), left nothing undone to secure the victory, and resorted even to the *ambush* described; how, on the other hand, Abijah and his people honored God by their *cry* and confident *shout*, and were *delivered* because they trusted in him (... 1 Samuel 17:45-47), and as follows, ver. 18, 'relied upon the LORD God of their fathers.'"

The Tyndale Commentary states: “The account of the actual battle moves through four stages: (a) Jeroboam’s ambush (vv. 13-14a); (b) Judah’s prayers (vv. 14b-15a); (c) God’s gift of victory to Judah (vv. 15b-16); and (d) the results (vv. 17-19). The whole paragraph reflects Israel’s victories in earlier days, showing that overwhelming odds presented no problem when Israel *relied* (v. 18) on God. Israel had been opposed by *ambush* in Judges 9:25 by an army at both *front and rear* in 2 Samuel 10:9 (= 1 Ch. 19:10), even by a vast army (v. 8) in 1 Kings 20:13, 28 (*cf.* 2 Ch. 14:9; 20:2, 12, 15, 24; 32:7). The sounding of a *battle cry* (vv. 12, 15) to the accompaniment of *trumpets* blown by *priests* recalls the memorable capture of Jericho (Josh. 6:1-20; *cf.* Nu. 10:9; 31:6). The account seems to draw particularly on Deuteronomy 20:1-4, 10-15, demonstrating Judah’s faithfulness to the principles of covenant law. The emphasis on trust in God despite an enemy’s superior strength, the affirmation that God is with his armies, and the offer of peace before the battle are especially noteworthy (v. 12). This pattern is often called a holy war, though, as applied to the Old Testament, the term is rather misleading. Israel could never assume the right to go to war on God’s behalf, for she could find herself at times opposed by God. A better term is ‘Yahweh’s war,’ which was sometimes appropriate for Israel’s wars because she was Yahweh’s nation, but is applicable to the church only when understood as spiritual warfare (*cf.* 2 Cor. 10:3-6; Eph. 6:10-20).

The central theme is reliance on God (v. 18). Judah ‘cried to the LORD (v. 14, NRSV, RSV, *etc.*) and raised the battle cry (v.15; *cf.* 2 Ch. 20:19-22), in contrast to Israel’s forsaking God (v. 11). The victory belonged to God, who *routed* Israel (v.15; *cf.* REB, NEB; lit. ‘struck’) and *delivered* (v. 16) her into Judah’s hands. The term for Israel’s defeat, *were subdued* (v. 18), is, literally, ‘were humbled’ (JB), *i.e.* exactly the opposite of that which God desired (*cf.* 2 Ch. 7:14; 12:6, 12). The result was a ‘great slaughter’ (v. 17, NRSV, RSV; ‘crushing defeat,’ GNB, JB), the Hebrew version of which is normally referred to Israel’s enemies (*e.g.* Jos. 10:10; 1 Sa. 19:8; 23:5), though it could be applied to rebellious Israelites (Nu. 11:33).

Despite Abijah’s conquest in southern Israel, border conflicts continued for many years (v. 19; *cf.* 2 Ch. 15:8; 16:6; 17:2). *Bethel*’s capture is an ironic comment on the golden calves’ inability to defend their own sanctuary (*cf.* 1 Ki. 12:28-33).”

The blowing of trumpets by the priests was in obedience to Moses’ command. We read: “When you go into battle in your own land against an enemy who is oppressing you, sound a blast on the trumpets. Then you will be remembered by the LORD your God and rescued from your enemies.”⁷⁴

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary is unimpressed by Abijah’s speech. We read: “The oration of Abijah, however animating an effect it might have produced on his own troops, was unheeded by the party to whom it was addressed; because while he was wasting time in useless words, Jeroboam had ordered a detachment of his own to move quietly round the base of the hill, so that when Abijah stopped speaking, he and his followers found themselves surprised in the rear, while the main body of the Israelite forces remained in front. A panic might have ensued had not the leaders ‘cried unto the LORD,’ and the priests ‘sounded with the trumpets’ - the pledge of victory (Num. 10:9; 31:6); and, reassured by the well-known signal, the men of Judah responded with war-shout, which, echoed by the whole army, was followed by an

⁷⁴ Num. 10:9

impetuous rush against the foe. The shock was resistless. The ranks of the Israelites were broken, because ‘God smote Jeroboam and all Israel.’ They took to flight, and the merciless slaughter that ensued can be accounted for only by tracing it to the rancorous passions enkindled by a civil war.”

The number of Israelite casualties seems enormous to the point of impossible. The Hebrew word rendered “slain” is *nakah*, which literally means “to strike.” So it can include wounded as well as killed. We find it, for instance in the verse: “Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD had commanded. He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood.”⁷⁵

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “Even if we accept for a moment the immense numbers written here and elsewhere as authentic, a considerable deduction may be made from our difficulty by virtue of the fact that this word need not mean to describe the actually *slain*. It occurs about ninety-one times. Of these, in our Authorized Version, it is found rendered, including marginal options, as many as fifteen times ‘wounded,’ or by even a less severe meaning. However, whether ‘slain’ or ‘wounded and slain,’ the alleged, numbers of our present text are, in our opinion, incredibly enormous.”

c. Abijah’s strength (13:20-21).

21 But Abijah grew in strength. He married fourteen wives and had twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters.

22 The other events of Abijah’s reign, what he did and what he said, are written in the annotations of the prophet Iddo.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “Jeroboam’s failure to *regain power* (v. 20) is a deliberate contrast to the fact that Abijah *grew in strength* (v. 21). Though Jeroboam outlived Abijah (1 Ki. 15:9), the former’s death is understood as a sign of divine judgment (*struck down*, v. 20, is the same Heb. verb as *routed*, v. 15). For a large family as a sign of blessing and strength (v. 21), *cf.* 1 Chronicles 26:5; 2 Chronicles 11:18-21.”

The Hebrew text of v. 20 reads literally: “Neither did Jeroboam regain strength again in the days of Abijah: and the LORD struck him, and he died.” That construction of a sentence has confused some Bible scholars. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, for instance, writes: “Who died? Abijah or Jeroboam? Some think it was Jeroboam; some, that it was Abijah. Both rabbis and Christians are divided on this point: nor is it yet settled. The prevailing opinion is that Jeroboam is meant, who was struck then with that disease of which he died about two years after; for he did not die till two years after Abijah: see 1 Kings 14:20; 15:9. It seems as if Jeroboam was meant, not Abijah.”

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The writer of Chronicles here, for brevity’s sake, and not to recur to his name again, records the death of Jeroboam, which, however, did not happen till after Abijah’s death, in the second year of Asa’s reign (1 Ki 14:29; 1 Ki 15:25). That the *LORD struck* him, may glance at the fearful announcement conveyed to him through his wife by Ahijah

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Ex. 7:20

(1 Ki 14:6-16).”

d. Concluding formula (13:22 – 14:1).

22 *The other events of Abijah's reign, what he did and what he said, are written in the annotations of the prophet Iddo.*

14:1 *And Abijah rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David. Asa his son succeeded him as king, and in his days the country was at peace for ten years.*

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “A couple of changes to 1 Kings 15:6-7 are worth noting. Though ‘story’ (v. 22, NRSV, RSV, NEB; *annotations*, NIV) is literally ‘midrash’ (JB), it is probably another for Iddo’s writing (cf. 2 Ch. 9:29; 12:15) rather than an early use of a term for a type of rabbinic exegesis (also 24:27). The ten-year period of *peace* (14:1) refers to Asa’s reign (cf. 14:5-7; 15:15, 19), since Abijah reigned for only three years (13:2).”

ii. Asa (14:2-16:14)

a. Asa seeks God and is prosperous (14:2-7).

2 *Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God.*

3 *He removed the foreign altars and the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles.*

4 *He commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, and to obey his laws and commands.*

5 *He removed the high places and incense altars in every town in Judah, and the kingdom was at peace under him.*

6 *He built up the fortified cities of Judah, since the land was at peace. No one was at war with him during those years, for the LORD gave him rest.*

7 *"Let us build up these towns," he said to Judah, "and put walls around them, with towers, gates and bars. The land is still ours, because we have sought the LORD our God; we sought him and he has given us rest on every side." So they built and prospered.*

In a general introduction to Asa’s reign, *The Tyndale Commentary* states: “Asa is the third king in a row to whom Chronicles has given considerably more attention than Kings (2 Ch. 14-16; cf. 1 Ki. 15:9-24). In contrast to Rehoboam and Abijah, however, Chronicle’s version is rather less complimentary. This is not because the Chronicler makes arbitrary judgments, but, as was noticed previously, to draw attention to certain over-all theological features rather than details about individuals. Two themes provide the framework for Asa’s reign. The first is ‘relying’ on God, indicated by the occurrence of the Hebrew verb *ša’an* five times in chapters 13-16 but nowhere else in Chronicles. Both Abijah and Asa offer examples for others to imitate (13:18; 14:11; 16:8), though unfortunately Asa did not end as he began (16:7). The second theme, that of seeking God, is central to Asa’s reign (the verb ‘to seek’ occurs nine times). King and people both live out the principle of 15:2 (14:4, 7; 15:4), committing themselves to God by a covenant (15:12, 15). Again, however, Asa falls away from his previous good practice (16:12), potentially putting himself under the curse of his own covenant (15:13).

A variety of other themes also bind the reign of Asa together. One of the most persistent is *war* and *peace* (or *rest*). Where humankind seems bent on making war (14:9-10; 15:5-6; 16:1, 4), God gives deliverance and peace (14:1, 5-7, 12-15; 15:15, 19) to those who put their trust in

him, though he may send war as a punishment to those who look elsewhere for help (16:9). A related theme is that of strengthening the kingdom, both through fortifications (14:6-7; 16:6) and through inner strength (15:7-8; 16:9). Trust in God is also expressed through faithfulness to Yahwism, especially in a concern for the temple (15:8, 18) and an intolerance of the paraphernalia of Canaanite religion (14:2-5; 15:8, 16-18). A key feature is respect for the authority of the prophetic word. Two prophecies are prominent, one to which Asa responds with enthusiasm (15:1-8) and one which causes him great anger (16:7-10). The centerpiece of Asa's faithfulness, however, is undoubtedly the *covenant* made at a special assembly (15:10-15). This highpoint of Judah's national life so far is entered into by the whole people with heart and soul, and was accompanied by much sacrificial worship and rejoicing. There is, though, a reverse side to this in a covenant or treaty made between Asa and Ben-Hadad of Syria (16:2-3), whose unhappy consequences (16:7-12) replaced the blessings of the first covenant."

According to *Haley's Bible Handbook*, Asa reigned for 41 years as king of Judah (912-872 BC). Thus his reign overlapped the reign of seven kings in the northern kingdom.

One of his first acts was the removal of the symbols of his father Abijah's idolatry. The Moloch altars and Asherah poles were demolished, as were the altars on high places in Judah, some of which may have been dedicated to Yahweh. The worship of God was to be held at the temple of Jerusalem, the place where God had revealed Himself to David.

The Hebrew text of v. 2 reads literally: "He took away the altars of the strange [gods], and broke down the high places and the images." Interestingly, the word "gods" is not in the original text. The Hebrew word for "strange" is *nekar*, which can refer to either a foreigner or something foreign. The suggestion is that idolatry does not belong in Israel; it is something foreigners practice and from which Israelites ought to abstain.

The Pulpit Commentary states about those altars: "Hebrew, *the altars of the stranger*, meaning, of course, 'the altars of the gods of the stranger.' This expression, 'strange gods,' is found in the Authorized Version about thirteen times for the Hebrew *nekar*, or *bamah*, and would be most correctly rendered, 'The gods [or, 'god'] of the stranger,' *i.e.* of the *foreigner*, as it is rendered in the solitary instance of Deut. 31:16."

b. Asa trusts God and is victorious (14:8-15).

8 Asa had an army of three hundred thousand men from Judah, equipped with large shields and with spears, and two hundred and eighty thousand from Benjamin, armed with small shields and with bows. All these were brave fighting men.

9 Zerah the Cushite marched out against them with a vast army and three hundred chariots, and came as far as Mareshah.

10 Asa went out to meet him, and they took up battle positions in the Valley of Zephathah near Mareshah.

11 Then Asa called to the LORD his God and said, "LORD, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, O LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. O LORD, you are our God; do not let man prevail against you."

12 The LORD struck down the Cushites before Asa and Judah. The Cushites fled,

13 and Asa and his army pursued them as far as Gerar. Such a great number of Cushites fell that they could not recover; they were crushed before the LORD and his forces. The men of Judah carried off a large amount of plunder.

14 They destroyed all the villages around Gerar, for the terror of the LORD had fallen upon them. They plundered all these villages, since there was much booty there.

15 They also attacked the camps of the herdsmen and carried off droves of sheep and goats and camels. Then they returned to Jerusalem.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “Normally in the Bible Cush is the area south of Egypt, *i.e.* Sudan (*cf.* GNB; rather than modern Ethiopia, *cf.* NRSV, RSV). Mention of Gerar (vv. 13-14), however, just across the Judean-Philistine border, may indicate a more local bedouin conflict, perhaps supported by the parallel between ‘Cushan’ and Midian (Hab. 3:7...). The African interpretation is more likely, however, for the following reasons. The Cushites are associated with the Libyans (2 Ch. 16:8, *cf.* 12:3), local bedouin tribes are unlikely to have owned 300 chariots when Judah had none (v. 9), and precise geographical conclusions should not be drawn on the basis of a single example of prophetic poetry, especially as Gerar is west of Judah and Midian is to the south. Zerah himself is most likely to have been a Nubian (= Sudanese) general in the army of Pharaoh Osorkon I (*c.* 924-884 BC), Shoshenq I’s son and successor (*cf.* 12:2ff.). The war is dated in Asa’s fifteenth year (*cf.* 15:10-11), approximately 897 BC, and took place on Judah’s south-western border at Mareshah (vv. 9, 10; *cf.* 11:8). The Valley of Zephathah (v. 10) is otherwise unknown.

Zerah’s army (v. 9) is best understood as comprising 1,000 units, which would be more likely alongside three hundred chariots than ‘a million’ soldiers (GNB, *etc.*). However the figures are understood, the invading army was nearly twice the size of the Judean forces (v. 8), so that Asa was fully justified in calling for God’s help against a ‘multitude’ (v. 11, NRSV, RSV; ‘huge army,’ GNB, *cf.* NIV).”

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “Zerah the Ethiopian; Hebrew, *kuwshiy*, the ‘Ethiopian,’ Greek and Septuagint rendering for ‘Cushite.’ In its vaguest dimensions Ethiopia, or Cush, designated Africa south of Egypt, but more concisely it meant the lands we now call Nubia, Sennaar, Kordefan, and part of Abyssinia. ...

The invasion of the text was probably in Asa’s fourteenth year, his reign thus far being dated B.C. 953-940. The alleged army of this Zerah was an Egyptian army, largely made of mercenaries (compare the description of Shishak’s army, 1 Ch 12:3). The present defeat of Zerah would go far to explain the known decline of the Egyptian power at just this date, *i.e.* some twenty-five to thirty years after Shishak. At the same time, it must be admitted that it is not possible to identify with certainty Zerah with either Usarken. Whether he is an unknown Arabian Cushite, or an unknown African Cushite of Ethiopia-above-Egypt, or one of the Usarkens, has yet to be pronounced. ... The mention of the valley of Zephathah in the following verse will half identify its exact position. It is probable that [some other Bible scholars] have reliably fixed the site one Roman mile south-west of the modern *Beit-Jibrin*. Mareshah is again mentioned in 2 Ch 20:37 and Mic. 1:15, as quoted already, in references interesting to be consulted. *A thousand thousand*. Whether this number be correct or not, it may be noted that it is the largest alleged number of an army given in the Old Testament.”

The Tyndale Commentary furthermore comments on the actual battle: “The theme of the battle report is that of ‘Yahweh’s war’ (*cf.* 13:13-18). It centers on Asa’s prayer (v. 11), which is to be understood as a plea in the *name* of Yahweh directed towards the temple (*cf.* 6:34-35). It also anticipates Jehoshaphat’s classic prayer (20:5-31; *cf.* 13:4-12). It exhibits several emphases typical of Chronicles, such as God’s *help* (*cf.* 1 Ch. 5:20; 15:26; 2 Ch. 18:31; 32:8), his concern for the *powerless* (*cf.* 2 Ch. 20:12), that he is Israel’s God (*cf.* 2 Ch. 13:12; 32:8) on whom they

rely (*cf.* 13:18; 16:8), his concern is for the powerless (*cf.* 2 Ch. 20:12), that he is Israel's God (*cf.* 2 Ch. 13:12; 32:8) on whom they rely (*cf.* 13:18; 16:8) and against whom neither this 'multitude' (NRSV, RSV; *vast army*, NIV; *cf.* 2 Ch. 20:12, 15; 32:7) nor 'mortal' man (REB) can prevail. Victory is attributed to the LORD (vv. 12-13; 'defeated,' v. 12, NRSV, RSV, JB, is the same verb as in 13:15, 20), as the opposition *fled* (v. 13; *cf.* 2 Ch. 13:16; 25:22) and were paralyzed by *the terror of the LORD* (v. 14; *cf.* 1 Ch. 14:17; 2 Ch. 17:10; 20:29). This whole theme may be summed up, 'The battle is not yours, but God's' (2 Ch. 20:15; *cf.* Eph. 6:12; Col. 2:15; Rev. 5:5). Despite Israel's faithfulness and preparations (vv. 2-8), it was God who proved the difference between destruction and victory.

Some details of the aftermath are provided (vv. 13-15). The Cushites were so (lit.) 'broken' (v. 13, NRSV, RSV) that there was 'no recovery' (*cf.* NIV, GNB, JB). The Hebrew for the latter is 'reviving' rather than 'life' (*cf.* Gn. 45:5; Ezr. 9:8-9), making RSV's 'none remained alive' (*cf.* REB, NEB) seem excessive. The people around Gerar (v. 14) and the *herdsmen* (v. 15) were presumably Zerah's allies, though the latter were probably *attacked* (NIV, NRSV, RSV, etc.) rather than 'killed' (REB, NEB). Interest in the spoil (vv. 13-15) is explained by its use in sacrifice (15:11)."

c. Asa obeys a prophet's word (15:1-8).

1 The Spirit of God came upon Azariah son of Oded.

2 He went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you.

3 For a long time Israel was without the true God, without a priest to teach and without the law.

4 But in their distress they turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him, and he was found by them.

5 In those days it was not safe to travel about, for all the inhabitants of the lands were in great turmoil.

6 One nation was being crushed by another and one city by another, because God was troubling them with every kind of distress.

7 But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded."

8 When Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Azariah son of Oded the prophet, he took courage. He removed the detestable idols from the whole land of Judah and Benjamin and from the towns he had captured in the hills of Ephraim. He repaired the altar of the LORD that was in front of the portico of the LORD's temple.

It seems that Azariah's prophecy is spread out over several verses. Vv. 3-6 may not be part of the prophetic word, but a comment by the editor.

This is the only place where Azariah appears in Scripture. Nothing is known about him. It could be that he was not a prophet in the regular sense of the word, but that the Spirit of God came upon him only once. Yet, his prophetic word pertained to the king as well as to the whole southern kingdom.

His first word is a fundamental biblical truth. James may have had this prophecy in mind when he wrote: “Come near to God and he will come near to you.”⁷⁶

The Tyndale Commentary states: “The theme of seeking God continues from chapter 14, occupying a central role in both the prophecy (v. 2, 4) and the covenant (vv. 12-13, 15). Two elements are stressed, that the purpose of seeking God is to be found by him (vv. 2, 4, 15), and that this is an attitude affecting the whole of life. Seeking is not an end in itself, but a God-given means to be restored to a relationship with him. That relationship is seen to encompass internal and external worlds, attitudes as well as actions. Neither pietism nor restructuring is adequate by itself, and any authentic movement of spiritual renewal should show evidence in both.”

It is obvious that the omnipresent God is always near, whether we seek Him or not. Yet, the Bible states: “The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.”⁷⁷ We interpret this to mean that we will experience God’s presence when we sincerely call upon Him, not that He is only present when we call.

It is important to bear in mind the context in which this prophecy was given. Asa was about to go into war. The presence of the LORD was the assurance of victory.

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary comments on v. 3: “Israel hath followed Jeroboam, and they have not worshipped the true God. They have burnt incense to their golden calves; their priestlings, cumeraiya, their black, sooty sacrificers, have burnt perfumes with a strange worship, and have not exercised themselves in the law.’-Targum. These priests could not teach, because they had not learnt; and as they had abandoned the law of the LORD, consequently they had no proper matter for instruction.

There is a great diversity of opinions concerning the meaning of this text. Some consider it a prophecy relative to the future state of this people, and the final destruction of the Jews as to their political existence: others consider it as referring to the state of the people under the reigns of Rehoboam and Abijah, which were happily changed under that of Asa; and this appears to me to be the most natural sense of the words.”

The Pulpit Commentary comments about Azariah’s reference to history: “When did these three things *happen* altogether most notoriously? They describe, not the transgressions of an individual king, but the state of the people and kingdom as a whole. If it were possible to conceive the description as a flagrant anachronism, a retrospective post-Captivity amplification, which the writer (in his glow of work and thought) was unconsciously and irresistibly betrayed into putting into the lips of the Prophet Azariah, all doubt would end; for the description would suit no state of things and no period better than that of the divided kingdoms, especially applying to the career of the separate kingdom of Israel. Our account, unfortunately, is unchecked just here by a parallel. It is, however, impossible to suppose this without any tittle of external authority for it, much less enough to proceed upon. Some so crave the illustration that they are prepared to suppose all the tenses of these verses present and future rather than past and ‘present perfect.’

⁷⁶ James 4:8

⁷⁷ Ps. 145:18

But, in fact, no doubt the history of Israel since the death of Moses illustrated the language of Azariah *passim* to a degree beyond all ‘that is written’ or that we know. And then we may certainly consider theft the expression chosen, ‘many days’ (which some translate ‘many a day,’ ‘many a time ‘), even the word ‘years’ not being employed, leaves it open to us to go to short episodes of an irreligious and disastrous character in the history of Israel. Lastly, the long stretch of fully three hundred years, extending throughout the Book of Judges (its last five chapters in right order or wrong) into the opening seven chapters of 1 Samuel, provides one running comment, superabundant almost to repetitiousness, for the illustration of our verses 3-7; in many cases absolutely *picking out* the very colors to match (*e.g.* Jdg. 5:6; 20:29, 31, compared with our Jdg. 20:5). ... It is a long-stretched-out history of a practically atheistic, priest-less, lawless life; divided into narratives of invasion, oppression, servitude, smart, cry for help manifestly more the cry of pain and cowardice than of penitence and repentance, resolution and vow, and—for another trial and still another—of Divine pity, forbearance, and deliverance.”

Turning back to Asa, the prophet encourages him by saying: “But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.” The Hebrew text reads literally: “Be you therefore strong and let your hands not be weak: for your work shall be rewarded.”

We assume that Asa had begun some spiritual cleanup already and that this prophecy not only encouraged him to continue, but to cleanse the whole country completely of anything that reeked of idol worship. We are not told what the “detestable idols” were. They were probably statutes that represented perverse sexual acts in which idol worshippers engaged when visiting the idol temples.

It is not clear what is meant by the renewal of the altar that stood at the entrance of the temple. The Hebrew verb used is *chadash*, which can mean “to rebuild.” It may mean that the altar had not been used for a long time and had therefore fallen in disrepair. It could also be that it had been used for idol worship and that a ritual of spiritual cleansing was performed to rededicate it to the LORD.

d. Asa’s covenant with God (15:9-19).

(i) A new covenant (15:9-15).

9 Then he assembled all Judah and Benjamin and the people from Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon who had settled among them, for large numbers had come over to him from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him.

10 They assembled at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa's reign.

11 At that time they sacrificed to the LORD seven hundred head of cattle and seven thousand sheep and goats from the plunder they had brought back.

12 They entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and soul.

13 All who would not seek the LORD, the God of Israel, were to be put to death, whether small or great, man or woman.

14 They took an oath to the LORD with loud acclamation, with shouting and with trumpets and horns.

15 All Judah rejoiced about the oath because they had sworn it wholeheartedly. They sought God eagerly, and he was found by them. So the LORD gave them rest on every side.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “The people’s *covenant* (v. 12) forms the climax of the reform. It is the first of four such covenants listed in Chronicles as against only two in Kings (cf. 2 Ch. 23:16; 29:10; 34:31-32; 2 Ki. 11:17; 23:3), testifying to their greater significance for Chronicles. All these covenants enabled the people to renew their commitment to God, though each had distinctive characteristics. The covenant, for example, committed to the people to *seek* God (vv. 12, 13, 15), that is, to express total obedience to him. This is a special meaning of ‘to seek.’ Whereas elsewhere it referred either to a special occasion (e.g. v. 4; 20:4) or to a general attitude of following God’s way (1 Ch. 28:9; 2 Ch. 7:14; 34:3), here it is equivalent to total commitment to God. This is combined with a variety of covenant expressions associated primarily with a variety of covenant expression associated primarily with Deuteronomy. The phrase *with all their heart and soul* (v.12; cf. v. 15, ‘with all their heart,’ NRSV, RSV, etc.) is found in e.g. Deuteronomy 6:5; 10:12; 11:13; a penalty of *death* for non-compliance (v. 13) follows Deuteronomy 13:6-10; 17:2-7; and a covenant confirmed by an *oath* (vv. 14-15) is mentioned in Deuteronomy 29:12, 14 (cf. Ne. 10:29).”

This kind of unconditional commitment to God strikes us as extreme. The general tendency of our age is to consider religion a private matter. Separation of church and state would make capital punishment for atheism impossible. For Israel, however, non-compliance would be an act of betrayal. Israel’s *raison d’être* was that they be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”⁷⁸

Asa must have understood that his nation’s very existence depended upon obedience to the law of God. He had received some unexpected aid and confirmation of this conviction by the influx of people who had fled the northern kingdom because of its state-sponsored idolatry.

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary observes: “Many out of the different tribes, particularly out of Simeon, Ephraim, and Manasseh, having reflected that the divine blessing was promised to the house of David, and finding the government of Jeroboam founded in idolatry, would naturally through a spirit of piety, leave their own country, and go where they might enjoy the worship of the true God.”

We could wonder why it was not until the fifteenth year of Asa’s reign that this national gathering of recommitment took place. *The Pulpit Commentary* may give the correct reason by stating: “It has been conjectured from 2 Ch. 14:1 that Zerah the Ethiopian, or Cushite, invaded Judah in Asa’s *eleventh* year. The present sacrificial festival, in his fifteenth year, evidently was held very shortly after the close of Asa’s victory over Zerah. This infers a rather longer duration of the war than is otherwise to be gathered from the face of the history. The interval, it is true, may be explained by supposing that Asa lingered long to restore the state of things where Zerah’s vast host had unsettled it.”

The Tyndale Commentary comments on the fact that the people took an oath “with loud acclamation”: “The *acclamation* and rejoicing (vv. 14-15) are linked with David (1 Ch. 15:25, 28) and *rest on every side* with Solomon (1 Ch. 22:9, 18; 28:2). Uniquely in the Old Testament, Israel is said to be *found* by God (v. 15; cf. v.2).” One of the reasons for the volume of the people’s acclamation must have been that they wanted to be heard over the sound of the trumpets and horns.

⁷⁸

Ex. 19:6

(ii) *Further reforms (15:16-19).*

16 King Asa also deposed his grandmother Maacah from her position as queen mother, because she had made a repulsive Asherah pole. Asa cut the pole down, broke it up and burned it in the Kidron Valley.

17 Although he did not remove the high places from Israel, Asa's heart was fully committed [to the LORD] all his life.

18 He brought into the temple of God the silver and gold and the articles that he and his father had dedicated.

19 There was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign.

The fact that Asa deposed Maacah from her role as queen mother seems to indicate that she used her position to influence the policy of the nation. She had obviously been in a place of power, which she used in a subversive way. We do not read that she was put to death, as were the people who did not pledge allegiance to the LORD. Yet, it seems doubtful that she would have made a profession of faith in Yahweh.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “The *queen mother’s* role (v. 16) was an important one, especially when as in Asa’s case he was a minor on his accession and Maacah was probably in over-all control for the opening years of his reign. By calling her Asa’s *grandmother*, NIV, REB, NEB, and GNB assume she is the same person mentioned in 13:2; 1 Kings 15:2, 10, but it is unwise to be so dogmatic. That she had a personal object of worship continues a tradition of royal wives going back to Solomon (*cf.* 1 Ki. 11:1-5; 16:31; 17:19). Her ‘Asherah image’ (*pole*, NIV) seems to have been particularly *repulsive* (‘obscene,’ GNB, REB, NEB), a Hebrew word which occurs only here and in 1 Kings 15:13. The *Kidron Valley* was a well-known dump for unwanted religious objects (*cf.* 2 Ch. 29:16; 30:14; 2 Ki. 23:4, 6, 12).”

The Hebrew word used for Maacah’s relationship to Asa is *‘em*, which some older versions render as “mother.” The word has a rather wide variety of meaning in Hebrew and can refer to female family relatives in a larger sense.

Although Asa’s heart was totally dedicated to the service of Yahweh, we read that the “high places,” where people brought sacrifices, were not eradicated. *Barnes’ Notes* comments on this: “Comparing this verse with marginal references, it would seem that in 2 Chron. 14:3, 5 the intention and endeavors of the monarch are in the writer’s mind, while here he is speaking of the practice of the people. However earnestly the most pious monarchs sought to root out the high-place worship, they failed of complete success. Compare a similar discrepancy, to be similarly explained, in the history of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 17:6; 20:33).”

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary comments on v. 18: “Since it was a custom to dedicate a part of the spoils taken from an enemy to the service and honor of God, it is natural to suppose that Abijah, having so signally overthrown Jeroboam, (2 Chron. 13:15-19,) had dedicated a part of the spoils to the LORD; but they had not been brought into the temple until this time.”

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “*The silver, gold, and vessels* were, of course, for the repair, restoration, and replacing of the revered fittings and ornaments of the temple. From what sources and after what victories the father of Asa and Asa himself had drawn these supplies is not given either here or in the parallel, but it is natural to suppose that Abijah’s victory over Jeroboam (2 Ch. 13:16) and Asa’s over Zerah would have been the chief occasions to finish them.”

The Tyndale Commentary adds: “Verse 19 seems to indicate that Judah and Israel were at peace between Asa’s fifteenth and thirty-fifth years (*cf.* v. 10), confirming verse 15. This is just about reconcilable with the statement in 1 Kings 15:16 that a state of war existed between Baasha of Israel (*cf.* 16:1) and Asa throughout their reigns, allowing for hostilities some time between Asa’s tenth (14:1) and fifteenth years (15:10) and also in his thirty-sixth year (16:1). What is not apparently reconcilable is that Baasha moved against Judah in Asa’s thirty-sixth year, since Baasha died in Asa’s twenty-sixth year (1 Ki. 15:33; 16:8). Israel’s king in Asa’s thirty-sixth year was Omri, Baasha’s third successor! Since Kings and Chronicles agree that Asa reigned for forty-one years (1 Ki. 15:10; 2 Ch. 16:13; *i.e.* either *c.* 910-869 BC (according to one Bible scholar) or *c.* 913-873 BC (according to another one), it seems at first sight either that Chronicles is following a different scheme for the Israelite monarchy here (but only here!) or that some scribal error has occurred. Two other alternatives are possible, however. The more ingenious is to follow (one Bible scholar) by seeing this and 16:1 as referring to the thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth years after the division, which would conveniently equate them with Asa’s fifteenth and sixteenth years and fit perfectly with the date for the covenant. Such a formula would be unique in the Old Testament, however. Otherwise, the discrepancy may be attributed to the Chronicler’s theological purposes, enabling Asa’s piety to be followed by peace and his unbelief by affliction. This, however, is equally unsatisfactory, not least because Baasha’s attack (16:1) cannot easily be fitted into such a scheme of reward and punishment. No solution, therefore, commends itself with any confidence.”

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “*There was no more war.* The Hebrew text should be adhered to, which simply says, *there was not war unto, etc. the five and thirtieth year.* There can be little doubt that the text originally said ‘twentieth,’ not ‘thirtieth’ (see also 2 Ch 16:1-14). The parallel, after the identical words of the previous verse already noted, goes on emphatically to speak of the fact that ‘there was war between Asa and Baasha all their days;’ and the same statement is repeated in the thirty-second verse of the same chapter (1 Ki. 15:16; 32). The following verse (33) says that Baasha’s twenty-four-year reign began in Asa’s third year. Putting the various and apparently somewhat varying statements together, they must be held to say, *first*, that a state of war was, indeed, chronic between Asa and Baasha (which way of putting need not disturb the correctness of 2 Ch. 14:5, 16, and of the fifteenth verse of our chapter), but that in the six and twentieth year of Asa, which would be the last or last but one of Baasha’s life, latent war gave place to active hostilities, and Baasha (2 Ch 16:1) came up to Judah to invade it, and to build Ramah—a course of conduct which was the beginning of the end for him.”

c. Asa’s covenant with Ben-Hadad (16:1-6).

1 In the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah and fortified Ramah to prevent anyone from leaving or entering the territory of Asa king of Judah.

2 Asa then took the silver and gold out of the treasuries of the LORD's temple and of his own palace and sent it to Ben-Hadad king of Aram, who was ruling in Damascus.

3 ‘Let there be a treaty between me and you,’ he said, ‘as there was between my father and your father. See, I am sending you silver and gold. Now break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so he will withdraw from me.’

4 Ben-Hadad agreed with King Asa and sent the commanders of his forces against the towns of Israel. They conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel Maim and all the store cities of Naphtali.

5 When Baasha heard this, he stopped building Ramah and abandoned his work.

6 Then King Asa brought all the men of Judah, and they carried away from Ramah the stones and timber Baasha had been using. With them he built up Geba and Mizpah.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments: “The blessing of God, which manifestly rested at this time on the kingdom of Judah, the signal victory of Asa, the freedom and purity of religious worship, and the fame of the late national covenant, were regarded with great interest throughout Israel, and attracted a constantly-increasing number of emigrants to Judah. Baasha, alarmed at this movement, determined to stem the tide; and as the high road to and from Jerusalem passed by Ramah, he made that frontier town-about six miles north of Asa’s capital - a military station, where the vigilance of his sentinels would effectually prevent all passage across the boundary of the kingdom.”

It is obvious that Asa’s behavior, in the face of the threat that Israel’s fortifications presented to the kingdom of Judah, indicates a change in his relationship with God. There was no turning to the LORD or asking any of the prophets of that time for divine counsel. Asa decided to handle the matter by political means instead of spiritually.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “Asa’s last five years, recounted in chapter 16, completely reverse the pattern of the rest of his life, a decline that is all the more unexpected in that it seems to have started from an act of unprovoked hostility (v. 1). From that point on, however, Asa seemed determined to go his own way, and he followed his initial rejection of God’s help (vv. 2-3) by persecuting a prophet (v. 10), oppressing his people (v. 10), and neglecting God (v. 12). A pattern therefore developed, which, though it may have begun by accident, became a series of conscious decisions.”

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “For the *six and thirtieth year, read six and twentieth*. Ramah belonged to Benjamin (Jos 18:21, 25, 28), and lay between Bethel and Jerusalem, about five or six Roman miles from each; but [some Bible scholars], by some error, call it thirty miles from Jerusalem, having very likely in their eye Ramah of Samuel, in Ephraim. The word signifies ‘lofty,’ and the present history speaks the importance of its position, and would infer also that Israel had regained Bethel, which, with other adjacent places, Abijah had wrestled from Jeroboam (2 Ch 13:19). The reference of Isa 10:28, 29 is exceedingly interesting, and bespeaks the fact that Ramah commanded another intersecting route from Ephraim. When it is said here that Baasha built (*banah*) Ramah, the meaning is that he was beginning to strengthen it greatly, and fortify it. The object of Baasha, which no doubt needed no stating in the facts of the day, is now stated by history.”

Ben-Hadad, having received the *money*, obliged Asa and began harassing Baasha, so that the latter was obliged to stop the fortification of Ramah and turn his attention to the threat by Damascus. Asa let no time go by, but immediately removed the stones and timber Baasha had left and used it to fortify Geba and Mizpah.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “The parallel (1 Ki 15:22) is so much the more graphic that it contains the two additions that Asa ‘made a proclamation throughout all Judah,’ and one that ‘exempted none’ from joining in the duty of moving all the stones and all the timber from Ramah, and diverting them to the use of building Geba and Mizpah. This greatly contributed to command the road from the north to Jerusalem. *Geba*. This was Geba of Benjamin, as clearly stated in the parallel. It was a position north of Ramah, whether opposite Michmash and the modern Jeba is not certain, as some think this answers to Gibeah of Saul (1 Sa. 14:2, 5). *Mizpah* (see Jer. 41:2, 3, 9, 10). This Mizpah is not that of the Shefelah (Jos. 15:38),

but was situated about two hours, or a short six miles, north-west of Jerusalem, on the Samaria route, and is probably the modern *Neby Samwil* (see also 2 Ki. 25:22-26; Je. 40:5-41:18)."

In closing this section, *The Tyndale Commentary* states: "Initially, things went favorably for Asa, with Baasha loosing territory on his northern and southern borders (vv. 4-6). *Ijon*, *Dan*, and *Abel Maim* (= Abel Beth Maacah, 1 Ki. 15:20) were all within *Naphtali* on or near the Rift Valley road (v. 4). *Store cities* is 'Kineroth' in 1 Kings 15:20, which became Genneseret in the post-exilic period (Josephus ...). The Chronicler's text here may have differed slightly from the MT of Kings, since 'store cities' could represent either the plural form of Kineroth or 'the whole of Naphtali.' The location of *Geba* ('hill') and *Mizpah* ('look-out post') are disputed, partly because they could apply to several places. Most probably, however, they represent Jeba and Tell en-Nasbeh, about six and eight miles respectively north of Jerusalem, so pushing the border a few miles back into Israel. Geba became the recognized limit of Judah (2 Ki. 23:8), probably the first stable border post since the division, though it is unknown whether Asa's defensive building work belonged to this stage of the conflict (Je. 41:9)."

f. Asa rejects a prophet's word (16:7-10).

7 *At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him: "Because you relied on the king of Aram and not on the LORD your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand.*

8 *Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and horsemen? Yet when you relied on the LORD, he delivered them into your hand.*

9 *For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war."*

10 *Asa was angry with the seer because of this; he was so enraged that he put him in prison. At the same time Asa brutally oppressed some of the people.*

The first part of v. 9 is one of the great promises of the Old Testament, valid for anyone whose heart is fully committed to the LORD in any period of world history.

The Tyndale Commentary states: "*Hanani* is probably to be identified with the father of the prophet Jehu, who was active in the reign of Asa's son (1 Ki. 16:1, 7; 2 Ch. 19:2; 20:34). *Seer* (Heb. *ro'eh*) is an old word usually associated with the period of Samuel (e.g. 1 Sa. 9:9, 19; 1 Ch. 9:22; 29:28; though cf. Is. 30:10). Its appearance here may hint at the antiquity of the Chronicler's source for this prophecy.

The message of the prophecy is sharply opposed to Azariah's encouraging tone (15:1-7). Asa had done a *foolish thing* (v. 9) by not trusting in God (v. 7), and his treaty (v. 3) had negated his earlier covenant (15:9-15). He had also rejected the 'Yahweh war' principle (cf. 14:9-15). Where previously Asa had *relied* on God who had *delivered* him from a *mighty army* (v. 8; cf. 14:11), now he *relied* on human resources alone (v. 7). The enemy had therefore *escaped from your hand* instead of being *delivered into your hand* (vv. 7-8). Asa's reaction was matched only by acts of folly by Saul and David and by Ahaz' unbelief. By 'acting foolishly' (v. 9, REB, NEB), Saul lost a kingdom (1 Sa. 13:18) and David very nearly so (1 Ch. 21:8; the only other use of this verb in Ch.), while Ahaz' appeal to foreign military help left him in great trouble (2 Ch. 28:16-21).

Like Azariah, Hanani also finds support in the prophetic literature. Ahaz' unwillingness to believe in God when threatened by Israel (Is. 7:9) is reflected in Asa's non-reliance (cf. v. 7; 'to rely' also occurs in Is. 10:20; 31:1), while Zechariah 4:10 (*the eye of the LORD range*

throughout the earth), which is quoted directly in verse 9, us used to encourage those whose faith is committed to God.

Hanani mentions two surprising consequences of Asa's unbelief, that it was the Syrian rather than the Israelite (*cf.* LXX (L)) army that escaped (v.7), and that Asa will experience future wars (v. 9). In fact, *Syria* was an increasing threat to Asa's successors, which Hanani implies could have been cut off at source (*cf.* 18:30; 22:5). Victory over Syria would also have extended Asa's earlier success, so that his unbelief should not be measured by victory over Israel (v. 6), but by a lost opportunity (*cf.* 1 Ki. 20:31-34; 2 Ki. 13:14-19). The second problem is that no further *wars* of Asa are mentioned, perhaps because the punishment was delayed until Jehoshaphat's reign (chapter 18). This is on occasion at least was retribution was not immediate."

The fact that Hanani's message angered Asa proves that he knew the prophet was right and he was wrong. Hanani's imprisonment was more than unbelief; it was in reality an act of rebellion against God. From that time on Asa began to rule the nation of Judah like a tyrant. We are not told what form this oppression took. The Hebrew word used is *ratsats*, which has a variety of meaning from "discourage" to "crush." The most extreme example is in the death of Abimelech, of whom we read: "Abimelech went to the tower and stormed it. But as he approached the entrance to the tower to set it on fire, a woman dropped an upper millstone on his head and *cracked* his skull."⁷⁹ A milder example is in the verse in which the Assyrian ambassador says to the representatives of King Hezekiah: "Look now, you are depending on Egypt, that *splintered* reed of a staff, which pierces a man's hand and wounds him if he leans on it! Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who depend on him."⁸⁰

It is doubtful that Asa's oppression would consist in splitting open people's skulls; his reign changed from leadership to tyranny. He no longer considered himself to rule his nation by the grace of God.

g. Asa fails to seek God (16:11-12).

11 The events of Asa's reign, from beginning to end, are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel.

12 In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was afflicted with a disease in his feet. Though his disease was severe, even in his illness he did not seek help from the LORD, but only from the physicians.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "Three significant additions to 1 Kings 15:23-24 stand out in the account of Asa's death and burial in verses 11-14, all of which are paralleled by additions in the account of Hezekiah. The first is the addition of 'and Israel' in the first occurrence in Chronicles of *the book of the kings of Judah and Israel* (v. 11; *cf.* 2 Ch. 25:26;

⁷⁹ Judg. 9:52, 53

⁸⁰ Isa. 36:6

28:26; 32:32). The title of this source, which is different from the biblical books of Kings, confirms that the kingdom of Judah is still the people of Israel (*cf.* 11:3; 12:1).

Secondly, extra details are given about Asa's illness (v. 12), which could be gout, dropsy, or 'gangrene' (REB). The disease may be divine judgment (*cf.* vv. 7-10), but the more serious criticism is that Asa sought the 'doctors' (GNB, JB) rather than *the LORD* while he was ill. Since this is the only time in the Bible that consulting physicians is considered a sin, this cannot be an attack on the medical profession (for positive view, *cf.* Gn. 50:2; Je. 8:22; Is. 38:21; Col. 4:14). Rather, Asa fails to recognize the LORD as the true source of healing (*cf.* Ex. 15:26; Ps 103:3). The idea of seeking the Lord for healing may show influence from the Psalms (*e.g.* 34:4; 77:2) and from two ironic instances in Kings in which an Israelite king sought Baalzebub and died (2 Ki. 1:2, 6, 16) and an Aramean king was restored after seeking the Lord (2 Ki. 8:8). Since prophets were involved in both the incidents in Kings (*cf.* also 2 Ki. 20:5), it may be that Asa was expected to find help through a prophet, especially as 'doctors' might imply 'ancestors' or 'mediums.' In all this, Asa turned his back on his own standard (14:4, 7; 15:12, 15), though strangely the pattern was also followed by Hezekiah, who, in spite of the fact that he was healed, 'did not respond to the kindness shown him' (2 Ch. 32:25)."

The Hebrew word referred to is *rapha`*, which can either be a verb, meaning "to heal," or a noun, "doctor," or "physician."

The Pulpit Commentary observes about the phrase "though his disease was severe,": "Perhaps a somewhat more literal rendering will more correctly express the emphasis of the original, *e.g. his disease was great even to excess*. For yet, read emphatically, and *also*; the historian purposing to say that as, in his fear of Baasha, he had not sought the *Lord*, but *Benhadad*, so, in his excessive illness also, he had not sought the Lord, but the physicians!"

h. Concluding formula (16:13-14).

13 Then in the forty-first year of his reign Asa died and rested with his fathers.

14 They buried him in the tomb that he had cut out for himself in the City of David. They laid him on a bier covered with spices and various blended perfumes, and they made a huge fire in his honor.

In the Hebrew text the word for "tomb" is in the plural. This may strike us as strange, since it is difficult to imagine that someone would be buried in more than one location. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* explains: "The tombs in the neighborhood of Jerusalem were excavated in the side of a rock. One cave contained several tombs or sepulchers."

Some Bible scholars believe that the huge fire mentioned in this text refers to a cremation. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary*, for instance, states: "It is very likely that the body of Asa was burnt; that the bed spoken of here was a funeral pyre, on which much spices and odoriferous woods had been placed; and then they set fire to the whole and consumed the body with the aromatics. Some think the body was not burned, but the aromatics only, in honor of the king."

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "Burials are important in Chronicles (information is added to Ki. in *e.g.* 21:20; 24:25), and the special *honor* accorded to Asa (*cf.* also Hezekiah, 2 Ch. 32:33) is probably a sign that despite his failings, the over-all assessment remained valid (*cf.*

14:2). The unusual nature of the tribute is indicated by the personal ‘rock tomb’ (GNB) that he had ‘dug’ (JB), the special variety of spices, and the fact that the fire was ‘very great’ (NRSV, RSV). Such fires were customary for royal funerals (*cf.* Je. 34:5), and were not for cremating the boy but a sign of honor (*cf.* 2 Ch. 21:19).”

C. Jehoshaphat (17:1 – 21:1)

i. Overture (17:1-19).

a. Jehoshaphat strengthens his kingdom (17:1-6)

1 Jehoshaphat his son succeeded him as king and strengthened himself against Israel.

2 He stationed troops in all the fortified cities of Judah and put garrisons in Judah and in the towns of Ephraim that his father Asa had captured.

3 The Lord was with Jehoshaphat because in his early years he walked in the ways his father David had followed. He did not consult the Baals

4 but sought the God of his father and followed his commands rather than the practices of Israel.

5 The Lord established the kingdom under his control; and all Judah brought gifts to Jehoshaphat, so that he had great wealth and honor.

6 His heart was devoted to the ways of the Lord; furthermore, he removed the high places and the Asherah poles from Judah.

In the main introduction to Jehoshaphat and his reign, *The Tyndale Commentary* writes: “Jehoshaphat occupies the next four chapters (17-20), and as with all his predecessors in the Divided Monarchy, the Chronicler’s version differs significantly from Kings. Again Chronicles is much longer and has a more varied assessment, though the most striking difference is the new over-all importance attached to Jehoshaphat. Whereas in Kings he is mainly an adjunct of the northern kingdom (1 Ki. 22:1-38; 2 Ki. 3:4-27; *cf.* 1 Ki. 22:41-50), he takes center stage in Chronicles’ account of the Divided Monarchy (chapters 10-28), exemplifying many of Chronicles’ key themes. He is a man of prayer and faith who removes idolatrous symbols, gives God’s law new priority, and has a special concern for the Levites. In typical Chronicles fashion, he is blessed with a strong army, new buildings, wealth, and international recognition. On the other hand, his willingness for compromise with the northern kingdom is a notable weakness, and neither he nor his people are fully committed to God.

His reign, therefore, as with all the best kings of Judah, is mixed, and far from brushing the negative features under the carpet, Chronicles adds two prophecies directly critical of Jehoshaphat (19:1-3; 20:37). The over-all effect, however, is to underline God’s crucial role in preserving his people, as can be seen in a key passage epitomizing both Jehoshaphat’s reign and the Divided Monarchy (20:14-22). A Levitical prophet and the king himself appeal to the people to *stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you*, because they are assured that *the LORD will be with you* (20:17).

Chapter 17 is a kind of overture to chapters 18-20, briefly introducing many subjects that are dealt with more fully later on. This is particularly true of the opening section (vv. 1-6), but also applies to the subject of teaching God’s law and the fear of the LORD (vv. 7-11; *cf.* 19:1-11; 20:29-30) and to the armed forces (vv. 12-19; *cf.* chs. 18 and 20).”

As Jehoshaphat commenced his reign, the main threat against Judah was still considered to be the northern kingdom. That was obviously the reason Jehoshaphat strengthened the cities his father had captured from Israel.

The Pulpit Commentary states: “In 2 Ch. 20:31 and 1 Ki. 22:41, 42 we are told that Jehoshaphat was now thirty-five years of age. He must, therefore, have been born when Asa was in the sixth year of his reign, and presumably not under sixteen years of age. His reign extended to twenty-five years, *i.e.* from B.C. 914 to B.C. 889. The name signifies ‘whom God judges,’ or ‘pleads for.’ Ahab is now in the fourth year of his reign, and the symptoms he manifests (1 Ki. 16:30-33) are those that the rather urge Jehoshaphat to *strengthen himself*, *i.e.* strengthen the defenses of his kingdom on the Israel side.”

It is stated that Jehoshaphat “walked in the ways his father David had followed.” It has been objected that David was not his father, but his ancestor. The Hebrew word used here is *ab*, which has a much wider meaning than the immediate relationship we understand it to stand for.

Jehoshaphat took his relationship with God seriously and he was passionate to bring Judah back to the true worship of YHWH. In this he went further than his father Asa, who had served God, but did not bring worship back to the place God had chosen to reveal Himself, which was in Jerusalem. Evidently, Asa had also left the remains of the former Baal worship untouched.

According to *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Asherah was the goddess of fertility, and the Asherah pole probably represented a sexual image, which we would consider obscene.

Jehoshaphat earned the respect and love of the population of Judah and the people respected his righteous testimony, honoring him with freewill gifts, which made him one of the wealthier kings of Judah.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “Jehoshaphat’s *father* could be either Asa or David (v. 3). Only NIV among EVV retains *David* (MT), with the rest following LXX because of the unusual reference to David’s former years’ (though it is not entirely without analogy, *cf.* 1 Ch. 29:29). In fact, Asa is probably meant, since his reign is divided into two parts (chs.14-15 and 16), and because a king is often compared in nearby chapters with his own father (20:32; 31:12; 22:9). The *Baals*, mentioned for the first time in Chronicles (v. 3), probably allude to Elijah’s conflict with Ahab and Jezebel. God’s establishing of *the kingdom* (v. 5), which ties in with Chronicles’ emphasis on God’s gift of a kingdom to Israel (*cf. e.g.* 1 Ch. 10:14; 14:2; 22:10), fulfills part of the promises of the Davidic covenant (1 Ch. 17:11; 28:7). It is a firm hint of God’s continuing authority over his people. The expression ‘took pride in’ (v. 6, GNB, REB, NEB; *devoted to*, NIV; ‘courageous,’ NRSV, RSV) is unique in this positive sense, but it conveys well Jehoshaphat’s determination to follow the Lord. Mention of the *high places* is doubly problematical, since Asa was supposed to have removed them in Judah (14:3, 5), but a later statement indicates that they were not all removed (20:33; *cf.* also 15:17). Though these conflicting statements might be partly explained by the Chronicler’s quoting of different sources, they may also witness to the deep hold of Canaanite and syncretistic forms of religion on ordinary Israelites. Popular views and practices are often quite different from pronouncements by religious authorities.”

b. Jehoshaphat’s blessings (17:7-11).

7 In the third year of his reign he sent his officials Ben-Hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel and Micaiah to teach in the towns of Judah.

8 With them were certain Levites-Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah and Tob-Adonijah — and the priests Elishama and Jehoram.

9 They taught throughout Judah, taking with them the Book of the Law of the Lord; they went around to all the towns of Judah and taught the people.

10 The fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms of the lands surrounding Judah, so that they did not make war with Jehoshaphat.

11 Some Philistines brought Jehoshaphat gifts and silver as tribute, and the Arabs brought him flocks: seven thousand seven hundred rams and seven thousand seven hundred goats.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “This paragraph continues to look forward to chapters 18-20, summarizing three of Jehoshaphat’s achievements. The first is the commission of *officials* (v. 7), *Levites* (v. 8), and *priests* (v. 8) to *teach* (vv. 7, 9) the people from the *Book of the Law of the LORD* (v. 9). The event is associated with, if not identical to, a similar campaign by some judges in 19:4-11, since both involved the same range of leaders and were based on the law, which was presumably some form of the Pentateuch (*cf.* 19:8, 10).”

In the Hebrew text the “officials” named in vv. 7 and 8 are called “princes.” The Hebrew word used is *sar*, which can refer to any person of high rank.

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary comments: “In these verses we find a remarkable account of an itinerant ministry established by Jehoshaphat; and in this work he employed three classes of men:

1. The princes.
2. The Levites.
3. The priests.

We may presume that the princes instructed the people in the nature of the civil law and constitution of the kingdom; the Levites instructed them in everything that appertained to the temple service, and ritual law; and the priests instructed them in the nature and design of the religion they professed. Thus the nation became thoroughly instructed in their duty to God, to the king, and to each other. They became, therefore, as one man; and against a people thus united, on such principles, no enemy could be successful.”

The question could be asked why the writer of *Chronicles* would bother to go into such detail to preserve the names of the officials and Levites sent by Jehoshaphat. After all, if *Chronicles* was written after the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, centuries later, the people mentioned, belonged to ancient history. It was, however, spiritual history, and as such it was an important stimulus to the post-captivity people to remember and live up to their heritage.

Another important point is that the result of the mission upon which Jehoshaphat sent his delegates was a spiritual revival, which brought God’s hand of protection upon the nation. The people, who had returned from captivity, could use a good measure of this peace in their own time.

The people’s response to the teaching of the law must have been a genuine forsaking of former idolatry and a renewed consecration to the Lord. The fear of the Lord would not have fallen on nations surrounding Judah if that were not the case.

The Tyndale Commentary states: “The second and third of Jehoshaphat’s achievements are peace (v. 10) and wealth (v. 11). These are attributed *to the fear of the LORD* (v. 10), *i.e.* a recognition by outsiders of some special protection on Judah. The fact that they are mentioned straight after the ‘Back to the Bible’ campaign suggests that they are the result of faithfulness to God’s word. As in verses 1-6, several phrases anticipate later elements of Jehoshaphat’s reign. For example, *the fear of the LORD* recurs in 19:7, 9; 20:29; the appointing of *priests* and *Levites*

in 19:8 (*cf.* also the role of a Levite and the signers in 20:14, 21); *the kingdoms of the lands* in 20:29, *cf.* 20:6; and the absence of war in 20:29. Since these themes and phrases are indicative of divine blessings throughout Chronicles. Jehoshaphat is presented as one who is specially favored (for *the fear of the LORD*, *cf.* 1 Ch. 14:17; 2 Ch. 14:14; *the kingdoms of the lands*, *cf.* 1 Ch. 29:30; and the lack of war, *cf.* 1 Ch. 22:9, 2 Ch. 14:1; 15:19).”

c. Jehoshaphat’s military resources (17:12-19).

12 Jehoshaphat became more and more powerful; he built forts and store cities in Judah

13 and had large supplies in the towns of Judah. He also kept experienced fighting men in Jerusalem.

14 Their enrollment by families was as follows: From Judah, commanders of units of 1,000: Adnah the commander, with 300,000 fighting men;

15 next, Jehohanan the commander, with 280,000;

16 next, Amasiah son of Zicri, who volunteered himself for the service of the Lord, with 200,000.

17 From Benjamin: Eliada, a valiant soldier, with 200,000 men armed with bows and shields;

18 next, Jehozabad, with 180,000 men armed for battle.

19 These were the men who served the king, besides those he stationed in the fortified cities throughout Judah.

Jehoshaphat’s trust in the Lord’s protection did not keep him from building up his defenses with the means he had. He felt that the two were not incompatible. The Scripture does not judge him for this.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “Details of Jehoshaphat’s fortification and supplies (vv. 12-13a) and troops (vv. 13b-19) are given in anticipation of Jehoshaphat’s battles in chapters 18 and 20 (*cf.* also vv. 1-2). He apparently increased the number of forts (v. 12) beyond those built by Rehoboam (11:5-12) and Asa (14:6-7). This was a sign of God-given strength, though it had its dangers (2 Ch. 26:15-16). In these towns, he probably kept supplies (NIV, *etc.*) rather than being engaged on ‘much work’ (v. 13, REB, NEB).

Troop numbers are based on a ‘muster’ (v. 14, NRSV, RSV) of *enrolment* (NIV, *cf.* REB, NEB). They are counted by *families* (v. 14, NIV, JB; ‘fathers’ houses,’ RSV; either is better than ‘clans,’ GNB, REB, NEB) of the tribal levies, though a standing army is mentioned in verse 19 and probably verse 13b. The list’s style suggests it originated from some kind of military census list As elsewhere, *thousand* is probably best understood as a military unit, though these figures are still unusually high (*cf.* 14:8; 25:5-6; 26:12-13). The note that one of the commanders ‘volunteered for service of the LORD’ (v. 16: REB, NEB) is unfortunately not explained, though it shows that the sacrificial spirit of David’s time was still evident (1 Ch. 29:5; *cf.* 2 Ch. 29:31).”

The Pulpit Commentary comments on *Amaziah, the son of Zichri*: “This man is not titled at all. The description of him as one *who had willingly offered himself unto the Lord*, not elucidated by the context or any effective parallel, will mark something honorable in his history. Possibly he comes from an unexpected quarter, and is a man of approved skill. Nothing further is known of these three men.”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary states about vv. 14 and following: “No monarch, since the time of Solomon, equaled Jehoshaphat in the extent of his revenue, in the

strength of his fortifications, and the number of his troops. The extent and wealth of the southern kingdom were as great as that of the northern. But the nucleus of it, on which the responsibility of its defense and security rested, was in comparison very inconsiderable. All depended on the men that occupied the fortress settlements of Judah and Benjamin. They furnished the troops for the garrisons of Edom, of the wilderness frontier, of Philistia, and of the various points of access into the country. From this point of view we have the means of estimating the strength and valor of the southern kingdom at this time; its position in relation to its dependencies may be illustrated by that in which our own country now stands to our colonies." That last observation shows that it was written when colonialism was still in existence.

ii. Jehoshaphat, Ahab and the prophets (18:1 -19:3)

a. An alliance for war (18:1-3).

***1 Now Jehoshaphat had great wealth and honor, and he allied himself with Ahab by marriage.
2 Some years later he went down to visit Ahab in Samaria. Ahab slaughtered many sheep and cattle for him and the people with him and urged him to attack Ramoth Gilead.***

3 Ahab king of Israel asked Jehoshaphat king of Judah, "Will you go with me against Ramoth Gilead?"

The Hebrew text of v. 1 reads literally: "Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance, and joined affinity with Ahab." The Hebrew key verb in the verse is *chathan*, which generally refers to giving away a daughter in marriage.

In introducing this chapter, *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "This chapter, from its second verse, finds its parallel in 1 Ki. 22:2-35. It opens with dangerous symptoms, recording in one sentence the event that was to bear ill fruit, if not till 'years' afterward (1 Ki. 22:2), of Jehoshaphat 'joining affinity with Ahab.' His son Jehoram married Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel (2 Ch. 21:6). The further steps by which Jehoshaphat became entangled with Ahab are graphically described. He forms an alliance with him in the war with Ramoth-Gilead (1 Ki. 22:1-3); he urges Ahab to consult 'a prophet of the Lord' (1 Ki. 22:4-12). Ahab unwillingly consents, and receives Micaiah's answer (1 Ki. 22:13-27); and finally the chapter tells us how Ahab went up to battle, and in battle received his mortal wound (1 Ki. 22:28-34)."

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "A proper link with 1 Kings 22 begins only in verse 3, following a quite different introduction (vv. 1-2) which sets out the theme that Jehoshaphat's relationship with Ahab was a deviation from God's purposes (*cf.* 19:1-3). It also makes clear that their association was the result not of Ahab's opportunism but of a formal 'alliance' (v. 1, NRSV, RSV). This alliance had been sealed several years before the battle (*cf.* v. 2) by marriage between Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram and Ahab's daughter Athaliah (*cf.* 2 Ki. 8:18; 2 Ch. 21:6). Such marriage alliances were typical in the ancient world, often serving as an expression of peace between those who had previously been opposed (*cf.* 1 Ki. 22:44). Since, on this occasion, peace had come after fifty years of hostilities, to many it must have been welcome at any price. For the Chronicler, however, even the two kings' uniting against a common enemy was not sufficient to give the alliance divine approval (*cf.* 10:18-19; 11:1-4; 13:3-19; 16:1-9). The reasons for God's displeasure are hinted at in verse 1, which could be translated, 'Though he had great wealth and honor, he allied himself ...'. Jehoshaphat's *great wealth and honor*, though a divine blessing (17:5), blinded him to the reality that Ahab was a man implacably opposed to the ways of God (19:2; *cf.* 1 Ki. 16:30-33; 18:18; 21:20, 25-26). Ahab probably expected that it would be quite easy to recapture *Ramoth Gilead*, a walled city southeast of the Sea of Galilee ...

since with prophetic encouragement his forces had twice repulsed Syrian attacks (1 Ki. 20:1-21, 22-34). The vagueness of the Chronicler's date (*Some years later*, v. 2) is due to his omitting the previous course of war (*cf.* 1 Ki. 22:1-2). Ahab may have been motivated by Ben-Hadad's failure to observe the terms of his treaty with Israel (1 Ki. 20:34), but, whatever the reason, Jehoshaphat was ready to join in fully. His words, *I am as you are ...* (v. 4), imply commitment to a contract or treaty (*cf.* Ru. 1:16; 2 Ki. 3:7), as is also implied in the prophet's criticism (19:2)."

b. The prophet and the war (18:4-27).

i. Misleading prophecies (18:4-14).

4 But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, "First seek the counsel of the Lord."

5 So the king of Israel brought together the prophets — four hundred men — and asked them, "Shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?" "Go," they answered, "for God will give it into the king's hand."

6 But Jehoshaphat asked, "Is there not a prophet of the Lord here whom we can inquire of?"

7 The king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, "There is still one man through whom we can inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah." "The king should not say that," Jehoshaphat replied.

8 So the king of Israel called one of his officials and said, "Bring Micaiah son of Imlah at once."

9 Dressed in their royal robes, the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah were sitting on their thrones at the threshing floor by the entrance to the gate of Samaria, with all the prophets prophesying before them.

10 Now Zedekiah son of Kenaanah had made iron horns, and he declared, "This is what the Lord says: 'With these you will gore the Arameans until they are destroyed.'"

11 All the other prophets were prophesying the same thing. "Attack Ramoth Gilead and be victorious," they said, "for the Lord will give it into the king's hand."

12 The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, "Look, as one man the other prophets are predicting success for the king. Let your word agree with theirs, and speak favorably."

13 But Micaiah said, "As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what my God says."

14 When he arrived, the king asked him, "Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?" "Attack and be victorious," he answered, "for they will be given into your hand."

Although Jehoshaphat had agreed to join Ahab in any campaign the latter was planning, he did advise Ahab to consult Yahweh before entering into any attack. Ahab seemed to oblige, but the group of prophets he called to reveal the will of the Lord had obviously no divine counsel to communicate. That did not mean that they did not act as if they were revealing what God had told them to say. Both Ahab and Jehoshaphat knew that this convocation of prophets was a fake. Ahab did not care about the will of God, but he wanted Jehoshaphat to think that he did seek divine advice.

The show was meant to impress the king of Judah, but Jehoshaphat realized that Ahab's show of piety was deceptive.

The scene was impressive. Both kings were dressed in their royal robes and were sitting on thrones at the entrance to the gate of Samaria. The four hundred prophets also provided an impressive show. They all declared to have divine revelations and one of them gave a physical demonstration of this by wearing bull horns, representing the overpowering force with which the victory over Ramoth Gilead would be achieved.

Evidently, Ahab thought that he could convince Jehoshaphat by invoking the opinion of a large numbers of prophets. If four hundred of them all said the same thing, it must be true. Both he and Jehoshaphat knew that this was not so. But Jehoshaphat sat through the whole sham without commenting. He knew, however, that this large group of prophets was not saying what the Lord had given them to say.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “The first group of prophets arise in response of Jehoshaphat’s (but not Ahab’s) repeated attempt to ‘consult the Lord (vv. 4, 6, 7, GNB). ... Ahab at first seemed quite willing to listen, though not apparently with any intention of complying with what he heard. He therefore gathered four hundred prophets (v. 5), who probably belonged to the group of Baal and Asherah prophets that formed a kind of government department in Israel (1 Ki. 18:19). Jehoshaphat does not recognize them as belonging with the Yahweh prophets who had recently been persecuted (v. 6; cf. 1 Ki. 18:4), though it would have been quite acceptable in those syncretistic times to speak in the name of more than one deity (cf. v. 11).”

All the prophets Ahab called for consultation prophesied that Ahab would be successful in his effort to capture Ramoth Gilead. Whether Ahab believed their message is not indicated. Evidently, Jehoshaphat had his doubts, realizing that these prophets were not prophets of Yahweh.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “*These four hundred prophets ... were not prophets of Asherah, nor of Baal, but strictly of Israel, i.e. of the images of the calf (1 Ki. 12:26-33). Their word speedily showed itself not the word of the Lord, but the word that was made up to order of the king, and to suit his known wish at any time.*”

At Jehoshaphat’s request Ahab calls Micaiah son of Imlah, who is reputed to be a genuine Yahweh prophet. Ahab makes the interesting observation that he hates him, because his divine prophecies are always condemnatory for Ahab. Ahab did not care what Yahweh thought about him, but he did not like to hear the messages of condemnation. Evidently, he enjoyed approval both by God and man, regardless of his behavior.

Michaiah was a genuine prophet of God. This is obvious from his answer to the servant who called him and led him to the two kings.

In order to put the story in its right perspective, it is good to remember what happened when Israel and Judah were divided into two separate kingdoms. Jeroboam had broken with Yahweh by determining where God ought to be served. God had chosen Jerusalem as the place of His revelation. Jeroboam decided that God must reveal Himself at the place of Jeroboam’s choosing. He had done this for political reasons. Although God had given him the prophetic assurance that he was given the throne of the northern kingdom by divine appointment, he feared that he would lose it if the people of Israel would travel to Judah in order to worship at Jerusalem.⁸¹ Breaking with the place of God’s revelation meant breaking with God.

⁸¹ I Kings 12:26-30

This led to a mentality, which was generally held by the people of Israel, that Yahweh was no longer relevant for daily life. That was the attitude of the servant who called Michaiah to come and prophesy to the two kings.

Michaiah's answer to the man is that he would only be able to speak what the Lord gave him to say.

ii. Micaiah's prophecy (18:15-22).

15 *The king said to him, "How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?"*

16 *Then Micaiah answered, "I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the Lord said, 'These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.'"*

17 *The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Didn't I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad?"*

18 *Micaiah continued, "Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing on his right and on his left.*

19 *And the Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab king of Israel into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?' "One suggested this, and another that.*

20 *Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the Lord and said, 'I will entice him.' "'By what means?' the Lord asked.*

21 *"'I will go and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets,' he said. "'You will succeed in enticing him,' said the Lord. 'Go and do it.'*

22 *"So now the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouths of these prophets of yours. The Lord has decreed disaster for you."*

When Michaiah is asked by one of the two kings, probably Ahab, whether they should go to Ramoth Gilead, he gives an answer that is not of God. Interestingly, Ahab recognizes this. That is probably the most striking detail in this story. Ahab knew what God wanted him to do, but he decided not to do it.

Upon this, Michaiah declares God's judgment upon Ahab. He gives the answer by quoting Moses. When Moses knew he was going to die before Israel would enter Canaan, he asked God to appoint a successor, saying: "May the Lord, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd."⁸²

Ahab must have believed Michaiah's prophecy, because we read later that he entered the battle in disguise, so that he would not be recognized as Israel's king.

Vv. 18-22 are among the most puzzling verses in all of Scripture. Part of the problem is the anthropometric way in which God's council is described. God, obviously, does not need the input of angels or other heavenly beings in order to decide what ought to be done on earth. Michaiah tells the story this way for the benefit of Ahab and the four hundred prophets who prophesied in his behalf.

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Num. 27:16, 17

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “Heavenly court scenes are usually mentioned during major national crises (*cf.* Is. 6:1-8; Ezk. 1; Dn. 7:9-10, 13-14; for an individual setting, *cf.* Jb. 1-2), with the function of underlining God’s sovereign control over his people. In this instance there is also an ironic contrast with the two kings in their finery (vv. 9-11). *The host of heaven* (v. 18) are the heavenly armies, including the angels and servant spirits, who carry out God’s will (*cf.* Pss. 103:21; 148:2; Lk. 2:13). They are to be sharply distinguished from two quite different senses of the same phrase, namely, the physical heavens (*e.g.* Is. 40:26; Dn. 8:10) or the astral deities of pagan religions (2 Ch. 33:3, 5; Zp. 1:5).

The heavenly court provides the setting for an explanation of God’s purposes for the false prophets. God is portrayed as inviting the spirits in his court to *entice* Ahab to his death (v. 19) and one of them is eventually sent as *a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets* (v. 21). This strange incident can only be understood against the background of other Old Testament passages, especially Deuteronomy 13:11 and Ezekiel 14:1-11. Both these passages speak of people being enticed by false prophets, in each case as a result of a link with idolatry. It seems therefore that the words of the false prophets here are God’s response to Ahab’s trust in false gods and a condemnation of his idolatry (*cf.* Ps. 40:5; Am. 2:4 for the deceptiveness of idols). Ahab was in fact renowned for idol worship (1 Ki. 16:30-33; 21:22, 26) and also for his commitment of evil (1 Ki. 21:20, 25; vv. 7, 17 here). In consequence, the Lord had already decreed *death* (v. 19) and *disaster* (v. 22; ‘evil,’ RSV) through Elijah (1 Ki. 21:21), which the false prophets were unwittingly putting into effect. ...

Three comments are worth noting. Firstly, the concept of a punishment fitting the crime is a typical biblical principle (*cf.* Ob. 15). Secondly, Ahab was not actually deceived, even by Micaiah, and recognized his need to know the *truth* (v. 15). The difficulty was not that he could not understand what God wanted, but that he did not want to understand (v. 26). Thirdly, God’s inciting or luring a person in this way is never to be understood as his final word. God’s aim was to purify his people (*cf.* Dt. 13:11; Ezk. 14:11) and to give them an opportunity to repent. This is well illustrated by David, who had also been enticed as a punishment, but eventually realized that he must turn to God for mercy (2 Sa. 24:1, 14; 1 Ch. 21:1, 13; *cf.* 1 Sa. 26:19). Ahab, however, set his course firmly in the opposite direction (v. 25).”

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary comments on v. 20: “The Targum gives a strange gloss here: ‘Then the spirit of Naboth of Jezreel came out from the abode of the righteous, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will deceive him. And the Lord said, By what means? To which he answered, I will be a spirit of false prophecy in the mouth of his prophets. And the Lord said, Thou mayest then. But although the power of deceiving them is given unto thee, nevertheless it will not be lawful for thee to sit among the righteous; for whosoever shall speak falsely cannot have a mansion among the righteous. Therefore go forth from me, and do as thou hast said.’”

The last part of v. 22, which the NIV renders with “The Lord has decreed disaster for you,” reads literally in Hebrew: “and the Lord has spoken evil against you.” It must be remembered that those words do not constitute a final verdict, but a warning. At this point Ahab was still given an opportunity for repentance. Ahab had a choice and he chose disaster.

iii. Rejection of Micaiah’s prophecy (18:23-27).

23 Then Zedekiah son of Kenaanah went up and slapped Micaiah in the face. "Which way did the spirit from the Lord go when he went from me to speak to you?" he asked.

24 Micaiah replied, "You will find out on the day you go to hide in an inner room."

25 The king of Israel then ordered, "Take Micaiah and send him back to Amon the ruler of the city and to Joash the king's son,

26 and say, 'This is what the king says: Put this fellow in prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I return safely.'"

27 Micaiah declared, "If you ever return safely, the Lord has not spoken through me." Then he added, "Mark my words, all you people!"

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia states about Zedekiah: "In Josephus ... there is an interesting rearrangement and embellishment of the Biblical narrative. There Zedekiah is represented as arguing that since Micaiah contradicts Elijah's prediction as to the place of Ahab's death, he must be regarded as a false prophet. Then, smiting his opponent, he prayed that if he were in the wrong his right hand might forthwith be withered. Ahab, seeing that no harm befell the hand that had smitten Micaiah, was convinced; whereupon Zedekiah completed his triumph by the incident of the horns."

In being slapped in the face Micaiah partook, in a sense, in the suffering of Jesus Christ, who was slapped in the face during the process that led to His crucifixion.

Commenting on the incident in the parallel passage in I Kings, *Barnes' Notes* comments: "As Micaiah had been brought from prison (1 Kings 22:26), it is probable that his hands were bound.

The prophet, thus standing before the great ones of the earth, bound and helpless, bearing testimony to the truth, and for his testimony smitten on the face by an underling, whose blow he receives without either shame or anger, is a notable type of our Lord before Caiaphas suffering the same indignity."

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "Zedekiah's words show his prime motive to have been jealousy, which sadly led on to violence. His treatment of Micaiah is strikingly similar to that meted out to Jesus the Suffering Servant (*cf.* Isa. 50:6; Mt. 26:67; 27:30, Jn. 18:22). He probably referred to a *spirit from the LORD* (v. 23) rather than the 'Spirit of the LORD' (RSV; *cf.* REB, NEB). The Hebrew expression (lit. 'the spirit,' also v. 20) refers to one particular spirit, and nothing in the context requires this to be God's own Spirit. On the other hand, it is not an evil spirit or an elementary form of Satan but one of God's servants who had been sent to carry out a special task."

Ahab reacts to Micaiah's prophecy by ordering his imprisonment, condemning him to confinement with the lowest food rationing. The prophet would be set free upon the king's safe return.

Micaiah's final words, "Mark my words, all you people!" suggest that a larger crowd must have been present than only the court servants.

c. Fulfilment of Micaiah's prophecy (18:28-34).

28 So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah went up to Ramoth Gilead.

29 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will enter the battle in disguise, but you wear your royal robes." So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle.

30 Now the king of Aram had ordered his chariot commanders, "Do not fight with anyone, small or great, except the king of Israel."

31 When the chariot commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they thought, "This is the king of Israel." So they turned to attack him, but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him. God drew them away from him,

32 for when the chariot commanders saw that he was not the king of Israel, they stopped pursuing him.

33 But someone drew his bow at random and hit the king of Israel between the sections of his armor. The king told the chariot driver, "Wheel around and get me out of the fighting. I've been wounded."

34 All day long the battle raged, and the king of Israel propped himself up in his chariot facing the Arameans until evening. Then at sunset he died.

Ahab's decision to enter the battle in disguise indicates that he did believe in the veracity of Michaiah's prophecy. Evidently, the kings of that time would wear war outfits that would make them stand out as leaders of their troops, so that their men would follow their lead. The back draw of this custom was that they would be easily recognized by the enemy and could easily become the primary target. So Ahab's disguise existed in the fact that he would wear the uniform of a common soldier instead of a royal outfit. Ahab's decision would make his ally, that is the king of Judah, who had kindly consented to enter into battle with him, the primary target of the enemy attack. We could quote the saying: "With friends like that, who needs enemies?"

The Tyndale Commentary states: "'Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails' (Pr. 10:21) is an apt summary of the outcome at Ramoth Gilead, for Jehoshaphat's deliverance and Ahab's death represented a totally unexpected turn of events."

We could ask the question "How unexpected?" After all, the prophecy had been given and believed. If Ahab had not believed the divine verdict, he would not have disguised himself.

The Hebrew word for "disguise" is *chaphas*, which has the primary meaning of "to seek." The first time the verb is used is in the story in which Rachel had taken Laban's idol images and hid them from her father Laban's search by sitting on them.⁸³ Another context is in King Saul's disguise when he consulted a medium. We read: "So Saul *disguised* himself, putting on other clothes, and at night he and two men went to the woman. 'Consult a spirit for me,' he said, 'and bring up for me the one I name.'"⁸⁴

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "It must remain doubtful which of the kings carried with him the uneasier heart. What Jehoshaphat might have gained in less element of personal and physical fear, he by rights should have lost in sensitiveness of conscience.

Ahab does not seem disposed to lose anything again for want of asking, and even vouchsafing apparently (but it is exceedingly likely that this arises from our failing to appreciate exactly the force of the Hebrew forms in the text) to use the tone of directing, to his brother-king of the better part and kingdom. It must be presumed that there was something to relieve Ahab's language of the barefaced disregard for the safety of Jehoshaphat and regard for his own, which lie on the surface of the words he uses. Quite possibly, for instance, *both* knew that Ahab was to

⁸³ Gen. 31:35

⁸⁴ I Sam. 28:8

be *the* mark of the shooters. Also Ahab's *disguise* may have meant a heavy price to pay to his pride, while Jehoshaphat's dignity was saved intact. So, too, Ahab may have merely purported to say, 'You can, without any special risk, wear your royal apparel; but I,' etc."

The Tyndale Commentary states about the battle: "Presumably the Syrian charioteers recognized at the last moment who Jehoshaphat was (or was not!), but Chronicles has made an interesting addition at the end of verse 31 which shows that his was a miraculous intervention of providence (*and the LORD helped him. God drew them away from him* is not in MT of 1 Ki. 22:32). Jehoshaphat's cry of desperation (1 Ki. 22:32) is understood as a prayer, illustrating the principle of 2 Chronicles 6:34-35 that God answer prayer (*cf.* also 2 Ch. 14:10). This understanding is also indicated by *helped*, a typical term used for God's deliverance in the context of battle (*cf.* 1 Ch. 5:20; 2 Ch. 25:8; 26:7; 32:8). *Drew away* is significant, since the same Hebrew verb in verse 2 is translated *urged* ('induced,' NRSV, RSV; 'incited,' REB, NEB), and both are synonymous of 'lure' or *entice* (v. 19). Whereas Ahab was lured into judgment, Jehoshaphat was led out of it through prayer.

Conversely, there was no escape for Ahab. Even 'chance' (v. 33, GNB; *random*, NIV, JB, REB, NEB) is made to serve God's sovereign purpose, when an archer 'in his simplicity' (lit....) fired his deadly arrow. Ahab was wounded between two sections of his armor (the exact details are not agreed), and died the same day. Though neither Chronicles nor Kings is explicit about it, this seems to have been the signal for Israel's retreat and defeat (*cf.* 1 Ki. 22:36)."

The way it sounds, Ahab was killed by accident. This was, of course, only seemingly so. God had preordained his death and the man who drew the bow and let the fatal arrow fly was, in a way, God's servant. There are in God's designs no accidents. This is good to remember, whether the outcome looks favorable or disastrous.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary states: "The Targum tells us who it was. 'Now, Naaman, the captain of the host of the great king of Syria, drew a bow against him (that the prophecy of Elijah the Tishbite, and of Micaiah the son of Imla, might be fulfilled), and smote the king of Israel between the heart and the caul of the liver, through the place where the coat of mail is joined.'"

The Pulpit Commentary adds: "Hebrew, *Itumow*, *i.e.* 'in his *innocence*.' The root is the familiar root expressive of uprightness, perfectness, simplicity, and the meaning here is that the shooter was innocent of what a distinguished deed he was doing, of the personality of the man at whom he aimed (for it is not necessary to suppose his shot was quite at random), and of the skill that gave the arrow to reach its ultimate destiny. *Between the joints of the harness*; literally, *between the joints and the harness*, *i.e.* that part called the breastplate. The arrow went through, or by the side of one of the actual articulations of the armor-mail worn. Ahab's direction to the chariot-driver at the spur of the first wounded moment to turn and carry him *out of the host*, was evidently qualified, when he found that the wound was not immediately fatal. As the heat of the battle grew, and victory did not at once turn one way or the other, he was the more anxious to give the moral support of his presence to the last to his army, and, unable to stand by himself, he was supported by his own orders (so our rendering is not inconsistent with that in the parallel '*was stayed*' (... 1 Kings 22:35) in the chariot till he died in the evening. Although the spirit of Ahab, and his fidelity to his own army, kingdom, and self, cannot but appear to advantage in these last incidents of his unworthy life, yet it is probable that they find their record here for the sake of giving clear statement to the fact, that in the chariot his life-blood collected according to the saying of the parallel (ver. 35 compared with ver. 38). Note, therefore, particularly the truncated history of the writer of Chronicles in this instance. He, no doubt, consciously omitted,

and with a purpose, his own usual purpose; but light is lost, and the cross light tends rather to misleading, except for that only correct user of Scripture, which teaches us to compare one Scripture with another, and balance one part against another — a thing easy to do in matters of fact, but too often forgotten in the weightier matter of doctrine.”

d. Jehu’s prophecy (19:1-3).

1 When Jehoshaphat king of Judah returned safely to his palace in Jerusalem,

2 Jehu the seer, the son of Hanani, went out to meet him and said to the king, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Because of this, the wrath of the Lord is upon you.

3 There is, however, some good in you, for you have rid the land of the Asherah poles and have set your heart on seeking God."

Jehoshaphat’s safe return from the battle was more than a narrow escape for the king personally, it was a spiritual victory. Jehoshaphat may not have realized this, but it freed him from an alliance with the evil spirit that ruled the northern kingdom and the doom of those who rejection the God of Israel. One cannot associate with dirt without being smudged.

Jehu’s warning to Jehoshaphat about his association with godless Ahab reminds us of Jude’s warning: “Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear-hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.”⁸⁵

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia states about Jehoshaphat’s alliance with Ahab: “In contrast to the former kings of Judah, Jehoshaphat saw greater benefit in an alliance with Israel than in civil war. Accordingly, the old feud between the two kingdoms (1 Kings 14:30; 15:6) was dropped, and Jehoshaphat made peace with Israel (22:44). The political union was cemented by the marriage of Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, to Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. Shortly after the marriage, Jehoshaphat joined Ahab in a campaign against Syria (2 Chron. 18:1-3). In view of the subordinate position that Jehoshaphat seems to take in the campaign (1 Kings 22:4, 30), and in view of the military service rendered to Jehoram (2 Kings 3:4 ff.), Judah seems to have become a dependency of Israel. Nevertheless, the union may have contributed to the welfare and prosperity of Judah, and it may have enabled Jehoshaphat to hold the suzerainty over the neighboring nations. However, the final outcome of the alliance with the house of Omri was disastrous for Judah. The introduction into Judah of Baalism more than counterbalanced any political and material advantage gained, and in the succeeding reigns it indirectly led to the almost total extinction of the royal family of Judah (11:1 ff.).”

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “Chronicles has omitted the details of Ahab’s death (1 Ki. 22:35-38), including how it fulfilled a further prophecy (*cf.* 1 Ki. 21:19; 22:38), in favor of the consequences of the battle for Jehoshaphat. This paragraph is an addition to 1 Kings 22, probably taken from one of the prophetic sources quoted by Chronicles. *Jehu the seer* (v. 2) was an aged prophet who had been active some forty years previously in Baasha’s reign (1 Ki. 16:1, 7; for Jehu’s father Hanani, *cf.* 2 Ch. 16:7, 10). *Seer* (Heb. *hozeh*) is a synonym for prophet (*cf.* 1

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Jude 22, 23

Ch. 29:29; Am. 7:12). The fact that Jehoshaphat reached home *safely* (v. 1) is significant. It contrasts his fate with Ahab's (the phrase is identical to 'in peace,' 18:16, 26, 27, NRSV, RSV, *etc.*; *cf.* 18:33-34), and testifies to God's grace given to a person who was almost destroyed by undiscerning folly.

Jehu develops a previously implied criticism (18:1-2) that Jehoshaphat had made a serious error in allying himself with a *wicked* person who *hated* the Lord (v. 2). *Love* and *hate* in this context are formal terms for actions within a covenant or treaty relationship rather than emotional feelings, and *help* is a typical Chronicles expression for formal support (*cf.* 1 Ch. 18:5; 22:17; 2 Ch. 28:16). The description of Ahab is severe. From time to time he had shown signs of repentance (*e.g.* 1 Ki. 20:13-14; 21:28-29), but it was always skin-deep and short-lived, and his commitment to Baal fully justifies Jehu's summary (*cf.* Ahab's hatred of Micaiah, 18:7). Nevertheless, the instruction to keep away from Ahab is a rare one in the Bible, and implies that Ahab was really to be treated as a Canaanite.

Jehoshaphat's failure to recognize the gravity of Ahab's behavior is also regarded as sin, and explains why God's *wrath* (v. 2; 'anger,' GNB) was against him. *Wrath* is another formal term in Chronicles, though a distinction is made between wrath which can and which cannot be averted (for the latter, *cf.* 2 Ch. 34:25; 36:16). It could be turned aside through sacrifice (*cf.* 1 Ch. 21:14-18) and repentance (*cf.* 2 Ch. 12:7; 32:25-26), and Jehoshaphat's 'good things' (v. 3; *some good*, EVV) are meant to convey such repentance. These not only included his removal of the Asherahs (*cf.* 17:6) and his heartfelt seeking after God (*cf.* 17:4, 6; for the whole phrase, *cf.* 1 Ch. 22:19; 28:9; 2 Ch. 11:16; 15:12), but also looked forward to his campaign to teach God's law (19:4-11, especially v. 10). Chronicles earlier message is again repeated that the way back to God is always open."

iii. Jehoshaphat's legal reforms (19:4-11)

a. Religious renewal (19:4).

4 Jehoshaphat lived in Jerusalem, and he went out again among the people from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim and turned them back to the Lord, the God of their fathers.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "Jehoshaphat responded to Jehu's warning about God's wrath (vv. 2-3, 10) by leading a movement of spiritual renewal (v. 4) whose chief feature was a reform of the judicial system (vv. 5-11)."

Evidently, Jehoshaphat realized that there would be no public turning back to the service of Yahweh without his personal involvement. He, therefore, traveled throughout the whole territory of Judah to make sure that there were responsible people in charge of spiritual and public affairs at every center of population.

The Tyndale Commentary furthermore observes: "Much of this chapter is based on Deuteronomy 16:18-20; 17:8-13 (*cf.* especially vv. 6-7, 9-11), though with some important differences. There too one finds the same concern for right attitudes in relation to human law, and for the purposes and presence of God (Dt. 16:20; 17:12). The reform therefore attempts to restore the principles of the Mosaic covenant in people's hearts as well as in their actions."

When Moses referred to the possibility of Israel becoming a kingdom, he stipulated that the king must develop a pattern of personal daily devotions in order to rule the nation according to the will of God. We read: "When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him,

and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees.”⁸⁶ Evidently, that is what Jehoshaphat had done.

The Pulpit Commentary states: “Jehoshaphat makes another conscientious and vigorous endeavor to reform his own kingdom, to keep it steadfast in the worship of God, and free from idolatry. It is to be noticed that he does not turn away his ear from the rebuke which had been given him, but turns his heart to it. As it does not appear that he broke with Israel and Israel’s kings (2 Ch. 20:35, 37; 2 Ki. 3:7, 14, 24), it is possible, especially in view of verse 37 ... that the severity of the Divine rebuke was understood to apply to the occasions which found Jehoshaphat in alliance with a king notably bad, and for some supposed chance of advantage to himself. This last element of consideration will difference sufficiently the two cases just cited, to wit, the case in which Jehoshaphat joined himself with Azariah, and is sternly ‘prophesied against,’ and that in which he helped Jehoram, and through Elisha’s intervention gained him the day.”

Jehoshaphat showed great understanding of the principles of right and wrong by relating them to the character of God. In his address to those who would be the judges, he said: “you are not judging for man but for the Lord.”

David sang: “The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.”⁸⁷

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary writes about Jehoshaphat’s attitude after the rebuke by Jehu: “To atone (as I may say) for the visit he had paid to Ahab, he made a pious profitable visitation of his own kingdom: He went out through the people in his own person from Beersheba in the south to Mount Ephraim in the north, and brought them back to the Lord God of their fathers, that is, did all he could towards recovering them. (1.) By what the prophet said he perceived that his former attempts for reformation were well pleasing to God, and therefore he revived them, and did what was then left undone. It is good when commendations thus quicken us to our duty, and when the more we are praised for doing well the more vigorous we are in well-doing. (2.) Perhaps he found that his late affinity with the idolatrous house of Ahab and kingdom of Israel had had a bad influence upon his own kingdom. Many, we may suppose, were emboldened to revolt to idolatry when they saw even their reforming king so intimate with idolaters; and therefore he thought himself doubly obliged to do all he could to restore them. If we truly repent of our sin, we shall do our utmost to repair the damage we have any way done by it to religion or the souls of others. We are particularly concerned to recover those that have fallen into sin, or been hardened in it, by our example.”

b. Appointment of judges (19:5-7).

5 He appointed judges in the land, in each of the fortified cities of Judah.

⁸⁶ Deut. 17:18, 19

⁸⁷ Ps. 33:5

6 He told them, "Consider carefully what you do, because you are not judging for man but for the Lord, who is with you whenever you give a verdict.

7 Now let the fear of the Lord be upon you. Judge carefully, for with the Lord our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery."

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "Jehoshaphat's speech affirms that Israel's legal system was *not for man but for the LORD* (cf. Dt. 1:17; Pr. 17:23; Eph. 6:6; Col. 3:23). It must reflect the reality of God's presence (he is with you) and of his character (he is without *injustice or partiality or bribery*). These emphases suggest that the appointments were more of a reform than an innovation, perhaps responding to difficulties in current legal practice. They also illustrate the need to apply covenant law to new situations (cf. Dt. 16:19; also Dt. 10:17)."

The Hebrew for "the fear of the Lord" is *pachad Yahweh*. The words do not only refer to an attitude towards God; in some instances they express the character of God, as for instance in the words Jacob addressed to his uncle Laban: "If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and *the Fear of Isaac*, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed."⁸⁸

Justice is defined by who God is. He is the ultimate standard of right and wrong.

c. Appointment of other officials (19:8-11).

8 In Jerusalem also, Jehoshaphat appointed some of the Levites, priests and heads of Israelite families to administer the law of the Lord and to settle disputes. And they lived in Jerusalem.

9 He gave them these orders: "You must serve faithfully and wholeheartedly in the fear of the Lord.

10 In every case that comes before you from your fellow countrymen who live in the cities — whether bloodshed or other concerns of the law, commands, decrees or ordinances — you are to warn them not to sin against the Lord; otherwise his wrath will come on you and your brothers. Do this, and you will not sin.

11"Amariah the chief priest will be over you in any matter concerning the Lord, and Zebadiah son of Ishmael, the leader of the tribe of Judah, will be over you in any matter concerning the king, and the Levites will serve as officials before you. Act with courage, and may the Lord be with those who do well."

Generally speaking, the king would be the highest authority in judicial matters. He could confirm or overrule the decisions of lower courts. We have no record of any of such incidents in Jehoshaphat's time, but that does not mean that they did not occur. One example of this occurred during David's reign, when Joab engaged the help of a "wise woman" to go to the king and present a trumped-up case to him, involving her two sons. One son killed his brother and he would be given the death penalty for his crime, robbing the woman of both boys.⁸⁹ The woman's story was not true, but Joab tried to convince David that he ought to bring Absalom back.

⁸⁸ Gen. 31:42

⁸⁹ See II Sam. 14:1-11.

The Tyndale Commentary explains: “The list of newly appointed officials confirms the traditional nature of the reform. The *priests*’ role alongside the judges is mentioned in Deuteronomy 17:9, 12 (*cf.* 1 Sa. 2:25; Je. 18:18), the *Levites* were appointed by David as their assistants (1 Ch. 26:29), and tribal leaders (*heads of families*) had been the backbone of Israel’s legal system for centuries (*cf.* Dt. 19:12; Ezr. 10:14; Mt. 26:57). This traditional emphasis is confirmed by the king’s absence. *Amariah the chief priest* (v. 11) occurs in the list of high priests in 1 Chronicles 6:11, though Judah’s tribal head *Zebadiah* (v. 11) is unknown elsewhere.”

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “This and the following three verses close the immediate subject by stating with some emphasis the reform in the metropolis itself, of the ‘supreme tribunal,’ as it has been called (Ex. 18:19, 20, 26; Deut. 17:9, 10; 17:12), composed of *Levites, priests, and chief of the fathers of Israel*; *i.e.* probably heads of the whole family that went by the same name. Of course every father was head of his own family, but only one (such as in modern times by primogeniture the eldest son) the representative head of the entire family, and under this expression is no doubt naturally set forth only those families that were of some relative consideration or distinction. *For the judgment of the Lord, and for controversies.* Considering the plainer distinction in the language of ver. 11, there can be no doubt that the words, ‘for the judgment of the Lord,’ do not intend simply to describe godly judgment, but point to dues payable to the Lord in some religious aspect: ‘Render to Caesar ... and to God the things that are God’s’; while the words, ‘and for controversies,’ point to the mutual strives of the people. *When they returned*; Hebrew, ‘and they returned.’ It has been proposed to remove this clause so as to begin the next verse with it (and so the Revised Version shows as a clause by itself, ‘And they returned to Jerusalem’), and, to make this fit the better, the word *did* in the first line of the verse is changed into ‘had.’ It is, however, possible to render the clause, ‘And they dwelt in Jerusalem,’ which would make a far more coherent sense, and would mark the permanence and stationariness of this chief court.”

The Tyndale Commentary states: “The chief difficulty is to decide on the function of these courts. There are two problems: whether the Jerusalem court was a higher court, and how the division between sacred and secular cases worked in practice (v. 11). On the first issue, the fact that cases were referred to Jerusalem from ‘your brothers living in the towns’ (v. 10, JB) has sometimes suggested that it was a higher court of appeal This view, however, assumes an underlying centralization policy, whereas evidence has been adduced to show that the basic system was little changed. The Jerusalem court is more likely therefore to have been an auxiliary to the local courts, probably a court of reference in difficult cases As such it would have extended the king’s existing judicial authority over problematic cases (*cf.* 2 Sa. 14; 1 Ki. 3:16-28). The matter is complicated by a textual difficulty at the end of verse 8, where MT’s ‘they returned to Jerusalem’ (so RV) makes little sense in the context. Of the two possible alternatives, it is much simpler to read ‘they had their seat at Jerusalem’ (RSV). This strengthens the idea of a national role (*cf.* v. 10), which may also find support by translating ‘for Israel’ in verse 8 (rather than ‘of Israel,’ NRSV, RSV; or *Israelite*, NIV, REB, NEB). The second alternative is that the court was both a national court and a local court for Jerusalem, but this seems unnecessarily confusing (*cf.* NEB, ‘to arbitrate in lawsuits among the inhabitants of the city’).

The second issue concerns the division between sacred (*any matter concerning the LORD*) and secular (*any matter concerning the king*) cases mentioned in verse 11. Though this distinction was well known in post-exilic Israel, as exemplified by Zerubbabel’s and Joshua’s joint leadership (*cf.* Hg. 1:1, 12, 14), it was already established in David’s time (1 Ch. 26:30, 32). No further details can be deduced from verses 8, 10, since the phrases *to administer the law of*

the LORD and to settle disputes (v. 8) and the subjects of the court's jurisdiction (v. 10) are too general to be divided up under these headings. The *law, command, decrees or ordinances* (v. 10) are simply synonyms for the Torah, and would have included civil and religious matters. It is less clear why matters of *bloodshed* were included, perhaps because all capital cases were to be referred to a central court ..., or because a more specific issue was causing debate.

The speech in verse 9-10 parallels that in verse 6-7 in both form and content, and, as before, a Deuteronomic law is applied to a new situation (*cf.* Dt. 17:8-13). The elliptical nature of some phrases in verse 10 is due to their being quoted from the earlier text. The main aim of setting up a court to handle difficult cases was that 'guilt' might not be incurred (v. 10, NRSV, RSV, *etc.*; *sin*, NIV) and to avoid God's *wrath* (*cf.* Dt. 17:12-13). These terms are frequently linked in Chronicles (*e.g.* 1 Ch. 21:3; 2 Ch. 24:18; 28:10, 13), but their potentially disastrous effects could always be removed through repentance (*cf.* v. 2).

Act with courage (v. 11) is reminiscent of the familiar phrase, 'Be strong and courageous' (Jos. 1:6-7; 1 Ch. 22:13; 28:20; 2 Ch. 32:7; *etc.*). Since it is usually lined with major events, it shows the importance of the reform. The final phrase is certainly a promise of God's presence, but 'good' (REB, NEB) could refer either to the work of reform (*cf.* NIV) or to those who will carry it out (*cf.* NRSV, RSV, REB, NEB, *etc.*.)"

iv. Jehoshaphat's faith (20:1-30)

a. Judah invaded (20:1-2).

1 After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to make war on Jehoshaphat.

2 Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Sea. It is already in Hazazon Tamar" (that is, En Gedi).

One of the problems in the opening verse is in the names of those who came to attack Jehoshaphat. The NIV states in a footnote about the "Meunites": "Some Septuagint manuscripts; Hebrew Ammonites," which would mention the same people twice.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary observes: "Here there must be a mistake; surely the Ammonites are the same as the children of Ammon. Our translators have falsified the text by inserting the words 'other beside,' which have nothing properly to represent them in the Hebrew. Literally translated, the words are: 'And it happened after this, the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them of the Ammonites:' and thus the Vulgate. The Syriac, which the Arabic follows, has felt the difficulty, and translated, Came together with warlike men to fight, *etc.* The Septuagint have given it another turn ... And with them people of the Minaites; which were a people of Arabia Felix near the Red Sea. The Targum has ... 'And with them some of the Edomites.' This is very likely to be the true reading, as we find from 2 Chron. 20:10, 22-23, that they procured men from Mount Seir; and these were the Idumeans or Edomites. We should, in my opinion, read the text thus: The children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them some of the Edomites."

b. Jehoshaphat prays (20:3-13).

3 Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah.

4 The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.

5 Then Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem at the temple of the Lord in the front of the new courtyard

6 and said: "O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you.

7 O our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend?

8 They have lived in it and have built in it a sanctuary for your Name, saying,

9 'If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague or famine, we will stand in your presence before this temple that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and you will hear us and save us.'

10 "But now here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, whose territory you would not allow Israel to invade when they came from Egypt; so they turned away from them and did not destroy them.

11 See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance.

12 O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you."

13 All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the Lord.

Hardship often leads to prayer. A threat of war tends to fill a church. Though short-lived, that may be a blessing. The threat by the combined enemy caused Jehoshaphat to be alarmed. The Hebrew text reads literally: "And Jehoshaphat feared and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah."

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "In his fear, Jehoshaphat turns to prayer rather than despair (vv. 6-12) and to fasting (v. 3). His attitude is summed up by the word 'seek,' which occurs twice in Hebrew though it is variously translated in EVV. This is a key word in Jehoshaphat's reign (*cf.* 2 Ch. 17:3-4; 18:4; 19:3), where it has the basic meaning of 'worship' (*cf.* 2 Ch. 1:5; 15:12), but also means to discover God's will (*cf.* 2 Ch. 15:4). It shows that Jehoshaphat has a higher trust in God than in his military resources, and that he rightly sees the *temple* as the place to seek God's face (v. 5; *cf.* 2 Ch. 7:14).

The people gathered in an *assembly* (v. 5, 14, 26; *cf.* 'assembled,' v. 4, NRSV, RSV, JB). The repetition of *all Judah* (vv.3, 13, 15, 18; *cf.* vv. 20, 27) and reference to *every town in Judah* (v. 4) and the women and children (v. 13) shows how strong was his idea of a gathered community (*cf.* also *e.g.* Ezr. 10:7-15; Ne. 8:2-12; 13:1-3). The *new courtyard* was for the people, and was separate from the priests' court (*cf.* 2 Ch. 4:9).

Jehoshaphat's prayer employs the recognized form of a national lament (*cf. e.g.* Pss 44, 74, 79), though it is closer in structure, content, and language to the prose prayers in Chronicles than to the psalms (*cf.* 1 Ch. 17:16-27; 29:10-19; 2 Ch. 6:14-42; 14:11; 30:18-19). Like the prayers of David and Solomon (1 Ch.17:16-27; 2 Ch. 6:14-42), it occurs at a key point in the Chronicler's narrative and is intended as an effective means of carrying the community through difficult and trying times: It falls into four sections."

The four sections into which *The Tyndale Commentary* divides Jehoshaphat's prayer are: (i) Praise for God's sovereign power (v. 6), (ii) praise for the gift of land and temple (vv. 7-9), (iii) complaint against invaders (20:10-11), (iv) plea for help (12).

Jehoshaphat's trust in God is what saved Judah from being wiped off the map. He realized that what makes a nation strong is not overwhelming armament, but spiritual protection.

An example of this is when the king of Aram attacked Israel, Elisha and his servant were in Dothan. The city was surrounded by Aram's troops. When Elisha's servant saw this, he panicked. Elisha said to him: "Don't be afraid . . . Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."⁹⁰ He prayed that the Lord would open the servant's eyes. When God answered, Gehazi saw that the city was surrounded by chariots of fire. Like Elisha, Jehoshaphat knew that those who were with him were more than the troops of Aram.

In the sixteenth century A.D. the Netherlands were under the crown of the king of Spain. The Dutch rebelled against the Spaniards under the leadership of the Prince of Orange, the father of the present Dutch royal family. Someone asked the prince with whom he had made an alliance so that he could successfully resist Spanish power. He answered: "I have made an alliance with the Potentate of all potentates."

Jehoshaphat may have thought of Solomon's dictum: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people."⁹¹

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "The prayer before us invokes the one God 'in heaven;' claims him the God 'of our fathers;' recites his universal authority above, below; pleads his former conduct of the 'people Israel,' in especial his establishing of that people in their present land; most touchingly recalls his covenant of condescending, everlasting 'friendship' with Abraham, the grand original of the people (Gen. 18:17-19, 33; 17:2; Ex. 33:11); makes mention of the consecration of the land by the sanctuary, and in particular of the very service of consecration and the special foreseeing provision in that service for a crisis like the present (1 Ki. 8:22-45; 2 Ch. 6:24-35; 7:1); and then (2 Ch. 20:10, 11) states pointedly the case and complaint with its aggravations (Deut. 2:4, 8, 9, 19; Num. 20:21; Jdg. 11:18), and with a parting appeal, confession of their own weakness, ignorance, and dependence unfeigned, commits the cause of the alarmed people to God. *Our eyes are upon thee.*"

Jehoshaphat begins his prayer in typical Hebrew fashion with a question, which is meant as a statement. He recognized God as the supreme power, as the source from which all human authority is derived. Jehoshaphat knew that his own royal power was delegated to him. He saw himself as a king, ruling by the grace of God. He also knew that Canaan, the land in which he and his people lived, had been God's gift to Israel, the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham. This is the first time in Scripture Abraham is designated as God's friend.

Jehoshaphat did not have to remind the omniscient God of His promises; his statement was more a reminder to himself. And since his prayer was a public prayer, it served as a reminder to the people who were gathered.

In v. 9 the king refers to Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple. Solomon had prayed: "When your people Israel have been defeated by an enemy because they have sinned against you, and when they turn back to you and confess your name, praying and making supplication to you in this temple, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel and bring them back to the land you gave to their fathers."⁹² God had answered Solomon,

⁹⁰ II Kings 6:16

⁹¹ Prov. 14:34

⁹² I Kings 8:33, 34

saying: “I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.”⁹³

The Tyndale Commentary observes about vv. 10 and 11: “The complaint is a typical lament, describing Jehoshaphat’s problem in very plain terms. His sense of injustice is surprisingly directed not so much at the invading army as at God. Though he did not *allow* (v. 10) Israel under Moses to attack these nations, he now permits them to deprive Israel of *the possession you gave us as an inheritance* (v. 11; cf. Nu. 20:14:21; Dt. 2:1-19; Jdg. 11:14-18). The ironic use of ‘repay/reward’ (v. 11) shows how history can give contradictory signals (cf. vv. 7-8). Though Jehoshaphat’s language is strong, however, it is going too far to speak of ‘Yahweh’s sin of omission.’ Rather God had showed grace to Moab and Ammon, and will show yet greater grace to Judah.”

Moab and Ammon were remotely related to Israel, since they were the offspring of Lot, Abraham’s nephew. That was why God had not allowed Israel to harass them as they entered Canaan. The same was true about the Edomites, who were Esau’s descendants. Now, those nations returned the compliment by attacking Judah.

“O our God, will you not judge them?” is an appeal to God’s justice. Like Abraham, Jehoshaphat knew that God was a God of justice. If God would not apply justice to human affairs, life on earth would no longer be livable. When Abraham prayed for Sodom, the place where his nephew Lot was living, he said: “Far be it from you to do such a thing — to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”⁹⁴

Jehoshaphat held God responsible for the protection and safety of His people. God must have loved that.

c. Jahaziel’s prophecies (20:14-19).

14 Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly.

15 He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's.

16 Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel.

17 You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.'"

⁹³ I Kings 9:3

⁹⁴ Gen. 18:25

18 Jehoshaphat bowed with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the Lord.

19 Then some Levites from the Kohathites and Korahites stood up and praised the Lord, the God of Israel, with very loud voice.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “God’s answer to Jehoshaphat comes from an unexpected source, through a prophecy given by the *Spirit of the LORD* to a Levite (v. 14). ...

Jahaziel’s remarkable prophecy centers on the double pronouncement that it is God and not Israel who will have to fight, literally, ‘it is not for you the battle/to fight’ (vv. 15, 17). In all there are four main elements: (a) a repeated command *not to be afraid* (vv. 15, 17); (b) repeated statements that *the battle is not yours, but God’s* (v. 15, cf. v. 17); (c) a repeated promise that God will be *with you* (v. 17; the repetition is visible only in Heb.); and (d) instructions for *tomorrow* about where to go and *see their deliverance* (NIV, NEB, NEB), ‘victory’ (NRSV, RSV, GNB), or ‘salvation’ (JB; vv. 16-17). The basic promise in fact combines several earlier Old Testament passages which affirm that the Lord fights for Israel (cf. Ex. 13-14; Dt. 20:4; I Sa. 17:37). What is distinctive here is that Israel has only to take her place in the spectators’ gallery (cf. v. 24), though the use of military language instructing Judah to *take up your positions and stand firm* (v. 17; NIV, cf. JB) is a nice ironic touch. Exodus 14:13-14 offers a particularly close analogy, which suggests that the Chronicler saw this incident as a unique parallel to the exodus itself. Only in these two passages are the following phrases combined: ‘do not be afraid,’ ‘take your stand,’ ‘see the LORD’s deliverance,’ while the two statements in verses 15, 17 that Judah does not have to fight are but a negative version of ‘the LORD will fight for you’ (Ex. 14:14).

Judah is instructed not to fear, because of God’s promise to be with them. *Do not be afraid* is a regular biblical command (e.g. Nu. 14:9; Dt. 20:3; Is. 41:9), and God’s presence is a well-known form of encouragement, especially in Chronicles (cf. 2 Ch. 13:12; 17:3; 32:7). Both are applicable to Christians, who can be assured of God’s constant presence through Christ’s resurrection and the gift of the Spirit (cf. Mt. 28:20; Jn. 14:16-19). These words of support are back up by specific commands about the time, the place, and the actions required. Unfortunately, the places mentioned in verse 16 cannot be decided with precision, though there is a route which led from Engedi to *Tekoa* (v. 20), about 6 miles south of Bethlehem, which was in use during the Judean monarchy.

The people responded with adoration (v. 18) and very *loud* praise (v. 19), illustrating the confidence of their faith (cf. v. 20). Dependence on God was of greater importance than merely winning the battle. Again the Levites play a key role, especially the *Korahites* who were one of the subdivisions of the *Kohathites* (it is probably best to translate ‘that is, even’ before Korahites). It is not clear whether they represent the Levites in general, among whom they provided the gatekeepers (cf. 1 Ch. 6:19; 26:19), or the musicians in particular (Heman, Asaph’s contemporary, was a Kohathite, 1 Ch. 6:33-38).”

The Fausset’s Bible Dictionary attributes Psalm 83 to Jahaziel, stating: “This psalm was composed by one of the sons ‘of Asaph,’ which Jahaziel was; he probably was its author. It is called: a “song” (*shiyr*), a thanksgiving by anticipation for the victory. It was sung by the Levite Kohathites and Korahites. So, according to their faith, ‘when they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushments against Ammon, Moab ... and they were smitten.’ The 47th Psalm was sung on the battlefield (2 Chron 20:26) after the victory, the 48th Psalm subsequently (2 Chron 20:28) in the temple.”

The section of Ps. 47, referred to, reads: “With cunning they conspire against your people; they plot against those you cherish. ‘Come,’ they say, ‘let us destroy them as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more.’ With one mind they plot together; they form an alliance against you — the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites, of Moab and the Hagarites, Gebal, Ammon and Amalek, Philistia, with the people of Tyre.”⁹⁵

d. Judah believes (20:20-26).

20 Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful."

21 After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying:

"Give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures forever."

22 As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.

23 The men of Ammon and Moab rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another.

24 When the men of Judah came to the place that overlooks the desert and looked toward the vast army, they saw only dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had escaped.

25 So Jehoshaphat and his men went to carry off their plunder, and they found among them a great amount of equipment and clothing and also articles of value — more than they could take away. There was so much plunder that it took three days to collect it.

26 On the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Beracah, where they praised the Lord. This is why it is called the Valley of Beracah to this day.

This section is one of the highlights of the whole Old Testament. It illustrates the power of praise. Praise is one of the most powerful weapons in the battle with Satan and evil. Paul and Silas knew this when they were thrown into the prison of Philippi. We read: “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody’s chains came loose.”⁹⁶ The apostles’ praise and prayer not only loosened their chains but also those that had chained the jailor’s heart to darkness.

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary comments: “Never was army drawn out to the field of battle as Jehoshaphat’s was. He had soldiers ready prepared for war (ch. 17:18), but here is no notice taken of their military equipment, their swords or spears, their shields or bows. But Jehoshaphat took care, 1. That faith should be their armor. As they went forth, instead of calling

⁹⁵ Ps. 83:3-7

⁹⁶ Acts 16:25, 26

them to handle their arms, and stand to them, to keep ranks, observe orders, and fight valiantly, he bade them believe in the Lord God and give credit to his word in the mouth of his prophets, and assured them that they should prosper and be established, v. 20. That is true courage which faith inspires a man with; nor will any thing contribute more to the establishing of the heart in shaking times than a firm belief of the power, and mercy, and promise of God. The heart is fixed that thus trusteth in the Lord, and is kept in perfect peace. In our spiritual conflicts, this is the victory, this is the prosperity, even our faith. 2. That praise and thanksgiving should be their vanguard, v. 21. Jehoshaphat called a council of war, and it was resolved to appoint singers to go out before the army, to charge in the front, who had nothing else to do but to praise God, to praise his holiness, which is his beauty, to praise him as they did in the temple (that beauty of holiness) with that ancient and good doxology which eternity itself will not wear thread-bare, Praise the Lord; for his mercy endureth for ever. By this strange advance towards the field of battle, Jehoshaphat intended to express his firm reliance upon the word of God (which enabled him to triumph before the battle), to animate his own soldiers, to confound the enemy, and to engage God on their side; for praise pleases God better than all burnt offering and sacrifice.”

Jehoshaphat’s faith was based upon Jahaziel’s prophecy. The king accepted that message as God’s answer to his prayer. That made him encourage the people.

The Hebrew text of v. 20 reads literally: “Believe in the Lord your God, and so you shall be established; believe his prophets, so you shall prosper.” The Hebrew word of “established” is *aman*, which literally means “to support.” We find the word for the first time in Scripture in the key verse: “Abram *believed* the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”⁹⁷ The Hebrew word for “prosper” is *tsalach*, which we find for the first time in the verse in which Abraham’s servant, Eliezer, meets Rebekah at the well. We read: “Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the Lord had made his journey successful.”⁹⁸

Jahaziel had said: “The battle is not yours, but God’s.” This means, first of all, that God took the assault very personal. Moab, Ammon and Edom were fighting Judah because they hated the Lord. King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah loved the Lord and praised Him because of “the splendor of his holiness.” The Hebrew words are *hadarah qodesh*. The Hebrew words of praise are *owlam chesed*, “forever mercy.” The Hebrew word *chesed* is one of the dominating words in the psalm. The KJV renders it most of the time with the beautiful word “lovingkindness.”

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “The idea of an army going into battle singing the praises of God is unique in Scripture, though it is related to the earlier practice in Yahweh’s wars of sounding the trumpet call and battle cry (*cf.* 2 Ch. 13:12; Jos. 6:4-20; Jdg. 7:18-20; Ps. 47:5). Both the form and content of this song of praise are based on the use of psalms in temple worship. The appointed ‘musicians’ (GNB; *cf.* 1 Ch. 15:16ff.; to sing, NIV, *etc.*) were Levites (*cf.* 1 Ch. 6:31-32; 25 1-31), their song was taken from Chronicles’ favorite psalm (Ps 136:1; *cf.* 1 Ch. 16:34; 2 Ch. 5:13; 7:3), and the phrase the splendor of his holiness (REB, NEB; ‘in holy array,’ RSV) is found elsewhere only in the Psalms (Ps. 20:2; 96:9; 1 Ch. 16:29). The

⁹⁷ Gen. 15:6

⁹⁸ Gen. 24:21

outstanding feature, however, is that as they began *to sing and praise* (v. 22), the Lord started the battle. There can be no clearer indication that this was neither an ordinary battle nor a traditional holy war, but Yahweh's war in which he acted on his own. In that sense, it anticipates Jesus' victory on the cross, though that was accompanied by silence rather than singing."

As a result of Judah praise of the Lord, God began to act by setting "ambushes" against Moab, Ammon and Edom. The Hebrew word used here for "ambush" is *arab*, which is actually not a noun but a verb. The first time the word is used in Scripture is in the verse: "But if a man hates his neighbor and *lies in wait* for him, assaults and kills him, and then flees to one of these cities, the elders of his town shall send for him, bring him back from the city, and hand him over to the avenger of blood to die. Show him no pity. You must purge from Israel the guilt of shedding innocent blood, so that it may go well with you."⁹⁹

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "The form of the word *ambushes* (v. 22) is slightly unusual and really means 'ambushers,' and, since it is said that God sent them, some have thought they must be supernatural agents. However, the fact that all other ambushers in the Old Testament are human suggests the same is true here, presumably meaning that the coalition members attacked each other. The men of Mount Seir were *annihilated* first, perhaps suspected of some kind of treachery, before the rest *destroyed one another* (v. 23; cf. also Jdg. 7:22; 1 Sa. 14:20)."

The victory for Judah came in an unexpected way. We do not read what kind of ambush the Lord set against the enemy, we only read what the results were. The different groups attacked each other and annihilated one another.

Paul's statement that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms,"¹⁰⁰ certainly finds a clear illustration here. The spiritual forces that inspired Judah's enemies, hated each other. There is no love lost between one demon and another.

In C. S. Lewis' book *Screwtape Letters*, a high placed demon advises a lower spirit about the care he has to take in the seduction of a young man in Great Britain. The young man dies during an air attack in the Second World War and enters heaven. Screwtape tells the lower demon that his reward for that failure will be that he will become the higher demon's breakfast.

In the same way Judah's enemy devoured itself. We ultimately will not have to defeat Satan; Satan will defeat himself.

Barnes' Notes explains about v. 24: "The march of Judah from Jerusalem would take five or six hours. By the time they reached the watch-towers in the wilderness of Jeruel all was over."

Jehoshaphat's army found a battlefield jammed with dead bodies, which they pilfered. It took them four days to collect all the booty.

The Pulpit Commentary states: "The Hebrew text reads literally, *both riches and dead bodies* (no article). The *hamitspeh* of the text, however, appears in several ('old authorities,' Revised Version) manuscripts, as *kaatanowt* ('garments'), and the versions of both Septuagint and Vulgate lend their authority to this reading. *Jewels*.¹⁰¹ The Hebrew term is *uwkleey*, the

⁹⁹ Deut. 19:11-13

¹⁰⁰ Eph. 6:12

¹⁰¹ KJV; NIV reads: "Articles of value."

most frequent rendering of which is ‘vessels,’ so rendered, that is, a hundred and sixty times out of about three hundred and eight times in all of its occurrence. It is, however, a word of very generic quality, and is rendered as here ‘jewels’ about twenty-five other times. It would seem nugatory to tell us that there were ‘dead bodies,’ in the bald rendering of ‘and dead bodies.’ Our Authorized Version rendering, ‘riches *with* the dead bodies,’ of course both ingeniously glosses the difficulty and makes a sufficiently good meaning.”

The Tyndale Commentary comments on the last verse of this section: “As the Judean soldiers arrived at the ‘watchtower’ (v. 24, NRSV, RSV, *etc.*; *place that overlooks the desert*, NIV), there were *only dead bodies ... no-one had escaped* (*cf.* 2 Ki. 19:35). This scene of total devastations was regarded as evidence of God’s work, as also was the amount of *plunder* (v. 25). Another link between this event and the exodus (*cf.* also v. 17) is that the Hebrew for ‘took for themselves’ (v. 25, NRSV, RSV; ‘plundered,’ REB, NEB) is used elsewhere only of despoiling the Egyptians (*cf.* Ex. 5:22; 12:26). The only possible response was to *praise* God (v. 16), though whether the valley was renamed as a result is impossible to say (*Beracah* means ‘praise, blessing’).”

c. Jerusalem rejoices (20:27-30).

27 Then, led by Jehoshaphat, all the men of Judah and Jerusalem returned joyfully to Jerusalem, for the Lord had given them cause to rejoice over their enemies.

28 They entered Jerusalem and went to the temple of the Lord with harps and lutes and trumpets.

29 The fear of God came upon all the kingdoms of the countries when they heard how the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel.

30 And the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for his God had given him rest on every side.

It is interesting to read that the peace of Judah was the result of God’s war “against the enemies of Israel.” The Lord stretched out His hand, not only over the southern kingdom of Judah, but over the whole Promised Land.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “The final paragraph of the war is a reversal of the first two sections of the chapter. The *joyful* assembly (vv. 27-28) forms a happy contrast with the earlier assembly for prayer (vv. 6-12), with both taking place in the *temple*. The note of joy in worship (*cf.* 1 Ch. 12:40; 29:9, 17, 2 Ch. 29:30) and the fact that it was accompanied by musical instruments are typical emphases in Chronicles (*cf.* 1 Ch. 15:16, 25; 2 Ch. 30:21).

So too is the summary of the *peace* that followed the war (vv. 29-30), which is in contrast with the account of the initial invasion (vv. 1-2). This peace is linked with Jehoshaphat’s reign as a whole (*cf.* 17:10), and with wider blessings of peace and rest resulting from victories elsewhere (*cf.* 1 Ch. 22:9; 2 Ch. 14:1, 5, 6; 23:21), and all because *the LORD had fought* (*cf.* vv. 15, 17) for Israel.”

The joy of the people over this victory was the joy of the Lord. We read: “For the Lord had given them cause to rejoice over their enemies.” *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this: “Note the extremely similar and almost identical language of Ezr. 6:22 and Neh. 12:43, and add also to the comparison the last sentence of our Neh. 12:29.”

“The fear of God” is the rendering of the Hebrew *pachad Elohim*. This is not the same fear David speaks about in the psalms. We read: “The Lord confides in those who *fear* him; he

makes his covenant known to them.”¹⁰² The word used in that context is *yare`* which refers to reverence for God.

v. Concluding formula (20:31 – 21:1)

31 So Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah. He was thirty-five years old when he became king of Judah, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-five years. His mother's name was Azubah daughter of Shilhi.

32 He walked in the ways of his father Asa and did not stray from them; he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord.

33 The high places, however, were not removed, and the people still had not set their hearts on the God of their fathers.

34 The other events of Jehoshaphat's reign, from beginning to end, are written in the annals of Jehu son of Hanani, which are recorded in the book of the kings of Israel.

35 Later, Jehoshaphat king of Judah made an alliance with Ahaziah king of Israel, who was guilty of wickedness.

36 He agreed with him to construct a fleet of trading ships. After these were built at Ezion Geber,

37 Eliezer son of Dodavahu of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, "Because you have made an alliance with Ahaziah, the Lord will destroy what you have made." The ships were wrecked and were not able to set sail to trade.

21:1 Then Jehoshaphat rested with his fathers and was buried with them in the City of David. And Jehoram his son succeeded him as king.

Halley's Bible Handbook gives the dates of Jehoshaphat's reign as 874-850 B.C. *The Tyndale Commentary* observes: "Jehoshaphat's *twenty-five* year reign (v. 31) included a three-year co-regency during his father Asa's final illness (*cf.* 2 Ch. 16:12-13; 17:7), so that his twenty-two years (*cf.* 2 Ki. 3:1; 8:16) as sole king would be approximately 869-848 BC ... or 876-852 BC The favorable comparison with Asa (v. 32) and mention of the *high places* (v. 33) hark back to the introduction (17:3, 6). Although the statements about the high places seem contradictory (*cf.* 14:3, 5; 15:17), the hint about the superficial standards of popular religion (v. 33) may give a clue as to why they persisted in some areas. It is also a salutary reminder about the limited success of Jehoshaphat's campaigns for religious and legal reform (17:7-9; 19:4-11). Though the king had set his heart on God (19:3; *cf.* 1 Ch. 29:18; 2 Ch. 30:19), his example was not widely followed (*cf.* 2 ch. 12:14). Further information is typically to be found in a prophetic source (v. 34; *cf.* 19:2), which is included in a larger work. *Kings of Israel* really means kings of Judah, indicating as usual that this small kingdom remained the true Israel (*cf.* 16:11; 27:7)."

Like King Solomon, Jehoshaphat tried to build a fleet, obviously with the intent to engage in international trade. Solomon's success was probably due to the fact that he manned his

¹⁰²

Ps. 25:14

ships with Phoenician sailors.¹⁰³ Jehoshaphat's fleet did not survive the waves of the Mediterranean.

D. Judah and the house of Ahab (21:2-22:12)

i. Jehoram (21:2-20)

a. God preserves the house of David (21:2-7).

2 Jehoram's brothers, the sons of Jehoshaphat, were Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azariahu, Michael and Shephatiah. All these were sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel.

3 Their father had given them many gifts of silver and gold and articles of value, as well as fortified cities in Judah, but he had given the kingdom to Jehoram because he was his firstborn son.

4 When Jehoram established himself firmly over his father's kingdom, he put all his brothers to the sword along with some of the princes of Israel.

5 Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years.

6 He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, for he married a daughter of Ahab. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord.

7 Nevertheless, because of the covenant the Lord had made with David, the Lord was not willing to destroy the house of David. He had promised to maintain a lamp for him and his descendants forever.

Jehoram inherited the kingdom from his father, but he did not inherit his godly spirit. He, obviously, did not recognize that he reigned over Judah by the grace of God, otherwise he would not have engaged in fratricide.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "The kingdom of Judah suddenly enters a very dark phase (chs. 21-23). The reigns of Jehoram and Ahaziah (chs. 21-22) and their sequel in Athaliah's overthrow and death (ch. 23), brought the nation to the brink of internal destruction. The chief cause was the insidious influence of *the house of Ahab* (21:6; 33:4, 5, 7, 8), which was known in contemporary non-Israelite documents as 'the house of Omri' (*cf.* 22:2). Ironically, that dynasty had been introduced into Judah's affairs by the godly Jehoshaphat (*cf.* 22:9), but the latter's faith and courage were unfortunately no guarantee of his wisdom. The disastrous nature of his alliance with Ahab has been mentioned already (*cf.* 18:1-2; 19:1-3; *cf.* 20:35-37), but now its consequences begin to unfold. The wider story of the house of Ahab's commitment to Baal worship and conflict with the prophets Elijah and Elisha is assumed to be known to the reader (1 Ki. 17 – 2 Ki. 11), leaving Chronicles to concentrate on their relationship with Judah."

It seems incorrect that Jehoshaphat is said to be "king of Israel." One possible explanation would be that Judah was considered by God to be the real Israel, because, under Jehoshaphat's reign it had remained true to the Lord. Some Bible scholars consider "Israel" to be a mistake.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary, for instance, writes: "Jehoshaphat certainly was not king of Israel, but king of Judah. Yisraa'eel must be a corruption in the text for Yehudah; which is the reading of the Syriac, the Arabic, the Septuagint, and the Vulgate: the Chaldee, only,

¹⁰³

I Kings 9:26-28

agrees with the Hebrew text. And the reading of the versions is supported by thirty-eight ... MSS. The word 'Judah' should therefore be restored to the text."

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "Verses 2-4, which have no parallel in Kings, are widely thought to have come from an official record, since they show little sign of the Chronicler's influence apart from the verb 'to strengthen oneself.' That two of Jehoram's brothers had almost identical names (Azariah, Azariahu, v. 2) is a surprise. However, the full list is well supported textually (LXX specifically has 'six' brothers), and, since the names are spelled differently, it is possible that they had different mothers. Jehoram is called *king of Israel* (v. 1, NIV, etc.; 'Judah,' REB, NEB, REV, GNB), because the Chronicler regarded the kingdom of Judah as the true Israel. Though Jehoram was the *firstborn son* (v. 3), it seems that his kingship was not an automatic right. Not only was he *given* the kingdom, but sons apart from the eldest were sometimes appointed as king, either by the preceding king (1 Ki. 1:13, 30; 2 Ch. 11:20-22) or by the people of the land (2 Ki. 23:31; cf. 2 Ki. 23:36; 1 Ch. 3:15, where Shallum is another name for Jehoahaz)."

The main cause for Jehoram's infidelity to the Lord seems to have been his marriage to the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. But we cannot merely attribute his perfidy to his relationship with his wife. That was not just a case of "cherchez la femme."

The Matthew Henry's Commentary comments on v. 7: "The tenor of the covenant was that David's seed should be visited for their transgressions, but the covenant should never be broken, Ps 89:30, etc." The psalm verses Matthew Henry refers to read: "If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes, if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands, I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging; but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered. Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness — and I will not lie to David — that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky."¹⁰⁴

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "The Chronological details refer to Jehoram's reign of *eight years* as sole ruler, approximately 848-841 BC (cf. 2 Ki. 1:17). However, as frequently the case, the dominant element in the introductory formula is the theological evaluation, which mentions two contrasting covenants. The first is Jehoram's marriage to Athaliah, *a daughter of Ahab* (v. 6; cf. 22:2; 22:10-23:21). Marriage contracts in the ancient Near East were known as covenants (cf. Ho 2:14-20; Je. 31:32), and often sealed political alliances (cf. 2 Ch. 18:1). However, the agreement between Jehoshaphat and Ahab resulted in Jehoram (and Ahaziah, 22:4) doing *evil in the eyes of the LORD* (v. 6). God's response was to invoke the *greater covenant* he *had made with David* (v. 7). The importance of this statement is indicated by its expansion from 2 Kings 8:19. *House of David*, which was previously 'house of Judah,' is now directly opposed to the 'house of Ahab' (v. 6), which 'David my servant' has become the covenant *the LORD had made with David*. The only other specific mention of the Davidic covenant in Chronicles is in 2 Chronicles 15:5, where the Davidic house was again under threat. Both passages refer back to 1 Chronicles 17:4-14, though the language here may well reflect the influence of the Psalms (e.g. Pss. 89:3, 35-36; 132:11-12) and the prophets (e.g. Is. 55:3; Je. 33:21), which speak of the Davidic covenant in terms of God's unchanging and unconditional commitment to his people. The *lamp* is also best understood in the same light (v. 7; cf. 1 Ki. 11:36)! While this unused

¹⁰⁴ Ps. 89:30-37

metaphor has been explained as symbolizing either ‘life’ ... or ‘dominion’ ..., the context here and elsewhere in the Old Testament shows that it is about permanence. Though ‘lamp of the wicked is snuffed out’ (Jb. 18:5; Pr. 13:9; 24:20), God’s people shine on in the surrounding darkness. The Chronicler’s special interest in the lampstand shining every night in the temple may well express similar confidence (cf. 2 Ch. 4:7; 13:11, both unparalleled in Ki.). It was not God’s will (lit. ‘not willing’) to destroy Jehoram’s whole family (v. 7; cf. v. 17; 22:10-11), and the Chronicler seems to have underlined the promise for his readers by adding ‘and’ before ‘to his sons for ever’ (v. 7, RSV).”

b. God punishes Jehoram (21:8-20).

8 In the time of Jehoram, Edom rebelled against Judah and set up its own king.

9 So Jehoram went there with his officers and all his chariots. The Edomites surrounded him and his chariot commanders, but he rose up and broke through by night.

10 To this day Edom has been in rebellion against Judah. Libnah revolted at the same time, because Jehoram had forsaken the Lord, the God of his fathers.

11 He had also built high places on the hills of Judah and had caused the people of Jerusalem to prostitute themselves and had led Judah astray.

12 Jehoram received a letter from Elijah the prophet, which said: "This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: 'You have not walked in the ways of your father Jehoshaphat or of Asa king of Judah.

13 But you have walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and you have led Judah and the people of Jerusalem to prostitute themselves, just as the house of Ahab did. You have also murdered your own brothers, members of your father's house, men who were better than you.

14 So now the Lord is about to strike your people, your sons, your wives and everything that is yours, with a heavy blow.

15 You yourself will be very ill with a lingering disease of the bowels, until the disease causes your bowels to come out.'"

16 The Lord aroused against Jehoram the hostility of the Philistines and of the Arabs who lived near the Cushites.

17 They attacked Judah, invaded it and carried off all the goods found in the king's palace, together with his sons and wives. Not a son was left to him except Ahaziah, the youngest.

18 After all this, the Lord afflicted Jehoram with an incurable disease of the bowels.

19 In the course of time, at the end of the second year, his bowels came out because of the disease, and he died in great pain. His people made no fire in his honor, as they had for his fathers.

20 Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years. He passed away, to no one's regret, and was buried in the City of David, but not in the tombs of the kings.

The historical relationship of Israel and Edom is an interesting study in the Old Testament. Although Esau was the oldest of the twins to whom Rebekah gave birth, she was told: “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Gen. 25:23

When Isaac gave his parental blessing to Esau, he said: “You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. But when you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from off your neck.”¹⁰⁶

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on the Edomite revolt against Judah: “That nation had been made dependent by David, and down to the time of Jehoshaphat was governed by a tributary ruler (1 Kings 22:47; 2 Kings 3:9). But that king having been slain in an insurrection at home, his successor thought to ingratiate himself with his new subjects by raising the flag of independence (Josephus). The attempt was defeated in the first instance by Jehoram, who possessed all the military establishments of his father; but being renewed unexpectedly, the Edomites succeeded in completely emancipating their country from the yoke of Judah (Gen. 27:40). Libnah, which lay on the southern frontier and toward Edom, followed the example of that country.”

Jehoram must have thought that he could easily bring Edom back on its knees if he put down the rebellion with his own armed forces. But the Edomites turned out to be better equipped than he anticipated and at one point he found himself surrounded and his life was in danger. He managed to escape under the cover of darkness. No details about this escape are given.

The Fausset’s Bible Dictionary comments: “Edom, heretofore tributary to Jehoshaphat, made a king over themselves (1 Kings 22:47; 2 Kings 3:9; 2 Sam 8:14) and revolted; and only by a night surprise did Jehoram extricate himself at Zair (2 Kings 8:20-22, for which the copyist in 2 Chron 21:9 has ‘with his princes’), in Edom, from ‘the Edomites who compassed him in.’ Libnah a fenced city (2 Kings 19:8) also revolted, probably as being given by Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 21:3) to one of those sons whom Jehoram had murdered. The great reason was God’s anger’ because he had forsaken the Lord God of his fathers.’ Then those surrounding peoples, upon whom the fear of the Lord had been in Jehoshaphat’s days so that they made no war, nay even gave presents and tribute to him, as the Philistines and the Arabians (2 Chron. 17:10-11) near the Ethiopians, now were stirred up by the Lord against Jehoram.”

The Tyndale Commentary adds: “In addition to promising security for David’s dynasty, the Davidic covenant also specifies that individual kings are to be punished for their waywardness (*cf.* 1 Ch. 28:9; 2 Ch. 7:19-22). The implications of this for Jehoram are pointed out in two ways, firstly in a short passage from Kings (vv. 8-10b) and then in material unique to Chronicles (vv. 10c-19).

The first evidence is a rebellion by *Edom* (vv. 8-10a) and an internal revolt by the Judean city of *Libnah* (v. 10b). Edom had probably been regained for Judah under Jehoshaphat (*cf.* 2 Ki. 3:9; 2 Ch. 30:36), but had now set up its own king (v. 8). The most likely understand of Jehoram’s attempt to restore control is that he just about managed to escape by night from an Edomite stranglehold (v. 9). Less probably, Judah was ‘defeated’ by the Edomites (NEB, also Sanda, Williamson). Nothing else is known of the trouble in Libnah, a town of uncertain location on Judah’s western border not far from Lachish. What is more important for the Chroniclers is that these military reverses symptomized the fact that Jehoram had *forsaken the LORD* (v. 10c). This final phrase of verse 10 is an explanatory addition to Kings, reflecting the idea that to forsake God is the opposite of seeking him (1 Ch. 28:9; 1 Ch. 7:19, 22; 15:2). The basic principle

¹⁰⁶ Gen. 27:40

is that God forsakes those who forsake him (*cf.* Mt.10:33; 1 Tim. 2:12), not in an impersonal deterministic way but as a matter of deliberate choice (*cf.* v. 14). However, an element of choice also extends to those under judgment, as may be seen in the contrast between Jeroboam's persistence in rejecting God (2 Ch. 13:11-20) and Rehoboam's humble repentance (2 Ch. 12:1-12)....

It is no surprise that God responds to this apostasy through prophecy, though the presence of a *letter* from *Elijah* is unexpected (vv. 12-15). Elijah makes no other appearance in Chronicles, is only known to have prophesied in Israel (though *cf.* 1 Ki. 19:3, 8), wrote no other letters, and is thought by many to have been dead by this time! Since the letter's style is also consistent with the Chronicler's, it is understandable that many commentators view it as the Chronicler's own creation. However, Elijah was certainly alive for part of Jehoram's reign (2 Ki. 1:17), and it is quite possible that he and Elisha functioned alongside each other for a while before his translation (2 Ki. 2:12). Letters (*cf.* 1 Ki. 21:8-10; 2 Ki. 5:5-7; 10:1-7) and written prophecies were also well known (*cf.* 1 Ch. 28:9; 29:29; 2 Ch. 20:34) at this time, and, if Elijah was now unable to travel because of age, he could well have found it easier to communicate in written form. The letter's content also reflects Elijah's conflicts with Ahab's house, and its present style may indicate the Chronicler's redrafting rather than his composition."

The Bible critical objections mentioned above would be incompatible with our belief in the literal inspiration of Scripture. We have, therefore, no doubt whether the Chronicler states the facts correctly.

The core message of Elijah's letter is that God will punish Jehoram severely. The Hebrew text of v. 14 and 15 reads literally: "Behold, the Lord will smite [with] a great plague your people, and your children, and your wives, and all your goods: And you [shall have] great sickness by disease of your bowels, until your bowels fall out by reason of your sickness day by day."

We must remember that God's reason for announcing punishment ahead of time is always to give room for repentance. It is an act of grace.

It is difficult to determine what the disease was that killed Jehoram. The symptoms described make us think of intestinal cancer in its worst form.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on the letter Elijah wrote to Jehoram: "There have been various efforts made toward as explanation of this singular occurrence. Some have thought that that prophet's translation having taken place in the reign of Jehoshaphat, the name of Elijah has, by the error of a transcriber, been put for that of Elisha. That opinion, however, is not supported by any manuscript authority. Grotius considered that the letter had come directly from the invisible world. Cajetan conjectured that some other Elijah was intended. But 'the writing' [*miktaab*] was in all probability a written prophecy rather than a letter; and in that case it might very well have been written by Elijah, as, according to the best chronological reckoning, Jehoram must have arrived at maturity before the venerable prophet's departure; and as he had exhibited deplorable proofs of an utterly irreligious and wicked character, it pleased the spirit of prophecy to dictate this letter, which was probably committed to Elisha, or some other prophet, to be delivered to the king at a particular crisis, when the writing would make the deepest impression on his mind."

Besides the physical suffering imposed upon Jehoram because of his unfaithfulness to the Lord, the king's spiritual infidelity caused suffering to the whole nation of Judah. The neighboring Philistines and Arabs began making raids into the territory of Judah, causing extensive damage. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes: "We have no other account of this

war. Though it was a predatory war, yet it appears to have been completely ruinous and destructive. What a general curse fell upon this bad king; in his body, soul, substance, family, and government!”

The Pulpit Commentary adds: “The *Ethiopians*, *i.e.* Cushites, fully fifteen centuries before the date of those original treatises from which the writers of Kings and Chronicles respectively borrowed their materials, or some of them, are recorded both genealogically and geographically in Gen. 10:6-8. They had their location very early in the south of Arabia, as also to the south of Egypt, speaking generally, with the Red Sea on the east, the Libyan desert on the west, and Abyssinia on the south, whilst Syene marked conspicuously a site on the line of the northern bounds between them and Egypt (Ezek. 29:9-22; Isa. 18:1, 2; 45:14; Zep. 3:10). They are almost invariably connected with Africa, from whence it is now that stress is laid upon those of them to whom the Arabians, on the other side of the Red Sea, were contiguous.”

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “The judgment (vv. 14-15) is in two parts, whose fulfillment is separately described in verses 16-19. The first part is directed against the people, with Jehoram’s *sons* and *wives* singled out for special treatment (vv. 14, 16-17). They will suffer ‘a great calamity’ (JB; *heavy blow*, NIV, REB, NEB), a phrase which is invariably associated with divine punishment. This could take the form of military defeat (*cf.* 1 Sa. 4:17; 2 Sa. 18:7) though it was more often a plague, especially in the exodus and wilderness periods (*cf.* Ex. 9:14; Nu. 16:48-50; 2 Ch. 21:14, 22; Ps. 106:29-30). The actual punishment is an invasion by *Philistines* and *Arabs* (v. 16). The former may have been associated with the rebellion in Libnah (v. 10), and the latter are probably from northern Arabia, though they may have come from southern Arabia if the *Cushites* (NIV, REB, NEB) are really ‘Ethiopians’ (RSV; ‘Sudanese,’ GNB; *cf.* also 14:9-15; 17:11; 26:7). The style is reminiscent of the ‘Yahweh war’ theme, for God had *aroused the hostility of* (v. 16, NIV), or ‘stirred up the anger of’ (RSV) the invaders, and ensured the punishment was carried out (v. 17). Elijah’s word is fulfilled, and Jehoram’s murders avenged (*cf.* v. 4). The king’s ‘house’ (v. 17); palace, REB, NEB) is almost certainly in one of the fortified cities (*cf.* v. 3), not Jerusalem. ‘Jehoahaz’ (RSV, REB, NEB) is another name for Ahaziah (NIV, JB, GNB; *cf.* 22:1; the two parts of the name are simply in reverse order).

The second part of the judgment falls directly on Jehoram (vv. 15, 18-19), who suffers an *incurable disease*. Unfortunately, it cannot be described any more specifically than as a very unpleasant disease of the bowels (despite REB, NEB). Translation problems have increased the difficulty, and the end may have come suddenly, ‘in two days . . . , rather than at the end of the *second year* (EVV).

The factual details of Jehoram’s passing also indicate God’s judgment. There are three negatives, that he was not honored with the customary funeral *fire* (v. 19; *cf.* 2 Ch. 16:14; Je. 34:5), that there was no regret at his passing, and that he was not buried in the royal cemetery (v. 20). Three items are also unusually omitted, *viz.* any source of further information, the direct succession, and that he rested with his fathers (*cf. e.g.* 2 Ch. 12:15-16; 13:22 – 14:1; 16:13-14). In this matter-of-fact way, the author shows that he regarded Jehoram’s reign, as also those of his successors Ahaziah and Athaliah, as an aberration.”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary states: “A series of overwhelming calamities befell this wicked king; because, in addition to the revolts already mentioned, two neighboring tribes (see 2 Chron. 17:11) made hostile incursions on the southern and western portions of his kingdom; his country was ravaged, his capital taken, his palace plundered, his wives carried off, all his children slain except the youngest, himself was seized with a chronic and incurable dysentery [accompanied by *prolapses ani*; but, according to some, *yeets_auw*

mee`eykaa, thy intestines come out, denotes rupture, so that the bowels protrude from the abdomen], which, after subjecting him to the most painful suffering for the unusual period of two years, carried him off, a monument of the divine judgment; and, to complete his degradation, his death was unlamented, his burial unhonored, by his subjects. This usage, similar to what obtained in Egypt, seems to have crept in among the Hebrews, of giving funereal honors to their kings, or withholding them, according to the good or bad characters of their reign.”

ii. Ahaziah (22:1-9)

a. Ahaziah and the house of Ahab (22:1-4).

1 *The people of Jerusalem made Ahaziah, Jehoram's youngest son, king in his place, since the raiders, who came with the Arabs into the camp, had killed all the older sons. So Ahaziah son of Jehoram king of Judah began to reign.*

2 *Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem one year. His mother's name was Athaliah, a granddaughter of Omri.*

3 *He too walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother encouraged him in doing wrong.*

4 *He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, as the house of Ahab had done, for after his father's death they became his advisers, to his undoing.*

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “The real subject of chapter 22 is the *house of Ahab* (vv. 3, 7, 8) rather than the rulers of Judah, *Ahaziah* (vv. 1-9) and *Athaliah* (vv. 10-12). The influence of Ahab’s house was felt during Ahaziah’s brief reign through *Athaliah*’s role as queen mother (v. 2) and through various advisers (vv. 4-5). External pressure was brought to bear by *Jehoram* king of Israel (also called *Joram*), who in one case is given the full title of *son of Ahab king of Israel* (v. 5; cf. vv. 6, 7, 8). Ahaziah was little more than a puppet, and, after his death, Athaliah ruled Judah while there was no effective male claimant (v. 12). During both reigns, therefore, Ahab’s dynasty was in effective control of Judah. The unity of Judah and Israel is eloquently symbolized by the names of their kings. No other Israelite king was called Jehoram or Ahaziah, yet both names are used of successive contemporary rulers in Judah and Israel.

Ahaziah and Athaliah represent two further stages in the subversion of Judah by Ahab’s dynasty before the denouement in chapter 23. While Jehoram of Judah is merely open to its influence (ch. 21), Ahaziah is fully co-operative. When Ahaziah dies, however, the situation becomes even more desperate. No male in David’s house can assume kingship (v. 9), and remnants of hope are dashed by Athaliah’s violent purge of what was left of the royal family (vv. 10-12). The overwhelming threat is no more evident than in the repeated group murders which affect the Davidic house four times within two generations (21:4; 22:1, 8, 10). It is true that one baby escapes Athaliah’s cruelty (vv. 11-12), but what could one baby do against such a tyrant? In all this, God’s own integrity is increasingly under question, for he seems to have failed to keep his promises, and to have left his people utterly defenseless.”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on Ahaziah’s age when he ascended the throne of Judah: “Forty and two years old - (cf. 2 Kings 8:26.) According to that passage, the commencement of his reign is dated in the 22nd year of his age; and according to this, in the 42nd year of the kingdom of his mother’s family. ‘If Ahaziah ascended the throne in the 22nd year of his life, he must have been born in his father’s nineteenth year. Hence, it may seem strange that he had older brothers; but in the East they marry early, and royal princes had,

besides the wife of the first rank, usually concubines, as Jehoram had (2 Chron 21:17); he might, therefore, in the 19th year of his age, very well have several sons' ... (cf. 2 Chron 21:20; 2 Kings 8:17)."

A footnote in the NIV states about Ahaziah's age, mentioned in v. 2: "Some Septuagint manuscripts and Syriac (see also 2 Kings 8:26); Hebrew forty-two)."

Although details of Ahaziah's sinful behavior as king of Judah are not specified, it is obvious that he committed idolatry, probably by worshipping Baal. Although his name meant "Yahweh sustains," he did not live up to the meaning of his name. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states about him: "A good name does not insure a good character. Ahaziah, the 'God-sustained,' served Baal and worshipped him, and provoked to anger Yahweh, the God of Israel, just as his father before him had done. He appears to have been weak and unfortunate, and calamities in quick succession pursued him."

b. Ahaziah's downfall and death (22:5-9).

5 He also followed their counsel when he went with Joram son of Ahab king of Israel to war against Hazael king of Aram at Ramoth Gilead. The Arameans wounded Joram;

6 so he returned to Jezreel to recover from the wounds they had inflicted on him at Ramoth in his battle with Hazael king of Aram. Then Ahaziah son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to Jezreel to see Joram son of Ahab because he had been wounded.

7 Through Ahaziah's visit to Joram, God brought about Ahaziah's downfall. When Ahaziah arrived, he went out with Joram to meet Jehu son of Nimshi, whom the Lord had anointed to destroy the house of Ahab.

8 While Jehu was executing judgment on the house of Ahab, he found the princes of Judah and the sons of Ahaziah's relatives, who had been attending Ahaziah, and he killed them.

9 He then went in search of Ahaziah, and his men captured him while he was hiding in Samaria. He was brought to Jehu and put to death. They buried him, for they said, "He was a son of Jehoshaphat, who sought the Lord with all his heart." So there was no one in the house of Ahaziah powerful enough to retain the kingdom.

The Pulpit Commentary comments lengthily on this section: "It will be remembered that Ahab failed when he solicited and obtained the help of Jehoshaphat (1 Ki. 22:3-36; 2 Ch. 18:3-34) in his enterprise against Ramoth-Gilead. The present attempt, however, seems to have had a different issue (2 Ki. 9:14, 15)

Both places (this and the parallel) tell first that Ahaziah went with Joram against Hazael; then that Joram, being smitten, returned for healing to Jezreel; next that Ahaziah, out of compassion in some sort, went down to see Joram in Jezreel; and lastly, it is here signaled that in that very deed of his, Providence brought it about that Jehu lighted upon the track of him (2 Ch. 22:7-9), and he met his end. This feature of the history the writer of Chronicles wishes to exhibit, as usual. *Ramah*; i.e. Ramoth-Gilead. *Jezreel*. This was a town in the Plain of Jezreel (Esdraelon), belonging to the tribe of Issachar. For *Azariah* read *Ahaziah*, the meaning of both being 'held' or 'upheld of the Lord.'

He went out with Jehoram against Jehu. The 'against' is the simple preposition 'et-, and need intend nothing more than 'to meet' Jehu; not to meet him hostilely. What the manner of the meeting was, however, we know from 2 Ki. 9:21, 22, 27, 28. The history of this and following two verses is here given very briefly; much must be filled in to give its full explanation, as in 2 Ki. 9:11-29. *Whom the Lord had anointed to out of the house of Ahab*; i.e. had raised him to the

throne, possessed of the characteristic qualities which he had for this purpose (2 Ki. 9:1-7; 19:16). *Jehu the son of Nimshi*. Strictly, ‘the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi’ (2 Ki. 9:2). *Executing judgment upon the house of Ahab*. The description of all this is sufficiently graphically scattered along the verses of 2Ki 9:24–11:20. *And found the princes of Judah* (see especially 2 Ki. 10:7; 11; 11:13-20). *And the sons of the brethren of Ahaziah*. This both explains and is explained by 2 Ki. 10:12-14. *That ministered to Ahaziah*. Even this enigmatical little clause receives its probable explanation from the last clause of 2 Ki. 10:13 in last quotation foregoing. *And he sought Ahaziah: and they caught him ... brought him ... buried him*. This verse, which at the first sight seems at variance with 2 Ki. 9:27, 28, is perhaps a simply surprising instance of undesigned corroboration of history by the treatment of different historians. The verse, e.g. corrects the italics of 2 Ki. 9:27; expunging them throws their proper force into the words, ‘at the going up to Gur,’ showing that Jehu reckoned on that steep hill to enable his pursuing warriors to overtake Ahaziah; makes a sufficiently possible harmony, to say the least, in respect of the remaining incidents narrated of his life—that he made for the time a successful flight to Megiddo, afterwards sought to hide in deeper retirement in Samaria, was thence brought to Jehu at Megiddo, there eventually slain before his eyes, and by his own servants, who must be supposed to have had some attachment to him, but probably with the sanction of Jehu himself, conveyed ‘in a chariot to Jerusalem’ for sepulture ‘in the sepulcher of his fathers in the city of David’ (2 Ki. 9:28). The fact that he received decent burial being due to the God-fearing character of his grandfather, and that this should find its record on the page of the book that will last while the world lasts, that very page already two thousand five hundred years old, is a most touching consideration. Megiddo was on the Esdraelon or Jezreel plain, that stretched between the hills of Galilee and those of Mount Ephraim or Samaria. *Had no power to keep still the kingdom*. The undoubted meaning of this clause is that there was no one of the house of Ahaziah who could succeed him. The Hebrew text does not say, ‘no one left,’ etc. But the allusion can scarcely be to anything but the fact that transpires in our 2 Ki. 9:11 (where only Joash is mentioned as a son, and with him a nurse), viz. that his only surviving son was an infant, The king’s sons (presumably sons of Ahaziah and grandsons of her own) were among the ‘seed royal,’ whom the wicked Athaliah had ‘destroyed.’ [One Bible scholar] says that the words that wrap in them the slight ambiguity, *wat_adabeer*, are a phrase peculiar to the later Hebrew, and he instances nine examples, all of which come from Daniel or Chronicles, the virtue of the phrase amounting to the *ports ease* of the Latin. Translate, *And there was no one of the house of Ahaziah able for the kingdom*, the exacter conditions of the case not being recorded.”

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “Judah and Israel’s joint hostility against the ‘Syrians’ (v. 5, RSV; *Arameans*, NIV, etc.) exemplify their unity, though Ahaziah’s acceptance of Israelite *counsel* (v. 5) and his journey to Jezreel (v. 6) show who was the dominant partner. *Went with* (v. 5) probably indicates Ahaziah’s general support for Jehoram/Joram (Heb. has both spellings), which in practice is limited to visiting the wounded king in Jezreel (v. 6) rather than assisting in the battle at *Ramoth Gilead* (v. 5).

Ahaziah is probably not condemned for participating in the war as such. Rather, by failing to separate himself from Jehoram, he made himself liable to suffer the same punishment that God had previously announced against Ahab’s house and which he had chosen *Hazael* and Jehu to carry out (cf. 1 Ki. 19:15-17; 2 Ki. 8:11-13). This lack of discernment shows itself in several attendant ironies. Firstly, though Israel and Judah had been reunited, it was on the basis of self-interest and idolatry rather than the covenant. Secondly, joint action against the Syrians at Ramoth Gilead had already led to one disaster (ch. 18). Thirdly, Jehoram’s attempt to *recover* (v.

6, NIV, REB, NEB, etc.) lit. 'be healed' (NRSV, RSV) at Jezreel is probably a tacit rejection of the Lord's offer of healing through repentance (*cf.* 2 Ki. 1:2-6, 15-17)."

The Hebrew text of v. 6 reads literally: "And he returned to be healed in Jezreel because of the wound which were given him at Ramah, when he fought with Hazael king of Syria. And Azariah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Jehoram the son of Ahab at Jezreel, because he was sick."

The Tyndale Commentary furthermore writes: "The text of verse 6 has several difficulties. 'Ramah' (NRSV, RSV) is to be understood as an alternative name of *Ramoth Gilead* (NIV, etc.), and MT's 'Azariah' has been correctly changed to *Ahaziah* in EVV. However, 'from the wounds' (EVV) is a smoothing over of an unfinished exploratory clause, following 2 Kings 8:20. MT has 'because the wounds ...', and, while EVV's harmonization may be correct, Vulg.'s addition of ... were many' is worth consideration"

V. 7 is a strange example of God's arranging of circumstances for the purpose of executing punishment. God chose Jezreel as the place where both Joram and Ahaziah would find death waiting for them. Joram had chosen Jezreel as the place of convalescence and Ahaziah as the place for visiting a friend. Neither knew how fatal their choice would be.

The Hebrew word for "downfall" is *tebuwcah*, which is unique in Scripture. This is the only place where it is found in the entire Old Testament. It can be rendered "ruin."

We read that his advisers counselled Ahaziah to visit Joram on his sickbed in Samaria. These counselors must have been under the influence of Athaliah also. That wicked woman must have been Satan's pawn in Judah for the purpose of opposing the worship of Yahweh.

It is ironic, or more than that, that the renewal of unity between Israel and Judah was brought about, not by a mutual desire to seek the Lord, but by a common bond of idolatry. It had been Athaliah's evil influence that brought the two states back together.

Jehu had been chosen by God to clean the nation of its idolatry. Jehu began his career as an officer in Ahab's army. According to God's instructions to Elijah, Jehu was anointed as God's chosen instrument to destroy the dynasty of Ahab.

When Ahaziah and Joram decided to meet Jehu, they were obviously unaware of Jehu's mission. The encounter led to their execution. When Ahaziah became aware of Jehu's mission, he went into hiding, but he was found and put to death, together with the other princes of Judah.

It was because of Jehoshaphat's testimony of faith in God that the people decided to give Ahaziah a royal burial.

Ahaziah's death left Judah without anyone who could ascend the throne. This allowed Athaliah to carry out her evil plot.

ii. Athaliah (22:10-12).

10 When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she proceeded to destroy the whole royal family of the house of Judah.

11 But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Jehoram, took Joash son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the royal princes who were about to be murdered and put him and his nurse in a bedroom. Because Jehosheba, the daughter of King Jehoram and wife of the priest Jehoiada, was Ahaziah's sister, she hid the child from Athaliah so she could not kill him.

12 He remained hidden with them at the temple of God for six years while Athaliah ruled the land.

The Hebrew text of v. 10 reads literally: “But when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal seed of the house of Judah.” The Hebrew word for “destroy” is *dabar*. The word has various meanings, ranging from “to arrange,” “to speak,” or “to subdue.” It is rarely used in the context in which it is found in our text. *The Tyndale Commentary* writes: “*Destroy* (NIV, RSV, etc.) is a rare word, and if it is not a corruption of the corresponding word in 2 Kings 11:1, means ‘remove’ or even ‘exterminate.’”

It is obvious that Athaliah’s intent was to promote herself as the supreme ruler of the country. All she wanted was power. But behind this was Satan’s effort to prevent God’s promise of the Messiah to be realized. If the house of David ceased to exist, there would be no seed of David to sit on the throne of Israel.

God’s solution was the preservation of a little baby. This story gives us the plan of salvation in a nutshell.

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary observes: “Nothing but the miraculous intervention of the divine providence could have saved the line of David at this time, and preserved the prophecy relative to the Messiah. The whole truth of that prophecy, and the salvation of the world, appeared to be now suspended on the brittle thread of the life of an infant of a year old, (see 2 Chron 24:1,) to destroy whom was the interest of the reigning power! But God can save by few as well as by many. He had purposed, and vain were the counter-exertions of earth and hell.”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary assumes that Athaliah’s act was, first of all, an effort of self-preservation. We read: “Maddened by the massacre of the royal family of Ahab, she resolved that the royal house of David should have the same fate. Knowing the commission which Jehu, had received to extirpate the whole of Ahab’s posterity, she expected that he would extend his sword to her. Anticipating his movements, she resolved, as her only defense and security, to usurp the throne and destroy ‘the seed royal,’ both because they were hostile to the Phoenician worship of Baal, which she was determined to uphold, and because, if one of the young princes became king, his mother would supersede Athaliah in the dignity of queen-mother.”

The Hebrew text of v. 11 reads literally: “But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the king the son of Joash, took Ahaziah, the son of Joash, and stole him from among the king’s sons, that were slain, and put him and his nurse in a bedchamber.” The parallel verse in II Kings reads: “But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Jehoram and sister of Ahaziah, took Joash son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the royal princes, who were about to be murdered. She put him and his nurse in a bedroom to hide him from Athaliah; so he was not killed. He remained hidden with his nurse at the temple of the Lord for six years while Athaliah ruled the land.”¹⁰⁷

The Tyndale Commentary states: “This incident is really a tale of two women. One ruled the land for six years (v. 12), though the lack of the usual formulaic framework shows that the author regarded her reign as illegitimate. She had taken the throne by violence, and was the only non-Davidic ruler in Judah The other woman was ‘Jehoshebeath’ (or *Jehosheba*, as in 1 Ki. 11:2; so NIV, REB, NEB, JB here), who was Athaliah’s daughter or stepdaughter and the wife of the priest *Jehoiada* (the usual pre-exilic term for the high priest). The Chronicler has inserted a phrase into verse 11 (cf. 2 Ki. 11:2), explaining how as Ahaziah’s sister she had access to the

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II Kings 11:2, 3

baby and that her courageous faith was just as vital as her husband's in restoring the legitimate kingship (*cf.* ch. 11).

This paragraph is usually seen as the beginning of Athaliah's end and taken with what follows (*cf.* the headings in NIV, NRSV). It may be equally regarded, however, as the final effort of Ahab's house in Judah. Though the process that began with Jehoram of Judah's fratricide (21:4) had done its worst, the lamp had not been extinguished (*cf.* 21:7). Now, the dark age was about to be replaced by a new era."

It seems more than symbolic that the temple became little Joash's hiding place for six years. The name Joash means "Yahweh supports." That became a factual experience for the royal child. It also meant that he grew up under the influence of the high priest Jehoiada.

E. Three declining kings (23:1 – 26:23)

i. Joash (23:1 – 24:27)

a. Joash's accession under Jehoiada's leadership (23:1-21).

i. The rightful king restored (23:1-11).

1 In the seventh year Jehoiada showed his strength. He made a covenant with the commanders of units of a hundred: Azariah son of Jeroham, Ishmael son of Jehohanan, Azariah son of Obed, Maaseiah son of Adaiah, and Elishaphat son of Zicri.

2 They went throughout Judah and gathered the Levites and the heads of Israelite families from all the towns. When they came to Jerusalem,

3 the whole assembly made a covenant with the king at the temple of God. Jehoiada said to them, "The king's son shall reign, as the Lord promised concerning the descendants of David.

4 Now this is what you are to do: A third of you priests and Levites who are going on duty on the Sabbath are to keep watch at the doors,

5 a third of you at the royal palace and a third at the Foundation Gate, and all the other men are to be in the courtyards of the temple of the Lord.

6 No one is to enter the temple of the Lord except the priests and Levites on duty; they may enter because they are consecrated, but all the other men are to guard what the Lord has assigned to them.

7 The Levites are to station themselves around the king, each man with his weapons in his hand. Anyone who enters the temple must be put to death. Stay close to the king wherever he goes."

8 The Levites and all the men of Judah did just as Jehoiada the priest ordered. Each one took his men — those who were going on duty on the Sabbath and those who were going off duty — for Jehoiada the priest had not released any of the divisions.

9 Then he gave the commanders of units of a hundred the spears and the large and small shields that had belonged to King David and that were in the temple of God.

10 He stationed all the men, each with his weapon in his hand, around the king — near the altar and the temple, from the south side to the north side of the temple.

11 Jehoiada and his sons brought out the king's son and put the crown on him; they presented him with a copy of the covenant and proclaimed him king. They anointed him and shouted, "Long live the king!"

The opening line of this chapter sounds strange: "In the seventh year Jehoiada showed his strength." The Hebrew verb is *chazaq*, which literally means "to fasten." The first time the verb

is used in Scripture is in the story of Lot's escape from Sodom. We read that the angel that came to warn Lot and his family "*grasped* his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the Lord was merciful to them."¹⁰⁸

The Living Bible reads: "Jehoiada the priest got up his courage" *The New Living Translation* renders it: "Jehoiada the priest decided to act" We could say that Jehoiada pulled himself together. It took courage to do something like this at a time when evil ruled supreme in the country.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "The priest *showed his strength* (cf. JB, REB, NEB), which may simply mean that he acted decisively. The phrase is used of several kings at the beginning of their reigns, usually in a positive sense, though in this case Jehoiada was acting on someone else's behalf rather than his own (cf. e.g. 2 Ch.15:8; 17:1; 27:6).

The first aim of the *coup* to see Joash anointed as king (v. 11) took place in three stages. The first stage (vv. 1-3) is an *assembly of Levites and heads of families* in Judah (vv. 2-3), convened with the help of some military officers (v. 1). The ease with which the 'rebels' gather suggests Athaliah had little popular support. The 'assembly' is a favored term in Chronicles because of its crucial role in post-exile Israel (cf. Ezr. 10:1; Ne. 8:2). In Chronicles it was usually a representative body, and, though its decisions were often of a political nature, they tended to have religious overtones (cf. 1 Ch. 13:2; 29:10; 2 Ch. 30:2). It was regarded as a virtue that leaders should respect the assembly, and it is noticeable that no assembly is mentioned while Judah was under the house of Ahab (the previous reference is 20:5, 14). A *covenant* is agreed (v. 3) which probably contained the terms of Joash's kingship, including those of Jehoiada's regency. The covenant with the military officers (v. 1) is most likely to have been a preliminary version.

Most EVV suggest the boy was actually produced in the assembly, 'Here is the king's son!' (v. 3, NRSV). Some feel the crucial element of surprise is thereby lost, and as an alternative, have either proposed that Jehoiada merely established the boy's identity ... or have combined this phrase with the next, *the king's son shall reign* (NIV). Even if his appearance was only brief, however, *with the king* (not in Ki.) does presume the boy's physical presence, as does the statement (2 Ki. 11:4) that the priest 'showed' them the child. The final sentence of verse 3 about God's promise to *the descendants of David* is an addition, but clearly shows why the author believed the coup took place (cf. 1 Ch. 17:10b-14; 2 Ch. 6:10; 21:7).

Jehoiada's specific instructions constitute the second stage (vv. 4-7), though the details are hard to unravel. There are two main difficulties, of which the first is the relationship between the various groups. While Chronicles has three groups of guards officiating at the temple and the palace with the rest of the people gathered in the temple courts, 2 Kings 11:5-7 speaks of three different groups accompanied by two companies of temple guards. The second problem is that Chronicles (but not Ki.) identifies some of these men as *priests and Levites* (vv. 6, 8) whereas Kings speaks only of 'the Carites and the guards,' *i.e.* the royal bodyguard (2 Ki. 11:4). Although the Chronicler has not simply substituted the former for the latter (cf. vv. 1, 5, 10, 20 with 2 Ki. 11:4, 6, 11, 19), he does seem to have interpreted those who guarded the king in the temple precincts as Levites (cf. v. 6; 2 Ki. 11:7). Since the Levites were not exempt from military

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Gen. 19:16

service, they would have been armed just like everyone else (*cf.* 1 Ch. 11:22-24; 12:26-28; 27:5-6). Further, Chronicles' inclusion of laymen (vv. 2-3) and of *all Judah* (v. 8), together with Kings' mention of temple guards who were presumably Levites (2 Ki. 11:7), suggests that both Kings and Chronicles refer to laymen and Levites, with the latter as usual emphasizing the Levites' contributions."

It is obvious that the conspiracy to overthrow Athaliah's reign required secrecy. The gathering of Levites in Jerusalem would not have aroused any suspicion, since it would have been difficult for outsiders to determine who and when among the Levites would serve at the temple.

The Pulpit Commentary states: "This was the second wider and more embracing covenant. *This* covenant is between all the gathered representatives and the young king, Jehoiada no doubt putting all things into shape. *And he said unto them, Behold, the king's son shall reign.* The *he* is Jehoiada, as of course. In view of the last clause of 2 Ch. 23:4—in the parallel, '*Jehoiada showed them the king's son*'—the likelier rendering of our text here is, *Behold the king's son; he shall reign, as, etc. As the Lord hath said of the sons of David* (see 2 Ch. 6:16; 7:18; 2 Sa. 7:12; 1 Ki. 2:4; 9:5). The hereditary nature of the monarchy (2 Sa. 7:1-29), pervaded ever by the spirit of the covenant, is evidently glanced at. It is probable that the existence of Joash was news to those to whom Jehoiada, as the parallel has it, 'showed ... the king's son,' so that double significance lies in the word 'showed.'"

Jehoiada's statement "The king's son shall reign" placed the "coup" on a basis of legitimacy. It made the action an expression of the will of God for the nation.

In order to guarantee its success, Jehoiada divided all the priests and Levites into three groups and gave instructions to each of them on their responsibility. Those who were on duty and those who would normally be off duty would all take up certain positions. A certain demonstration of force would be needed in case Athaliah's bodyguard would decide to take action.

Since the king had been hidden in one of the rooms of the temple, a strong force would be required to be at the temple for his protection.

The Tyndale Commentary states: "The plan depended on two crucial elements. One was that the timing would not create suspicion, since the changing of the temple and palace guards on the Sabbath involved the natural movement of the maximum number of armed men. The only irregularity was that all leave was cancelled (v. 8). The second was that Athaliah probably knew very little of what went on in the Lord's temple, since she worshipped Baal (v. 17). The element of surprise is therefore realistic.

The third stage culminated in Joash's anointing and acclamation (vv. 8-11). The weapons used by the guards (v. 9) were readily available in the temple, and were probably a mixture of trophies captured from *David's* defeated enemies (1 Ch. 18:7-11) and decorated weapons specially made for Solomon (2 Ch. 9:15-16). The word translated *small shields* (NIV, NRSV, RSV, JB; 'buckler,' REB, NEB) is probably 'quivers' (*cf.* also 1 Ch. 18:7).

As the boy came out of the front of the temple, he seems to have been fully protected by armed men standing between *the temple* and *the altar* and flanking him to left and right (*north* and *south*, v. 10). Ironically, this was the same general area where Joash would later order Jehoiada's son to be murdered for speaking out of turn (2 Ch. 24:21). The word for *side* (NIV, RSV; 'corner,' REB, NEB, JB) may well refer to part of the entrance between the main opening and the next corner."

The Hebrew text of v. 11 reads literally: “Then they brought out the king’s son, and put upon him the crown, and [gave him] the testimony, and made him king. And Jehoiada and his sons anointed him and said God save the king.” “Testimony” is the rendering of the Hebrew word *ʿeduwth*. The word is first used for the ark, which stood in the tabernacle, as replica of the throne of God.¹⁰⁹ In this instance it stands for the copy of the law that the king was supposed to study on a daily basis.¹¹⁰

ii. *The usurper removed (23:12-15).*

12 When Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and cheering the king, she went to them at the temple of the Lord.

13 She looked, and there was the king, standing by his pillar at the entrance. The officers and the trumpeters were beside the king, and all the people of the land were rejoicing and blowing trumpets, and singers with musical instruments were leading the praises. Then Athaliah tore her robes and shouted, "Treason! Treason!"

14 Jehoiada the priest sent out the commanders of units of a hundred, who were in charge of the troops, and said to them: "Bring her out between the ranks and put to the sword anyone who follows her." For the priest had said, "Do not put her to death at the temple of the Lord."

15 So they seized her as she reached the entrance of the Horse Gate on the palace grounds, and there they put her to death.

Athaliah must have been aware of the large gathering of people in Jerusalem, but she paid no attention to that, thinking that it was normal behavior during certain feasts and celebrations. Since she did not serve Yahweh, she may not have known that no religious feast was scheduled for that day.

What drew her attention was the noise of the crowd, which must have been louder and more exuberant than normally heard at feasts. She saw the young Joash standing at the place where kings were supposed to stay, with a royal crown on his head and surrounded by army officers and people blowing their horns.

In the parallel passage in II Kings we read: “She looked and there was the king, standing by the pillar, as the custom was.”¹¹¹

That made her cry out “Treason! Treason! The Hebrew word she must have used was *qesher*. Being a traitor herself, it is amazing that she knew the word!

The first time that word occurs in Scripture is in connection with Absalom’s revolt against his father David. We read: “While Absalom was offering sacrifices, he also sent for

¹⁰⁹ See Ex. 16:34.

¹¹⁰ Deut. 17:18, 19

¹¹¹ II Kings 11:14

Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, to come from Giloh, his hometown. And so the *conspiracy* gained strength, and Absalom's following kept on increasing."¹¹²

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "Athaliah's cry of *Treason!* Is ironic in the extreme, given the violent circumstances in which she had seized the throne (22:3, 10-11). Her reaction is a classic example of Jesus' teaching about the mote and the beam (Mt. 7:3-5; Lk. 6:41-42). The lack of any concluding formula reveals the writer's view of the illegitimacy of her reign, which was due not to her crimes, for others were equally guilty (*cf.* 21:4; 28:22-24; 33:2-9), but because she had no right to the throne in the first place."

One of the great surprises for Athaliah must have been to discover that one member of the royal family had survived her murderous actions. She thought she had wiped out all of David's offspring. Her problem was that she had not murdered enough! That became her own undoing.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments: "The unusual commotion indicated by the blast of the trumpets, and the vehement acclamations of the people, drew her attention or excited her fears. She might have flattered herself that having slain all the royal family, she was in perfect security; but it is just as likely that, finding on reflection one had escaped her murderous hands, she might not deem it expedient to institute any inquiries; but the very idea would keep her constantly in a state of jealous suspicion and irritation. In that state of mind, the wicked usurper, hearing across the Tyropoeon the outburst of popular joy, rushed across the bridge to the temple ground, and penetrating from a single glance the meaning the whole scene, raised a shriek of 'Treason!'"

The Matthew Henry's Commentary writes: "Athaliah slain. She ran upon the point of the sword of justice; for, imagining her interest much better than it was, she ventured into the house of the Lord at that time, and cried, Treason, treason! But nobody seconded her, or sided with her. The pride of her heart deceived her. She thought all her own, whereas none were cordially so. Jehoiada, as protector in the king's minority, ordered her to be slain (v. 14), which was done immediately (v. 15), only care was taken that she should not be slain in the house of the Lord, that sacred place must not be so far disgraced, nor that wicked woman so far honored."

iii. *The covenant renewed (23:16-21).*

16 Jehoiada then made a covenant that he and the people and the king would be the Lord's people.

17 All the people went to the temple of Baal and tore it down. They smashed the altars and idols and killed Mattan the priest of Baal in front of the altars.

18 Then Jehoiada placed the oversight of the temple of the Lord in the hands of the priests, who were Levites, to whom David had made assignments in the temple, to present the burnt offerings of the Lord as written in the Law of Moses, with rejoicing and singing, as David had ordered.

19 He also stationed doorkeepers at the gates of the Lord's temple so that no one who was in any way unclean might enter.

¹¹² II Sam. 15:12

20 He took with him the commanders of hundreds, the nobles, the rulers of the people and all the people of the land and brought the king down from the temple of the Lord. They went into the palace through the Upper Gate and seated the king on the royal throne, 21 and all the people of the land rejoiced. And the city was quiet, because Athaliah had been slain with the sword.

In the parallel passage in II Kings, we read: “Jehoiada then made a covenant between the Lord and the king and people that they would be the Lord’s people. He also made a covenant between the king and the people.”¹¹³

The renewal of the covenant with the Lord implied the recognition that Israel was basically a theocracy. God was the actual king and the earthly king reigned by the grace of God.

The renewal of the covenant with the Lord would put an end to idolatry in the land. The practical implication of that agreement was that every reminder of Baal worship was to be destroyed.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “The climax is not Joash’s coronation, but a covenant renewing the nation’s relationship with God. The participants (v. 16) are described differently from 2 Kings 11:17, especially in replacing ‘between the LORD’ with ‘between him,’ i.e. Jehoiada (cf. RSV)! The Chronicler has probably interpreted *that they would be the LORD’s people* as implying God’s participation, though he may have regarded the word for ‘him’ (*he*, NIV) as an abbreviation for Yahweh. The Chronicler has also omitted the covenant between the king and the people, but that has already been mentioned in verses 3, 11. The covenant is different from that in verse 11, since this one is made between the people and God rather than the people and the king. The follow-up confirms this distinction, since verses 17-21 are concerned more with religious matters in general than with the specific issue in verses 4-15 of who should be the rightful king. The aim of this covenant was to put current wrongs right. As often in Chronicles, it resulted in a purge of pagan worship (v. 17; cf. 2 Ch. 15:12-16; 34:31-33) in obedience to the Deuteronomic law (cf. Dt. 4:23; 7:6). It also led to the reinstatement of the twin pillars of the Davidic covenant, reorganized temple worship according to God’s law (vv. 17-19) and setting the Davidic king on the rightful throne (vv. 20-21).”

The Hebrew text of v. 17 reads literally: “Then all the people went [to] the house of Baal, and broke it down, and his altars, and broke his images in pieces, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars.” The Hebrew preposition “before” is *lipneey*, which is derived from a word meaning “face.” As a priest of Baal, Mattan had probably brought human sacrifices, killing little children and burning them on the Baal altar. It could be that he suffered the fate to which he had submitted his young victims.

The Tyndale Commentary observes about the destruction of the Baal temple: “The *Baal temple* (v. 17), which had presumably been constructed under the auspices of Ahab’s house (cf. especially 21:11, 13), was demolished in an action that is remarkably similar to Jehu’s handiwork in Samaria. The latter may have inspired Jehoiada, except that this occasion was less bloody (cf. 2 Ki. 10:18-28). On the positive side, temple worship was revised according to the instructions given to *David* and *Moses* (v. 18; cf. also 24:9-10), a typical example of the

¹¹³ II Kings 11:17

Chronicler's concern that any changes in worship required proper authority (for Moses, *cf. e.g.* 1 Ch. 16:40; 2 Ch. 31:3; 34:14). David had given particular instructions about music and temple personnel. The special responsibilities of *priest, Levites* (v. 18, note the mention of *singing*), and 'gatekeepers' (v. 19, NRSV, RSV) are all mentioned. In that verses 18b-19 are unique to the Chronicler, they doubtless reflect the special concerns of his own day.

Those who brought the young king from the temple to the palace (v. 20) are now the *nobles and rulers of the people* rather than the royal bodyguard as such, emphasizing the leaders' commitment to the new king. With the king properly installed, joy and peace flourished (v. 21). The people's *rejoicing* augmented the joy of temple worship (v. 18), and sounded a note unheard since the days of Jehoshaphat (20:27). That the city was *quiet* was a sign of God's blessing, which often followed special acts of faith and obedience (*cf.* 1 Ch. 4:40; 22:9; 2 Ch. 13:23; 14:4-5; 20:30)."

b. Joash's faithfulness while Jehoiada lives (24:1-16).

i. Introduction to Joash' reign (24:1-3)

1 Joash was seven years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem forty years. His mother's name was Zibiah; she was from Beersheba.

2 Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all the years of Jehoiada the priest.

3 Jehoiada chose two wives for him, and he had sons and daughters.

The Tyndale Commentary introduces this section with: "Joash's story is one of the saddest in Chronicles. It describes a king who deliberately turned his back on God after he had received personal experience of God's mercy and had initiated a religious reformation. What is more, the pattern of early success followed by a sharp decline becomes established for the reigns of his two successors Amaziah (ch. 25) and Uzziah (ch. 26). The pattern is not new, having applied to Rehoboam (2 Ch. 11-12) and Asa (2 Ch. 14-16), but it plumbs new depths in chapters 24-26. Positive balancing factors at the end of these reigns are no longer to be found (*cf.* 12:12; 16:14), and each concludes in disaster."

There are several things in this section that are not mentioned, leaving it up to us to fill in the blanks. It is obvious that a seven-year-old boy would not have the wisdom to rule a country or even establish a deep personal relationship with God. The fact that Joash did well as long as Jehoiada was alive means that Joash's righteousness was actually the righteousness of Jehoiada. The fact that Joash did right cannot be put as a credit on his account.

A spiritual application could be made of this situation in that we can say that our righteousness is imputed to us by what Jesus Christ has done in our behalf.

We do not read when Joash married. He may have been in his early teens when Jehoiada arranged his marriages. It is also not clear either how much time elapsed between each marriage.

ii. Repairing the temple (24:4-16).

4 Some time later Joash decided to restore the temple of the Lord.

5 He called together the priests and Levites and said to them, "Go to the towns of Judah and collect the money due annually from all Israel, to repair the temple of your God. Do it now." But the Levites did not act at once.

6 *Therefore the king summoned Jehoiada the chief priest and said to him, "Why haven't you required the Levites to bring in from Judah and Jerusalem the tax imposed by Moses the servant of the Lord and by the assembly of Israel for the Tent of the Testimony?"*

7 *Now the sons of that wicked woman Athaliah had broken into the temple of God and had used even its sacred objects for the Baals.*

8 *At the king's command, a chest was made and placed outside, at the gate of the temple of the Lord.*

9 *A proclamation was then issued in Judah and Jerusalem that they should bring to the Lord the tax that Moses the servant of God had required of Israel in the desert.*

10 *All the officials and all the people brought their contributions gladly, dropping them into the chest until it was full.*

11 *Whenever the chest was brought in by the Levites to the king's officials and they saw that there was a large amount of money, the royal secretary and the officer of the chief priest would come and empty the chest and carry it back to its place. They did this regularly and collected a great amount of money.*

12 *The king and Jehoiada gave it to the men who carried out the work required for the temple of the Lord. They hired masons and carpenters to restore the Lord's temple, and also workers in iron and bronze to repair the temple.*

13 *The men in charge of the work were diligent, and the repairs progressed under them. They rebuilt the temple of God according to its original design and reinforced it.*

14 *When they had finished, they brought the rest of the money to the king and Jehoiada, and with it were made articles for the Lord's temple: articles for the service and for the burnt offerings, and also dishes and other objects of gold and silver. As long as Jehoiada lived, burnt offerings were presented continually in the temple of the Lord.*

15 *Now Jehoiada was old and full of years, and he died at the age of a hundred and thirty.*

16 *He was buried with the kings in the City of David, because of the good he had done in Israel for God and his temple.*

V. 4 states that Joash made plans for the restoration of the temple "some time later." Those words are the translation of the Hebrew word *hayah*, which literally means "to exist," or "to become." It seems strange that the plan for the restoration of the temple was initiated by the king instead of by the high priest. Jehoiada may have had more influence upon the king to bring this about than the text explains. Yet it seems that the priests and Levites were dragging their feet, while the king demonstrated enthusiasm.

The temple may have presented an eyesore after what Athaliah had done in purloining its treasures for the worship of Baal. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes: "During the reigns of Joram and Athaliah, the temple of God had been pillaged to enrich that of Baal, and the whole structure permitted to fall into decay." But it is doubtful that Joash initiated any restoration plans as a seven-year-old.

Money would be needed for the restoration. In order to collect this, the king decided to apply the Law of Moses, which required all Israelites to pay a certain some of money for the atonement of their souls. There would be an obvious connection between the restoration of the temple, the temple services and the atonement of the souls of the Israelites.

We read in Exodus: "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay the Lord a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them. Each one who crosses over

to those already counted is to give a half shekel, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs. This half shekel is an offering to the Lord. All who cross over, those twenty years old or more, are to give an offering to the Lord. The rich are not to give more than a half shekel and the poor are not to give less when you make the offering to the Lord to atone for your lives. Receive the atonement money from the Israelites and use it for the service of the Tent of Meeting. It will be a memorial for the Israelites before the Lord, making atonement for your lives.”¹¹⁴

There is no record in Scripture that this law was ever applied in Israel. Actually, failure to collect census money was, probably, the reason David was chastised when he ordered a census to be taken.¹¹⁵

Interestingly, the priests and Levites showed the same reluctance to carry out the census as Joab did when David ordered it to be done. Evidently, the clause in the law that mentions the plague that could decimate the population if no ransom money was paid, must have been in everybody’s mind.

The Tyndale Commentary states: “The basic restoration work (vv. 4-12) is treated separately from its results (vv. 13-16). The term *restore* (‘renovate,’ REB, NEB) marks the beginning and end of the first part (vv. 4, 12). The word really means ‘renewal,’ and is most often used of personal renewal (Pss. 51:10; 103:5; La. 5:21), being applied to buildings only in 2 Chronicles 15:8 (the temple altar) and Isaiah 61:4. The idea of ‘giving new life’ to buildings also occurs in 1 Chronicles 11:8, and verse 14 implies that this includes the use to which they are put as much as the physical task of reconstruction.

Athaliah and her family (v. 7; lit., *sons*, but *cf.* 22:10; ‘adherents,’ REB, NEB) are the chief cause of the temple’s troubles, though it had probably suffered from general neglect for some time before that (the most recently mentioned work is in 15:8). The first stage of the work was clearly unsuccessful, however, because of insufficient annual contributions (v. 5). Four significant alterations from 2 Kings 12 require comment. Firstly, Chronicles has simplified the different types of temple income (2 Ki 12:4), perhaps distinguishing between regular support and a special restoration fund. Secondly, 2 Kings 12:6 implies that the first phase took several years, since Joash did not call the priests to account until his twenty-third year. Thirdly, the *Levites* (vv. 5-6) are blamed for the failure as well as the priests. Such criticism is unusual in Chronicles but not unique Fourthly, Athaliah, who is not mentioned in 2 Kings 12, is really described as the embodiment of ‘wickedness’ (v. 7). Since this description is remarkably similar to that found in one of Zechariah’s visions, this may well be another example of the Chronicler’s use of prophetic imagery (Zc. 4:7-8).

Joash now takes responsibility himself for the proper funding of the temple (*cf.* 1 Ch. 29:1-5). He sets up a separate fund by royal proclamation (v. 9), requiring the people to put their ‘tax’ (v. 10, RSV; *contributions*, NIV) in a ‘box’ (GNB; *chest*, other EVV) specially made for the purpose (vv. 8-10). His actions are another example of faithfulness to the ways of *Moses* (v. 9) and David (*cf.* also 23:18). The word for ‘proclamation’ links a practice from the Chronicler’s time (*cf.* 2 Ch. 30:5; 36:22 = Ezr. 1:1; Ezr. 10:7; Ne. 8:15) with the wilderness period (Ex. 36:6). The tax itself was based on the half-shekel tax for the *Tent* (vv. 6, 9; *cf.* Ex. 30:12-16; 38:25-26),

¹¹⁴ Ex. 30:11-16

¹¹⁵ See II Kings 24.

though it was also renewed by Nehemiah (Ne. 10:32; cf. Mt. 17:24). In fact, the people responded as they had done in the case of the Tent by bringing too much (v. 14; cf. Ex. 36:4-7; *until it was full*, NIV, NRSV, etc., in v. 10 is better than ‘until they had finished,’ RSV), as though this were a freewill offering rather than a tax. The blessings of David’s temple preparations are recalled as the people ‘rejoiced’ (RSV) in making their contributions (v. 10; cf. 1 Ch. 29:1-9), and hired *masons and carpenters* and *workers in iron and bronze* (v. 12; cf. 1 Ch. 21:15-16). Popular enthusiasm for the Lord’s work is a favorite theme in Chronicles (cf. 2 Ch. 11:16-17; 15:15; 20:4).

Administration of the fund was taken away from the priests and placed in the hands of two officials, one appointed by the king and the other by the high priest, who allocated resources to the workmen (vv. 11-12a). The box’s location *outside the gate* (v. 8) varies from 2 Kings 12:9 where it is ‘beside the altar ... as one entered the house of the LORD.’ The latter phrase, however, could have influenced the Chronicler, who was possibly thinking of his own day when the inner court was reserved for priests (cf. 2 Ch. 4:9; 6:13; Ezk. 40:44-47). One interesting harmonization is that a layman might have paid a Levite gatekeeper who then put the money in the box!

Finally, the temple was restored to its ‘proper condition’ (v.13, NRSV, RSV; ‘former state,’ JB; *original design*, NIV, REB, NEB). The Hebrew word contains a notion of a ‘standard’ (cf. Ex. 30:32, 27; Ezk. 45:11), which harks back to the plans for the temple revealed by God (1 Ch. 28:12, 19). Once the building was *finished* (v. 14), two further things were required to complete the restoration. Various *articles* (‘utensils,’ RSV; ‘vessels,’ NEB) were manufactured, and daily worship, especially the *burnt offerings*, reorganized (v. 14). An apparent contradiction with 2 Kings 12:13-14 over the temple vessels seems to be explained by reference to different funds. Kings alludes to the main fund for the actual temple, but these temple vessels were paid for out of surplus contributions.

The brief death notice for Jehoiada describes the restored temple as the chief *good* he had done (v. 16). This word recalls Nehemiah’s prayers (Ne. 5:19; 13:31), and his similar work of renewal in *the service of God* (cf. v. 16). Jehoiada’s age at death, *a hundred and thirty*, is unparalleled since patriarchal times (v. 15), though that does not make it unhistorical. Burial in the royal cemetery is unique for a high priest. Though these details mark him out as a special character, his desire to see the legitimate king installed distinguishes from the trend in the later post-exilic period where the high priests gradually assumed greater civil powers.”

c. Joash’s apostasy after Jehoiada’s death (24:17-27).

17 After the death of Jehoiada, the officials of Judah came and paid homage to the king, and he listened to them.

18 They abandoned the temple of the Lord, the God of their fathers, and worshiped Asherah poles and idols. Because of their guilt, God’s anger came upon Judah and Jerusalem.

19 Although the Lord sent prophets to the people to bring them back to him, and though they testified against them, they would not listen.

20 Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest. He stood before the people and said, "This is what God says: 'Why do you disobey the Lord’s commands? You will not prosper. Because you have forsaken the Lord, he has forsaken you.'"

21 But they plotted against him, and by order of the king they stoned him to death in the courtyard of the Lord’s temple.

22 King Joash did not remember the kindness Zechariah's father Jehoiada had shown him but killed his son, who said as he lay dying, "May the Lord see this and call you to account."

23 At the turn of the year, the army of Aram marched against Joash; it invaded Judah and Jerusalem and killed all the leaders of the people. They sent all the plunder to their king in Damascus.

24 Although the Aramean army had come with only a few men, the Lord delivered into their hands a much larger army. Because Judah had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers, judgment was executed on Joash.

25 When the Arameans withdrew, they left Joash severely wounded. His officials conspired against him for murdering the son of Jehoiada the priest, and they killed him in his bed. So he died and was buried in the City of David, but not in the tombs of the kings.

26 Those who conspired against him were Zabad, son of Shimeath an Ammonite woman, and Jehozabad, son of Shimrith a Moabite woman.

27 The account of his sons, the many prophecies about him, and the record of the restoration of the temple of God are written in the annotations on the book of the kings. And Amaziah his son succeeded him as king.

The change of heart, or rather the change of attitude of Joash, is difficult to explain. He owed his life to Jehoiada's intervention. He repaid Jehoiada's kindness by killing the high priest's sons.

It began with an audience of some Judean officials to the king. We read that they *paid homage* to the king. The Hebrew verb used is *shachah*, which literally means "to prostrate." Their attitude may not have been unusual. It was probably customary for people who were granted an audience to bow low to the ground before the royal throne.

The delegation of the Judean officials probably told Joash that his status would be more elevated if he left the old religion of Yahweh and turned to the more modern idols of his time.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary comments: "I believe the Targum has given the true sense of this verse: 'After the death of Jehoiada, the great men of Judah came and adored King Joash, and seduced him; and then the king received from them their idols.'"

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary adds: "Hitherto, while Joash occupied the throne, his uncle had held the reins of sovereign power, and by his excellent counsels had directed the young king to such measures as were calculated to promote both the civil and religious interests of the country. The fervent piety, practical wisdom, and inflexible firmness of that sage counselor exerted immense influence over all classes. But now that the helm of the state ship was no longer steered by the sound head and firm hand of the venerable high priest, the real merits of Joash's administration appear; and for want of good and enlightened principle, as well as, perhaps, of natural energy of character, he allowed himself to be borne onward in a course which soon wrecked the vessel upon hidden rocks.

They were secretly attached to idolatry, and their elevated rank affords sad proof how extensively and deeply the nation had become corrupted during the reigns of Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Athaliah. With strong professions of allegiance, they humbly requested that they might not be subjected to the continued necessity of frequent and expensive journeys to Jerusalem, but allowed the privilege their fathers had enjoyed of worshipping God in high places at home; and they framed their petition in this plausible and least offensive manner, well knowing that, if excused attendance at the temple, they might-without risk of discovery or disturbance-indulge their tastes in the observance of any private rites they pleased. The weak-minded king granted

their petition; and the consequence was, that when they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, they soon ‘served groves and idols.’”

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “After Jehoiada died, Joash’s policy turned full circle under the influence of *the officials of Judah* (v. 17; ‘leading men,’ REB, NEB). The apparent swiftness of the change may owe more to the Chronicler’s editorial technique than to what actually happened, though two factors help to explain the transition. Joash was always more of a follower than a leader, and the enthusiasm for what seemed like new ways (*cf.* vv. 5-6). A sizeable number in Judah undoubtedly preferred the easier ways of Ahab’s house, and, as soon as the awkward Jehoiada was out of the way, they saw their opportunity to return to the worship of *Asherah poles and idols*,’ REB, NEB, NRSV, RSV). Asherah was a Canaanite fertility goddess whose symbol was some kind of wooden object, possibly a pole (*cf. e.g.* 14:3; 15:16; 33:3; 34:3). She was closely associated in the Old Testament with Baal worship (*cf.* 21:11; 23:17), though in the Ugaritic texts she was the consort of El, the head of the pantheon.”

Tyndale’s observation that “Joash was always more of a follower than a leader” may be taken with a grain of salt. Joash’s rather firm action in calling people to account for their neglect in the collection of funds for the restoration of the temple, does not draw a picture of a weak character. It was probably more the lure of personal popularity than weakness of character that accounted for Joash’s change in behavior. Joash’ life had literally been saved by God’s intervention. God had used Jehoiada in the process. Joash betrayed both Yahweh and Jehoiada in turning to idolatry. Lack of gratitude is often a fruit that grows on the tree of pride.

And behind this change of allegiance rises, of course, the shadow of the prince of darkness who wanted Israel and Judah to become so corrupt that God’s promise of a Savior could not be fulfilled through them.

The Pulpit Commentary states: “Joash must have been now about thirty-six years of age; he was seven years old when he began to reign, he had reigned twenty-three years before the restoring of the temple (2 Ki. 12:6), and a few years had elapsed since. The words of the princes, to which Joash *hearkened*, are not supplied by the parallel, which indeed at once proceeds to speak of the threatening attitude of the Syrian king Hazael, and of how Joash bought him off. Our next verse, however, shows to what end those words tended The worship of the true God was not left by the whole people, and we are not told it was by the king; but (very probably through want of moral courage) he incurred the severest sort of blame, and was without even the excuse of strong personal temptation.”

Chronicles states that the Lord sent several prophets who warned Judah. Their actual message is not given here. But we read in the parallel passage in Second Kings: “The Lord warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: ‘Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your fathers to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets.’”¹¹⁶ Their message found no response.

The Tyndale Commentary writes: “The people listened to the officials (v. 17) but did not listen to the prophets (v. 19). Therefore, God pronounced judgment through a prophesying priest, Jehoiada’s son *Zechariah* (v. 20), who the *Spirit of God* ‘clothed’ (‘took possession of,’ REB,

¹¹⁶

II Kings 17:13

NEB, NRSV, RSV). Two of the three Old Testament examples of this distinctive expression occur in Chronicles (*cf.* Jdg. 6:34; 1 Ch. 12:18), though it continues in the New Testament (Lk. 24:49; *cf.* Gal. 3:27). It refers to the exercise of a prophetic gift, and is parallel to a similar phrase in 2 Chronicles 15:1; 20:14. Zechariah's message is typical of the prophecies in Chronicles in expounding earlier Scripture as well as one of Chronicles' central themes. The scripture is Numbers 14:41, 'Why do you disobey the LORD's commands? You will not prosper.' The familiar these is that *because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you* (1 Ch. 28:9; 2 Ch. 15:2; *cf.* 2 Ch. 7:19; 15:13). The biblical principle that the form of punishment is appropriate to the sinner's offence is confirmed by two further occurrences of the Hebrew verb 'azab in verses 24-25 (EVV 'abandon,' 'forsake' or 'left')."

The people reacted to Zechariah's prophetic warning by killing him. Evidently, they received not only the king's approval, but even his executive order. The Hebrew text reads literally: "They conspired against him and at the command of the king stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the Lord.

Adam Clarke's Commentary comments: "What a most wretched and contemptible man was this, who could imbrue his hands in the blood of a prophet of God, and the son of the man who had saved him from being murdered, and raised him to the throne! Alas, alas! Can even kings forget benefits? But when a man falls from God, the Devil enters into him; and then he is capable of every species of cruelty."

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "This idea that the punishment fits the crime is illustrated further by a whole string of ironies concerning Zechariah's murder (vv. 21-22) and Joash's death (vv. 23-26). As for Zechariah, the people firstly prefer the 'command of the king' (v. 21; NRSV, RSV) to that of the Lord (v. 20), the Heb. word is the same). Secondly, Zechariah's father's *kindness* in saving Joash's life when he was a baby (22:10-12) is cruelly reversed. Thirdly, he was killed in the very place where Jehoiada had anointed Joash king (23:10-11). Fourthly, though Joash had abandoned God, Zechariah prayed that God would still 'seek' him (v. 22). This is the literal meaning of *call to account* (NIV), 'avenge' (JB, NRSV, RSV) or 'exact the penalty' (REB, NEB; *cf.* the meaning 'hold accountable' in Dt. 23:21, EVV; Jb. 10:6; Ps. 139:1, 23; Ezk. 34:10). It is significant because 'seeking' and 'forsaking' are antithetical terms in Chronicles, though they are no simple opposites. This is illustrated in 1 Chronicles 28:9, the only other verse in Chronicles where God is the seeker. The phrase 'God searches (or seeks) every heart' could mean either being found by God or being found out by him and forsaken, depending on one's response. It is the latter for which Zechariah now asks."

The Hebrew text of Zechariah's last words reads: "The Lord look upon it and require it." The Hebrew verb, rendered "require" is *darash*, which is difficult to translate. The basic meaning is "to tread," or "to frequent." It can also mean "to seek," or "to ask." The first instance in Scripture in which the verb is found is in the verse: "And for your lifeblood I will surely *demand an accounting*. I will *demand an accounting* from every animal. And from each man, too, I will *demand an accounting* for the life of his fellow man."¹¹⁷ That verse puts the verb in the same context in which we find it in the way Zachariah may have intended it. Another context in which we find the same verb is in the verse: "When Moses *inquired* about the goat of the sin offering and found that it had been burned up, he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's remaining sons, and asked, 'Why didn't you eat the sin offering in the sanctuary area? It is most holy; it

¹¹⁷ Gen. 9:5

was given to you to take away the guilt of the community by making atonement for them before the Lord.”¹¹⁸

The Tyndale Commentary furthermore comments: “The prayer should not be compared unfavorably with those of Jesus and Stephen (Lk. 23:34; Acts 7:60). For one thing, Jesus actually quotes this incident in pronouncing the same judgment on his contemporaries (*cf.* Mt. 23:33-36; Lk. 11:47-51). For another, Zechariah is not looking for personal revenge but asking God to act in keeping with his declared principles of justice. If God were inactive, the result would be anarchy and God’s claims to sovereignty would be seriously jeopardized.”

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary observes: “The dying martyr’s prophetic imprecation of vengeance upon his murderers: The Lord look upon it, and require it! This came not from a spirit of revenge, but a spirit of prophecy: He will require it. This would be the continual cry of the blood they shed, as Abel’s blood cried against Cain: ‘Let the God to whom vengeance belongs demand blood for blood. He will do it, for he is righteous.’ This precious blood was quickly reckoned for in the judgments that came upon this apostate prince; it came into the account afterwards in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans—their misusing the prophets was that which brought upon them ruin without remedy (ch. 36:16); nay, our Savior makes the persecutors of him and his gospel answerable for the blood of this Zechariah; so loud, so long, does the blood of the martyrs cry. See Matt 23:35. Such as this is the cry of the souls under the altar (Rev 6:10), How long ere thou avenge our blood? For it shall not always go unrevenged.”

As was mentioned above, Jesus refers to the murder of Zechariah, saying to the people of His day: “And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.”¹¹⁹ It may sound strange to us that God would hold us responsible for crimes that were committed centuries before we were born. But unless we clearly and purposely disassociate ourselves from the crimes of humanity of which we are a member, God will hold us responsible. The only way we can disassociate ourselves is by claiming the coverage of the blood of Christ for our sins. The author of Hebrew states about the blood of Jesus: “You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” When Cain killed his brother Abel, God said to him: “Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.”¹²⁰ Christ’s blood not only speaks a better word, it also speaks louder; so loud that it outshouts the cry of Abel’s blood.

One of the ways in which Zachariah’s blood was avenged was in Aram’s invasion in Judah in which all of the leaders of Judah were killed and Joash was severely wounded.

¹¹⁸ Lev. 10:16, 17

¹¹⁹ Matt. 23:35; Luke 11:50-51

¹²⁰ Gen. 4:10

Humanly speaking, Judah could easily have defeated the Arameans. The invaders were numerically much weaker than the defenders.

God had promised Israel: “Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you.”¹²¹ But if Israel turned from the Lord, God said: “I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies; those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you.”¹²² That was what happened to Judah as a punishment for the murder of Zachariah.

Joash must not have been popular. Even his own servants hated him. We read that they conspired against him and assassinated him “in his bed.” This probably means that they killed him while he was asleep.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “The concluding formula confirms God’s judgment on Joash. The fact that he was not honored by a place in the royal cemetery (in contrast to Jehoiada, v. 16) is important in Chronicles. Also, that his conspirators were sons of foreign women adds to the ignominy. Further information can be found in a ‘commentary’ (GNB, NRSV, RSV) or *annotations* (literally, ‘midrash’ (JB), but neither here nor in 13:22 does this word carry the connotations which it had in later Jewish literature. It seems to include prophetic or historical material or both. The intriguing comment that it contained may prophecies *about* (REB, NEB, NIV) or ‘against’ (GNB, NRSV, RSV) Joash presumably refers to verse 19, and reflects Chronicles’ continuing emphasis on prophetic interpretations of history.”

ii. Amaziah (25:1-26:2)

a. Amaziah’s strength (25:1-4).

1 Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Jehoaddin; she was from Jerusalem.

2 He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but not wholeheartedly.

3 After the kingdom was firmly in his control, he executed the officials who had murdered his father the king.

4 Yet he did not put their sons to death, but acted in accordance with what is written in the Law, in the Book of Moses, where the Lord commanded: "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sins."

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “The date of Amaziah’s reign is a seemingly intractable problem, and his twenty-nine years (v. 1) has been reduced to varying lengths such as thirteen, sixteen, or nineteen years. One solution regards Amaziah as sole ruler for only five years before being taken hostage by Jehoash of Israel (vv. 23-24), with his son Uzziah being co-regent for the remaining twenty-four years. This rather surprising conclusion has found support in the unique comment that Amaziah *lived* for *fifteen years* after Jehoash’s death (v. 25) and in the participation of the people at Uzziah’s accession, perhaps indicating some kind of crisis

¹²¹ Lev. 26:8

¹²² Lev. 26:17

(26:1; cf. 22:1). If this is correct, the two wars belong to Amaziah's first five years, though the whole reign has been dated between 801-773 ... and 796-767"

The Hebrew text of v. 2 reads literally: "And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart." The Hebrew word, rendered "perfect" is *shalem*, which has the primary meaning of "complete." The first time that word is used in Scripture is in what God says to Abraham about the future of his offspring: "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its *full measure*."¹²³

We may conclude that Amaziah obeyed the law of God out of obligation; but he did not do it out of love for God. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes about the expression: "In almost all cases, the *not perfect* heart speaks of that which *began* well, but did not 'endure unto the end.'"

Amaziah did not take any action against the murderers of his father until he felt safe enough to do so. We read that he did not act until "after the kingdom was firmly in his control."

This may suggest that there had been some general public approval of Joash's murder because of his lack of popularity among the people.

The Tyndale Commentary continues its comment on Amaziah's reign: "The one occasion where no criticism of Amaziah may be intended is when he put to death his father's murderers (v. 3). Even here, however, he followed the letter of the law at best (v. 4), and his later behavior suggests that this is an act of revenge rather than keeping the kingdom *firmly in his control*. For example, 'killed' (RSV, JB; 'put to death,' REB, NEB; *executed*, NIV) translates the same word as in 21:4, 13; 22:1, 8; 23:17; 24:22, 25, and is really a thematic term in chapters 21-28 for violence (cf. also 28:6, 7, 9), even though it sometimes involved retributive justice (23:16; 24:25). Behind the Mosaic law that individuals should be responsible in capital offences for their own sins (cf. Dt. 24:16; Je. 31:29-31; Ezk. 18:1-20) was the principle that justice should always be limited (even in visiting the fathers' sins on their descendants, God's mercy to thousands far exceeds his judgment to the third and fourth generations (cf. Ex. 20:5-6). As in chapter 24, the influence of the teaching of individual responsibility in Ezekiel 18 is again evident."

b. War against Edom (25:5-16).

5 Amaziah called the people of Judah together and assigned them according to their families to commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds for all Judah and Benjamin. He then mustered those twenty years old or more and found that there were three hundred thousand men ready for military service, able to handle the spear and shield.

6 He also hired a hundred thousand fighting men from Israel for a hundred talents of silver.

7 But a man of God came to him and said, "O king, these troops from Israel must not march with you, for the Lord is not with Israel — not with any of the people of Ephraim.

8 Even if you go and fight courageously in battle, God will overthrow you before the enemy, for God has the power to help or to overthrow."

9 Amaziah asked the man of God, "But what about the hundred talents I paid for these Israelite troops?" The man of God replied, "The Lord can give you much more than that."

¹²³

Gen. 15:16

10 So Amaziah dismissed the troops who had come to him from Ephraim and sent them home. They were furious with Judah and left for home in a great rage.

11 Amaziah then marshaled his strength and led his army to the Valley of Salt, where he killed ten thousand men of Seir.

12 The army of Judah also captured ten thousand men alive, took them to the top of a cliff and threw them down so that all were dashed to pieces.

13 Meanwhile the troops that Amaziah had sent back and had not allowed to take part in the war raided Judean towns from Samaria to Beth Horon. They killed three thousand people and carried off great quantities of plunder.

14 When Amaziah returned from slaughtering the Edomites, he brought back the gods of the people of Seir. He set them up as his own gods, bowed down to them and burned sacrifices to them.

15 The anger of the Lord burned against Amaziah, and he sent a prophet to him, who said, "Why do you consult this people's gods, which could not save their own people from your hand?"

16 While he was still speaking, the king said to him, "Have we appointed you an adviser to the king? Stop! Why be struck down?" So the prophet stopped but said, "I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this and have not listened to my counsel."

The war that is at the center of this story is a war against Edom. *The Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* states about Seir: "God gave this land to Esau and his descendants, who drove out the Horites, or Hurrians (Deut. 2:12). Esau and his descendants, the Edomites, lived in Seir (Deut. 2:29). This explains why God directed the children of Israel not to invade this territory when they moved from Egypt toward the Promised Land (Deut 2:4-5)."

No reason is given here for Amaziah's attack upon the Edomites. We have to turn to Second Kings to learn that Edom had been under the power of Judah and rebelled. We read there: "In the time of Jehoram, Edom rebelled against Judah and set up its own king. So Jehoram went to Zair with all his chariots. The Edomites surrounded him and his chariot commanders, but he rose up and broke through by night; his army, however, fled back home. To this day Edom has been in rebellion against Judah."¹²⁴

So Amaziah decided to bring Edom back under Judah's thumb. *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* explains: "The preparations for the war against Edom, and the victory over the Edomites in the Valley of Salt. - Amaziah assembled Judah, i.e., the men in his kingdom capable of bearing arms, and set them up (ordered them) according to the princes of thousands and hundreds, of all Judah and Benjamin, and passed them in review, i.e., caused a census to be taken of the men liable to military service from twenty years old and upward. They found 300,000 warriors 'bearing spear and target' (*cf.* 2 Chron 14:7); a relatively small number, not merely in comparison with the numbers under Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron 17:14 ff., which are manifestly too large, but also with the numberings made by other kings, e.g., Asa, 2 Chron 14:7. By Joram's unfortunate wars, ch. 21:17, those of Ahaziah, and especially by the defeat which Joash sustained from the Syrians, 24:43, the number of men in Judah fit for war may have been very much

¹²⁴

II Kings 8:20-22

reduced. Amaziah accordingly sought to strengthen his army against the Edomites, according to v. 6, by having an auxiliary corps of 100,000 men from Israel (of the ten tribes) for 100 talents of silver, i.e., he took them into his pay. But a prophet advised him not to take the Israelite host with him, because Yahweh was not with Israel, viz., on account of their defection from Yahweh by the introduction of the calf-worship. To Israel there is added, (with) all the sons of Ephraim, to guard against any misunderstanding.”

In order to prepare for war with Edom, Amaziah conscripted the men of Judah who were of the age in which they could serve in the army. This provided him with three hundred thousand men, age twenty and up. He must have thought that he needed a larger force, so he hired another one hundred thousand men from the northern kingdom of Israel. For this he laid out an amount of one hundred talents of silver. *The New Living Translation* reads: “He also paid about 7,500 pounds of silver to hire 100,000 experienced fighting men from Israel.” *The Living Bible* puts this in more contemporary terms: “He also paid \$200,000 to hire 100,000 experienced mercenaries from Israel.”

The Tyndale Commentary divides this story in four different sections. We read: “Several stages may be discerned in this battle, which illustrates Amaziah’s strengths and weaknesses:

- i. Muster of Judean troops (25:5).
- ii. Muster of Israelite troops (25:6-10).
- iii. The battle against Edom (25:11-13).
- iv. The aftermath of victory (25:14-16).

The total of Amaziah’s army came to four hundred thousand; three third from Judah and one third from Israel.

Amaziah is not condemned because he wanted to bring Edom back under Judah’s control, but the divine sanction is about his association with the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

One of the reasons for which Amaziah endeavored to hire extra troops from Israel was that the number of men who could bear arms in Judah had diminished drastically. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments on the number of recruits: “This was only a fourth part of Jehoshaphat’s army (2 Chron. 17:14-19), showing how sadly the kingdom of Judah had, in the space of 82 years, been reduced in population by foreign wars, no less than by internal corruptions. But the full amount of Amaziah’s troops may not be here stated.”

Amaziah thought in terms of numbers in order to determine power and chances of victory. He must not have taken God into his calculations. He did not evince any of the faith of Jonathan, the son of King Saul, who attacked the Philistines single-handedly, and who said to his armor-bearer: “Come, let’s go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few.”¹²⁵

Faith in the God of Israel played no role in Amaziah’s strategic planning; he wanted to be sure his numbers were up.

At this point Amaziah is met by an anonymous prophet, who tells him that it would be wrong to hire additional troops from Israel because of the idolatry in which the Northern

¹²⁵

I Sam. 14:6

Kingdom was steeped at that time. The spirit of the house of Ahab was still governing that nation. The prophet told him that he would be defeated in spite of his numerical majority. Numbers and courage are not enough for victory. There would be no victory without the help of God. And Amaziah had left God out of the picture.

V. 9 is the golden verse in this story. When Amaziah argues with the prophet about the money he paid, which would be lost if he would send home the Israelite soldiers, the prophet answers: “The Lord can give you much more than that.” Those words ought to be comfort and encouragement for everyone who has ever had any financial problems.

If the Lord plays the most important role in our financial administration, we will always have enough money to pay our bills. I remember the statement of a preacher who said: “A Christian can always afford to pay.”

Ironically, the Lord began to speak to me about tithing when I was financially at the lowest point in my life! I argued with Him, and He answered: “Try me!” I did, and, although my income did not change, God changed my circumstances which cut my expenses dramatically.

Amaziah obeyed the Word of the Lord that the prophet gave him and he sent the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom home. We are told that they were furious. The anger of these recruits actually worsened the relationship between the parts of the nation of Israel. The Hebrew text reads literally: “Wherefore their anger against Judah was kindled greatly, and they returned home in great anger.” The Hebrew word for anger, *aph*, actually refers to the face. It expresses the facial expression of an angry person.

We read in v. 13 that they took out their anger upon some of the towns they passed on their way home, killing three thousand people and taking home a large amount of plunder.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “Intent on obtaining their reward of *plunder* (or ‘spoil’ or ‘booty’) by fair means or foul, the Israelite soldiers turn their anger to theft and murder (cf. Mt. 5:21-22; Jas. 4:1-2) by wreaking vengeance on various Judean towns (v. 13). The statement that they came from *Samaria to Beth Horon* suggests that they made a special raid from their homes in Ephraim (v. 10). Beth Horon was about ten miles from Jerusalem on the borders of Judah and Israel in the Aijalon valley, an important route leading from the coastal plain to Bethel and Jerusalem.”

The Pulpit Commentary believes that King Joash played a more important role in the soldiers’ behavior than the text explains. We read: “There is probably something to read between the lines here, to wit, that the soldiers returned to their master and king (Joash of Israel), and were by him remitted to this work. The mention of Samaria before Beth-Horon ... indicates it, and the words ‘sent back’ may be held to imply, at least, that they first *went* back—that the disappointment of spoil was the chief part of their aggravations, so that now the rather they got there much spoil, and note made thereof, and that—since not so much the instructive and so far forth more excusable revenge on the part of the disappointed soldiers, but the deliberate plan and order of their king had brought about this devastation of Amaziah’s domains, in *this* fact we have the key of what we read in our 2 Ch. 25:17, 18, etc.; and of the very cool manner in which Amaziah challenged Joash. The cities of Judah attacked were apparently those that once had belonged to Ephraim.”

In v. 11 we read that Amaziah “marshaled his strength.” This sounds like a strange expression. The Hebrew verb used is *chazaq* which literally means “to fasten,” or “to be strong.” The verb is used in the story of Lot leaving Sodom. We read about the angels who had come to announce Sodom’s destruction to Lot and his family: “When he hesitated, the men *grasped his hand* and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for

the Lord was merciful to them.”¹²⁶ We could say in modern English that Amaziah got a hold of himself. He attacked the Edomites in the Valley of Salt. That probably refers to an area in the vicinity of the Dead Sea. He killed ten thousand men in the battle and took another ten thousand as prisoners of war.

What he did with the prisoners is another strange, unethical story. It amounted to unusual cruelty. *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* observes correctly: “What provocation he had to exercise this cruelty towards them we are not told; but it was certainly very severe.” It shows that the king had a sadistic streak.

iv. The aftermath of victory (25:14-16).

14 When Amaziah returned from slaughtering the Edomites, he brought back the gods of the people of Seir. He set them up as his own gods, bowed down to them and burned sacrifices to them.

15 The anger of the Lord burned against Amaziah, and he sent a prophet to him, who said, "Why do you consult this people's gods, which could not save their own people from your hand?"

16 While he was still speaking, the king said to him, "Have we appointed you an adviser to the king? Stop! Why be struck down?" So the prophet stopped but said, "I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this and have not listened to my counsel."

There must have been demonic influence in Amaziah's behavior which made him take the gods of the Edomites and worship them. Our first impression would be that this was an act of stupidity. If the idols of Edom were not strong enough to protect that people who worshipped them, what value would they have for Amaziah? Amaziah may have thought that they had been so favorable to him that they gave him their territory. Instead attributing his victory to the Lord, he accredited it to the Edomite idols! That sounds like the kind of lie Satan would whisper in someone's ear.

God sent another prophet to Amaziah, who questioned his rational. Amaziah did not even allow the prophet to finish his message. He told him that he was not used to take advice from people who were not part of his own circle. Again, he left God out of the picture. Actually, it was God who dismissed Amaziah. From that point on there would be no more divine help for him.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “Amaziah's achievement seems to bring out the worst in him. Whereas he had previously made some response to God, now he turns to idolatry (vv. 14-15), persecution (v. 16), revenge (v. 17), intransigence (vv. 16, 20), pride (v. 19), and apostasy (v. 27). The decisive factor is Amaziah's worship of Edomite gods (v. 14). This is the only explicit reference to Edomite worship in the Bible, even though there was a persistent sense of brotherhood between Israel and Edom (*cf.* Dt. 23:7; Am. 1:11). The Edomites did worship a deity by the name of Qos, though the earliest evidence comes from a few decades later than Amaziah. Sacrifice to a defeated enemy's gods is unique in the Old Testament, but several features are readily understandable in the light of ancient Near Eastern custom. In the first place,

¹²⁶

Gen. 19:16

it was a well-known practice to take captive the divine images of defeated enemies. The purpose of this has been variously understood, but one of the effects was to reduce the likelihood of future conflict by leaving opponents defenseless. Secondly, defeat in war was often thought to be due to divine displeasure, and Amaziah's action may be intended to placate the presumed anger of the Edomites' gods. Thirdly, worship of deities of defeated foes is not without analogy. The seventh-century Assyrian conqueror Ashurbanipal made a dedicatory offering to the deity of a defeated Arab foe in return for help received. Also, the Chronicler would have been familiar with the practice of Persian kings who endowed gifts in their own name to the deities of subject peoples (*cf. e.g. Ezr. 6:9-10; 7:21-23*). Amaziah was certainly not the only ruler who recognized his debt to the gods of another nation."

c. War against Israel (25:17-24).

17 After Amaziah king of Judah consulted his advisers, he sent this challenge to Jehoash son of Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, king of Israel: "Come, meet me face to face."

18 But Jehoash king of Israel replied to Amaziah king of Judah: "A thistle in Lebanon sent a message to a cedar in Lebanon, 'Give your daughter to my son in marriage.' Then a wild beast in Lebanon came along and trampled the thistle underfoot."

19 You say to yourself that you have defeated Edom, and now you are arrogant and proud. But stay at home! Why ask for trouble and cause your own downfall and that of Judah also?"

20 Amaziah, however, would not listen, for God so worked that he might hand them over to [Jehoash], because they sought the gods of Edom.

21 So Jehoash king of Israel attacked. He and Amaziah king of Judah faced each other at Beth Shemesh in Judah.

22 Judah was routed by Israel, and every man fled to his home.

23 Jehoash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Joash, the son of Ahaziah, at Beth Shemesh. Then Jehoash brought him to Jerusalem and broke down the wall of Jerusalem from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate — a section about six hundred feet long.

24 He took all the gold and silver and all the articles found in the temple of God that had been in the care of Obed-Edom, together with the palace treasures and the hostages, and returned to Samaria.

Bible scholars have tried to interpret the meaning of Amaziah's message to Jehoash, inviting him for a meeting "face to face." The Hebrew words *ra'ah panim* can be interpreted either in a friendly sense or confrontationally. It seems that Jehoash saw it as a challenge to a duel.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "A refined analogy to this expression, with all its speaking significance, occurs in 2 Sa. 2:13; and, perhaps yet more remarkably, a strange some balance between 14, 15, 17, of that chapter and our 22, 22 may be noticed."

The above mentioned references refer to a duel between the soldiers of Saul's son, Ish-Bosheth and David's men. David's general Joab suggested to Abner, the commander of Saul's men, that the two groups would fight duels. The result turned out to be a decisive victory for David's army.

The Tyndale Commentary writes: "Amaziah's invitation to Jehoash of Israel has been interpreted as a neutral act ... which may even have been intended to bring about an alliance by

marriage But Jehoash suspects a thinly veiled threat (*cf.* REB, GNB), as Amaziah reacts to the prophet's criticism by seeking revenge against the Israelite mercenaries (vv. 6-10, 13)."

Amaziah's victory over Edom probably went to his head. Not giving any glory to God for his success, he took full credit for himself. That must have been the reason he contacted Jehoash in a confrontational manner. And Jehoash's interpretation of Amaziah's intentions was obviously correct.

There is a trace of humor, if not a good deal, in Jehoash's answer to Amaziah. It is given in the sense of a parable or a fable. The thistle is obviously Judah and Israel is the cedar. Although both are part of God's creation of vegetation, the cedar is clearly the superior one and the thistle inferior. Even worse, thistles are only mentioned in the creation story after sin entered the world. In the marriage arrangement the thistle father wants to make with the cedar's daughter, King Jehoash mixes his metaphor; but that is permissible in a parable.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary states: "After reciting this fable, the Targum adds, 'Thus hast thou done in the time thou didst send unto me, and didst lead up from the house of Israel a hundred thousand strong warriors for a hundred talents of silver; and after they were sent, thou didst not permit them to go with thee to war, but didst send them back, greatly enraged, so that they spread themselves over the country; and having cut off three thousand, they brought back much spoil.'"

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "If the contents of this verse do not fail to impress with a persuasion of the keen mental gift of Joash, they do not fall far short of warranting some persuasion of a certain moral sense and goodness about him also. He knows human nature well, and Amaziah's particular variety therein perfectly well. And many would have snapped at the opportunity of humbling such a man. But not so Joash; he enjoys, indeed, the opportunity of satisfying his own sarcasm and patronizingness, but would still spare Amaziah's people and save him from himself. This does not resemble, at any rate, the commonest, poorest, hungriest style of soul."

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "Jehoash responds with a colorful but insulting fable (vv. 18-19). He accuses Amaziah of being *arrogant and proud* (v. 19, NIV, *cf.* NRSV, RSV) and predicts that he will cause his own *downfall* (v. 19) as well as Judah's. Some of the detail of verse 19 is obscured by uncertainty about the extent to which the text diverges from Kings, but the over-all meaning is clear. Again, however, *Amaziah would not listen* (*cf.* v. 16; *cf.* 24:19). This time, however, Chronicles adds (*cf.* 2 Ki. 14:11) that his deliberate deafness is (lit.) 'from God' (God's doing,' v. 20, NRSV, REB, NEB, JB; *cf.* the identical phrase in 2 Ch. 10:15; 22:7), though that does not mean it was contrary to Amaziah's intentions. God would therefore 'hand them over' (v. 20, NRSV). The Hebrew is abrupt, and most EVV add either *to Jehoash* (NIV, REB, NEB; with LXX(L) or 'to their enemies' (JB, *cf.* RSV). This all happened because Amaziah *sought* (v. 20) Edomite gods (*cf.* v. 15), *i.e.* he had 'worshipped' them (GNB; *cf.* 1 Ch. 22:19; 2 Ch. 15:2, 12; 17:4). Saul is the only other king in Chronicles who seeks foreign deities (1 Ch. 10:13), though others were equally guilty by failing to seek Yahweh (*cf.* 1 Ch. 13:3, 2 Ch. 12:14; 16:12).

The result is as both the prophet and Jehoash predict (vv. 21-24). This time 'Yahweh war' language shows that God is no longer for Amaziah (*cf.* vv. 7-8) but against him. He is *routed* (v. 22, NIV, REB, NEB; 'defeated,' JB, NRSV, RSV; also in *e.g.* 13:15; 14:12; EVV; 20:22) and everyone *fled* (also in *e.g.* 1 Ch. 19:14, 15, 18; 2 Ch. 13:16; 14:12; EVV). *Beth-Shemesh* (vv. 21, 23), about fifteen miles south-west of Jerusalem (*cf.* Jos. 15:10; 1 Ki. 4:9), implies a westerly attack on Jerusalem and Jehoash's desire to control trade routes. Jehoash

captures Amaziah and other *hostages* (v. 24b), breaks down part of Jerusalem's wall, probably in the north-western corner (v. 23), and plunders the temple and palace treasures (v. 24a). Such is his respect for Yahweh's house! In fact, the raid on the temple must be seen as a punishment against idolaters in line with the principles of 2 Chronicles 7:19-22. The additional reference to *Obed-Edom* (cf. 2 Ki. 14:14) looks back to a specially favored family of gatekeepers (1 Ch. 13:13-14; 26:4-8, 15). Mention of hostages contrasts with a similar incident in 2 Chronicles 28:8-15 when the northerners had second thoughts about the validity of taking fellow Israelites hostage."

In the parallel passage in Second Kings there is no mention that Jehoash brought Amaziah back to Jerusalem. We only read: "Then Jehoash went to Jerusalem and broke down the wall of Jerusalem from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate — a section about six hundred feet long."¹²⁷ If Amaziah was taken back to Jerusalem, it was probably to make him see the damage Jehoash did to the city. With a large section of the city wall broken down, Jerusalem would no longer be defensible to enemy attack.

d. Amaziah's end (25:25 – 26:2).

25 Amaziah son of Joash king of Judah lived for fifteen years after the death of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel.

26 As for the other events of Amaziah's reign, from beginning to end, are they not written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel?

27 From the time that Amaziah turned away from following the Lord, they conspired against him in Jerusalem and he fled to Lachish, but they sent men after him to Lachish and killed him there.

28 He was brought back by horse and was buried with his fathers in the City of Judah.

26:1 Then all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king in place of his father Amaziah.

2 He was the one who rebuilt Elath and restored it to Judah after Amaziah rested with his fathers.

The Tyndale Commentary states: "If the chronology mentioned earlier is correct, this final paragraph covers Amaziah's last twenty-four years when his son *Uzziah* acted as co-regent (26:1), for nine years of which he may have been Jehoash's captive (cf. v. 1). At what point he *turned away from following the LORD* (v. 27) is not clear. It may refer to worshipping the Edomite gods (vv. 14, 20), in which case the conspiracy which led to his death took place many years afterwards. Alternatively, the whole of verse 27 refers to some otherwise unknown incident at the end of his life. However, divine judgment in Chronicles can often take place at a later date (cf. chs. 21-23), so that dogmatism over the timing of events is unwise. Amaziah may, for example, have sought protection for much of his last fifteen years in *Lachish*, a fortified city in south-western Judah. The significance of his body being returned *by horse* is unknown. *City of*

¹²⁷

II Kings 14:13

Judah (v. 28) is unique in the Old Testament, but, though it occurs in Assyrian and Babylonian sources, most EVV have the more usual ‘*City of David*’ (with 2 Ki. 14:20 and the vss.)”

Amaziah survived Jehoash by fifteen years. If he spent those years in Jerusalem, it was, evidently not as ruling monarch. His lack of popularity, which was probably due to the fact that he had been unable to prevent the humiliation of the city of Jerusalem, made him the target of a conspiracy against his life.

We do not read who the conspirators were. They can hardly have been people who served the true God and were against idolatry. Such people would not contemplate murder. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states: “He no doubt became very unpopular after having lost the battle with the Israelites; the consequence of which was the dismantling of Jerusalem, and the seizure of the royal treasures, with several other evils. It is likely that the last fifteen years of his reign were greatly embittered: so that, finding the royal city to be no place of safety, he endeavored to secure himself at Lachish; but all in vain, for thither his murderers pursued him; and he who forsook the Lord was forsaken by every friend, perished in his gainsaying, and came to an untimely end.”

The Pulpit Commentary comments on v. 27: “*Now after the time that Amaziah did turn away from following the Lord.* Let it be particularly noted that the entire of this sentence (which is a strong anachronism *sui generis*) is wanting in the parallel. It is, of course, in its matter intrinsically true, but none the less misleading in its *form*. The object of the writer cannot be doubted, as so many a cross-light is thrown upon it, in other places, *viz.* to connect the rise and the operativeness of the conspiracy with the *fact* that (though not the exact date at which) the king had turned aside from Jehovah to idols. *They made a conspiracy.* When every deduction is made, it may be that the conspiracy was one that was long hatching, and one which began in embryo from the date of Amaziah’s ignominious return to Jerusalem. Very certain it is that this would be historic certainty with the Paris of the past century or more. The French would have required a deadly explanation of such an affront, if brought upon them by any ruler of theirs.¹²⁸ *He fled to Lachish.* In the Shefelah of Judah, and a strongly fortified place (2 Ch. 11:9; Josh 10:3, 32; 15:39; 2 K. 14:19; 18:14; 19:8; Isa. 36:2; Jer. 34:7; Mic. 1:13). Eusebius places it seven Roman miles south of Eleutheropolis.”

The Tyndale Commentary ends this section with the observation: “Some difficulty is usually implied when the people (26:1) are involved in putting a new king on the throne (*cf.* 22:11; 33:25; 36:1), perhaps connected here with Amaziah’s defeat (*cf.* 25:21-24). However, the idea that the king could be chosen by the will of the people was never entirely lost in Judah. ‘Eloth’ (REB, NEB, NRSV, RSV) or Elath (NIV, GNB, JB) was an important port at the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba, very close to Ezion-Geber where Solomon and Jehoshaphat had kept ships (2 Ch. 8:17-18; 20:35-37). Uzziah’s reclaiming it for Judah signified two things. It brought Amaziah’s unfinished Edomite business to an end (2 Ch. 21:8-10; 25:11-12), and symbolized the beginning of a prosperity unparalleled in Judah since the days of Solomon.”

iii. Uzziah (26:3-23).

a. Uzziah seeks God and is successful (26:3-15).

¹²⁸

This must refer to a political incident that occurred in France in the nineteenth century.

3 Uzziah was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-two years. His mother's name was Jecoliah; she was from Jerusalem.

4 He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father Amaziah had done.

5 He sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God. As long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success.

6 He went to war against the Philistines and broke down the walls of Gath, Jabneh and Ashdod. He then rebuilt towns near Ashdod and elsewhere among the Philistines.

7 God helped him against the Philistines and against the Arabs who lived in Gur Baal and against the Meunites.

8 The Ammonites brought tribute to Uzziah, and his fame spread as far as the border of Egypt, because he had become very powerful.

9 Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate, at the Valley Gate and at the angle of the wall, and he fortified them.

10 He also built towers in the desert and dug many cisterns, because he had much livestock in the foothills and in the plain. He had people working his fields and vineyards in the hills and in the fertile lands, for he loved the soil.

11 Uzziah had a well-trained army, ready to go out by divisions according to their numbers as mustered by Jeiel the secretary and Maaseiah the officer under the direction of Hananiah, one of the royal officials.

12 The total number of family leaders over the fighting men was 2,600.

13 Under their command was an army of 307,500 men trained for war, a powerful force to support the king against his enemies.

14 Uzziah provided shields, spears, helmets, coats of armor, bows and slingstones for the entire army.

15 In Jerusalem he made machines designed by skillful men for use on the towers and on the corner defenses to shoot arrows and hurl large stones. His fame spread far and wide, for he was greatly helped until he became powerful.

Uzziah's rise to power and his fall could be used as an illustration of Lord Acton's dictum: "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." We would do well, however, if we would not put all the blame on the power, but also take into consideration the person. Not every person who becomes powerful is corrupted by power. When David received the prophecy about the perpetuity of his throne and about his descendants who would occupy it, he prayed and said: "Who am I, O Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?"¹²⁹ Only corrupted people become more corrupted by power.

Uzziah must have believed that God had put him on the throne of Judah because of his outstanding personal qualities. He did not consider himself to be reigning by the grace of God.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "Though Uzziah reigned for *fifty-two years* (v. 3), his reign included co-regencies with his father Amaziah (probably for twenty-four years) and his son Jotham (for ten years). His over-all dates vary between 792-740 ... and 787-736 ...¹³⁰ though the chronology of this period is particularly difficult. He is consistently called *Uzziah* in

¹²⁹ II Sam 7:18

¹³⁰ According to different Bible scholars.

Chronicles (*cf.* Is. 1:1; 6:1; *etc.*) but Kings has Azariah (2 Ki. 14:21; 15:1ff.) as well as Uzziah (2 Ki. 15:13, 32, 34). The two names are best understood as variants arising from the interchangeability of two closely related Hebrew roots. Uzziah may be preferred here to distinguish him from the high priest Azariah (vv. 17, 20), who does not appear in Kings. As Azariah he may appear in the annals of the contemporary Assyrian ruler Tiglath-Pileser III, as a leader of a group of rebels against the Assyrians in about 730-738 BC, but both the location and the date cause problems.

The apparent double introduction to Uzziah arises because verses 1-2 really conclude Amaziah's reign (*cf.* 2 Ki. 14:21-22). Uzziah's account begins with verses 3-4, to which the Chronicler has added his own material in an extra verse (v. 5). That Uzziah did what *was right ... as his father Amaziah* (v. 4) is not meant to be a blanket commendation of either king, as both Kings and Chronicles recognize. Though the phrase originally occurred in 2 Kings 15:3, the Chronicler in fact provides much more positive evidence about Uzziah, in spite of his later criticism (vv. 16-21).

The complimentary verse 5 continues this positive outlook, but uses the Chronicler's typical language: God *gave Uzziah success* because he *sought* God (the latter verse occurs twice). Uzziah's attitude was directly opposed to that which had brought down his father (25:15, 20), but, more importantly, it showed that he lived in obedience to Yahweh (*cf. e.g.* 2 Ch. 15:2, 4, 12; 17:4; 30:19), at least while he was under the tutelage of the otherwise unknown *Zechariah*. The latter was a kind of 'religious adviser' (GNB), as Jehoiada had been to Joash (2 Ch. 24:2), though his exact status is not clear. Nor is it certain in what Uzziah was instructed. Though EVV mention the *fear of God* (with the VSS), this phrase is unique in Chronicles (even 'fear of the LORD' occurs only in 2 Ch. 19:9). The reading of most Hebrew MSS, 'seeing God' or *vision* (NIV mg.), cannot be simply dismissed. 'Vision' is another word for prophecy (*e.g.* Is. 1:1; Na. 1:1; 2 Ch. 32:32), which is of course central to Chronicles. Also, the Chronicler's dependence on Isaiah as a source for Uzziah (v. 22) could have resulted in his interest in Isaiah's theme of spiritual sight (*e.g.* Is. 6:10; 29:18; 35:2; *cf.* Je. 23:18) and in the influence of expressions for 'seeing God' in Isaiah 6:1, 5 on the wording here. 'Seeing God' therefore could mean obedience to God's prophetic word and an awareness of God's presence in the temple.

Zechariah's guidance clearly brought *success*, a typical expression in Chronicles. The practical side of this is detailed in verses 7-15, but it resulted first of all from seeking God. Elsewhere obedience to the law (1 Ch. 22:13; 2 Ch. 31:21) and the prophets (2 Ch. 20:20) brings prosperity, while disobeying the prophets or resisting God in other ways leads to disaster (2 Ch. 13:12; 24:20). The underlying theology is not so much materialistic as expecting to see the results of obedience in this life. Even so, visible success was certainly not automatic. Obedient kings often experiences undeserved trouble (2 Ch. 13:8, 13-14; 14:9-11; 32:1), though trust in God on these occasions usually resulted in a successful conclusion."

We read that, under Zechariah's influence, the Lord gave Uzziah success. The Hebrew text reads literally: "the Lord God made him prosper." The Hebrew verb used is *tsalach*, which literally means "to break out." In some contexts the verb is related to the working of the Holy Spirit in a person's life, as in the case of Samson, about whom we read: "The Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power."¹³¹

¹³¹ Judg. 14:6

The first realm in which God's blessing came was in Uzziah's international relationships. We read that Uzziah was able to put down the Philistine threat against Judah as well as the menace of the Arabs and Meunites. He imposed taxes upon the Ammonites and even gained the respect of Egypt.

The Tyndale Commentary comments on Uzziah's building program: "Uzziah's building work in Jerusalem (v. 9) and in Judah (v. 10) is a second sign of God-given success, and is well supported by archaeological data Repairs in Jerusalem were necessitated by the damage incurred during the previous reign (note the special mention of the *Corner Gate* in 25:23) and possibly by an earthquake (Am. 1:1; Zc. 14:5). The country is divided into three areas, the *desert*, i.e. the Negev, the *foothills* (cf. GNB) or Shephelah, and the *plain*, i.e. the Judean parts of the Philistine plain. The latter was recaptured and rebuilt by Uzziah (v. 6), and cannot in this context be the Transjordanian 'tableland' (JB). The *fertile lands* are actually Carmel, a Judean town seven miles south of Hebron in an area where large flocks could graze (1 Sa. 25; cf. Jos. 15:55). 'Farmers and vinedressers' (REB, NEB, NRSV, RSV) would have worked on royal estates (cf. 1 Ch. 27:25-31). Evidence for some of the officials in charge of such workers has come from seals bearing the name of Uzziah/Azariah, one of which was actually found in a cistern at Tell Beit Mirsim. The rather touching description *he loved the soil* is unique in the Bible."

Uzziah evinced superior intelligence, as well as ability of leadership in the way he built up the defense of Jerusalem. He reorganized the army, increasing the total of fighting men to 307,500, under the command of 2,600 officers. We could call him the inventor of the canon, in that he made "machines ... to shoot arrows and hurl large stones."

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "In addition to his many other skills, Uzziah seems to have been something of an inventor (v. 15). His (lit.) 'inventions' were probably protective shields or screens on city walls enabling archers and others to operate in comparative safety. This is more probably than 'engines' (RSV, JB) or machines (NIV, NRSV, REB, NEB), which implies some kind of catapult, but the latter is not known before the fifth century BC"

The latter statement may be difficult to verify from our present historical distance.

b. Uzziah's pride and downfall (26:16-23).

16 But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense.

17 Azariah the priest with eighty other courageous priests of the Lord followed him in.

18 They confronted him and said, "It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful; and you will not be honored by the Lord God."

19 Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the Lord's temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead.

20 When Azariah the chief priest and all the other priests looked at him, they saw that he had leprosy on his forehead, so they hurried him out. Indeed, he himself was eager to leave, because the Lord had afflicted him.

21 King Uzziah had leprosy until the day he died. He lived in a separate house - leprous, and excluded from the temple of the Lord. Jotham his son had charge of the palace and governed the people of the land.

22 The other events of Uzziah's reign, from beginning to end, are recorded by the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz.

23 Uzziah rested with his fathers and was buried near them in a field for burial that belonged to the kings, for people said, "He had leprosy." And Jotham his son succeeded him as king.

The first part of v. 16 reads literally in Hebrew: "But when he was strong his heart was lifted up to his destruction" The Hebrew word rendered "strong" is *gabahh*, which means "high," but usually refers to pride, as in the verse: "My heart is not *proud*, O Lord, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me."¹³²

Uzziah's problem was that he believed that his abilities were not a gift from God, but things he had created within himself. When people are gifted, they ought to realize that their gifts come from a source outside themselves. No one can take credit for his or her gifts. Humility does not consist in denying one's abilities, but in recognizing the source.

Uzziah's sin was that he wanted to act as a priest, while the office entrusted to him was the kingship. The crown he wore had been given to him by God. It was not his own, he would have to hand it back to the Giver.

In the New Testament dispensation in which we live, we have been made kings and priests by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹³³ The Greek text of that verse reads literally: "And has made us kings [and] priests unto his God and Father. The fact that the word and is in brackets means that it is not in the original manuscript. In our present condition we have the right to enter the sanctuary and bring our sacrifice of praise, even into the holy of holies!

In a sense, King Uzziah was centuries ahead of his time, but what pushed him was not faith; it was human pride. His source was not the Holy Spirit, but the other dark spirit.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "The 'transgression' of a heart that had waxed wanton through prosperity took that peculiarly aggravated form of sinning against holy things and a holy ceremonial. Although, in the daily service of the second temple, the duty of offering incense attached to one chosen by lot each morning and evening of the inferior priests, yet originally the *high* priest was solemnly appointed for this office."

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "The seriousness of the problem is indicated by two phrases. Firstly, pride here and in 25:19 is a matter of the 'heart' being 'lifted up.' It is a deep-seated disease which might be described as heart trouble. Secondly, Uzziah is *unfaithful* (vv. 16, 18). This is the most important expression for sin in Chronicles, and it can bring down a dynasty (1 Ch. 10:13) or take a nation into exile (1 Ch. 5:25; 9:1; 2 Ch. 33:19; 36:14). The term has not appeared since Rehoboam's time (2 Ch. 12:2), but will now become a regular theme to

¹³² Ps. 131:1

¹³³ See Rev. 1:6.

the end of the book (28:19, 22; 29:6, 19; 30:7; 33:19; 36:14). Though Uzziah's pride did not cause the exile, it is an excellent illustration of why the exile eventually came about. From now on, Judah's end is definitely in sight.

Uzziah's offence was not that he fell foul of important cultic regulations but that like Uzzah before him (1 Ch. 13), he was unaware of the true nature of God's holiness. In practice he encroached on two aspects of worship which God had reserved to the Aaronic priests and Levites – he *entered the temple* (v. 16) and attempted to make an offering at the *incense altar* (vv. 16b-19). The temple was for the priests and Levites. It is true that Solomon and Ahaz offered sacrifices at the temple, but they did so on altars outside the courtyard (2 Ch. 6:12-13; 7:7; 2 Ki. 16:12-15), while young Joash was either kept in the living quarters in the surrounding rooms or was treated as an exception in view of the threat to his life (22:12; 23:11). *To burn incense to the LORD* on the inner altar was *not right* for Uzziah, only for the *consecrated* priests (v. 18; cf. Ex. 30:1-10; Nu. 16:40; 18:1-7).

Uzziah's action reflects three earlier Old Testament incidents, involving Aaron's sons (Lv. 10:1-3), Korah (Nu. 16:1-40) and Jeroboam I (1 Ki. 12:33 -33:1). Aaron's sons had offered incense in an unholy manner, while Korah and Jeroboam were laymen who attempted to act as priests by offering incense. Azariah's opposition and that of the *eighty courageous priests* (v. 17) has analogies with the role played by Moses (Nu. 16:4ff.) and the unnamed man of God in 1 Kings 13:1-3, especially as Azariah's words are a kind of prophetic warning (v. 18; cf. 12:5; 24:20; 25:115-16). The link with Numbers 16 is especially close, however, and shows not only that Uzziah should have known better, but also that God does not stand idly by when his holiness is tampered with. Specific connections include Uzziah's *leprosy* (vv. 19-23) with the plague on the people (Nu. 16:45-50), the fact that the punishment broke out suddenly from the Lord (vv. 19-20; cf. Nu. 16:35, 46), the need for hurry to prevent a greater spread of disease (v. 20; cf. Nu. 16:46), and that God's 'glory' (JB) had departed from the offenders (v. 18; cf. Nu. 16:19, 42). In view of the latter parallel, the final phrase of verse 18 should be 'God will not reveal his glory to you' (Ackroyd, cf. JB, GNB) rather than 'bring you no honor ...' (RSV, etc.).

Despite the seriousness of what Uzziah had done, God still does not act until Uzziah becomes 'enraged' (REB), an emphatic word occurring twice in verse 19. God's righteous anger only breaks out against human rebellious anger. Uzziah's punishment is described in terms of yet another earlier Scripture: compare (lit.) 'And Azariah ... turned to him and behold he was leprous' with Numbers 12:10; 'And Aaron turned towards Miriam, and behold, she was leprous' (RSV, cf. also 2 Ki. 5:27). The disease is not leprosy as it is known today, but a general term for all kinds of skin diseases."

The Hebrew word in v. 20 rendered "leprous" is '*matsoraa*', which is derived from *tsaraa*', which literally means "to scourge." It is consistently rendered "leper" or "leprous" in the Old Testament.

It was the task of the priests to diagnose leprosy. We read: "The priest is to examine him, and if there is a white swelling in the skin that has turned the hair white and if there is raw flesh in the swelling, it is a chronic skin disease and the priest shall pronounce him unclean."¹³⁴

As soon as the priests realized that Uzziah had become a leper they hurried him out of the temple, where he wasn't supposed to be to begin with.

¹³⁴ Lev. 13:10, 11

According to *The Adam Clarke's Commentary*, the Targum comments on v. 20: "Because the WORD of the Lord had brought the plague upon him."

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "This conjugation of *wakal* does not point to the force adopted, but to the *trembling anxiety* with which, for horror's sake of such a monstrous catastrophe, as a leper by the altar and with a censer in his hand, etc.; the priests urged him out. Evidently, from the next clause, no great force in the ordinary sense was needed. *Yea, himself hasted* It is interesting to note that this root occurs only here and three times in Esther, viz. Est. 3:15; 6:12; 8:14. Uzziah can scarcely have been ignorant that he had been daring the utmost penalty of the Law (Num. 16:31, 35; 18:7)."

When Uzziah realized what had happened to him, he may have feared that death would occur in the next moment. So "he himself was eager to leave." The Hebrew text states that "the Lord had smitten him." The verb used is *naga*, which has the primary meaning of "to touch." Interestingly, the first time the verb occurs in Scripture is in connection with *the tree of knowledge* in Paradise, when Eve says to the serpent: "God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not *touch* it, or you will die.'"¹³⁵

Although Uzziah continued to stay alive for several years, as far as being king of Judah was concerned, he could be considered to be dead. He spent the rest of his life in seclusion. *The Tyndale Commentary* states: "Responsibility for royal administration (*charge of the palace*, v. 21; cf. Is. 22:15) was given for several years to his son and regent Jotham, until Uzziah died (cf. on v. 3). The fact that the king's son occupied this post testifies to its increased importance in the later monarchy. The special nature of Jotham's role is conveyed by the verb 'governed' (cf. NRSV, RSV), which is more often used of rulers in the book of Judges."

F. Three alternating kings (27:1 – 32:33)

i. Jotham's obedience (27:1-9)

a. Jotham's contrast with his father (27:1-2).

1 Jotham was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. His mother's name was Jerusha daughter of Zadok.

2 He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father Uzziah had done, but unlike him he did not enter the temple of the Lord. The people, however, continued their corrupt practices.

Most Bible scholars believe that Jotham's sixteen year's reign includes the period he reigned when his father was still alive, but excluded from the throne because of his leprosy. If the number of years he reigned is added up to his age at the ascension of the throne, he died rather young, at the age of forty-one.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "Though *Jotham* is said to have reigned for sixteen years (v. 1), his chronology raises difficulties to which no convincing solution exists. In contrast to this datum, Hoshea of Israel became king in Jotham's twentieth year (2 Ki. 15:30) as well as

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Gen. 3:3

in Ahaz' twelfth year (2 Ki. 17:1). Most solutions involve Jotham in co-regencies with either Uzziah or Ahaz or both, usually with some adjustment of numbers

Jotham continued to do what was right before God (v. 2), since he did *not enter the temple of the LORD*, in contrast to his father. Though this phrase is sometimes regarded as a criticism of Jotham (... *unlike him*, NIV, REB, NEB, is not in Heb.) this phrase is the exact opposite of Uzziah's offence (26:16). In any case, entering the temple was forbidden to any except priests and Levites. The *people*, on the other hand, persisted in their *corrupt practices*, which refers to worship at the high places (2 Ki. 15:35). However, the Hebrew word comes from the same root as 'destruction, downfall' (26:16), and its main purpose may be to show how Uzziah's errors spread throughout the country, despite the example of the new king/regent."

The report of his reign is quite favorable. He honored the Lord, did some restorative work on the temple and was victorious in a war with the Ammonites, who paid him tribute in silver and grain. *The Living Bible* puts this in modern terms of: "\$200,000 in silver, 10,000 sacks of wheat, and 10,000 sacks of barley."

Jotham's main problem was that, although he was personally faithful to Yahweh, the people of Judah were too steeply mired in idolatry to follow him in the true worship of Yahweh.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "The turn-round from the latter part of Uzziah's reign is all the more remarkable when one remembers that part of Jotham's rule, perhaps the majority, took place while his father was still alive Perhaps his father's experience in the temple was a salutary warning of the value of living according to God's word (v. 6). Jotham's obedience led to renewed prosperity, and enabled him to resume several of Uzziah's earlier achievements (*cf.* vv. 3-5; 26:2-10). However, what stands out in comparing Jotham and Uzziah is their contrasting attitudes to their power or strength. While Uzziah's success had gone to his head, Jotham showed it was still possible to be submissive to God's word and yet be successful (*cf.* the uses of *power/strength* (in 26:16; 27:6). A notable feature of Jotham's achievement was that it meant turning away from the unhelpful ways of his predecessor."

b. Jotham's continuity with his father (27:3-6).

3 Jotham rebuilt the Upper Gate of the temple of the Lord and did extensive work on the wall at the hill of Ophel.

4 He built towns in the Judean hills and forts and towers in the wooded areas.

5 Jotham made war on the king of the Ammonites and conquered them. That year the Ammonites paid him a hundred talents of silver, ten thousand cors of wheat and ten thousand cors of barley. The Ammonites brought him the same amount also in the second and third years.

6 Jotham grew powerful because he walked steadfastly before the Lord his God.

The Tyndale Commentary writes: "Three aspects of Jotham's achievements are mentioned, all of them developing Uzziah's earlier work. The first is his building, which is very obviously the theme of verses 3-4 in Hebrew where he (*re*)built occurs four times. The *Upper Gate* of the temple was on the northern side (Ezk. 9:2; *cf.* Je. 20:2), and was perhaps part of the rebuilding required after the attack by Jehoash of Israel (*cf.* 25:24), since Uzziah is not known to have worked on the temple. On the other hand, Uzziah had done *extensive work* on the city wall (26:9; *cf.* 25:23), which Jotham continued at the southern end of the city on the *Ophel* hill. The latter is usually thought to be the part of the south-eastern hill between the temple and the City of

David. Both Uzziah and Jotham also did some building in the hill country of Judah, and both constructed *towers* (v. 4; *cf.* 26:10). The wooded areas were presumably the hills, and their being turned into *towns/cities* may be intended as a reversal of a defensive move against a possible threat by a coalition between Syria and Israel (2 Ki. 15:37).

Secondly, Jotham's victory over the *Ammonites* continues Uzziah's military successes, though in the east rather than the south-west (v. 5; *cf.* 26:6-8). ... The tribute was substantial, something over three tons of *silver* and approximately ten thousand donkey loads of *barley* (the *kor* was equivalent to a homer or donkey load). The Ammonite war may also reflect real or potential danger from the Syro-Ephraimite coalition, either in a defensive ploy by Jotham or as a reason why tribute ceased after three years.

Thirdly, Jotham became strong/*powerful* as Uzziah had done, but without falling for his father's temptations (v. 6; *cf.* 26:8, 15, 16). The reason for Jotham's success was that he 'ordered his ways' as God required (v. 6, NRSV, RSV; *walked steadfastly*, NIV). The particular expression is unique in Hebrew (lit., 'he established his ways'), but it seems to be synonymous with a similar phrase, 'to set the heart (on God)' (*cf.* 1 Ch. 29:18; 20:33; 30:19)."

c. Jotham rests with his fathers (27:7-9).

7 The other events in Jotham's reign, including all his wars and the other things he did, are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah.

8 He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years.

9 Jotham rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David. And Ahaz his son succeeded him as king.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "The concluding formula contains the expected information, except that verse 8 repeats the details of verse 1a. This technique of reprise, however, has already been used by the Chronicler in 2 chronicles 21:5, 20. *All his wars* (v. 7) presumably refers to the initial stages of conflict with the Syro-Ephraimite coalition which turned into a major crisis under Ahaz (*cf.* 2 Ch. 28:5-8; Is. 7:1-9). This has been alluded to in verses 3-5, which is the most likely reason why the reference in 2 Kings 15:37 is not repeated here. The statements about his burial (v. 9) are unusually normal! It has been rare in recent reigns for a king to *rest with his fathers* in the main section of the royal cemetery (*cf.* 2 Ch. 25:28 with 21:20; 22:9; 23:21; 24:25; 26:23)."

The Pulpit Commentary observes about Jotham's war with the Ammonites: "No allusion is made to the matter of this verse in the parallel, which contains a statement of the Syrian Rezin's attack or threatened invasion of Judah; as well as Pekah's, son of Remaliah King of Israel. Of the Ammonites' defeat by Uzziah we have just heard (foregoing chapter, 2 Ch. 27:8). A general statement is all that is made there of the gifts or tribute, they then had to pay. The present tribute was a heavy payment, and enforced for three, years. The 'wheat' and 'barley,' in which payment was largely made, bespeak the fertile arable quality of the Ammonite land."

ii. Ahaz' unfaithfulness (28:1-27).

a. Ahaz' apostasy (28:1-4).

1 Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord.

2 He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and also made cast idols for worshiping the Baals.

3 He burned sacrifices in the Valley of Ben Hinnom and sacrificed his sons in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.

4 He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree.

There is some confusion among Bible scholars about the details of Ahaz' reign. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states: "Ahaz was the son of Jotham, king of Judah. He succeeded to the throne at the age of 20 years (according to another reading 25). The chronology of his reign is difficult, as his son Hezekiah is stated to have been 25 years of age when he began to reign 16 years after (2 Kings 18:2). If the accession of Ahaz be placed as early as 743 B.C., his grandfather Uzziah, long unable to perform the functions of his office on account of his leprosy (2 Chron. 26:21), must still have been alive. (Others date Ahaz later, when Uzziah, for whom Jotham had acted as regent, was already dead.)"

The assessment of Ahaz is one of the most negative of all the kings of Judah, perhaps with the exception of Manasseh.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "The Chronicler's history reaches another low point in the reign of Ahaz. To start with, Ahaz *did not do what was right* before God (v. 1), in contrast to his immediate predecessor Jotham (27:2). Secondly, the totally negative assessment of Ahaz puts him on a par with the rulers of Ahab's house (2 Ch. 21-23) and with the kings whose reign led directly to the exile (22 Ch. 36; cf. also 2 Ch. 33:21-25). Thirdly, Chronicles has made Kings' descriptions of Ahaz' failing much more explicit. Additional interpretative comments explain that Judah was being punished because they had forsaken God (v. 6) and because Ahaz had been *most unfaithful* (v. 19), in sharp contrast with the merciful attitudes shown by the inhabitants of Israel (vv. 12-15). ...

The most serious criticism of any king of Judah was that he *walked in the ways of the kings of Israel* (v. 2). This explicit reference to idolatry has been used only of Jehoram (2 Ch. 21:6; though cf. 22:4), though even the latter could not offer the variety mentioned in verses 2-4, 25. The most noteworthy features are the elements added to Kings (vv. 2b-3a), Ahaz' worship of the Baals puts him in the tradition of the house of Ahab (1 Ki. 18:18; 2 Ch. 24:7). Also, the reference to the hideous child sacrifice (v. 3) is clearer than in 2 Kings 16:3, where 'caused his son to pass through' has become 'burnt his sons' (REB, NEB). The Hebrew name of the *Valley of Ben Hinnom* (cf. 2 Ch. 33:6; 2 Ki. 23:10; Je. 7:31-32; Ezk. 16:20:20-21), where the fires of Jerusalem's rubbish dump burned, has become popularized as Gehenna, 'hell.'"

Evidently, in the worship of Moloch, babies and young children were thrown alive in the mouth of the idol in which a fire was burning.

When Israel was on her way to Canaan, God warned them about the atrocious practices of the people of the land. We read: "Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the Lord."¹³⁶ And: "You must not worship the Lord your God in their way, because in worshiping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable

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Lev. 18:21

things the Lord hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods.”¹³⁷

b. Massacre and mercy (28:5-15).

5 Therefore the Lord his God handed him over to the king of Aram. The Arameans defeated him and took many of his people as prisoners and brought them to Damascus. He was also given into the hands of the king of Israel, who inflicted heavy casualties on him.

6 In one day Pekah son of Remaliah killed a hundred and twenty thousand soldiers in Judah — because Judah had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers.

7 Zicri, an Ephraimite warrior, killed Maaseiah the king's son, Azrikam the officer in charge of the palace, and Elkanah, second to the king.

8 The Israelites took captive from their kinsmen two hundred thousand wives, sons and daughters. They also took a great deal of plunder, which they carried back to Samaria.

9 But a prophet of the Lord named Oded was there, and he went out to meet the army when it returned to Samaria. He said to them, "Because the Lord, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand. But you have slaughtered them in a rage that reaches to heaven.

10 And now you intend to make the men and women of Judah and Jerusalem your slaves. But aren't you also guilty of sins against the Lord your God?

11 Now listen to me! Send back your fellow countrymen you have taken as prisoners, for the Lord's fierce anger rests on you."

12 Then some of the leaders in Ephraim—Azariah son of Jehohanan, Berekiah son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah son of Shallum, and Amasa son of Hadlai — confronted those who were arriving from the war.

13 "You must not bring those prisoners here," they said, "or we will be guilty before the Lord. Do you intend to add to our sin and guilt? For our guilt is already great, and his fierce anger rests on Israel."

14 So the soldiers gave up the prisoners and plunder in the presence of the officials and all the assembly.

15 The men designated by name took the prisoners, and from the plunder they clothed all who were naked. They provided them with clothes and sandals, food and drink, and healing balm. All those who were weak they put on donkeys. So they took them back to their fellow countrymen at Jericho, the City of Palms, and returned to Samaria.

It is interesting to see that there were in the Northern Kingdom several people who were aware of God’s anger upon them as a nation. Several of the civil leaders sided with the prophet Oded and told the Israelite troops that it was against the will of the Lord to take their fellow Israelites as prisoners of war.

The Tyndale Commentary writes about this section: “The paragraph divides clearly into the war against Syria and Israel (vv. 5-8) and its unexpected aftermath (vv. 9-15). Though the

¹³⁷

Deut. 12:31

war is described several times in the Old Testament (2 Ki. 15:37; 16:5-6; Is. 7:1 – 9:6; Ho. 5:8 – 7:10), the Chronicler has presented it in such a way as to give the impression that this version contradicts the earlier ones. Syria and Israel, for example, seem to be treated separately here but as a coalition elsewhere (2 Ki. 16:5; Is. 7:1-2), while Chronicles' concentration on Judah's defeat contrasts with the coalition's failure to achieve complete victory. The differences are more apparent than real, however. The actions of the two invaders are so similar as to imply some kind of partnership (v. 5), while verses 6ff. concentrate on Israel's role. Also, 2 Kings 16 and Isaiah 7 make quite clear that the coalition armies must have overrun most of northern Judah, failing only to capture Jerusalem.

It is therefore consistent to say that Judah suffered a (lit.) 'great captivity' and a 'great defeat' at the hands of the Syrians and Israelites respectively (v. 5), and it is no surprise that the victors *took captive* a large number of Judeans (vv. 5, 8). The large numbers (vv. 6, 8) are probably not to be taken at face value, though the problem of casualty statistics is somewhat different from calculating the size of an army (*cf. e.g.* 13:3; 14:8). It may still be possible, however, to think in terms of fatalities from 120 military units and the women and children from 200 families or clans being carried off. Whatever the precise figures, the fact that the dead included a member of the royal family and the two most senior administrative officials (v. 7) indicates how serious the crisis was.

The reason for the disaster was just as important as the extent of it. Chronicles states in typical style that because Judah *had forsaken God* (v. 6), God had become *angry* (v. 9) and *handed them over* (v. 5) to their enemies. Judah had broken the covenant by forsaking God (1 Ch. 28:9; 2 Ch. 7:19-22; 15:2), which made them liable to military defeat and captivity as a sign of divine anger (2 Ch. 6:36). Isaiah had earlier made the same point (*cf.* Is. 7:1-12). The same divine sovereignty that had protected Jerusalem against the armies of Syria and Israel now used them as agents of divine punishment."

Comparing the two accounts of this war, the one in Second Kings and in Second Chronicles, *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "The *King of Syria*. The *name* of this king (Rezin) does not appear in this chapter, but it does in the parallel, 2 Ch. 28:5, 6, 9. *They smote him*. A previous unsuccessful attempt of Rezin and Pekah is apparently passed over in our chapter (2 Ki. 16:5), while the contents of our present text must be understood to have its place just before the last clause of 2 Ch. 28:5 in the parallel, and to be significantly confirmed by the contents of its following verse. *They smote ... carried away ... brought*. These plurals strongly indicate the dislocation of sentences in compiled matter. They probably came from original sources, where the conjoined names of Rezin and Pekah had been the antecedents (see on this history, Isa. 7:1-25; 8:1-22; 9:1-21). *Brought them to Damascus*. The mode of the first introduction of the name of Ahaz in connection with Damascus in the parallel (2 Ch. 28:10) is a suggestive illustration of how these parallel but very various narratives proffer to piece themselves, and in a wonderful manner clear their whole subject of any possible taint of the 'cunningly devised fable.' A *great multitude* of Judah's people had been *carried captives* and 'brought to Damascus.' When the King of Assyria (parallel, 2 Ch. 28:9) came to the help of Ahaz, he struck a fierce and evidently decisive blow against Damascus and Rezin, and to Damascus, 'to meet' Assyria's king, Tiglath-Pileser, the very next verso tells us, Ahaz went — little doubt to pay his bills, over which a decent veil of silence is thrown. *He was also delivered into the hand*, etc. The form of this sentence, with its 'also,' and with its evidently tacked-on appearance, coupled with the conjunction 'for' with which the following verse is dragged in, seems to give great probability to the idea, *first*, that the latter half of 2 Ch. 28:5 and all of 2 Ch. 28:6 find their real place before

(say) the word ‘Damascus;’ and secondly, that they are strictly and conterminously paralleled by the former part of 2 Ch. 28:5 parallel.”

Oded accused the people of the Northern Kingdom that they went beyond what God intended them to do with the people of Judah. They were the tool in God’s hand to demonstrate His anger over the Judeans, but instead of doing what God wanted them to do they gave free reign to their own racial hatred. The axe kept on cutting after the job was done.

The Hebrew text of v. 9 reads literally: “Behold, the Lord God of your fathers was wroth with Judah, He has delivered into your hand, and you have slain in a rage that reaches unto heaven.” The Hebrew verb, rendered “slain” is *harag*, which can be translated “to murder,” or “to slaughter.” The verb occurs for the first time in Scripture in connection with Cain’s murder of his brother Abel.¹³⁸

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “A prophet from Samaria called *Oded* intervenes to greet the returning victorious Israelite army with the apparently unwelcome message that the prisoners must be sent back (vv. 9-11). He gives three reasons, that the Israelites had reacted with excessive *rage* (v. 9), that their plan to subject the Judean prisoners of war to the usual fate of slavery was unacceptable (v. 10a), and that they had ‘committed sin’ (v. 10b, JB; ‘are guilty,’ REB, NEB) before God. As with many previous prophecies in Chronicles, Oded uses earlier Scripture. Excessive violence in war regularly met with God’s disapproval (*cf.* Is. 10:15-16; Ho. 1:4; Hab. 2:2-20; Zc. 1:15), even though the Israelites might claim that they were simply getting their own back on Amaziah (*cf.* 25:11-12). Slavery of fellow Israelites was against the law of Leviticus 25:42-43, 46, because they were (lit.) ‘brothers’ (vv. 8, 11, 15; ‘kinsmen,’ REB, NEB; ‘kinfolk,’ RSV), a significant theme throughout Chronicles (*cf.* 1 Ch. 12:39; 13:2; 2 Ch. 11:4). Also, ‘to force into slavery’ (v. 10, REB, NEB) is a phrase always associated with God’s disapproval, and occurs only in Jeremiah 34:11, 16 and Nehemiah 5:5, in the latter case perhaps not too distant from the Chronicler’s own experience. Finally, the prophecy is an appeal for repentance (v. 11). The only hope against God’s anger for both Israelites and Judeans (vv. 9, 11) is in God’s mercy, which according to 2 Chronicles 6:36-39 was available even in captivity. Though they had sinned against the law and the prophets, Scripture also pointed the way to forgiveness.”

Some of the inter-tribal envy can be traced back to the envy among Jacob’s sons as members of that dysfunctional family. In a way, Israel was never truly “one nation under God.”

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “*The captives*; Hebrew, *shibyah*; literally, *the captivity*; *i.e.* of course, the body of captives (Deut. 21:11; 32:42). *Clothed ... arrayed*. These two renderings are both the same verb (*labash*), and even the same (hyphenated) conjugation. The undisguised, apparent repetition in the Hebrew text, veiled and disguised in both the Authorized and Revised Versions, may perhaps be owing to the intentness of the narrative on saying, *first*, that all *who were literally naked* were clothed from their own captive spoil; and then, *secondly*, that *all* whosoever (dusty, dirty, tired, footsore) were clothed, in the sense of being fresh dressed. The eleven particulars of this verse are uncommonly graphic in the Hebrew text brevity of description. The verse may read thus: *And the men appointed by their names rose up, and took the captives by the hand, and all of the naked of them they dressed from the very spoil, and dressed them (all), and shod them, and fed them, and gave them drink, and anointed them, and carried upon asses all the feeble ones, and brought them to Jericho, city of palms, to*

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Gen. 4:8

the very side of their brethren, and ... returned to Samaria. These made their own so far the blessedness of them of Mat. 25:34-36. Jericho; *i.e.* well within their own land, to a fertile and shaded spot of it, with plenty of water, and whence probably all might most easily wend their ways to their own district and town. *Jericho* lay on the border of Benjamin.”

c. False help (28:16-21).

16 *At that time King Ahaz sent to the king of Assyria for help.*

17 *The Edomites had again come and attacked Judah and carried away prisoners,*

18 *while the Philistines had raided towns in the foothills and in the Negev of Judah. They captured and occupied Beth Shemesh, Aijalon and Gederoth, as well as Soco, Timnah and Gimzo, with their surrounding villages.*

19 *The Lord had humbled Judah because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had promoted wickedness in Judah and had been most unfaithful to the Lord.*

20 *Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came to him, but he gave him trouble instead of help.*

21 *Ahaz took some of the things from the temple of the Lord and from the royal palace and from the princes and presented them to the king of Assyria, but that did not help him.*

King Ahaz' foolish behavior brought him up to his neck in trouble. Edom attacked from the south and the Philistines from the north. Both took prisoners and diminished Judah's territory by occupying several cities and villages. We read that God allowed this to happen in order to humble Judah.

The Hebrew text of v. 19 is difficult to analyze; it reads literally: "For the Lord brought Judah low for Israel because of King Ahaz, He made naked and sore; Judah transgressed against the Lord." "He made naked" is one of the many possible renderings of the Hebrew verb *para*, which literally means "to loosen," or "to uncover."

In appealing for help to the king of Assyria, Ahaz was like a man who would ask the devil "do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Tiglath-Pileser came, evidently stating that help would be expensive. So Ahaz took all the treasures he could find in order to pay him off. The king of Assyria took what was handed to him, but gave no help.

The Tyndale Commentary states: "The origins as well as the outcome of Ahaz' appeal to Tiglath-Pileser III, king of Assyria (745-727), vary from the brief account in 2 Kings 16:7-9. Whereas Kings makes the Syro-Israelite invasion the reason for Ahaz' desperate request, here the *Edomites* (v. 17) and *Philistines* (v. 18) are the cause of the trouble. Both these nations, however, fought against the Assyrians as the Syrians and Israelites had done, and 2 Kings 16:6 suggests that the Syrian and Edomite attacks may even have been coordinated. The yoke imposed by Uzziah also gave them further reason to be hostile (2 Ch. 26:2, 6-7). The Philistines attacked the strategic valleys in the Shephelah, though Gimzo was probably further north in Israel.

Any relief brought by Ahaz' 'bribe' (2 Ki. 16:8, NEB), however, was short-lived, since ultimately the Assyrians *gave him trouble* (v. 20); 'afflicted,' RSV; 'oppressed,' NRSV). Isaiah's prediction (7:17) that God would send the king of Assyrian in judgment was soon fulfilled, with Judah becoming Assyria's vassal for some thirty years, and most of Israel immediately being turned into three Assyrian provinces (*cf.* Is. 8:1). The considerable cost of sending temple and palace treasures was all to no avail (v. 21).

Ahaz' real failure, however, was to seek human rather than divine *help*. One of the Chronicler's principles is that 'God has the power to help or to overthrow' (2 Ch. 25:8; *cf.* 32:8), and that he helps those who put their trust in him (*cf.* 1 Ch. 5:20; 14; 10; 18:31). Ahaz' turning to Assyria was therefore a sign of his unbelief (*cf.* Is. 7:9-12). Ahaz also 'behaved without restraint' (v. 19, NRSV) and was *most unfaithful*. The former expression really means to favor license rather than true liberty, while the latter is a typical term in Chronicles for failing to give God his due. Therefore God *humbled* Judah as he had Israel under Jeroboam (2 Ch. 13:18), but with even more disastrous results."

d. Ahaz' further apostasy (28:22-25).

22 In his time of trouble King Ahaz became even more unfaithful to the Lord.

23 He offered sacrifices to the gods of Damascus, who had defeated him; for he thought, "Since the gods of the kings of Aram have helped them, I will sacrifice to them so they will help me." But they were his downfall and the downfall of all Israel.

24 Ahaz gathered together the furnishings from the temple of God and took them away. He shut the doors of the Lord's temple and set up altars at every street corner in Jerusalem.

25 In every town in Judah he built high places to burn sacrifices to other gods and provoked the Lord, the God of his fathers, to anger.

The Hebrew word for "trouble" is *tsarar*, which literally means "cramp." It can also be used as a verb, meaning "to wrap," as in the verse: "So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs *wrapped* in clothing."¹³⁹ It can also mean "to oppose," as in the verse: "If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will *oppose* those who oppose you."¹⁴⁰

A Dutch proverb states: "In times of need one learns to pray." Prayer was not Ahaz' reaction to the trouble and pressure in which he found himself. He must have thought that if God opposed him, he would seek help with God's enemy. Ahaz, obviously, had no concept of who the God was he opposed.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on v. 23: "'*He sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him.* The writer must be understood to speak from the point of view of Ahaz, in putting it, that it was the gods of Damascus who smote.' The formula, all Israel, is a clear instance of how the name 'Israel' is used as 'Judah.' The *gods of Damascus* were, of course, the same with those of Syria, of which Damascus was capital. Their names were Rimmon, Tabrimmen, Hadad, and some others. Perhaps no verse in Chronicles is more typical of the special moral aspects and aims of the writer." Ahaz did not understand that it was God who made him suffer defeat by the Syrians. It was not the power of the Syrian idols, but the power of God that made him fail. The 'gods' of Syria were no gods at all. There is a sense in which all idolatry is inspired by Satan, which means that there is demonic power in idolatry. But in a confrontation

¹³⁹ Ex. 12:34

¹⁴⁰ Ex. 23:22

between God and Satan, there is no question about where the source of all strength lies. The Apostle Paul states about the power of Satan that “the Lord Jesus will overthrow [him] with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.”¹⁴¹

Ahaz’ downfall was Israel’s downfall. Evidently, the nation followed its king in his idolatry.

The Hebrew text of the second part of v. 23 reads literally: “But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel with him.” The Hebrew word used is *kashal*, which is mainly used as a verb, meaning “to totter,” or “to falter.” The first time the verb is used in Scripture is in the verse: “They will *stumble* over one another as though fleeing from the sword, even though no one is pursuing them. So you will not be able to stand before your enemies.”¹⁴²

Actually, Ahaz did more than stumble; he fell flat on his face. He tried to eradicate all traces of true worship by taking away everything from the temple in Jerusalem and closing the doors of the temple.

In recent history, the government of communist China has tried to exterminate all religion from the country. The result has been a phenomenal growth of Christianity.

Ahaz also tried to make idolatry the center of life in every town and city in Judah by erecting idol altars everywhere. With this he provoked God’s anger to the point where all hope of salvation was gone. God had said to Isaiah: “I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.”¹⁴³

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “In place of the altar from Damascus which is the main criticism of Ahaz in 2 Kings 16:10-18, Chronicles prefers to include wider evidence of Ahaz’ increasing apostasy. Shutting the temple doors (*cf.* 29:7) does not contradict Ahaz’ worship on the new altar, since the latter was outside the temple. All these activities *provoked ... God ... to anger* (v. 25). The phrase is very reminiscent of Kings (*cf. e.g.* 1 Ki. 16:33; 2 Ki. 17:11; 23:19), suggesting that though this material is unique to Chronicles, it may derive from a source also available to Kings.”

e. Ahaz’ burial (28:26-27).

26 The other events of his reign and all his ways, from beginning to end, are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel.

27 Ahaz rested with his fathers and was buried in the city of Jerusalem, but he was not placed in the tombs of the kings of Israel. And Hezekiah his son succeeded him as king.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “The concluding formula twice associates Ahaz with the kings of Israel (v. 27; *cf.* v. 26), which must be noted alongside his title ‘king of Israel’ (v. 19) and Judah’s description as ‘all Israel’ (v. 23). These may all allude to the fact of the

¹⁴¹ II Thess. 2:8, 9

¹⁴² Lev. 26:37

¹⁴³ Isa. 42:8

northern kingdom's assimilation by Assyria in 722, representing a fresh opportunity for southerners and northerners to consider their religious unity as Israel as more important than the new political divisions. Previous failures did not augur well, however (*cf.* 11:1-4; 13:3-18; 16:1-9; 19:2-3; 20:35-37; 21:2 – 23:21; 25:7-10, 17-24), even though the repentant Israelites showed that God's mercy was never far away. Further opportunities for unity based on worship at the Jerusalem temple came under Hezekiah and Josiah, but only a later king could still truly bring Jews and Samaritans to worship together (Jn. 4:19-24).

Meanwhile, Ahaz' reign came to its sad end, though his burial apart from the royal cemetery is hardly to be interpreted as part of the theme of exile (v. 27). As with several other kings (*cf.* 21:20; 24:25; 26:23), it is rather a mark of God's judgment."

iii. Hezekiah's reforms (29:1 – 31:21)

a. Invitation to consecrate the temple (29:1-11).

In a general introduction to this section, *The Tyndale Commentary* writes: "Hezekiah's accession heralds the dawn of a new reformation after the nadir of Ahaz' reign. In fact, Hezekiah is so important to the Chronicler that four chapters are devoted to him, more than for any other king apart from David and Solomon (chs. 29-32). This presentation is quite different from that in 2 Kings from which only the introduction (2 Ki. 18:1-7; *cf.* 2 Ch. 29:1-2; 31:1, 20-21) and conclusion (2 Ki. 20:20-21; *cf.* 2 Ch. 32:32-33) reappear, together with the events of the main part of 2 Chronicles 32. Though the Chronicler certainly agrees with Kings' positive view, he has selected very different examples of Hezekiah's faith. Hezekiah here is primarily a reformer of worship (chs. 29-31), with his military successes and international reputation (ch. 32) as a consequence of the nation's new relationship with God....

Chapter 29's special emphases are expressed in three different patterns. In the first, Hezekiah's reign revives the combined era of David and Solomon. David's reign is recalled by two specific references (vv. 25-27, 30) as well as by the parallels between the Levites' role in verses 3-9 and 1 Chronicles 15. Solomon is reflected in the parallel between his dedication of the temple (2 Ch. 7) and Hezekiah's worship at the rededicated altar (vv. 20-35) and in the Passover (ch. 30). The link with David, which is especially strong in this chapter, shows that Hezekiah is much more than a second Solomon.... The second pattern contrasts Hezekiah with two other kings, namely Jeroboam 1 (as described by Abijah in 2 Ch. 13:8-12) and Ahaz (2 Ch. 28:22-24; 2 Ki. 16:10-18). Not only does this make Hezekiah's reign the start of a new era, it confirms the message of Ezekiel 28 that Israel was not inevitably bound by its past (*cf.* chs. 27-28). The third pattern has been called a 'festival schema,' and is based on the dedication of the temple (2 Ch. 7:8-10). This includes four components, a date (*cf.* v. 36). This is repeated in the reigns of Asa (2 Ch. 15:9-15) and Josiah (2 Ch. 35:1-19) as well as occurring twice in Hezekiah's (*cf.* also 30:13-27), all of which confirms Hezekiah's desire to participate in a living tradition of temple worship."

i. Introduction (29:1-2).

1 Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah.

2 He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father David had done.

Haley's Bible Handbook gives the following résumé of Hezekiah and his reign: "Hezekiah, king of Judah. 726-797 BC. Reigned 29 yrs. ... Inherited a disorganized real and a heavy burden of tribute to Assyria. Began his reign with a great Reformation. Broke down the idols Ahaz had set up. Re-opened and cleansed the Temple. Restored the service of God. 'Trusted God.' 'God was with him, and he prospered.' Gained independence from Assyria. Isaiah was his trusted adviser.

In Hezekiah's 6th yr. 721 BC. the Northern Kingdom fell. In his 14th yr. 713 BC, it seems, Sennacherib, as leader of his father Sargon's armies, invaded Judah. Hezekiah paid him tribute. Then the visit of the Babylonian embassy, II Ki. 20:12-15, which looked suspicious to Sennacherib, who again, 7-1 BC. invaded Judah. Hezekiah strengthened the wall, built the conduit, and made great military preparation. Then followed the Great Deliverance by the Angel, II Ki. 19:35. The victory brought Hezekiah great prestige and power."

The Pulpit Commentary observes about Hezekiah's age at the time of his ascension: "We have been told (2 Ch. 28:1) that Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years. So that, if these numbers be correct, and the numbers of our verse correct, Hezekiah must have been born when his father was only *eleven* years old. Of which all that can be said is ... that such a thing was not impossible and not unknown. It is far more probable, however, that one of the determining figures is wrong, but we have nothing to guide us to say which."

Barnes' Notes states: "The treatment of Hezekiah's reign by the author of Chronicles is in marked contrast with that followed in the Book of Kings. The writer of Kings describes mainly civil affairs; the author of Chronicles gives a full account of Hezekiah's religious reformation. 2 Chron. 29-31 contain matter, therefore, which is almost wholly new."

The Tyndale Commentary writes: "This is the only paragraph in the chapter which is dependent on Kings (2 Kings 18:1b-3) and, apart from the usual omission of the synchronism (2 Ki. 18:1), it keeps closely to its source. It should not be treated as merely routine, however. Hezekiah is the first king to be fully compared with *David* (*cf.* 17:3) and verse 2 also contrasts him with his predecessor (*cf.* 28:1). Indeed, verse 2 really sets the theme by anticipating several direct analogies with David in the chapter."

It is a most amazing fact that Hezekiah, who grew up in the polluted atmosphere of Ahaz' palace, developed such an intimate fellowship with God.

ii. *An invitation to consecration (29:3-11).*

3 *In the first month of the first year of his reign, he opened the doors of the temple of the Lord and repaired them.*

4 *He brought in the priests and the Levites, assembled them in the square on the east side*

5 *and said: "Listen to me, Levites! Consecrate yourselves now and consecrate the temple of the Lord, the God of your fathers. Remove all defilement from the sanctuary.*

6 *Our fathers were unfaithful; they did evil in the eyes of the Lord our God and forsook him. They turned their faces away from the Lord's dwelling place and turned their backs on him.*

7 *They also shut the doors of the portico and put out the lamps. They did not burn incense or present any burnt offerings at the sanctuary to the God of Israel.*

8 *Therefore, the anger of the Lord has fallen on Judah and Jerusalem; he has made them an object of dread and horror and scorn, as you can see with your own eyes.*

9 This is why our fathers have fallen by the sword and why our sons and daughters and our wives are in captivity.

10 Now I intend to make a covenant with the Lord, the God of Israel, so that his fierce anger will turn away from us.

11 My sons, do not be negligent now, for the Lord has chosen you to stand before him and serve him, to minister before him and to burn incense."

Hezekiah's first act as reigning monarch was to restore the temple and its services, giving back to God the central place He ought to occupy among the Israelites. We may assume that Hezekiah had planned to repair the damage Ahaz had done to the temple and the worship of Yahweh, long before he ascended the throne. The rededication of the temple service was the logical fruit of Hezekiah's personal dedication to the Lord.

In order to reinstate the temple service, the temple personal, that is the Levites, had to be re-consecrated to the Lord. During Ahaz' reign they probably lived in their villages as everyday citizens and not as "clergy."

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "As was the custom with wise kings, Hezekiah first *assembled* the people who would carry out the intended task (v. 4; cf. vv. 20, 23, 28, 31, 32; 2 Ch. 5:2-3; 28:14; 34:29). They were the *priests and Levites*, whose predecessors David had employed for transporting the ark (cf. 1 Ch. 15:4; cf. 23:2). ... The *square on the east* (v. 4) was probably in front of the temple (cf. Ezr. 10:9), where the assembled Levites could see the temple's uncleanness for themselves, though another square existed near the city gate outside the temple precincts (Ne. 8:1, 3)....

Hezekiah makes three points, of which the first calls the priests and Levites to *consecrate* both themselves and the *temple* (v. 5; cf. vv. 10-11). This was the first step in restoring fellowship with God (vv. 15, 34; 30:15, 24; 31:18)..., since only a true priesthood could offer acceptable worship.... 'Consecrate' means 'to make holy, hallow,' that is, to set apart someone or something for God's service (cf. 1 Pet. 1:15-16). Though it included positive commitment to God, it also required removing every kind of *defilement* (v. 5, NIV, REB; 'what is impure,' JB). The latter term (Heb. *niddā*) was used in the exile and later to describe the general state of God's people (e.g. Ezr. 9:11; La 1:8, 17; Ezk. 36:17), though it referred elsewhere to ritual uncleanness (e.g. Lv. 15:19-33). The Chronicler's audience was doubtless intended to understand both meanings, though they would also have known God's promise of a fountain to cleanse away all impurity (Zc. 13:1).

Secondly, the people had been *unfaithful*, turning their *backs* instead of their *faces* to God (v. 6). Worship was meant to be a face to face meeting with God (Ex. 33:11; Ps. 27:4-9), but they had personally rejected him by failing to recognize his presence (cf. Je. 18:17). That is why they had closed the temple (v. 7; cf. 13:11; 28:24), and established pagan patterns of worship (28:2-4, 22-25; 2 Ki. 16:12-16). The problem went back not just to one generation, however, but to *our fathers* (v. 6) in general. The use of terms such as *unfaithful* (cf. 2 Ch. 26:16, 18; 28:19, 22; 36:14) and *forsook* (cf. 2 Ch. 15:2; 24:18, 20; 28:6) typify the attitudes towards God that ultimately led to the punishment of exile.

Thirdly, Hezekiah underlines that to reject God arouses his *anger* (vv. 8, 10). This theme provides another connection with the exile (cf. 2 Ch. 36:16), as does the description of Jerusalem as an object of 'horror, astonishment and hissing' (v. 8, cf. NRSV, RSV), a phrase which is paralleled only in Jeremiah 29:18 (cf. also the individual terms in Je. 15:4; 19:8; 24:9; 25:9). Seeing *captivity* (v. 9) *with your own eyes* (v. 8) could also refer to the exile, but its primary

reference is to Ahaz' reign in chapter 28 where the notion of captivity is repeated eight times (vv. 5, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17). It was also under Ahaz' reign that their fathers died by the *sword* and their *sons and daughters wives* were taken captive (v. 9; cf. 28:6, 8). The key to follow Hezekiah's speech, however, is that punishment does not have to follow automatically from God's anger (v. 10)....

Hezekiah's commitment to repentance is signified by his intention to make a *covenant* with God (v. 10). No details of this covenant are given, and there is not even any formal acknowledgment that it actually took place, though the calling of an assembly (v. 15) and the action that followed it (vv. 16-35) provide strong testimony of its being put into action....

The expression has direct analogy with David's inner desire for the temple (cf. 1 Ch. 22:7; 28:2; 2 Ch. 6:7). The fact that God has *chosen* the priests and Levites (v. 11) is a further link with David, for the Levites' election occurs elsewhere only in 1 Chronicles 15:2. The final exhortation may be stronger than not to *be negligent* (v. 11). It could mean that either they were not to err (cf. 2 Sa. 6:7, AV, RV) or that they must not commit blasphemy (cf. Dn. 3:29, REB, NEB)."

b. Renewing temple worship (29:12-36).

12 Then these Levites set to work: from the Kohathites, Mahath son of Amasai and Joel son of Azariah; from the Merarites, Kish son of Abdi and Azariah son of Jehallelel; from the Gershonites, Joah son of Zimmah and Eden son of Joah;

13 from the descendants of Elizaphan, Shimri and Jeiel; from the descendants of Asaph, Zechariah and Mattaniah;

14 from the descendants of Heman, Jehiel and Shimei; from the descendants of Jeduthun, Shemaiah and Uzziel.

15 When they had assembled their brothers and consecrated themselves, they went in to purify the temple of the Lord, as the king had ordered, following the word of the Lord.

16 The priests went into the sanctuary of the Lord to purify it. They brought out to the courtyard of the Lord's temple everything unclean that they found in the temple of the Lord. The Levites took it and carried it out to the Kidron Valley.

17 They began the consecration on the first day of the first month, and by the eighth day of the month they reached the portico of the Lord. For eight more days they consecrated the temple of the Lord itself, finishing on the sixteenth day of the first month.

18 Then they went in to King Hezekiah and reported: "We have purified the entire temple of the Lord, the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the table for setting out the consecrated bread, with all its articles.

19 We have prepared and consecrated all the articles that King Ahaz removed in his unfaithfulness while he was king. They are now in front of the Lord's altar."

20 Early the next morning King Hezekiah gathered the city officials together and went up to the temple of the Lord.

21 They brought seven bulls, seven rams, seven male lambs and seven male goats as a sin offering for the kingdom, for the sanctuary and for Judah. The king commanded the priests, the descendants of Aaron, to offer these on the altar of the Lord.

22 So they slaughtered the bulls, and the priests took the blood and sprinkled it on the altar; next they slaughtered the rams and sprinkled their blood on the altar; then they slaughtered the lambs and sprinkled their blood on the altar.

23 The goats for the sin offering were brought before the king and the assembly, and they laid their hands on them.

24 The priests then slaughtered the goats and presented their blood on the altar for a sin offering to atone for all Israel, because the king had ordered the burnt offering and the sin offering for all Israel.

25 He stationed the Levites in the temple of the Lord with cymbals, harps and lyres in the way prescribed by David and Gad the king's seer and Nathan the prophet; this was commanded by the Lord through his prophets.

26 So the Levites stood ready with David's instruments, and the priests with their trumpets.

27 Hezekiah gave the order to sacrifice the burnt offering on the altar. As the offering began, singing to the Lord began also, accompanied by trumpets and the instruments of David king of Israel.

28 The whole assembly bowed in worship, while the singers sang and the trumpeters played. All this continued until the sacrifice of the burnt offering was completed.

29 When the offerings were finished, the king and everyone present with him knelt down and worshiped.

30 King Hezekiah and his officials ordered the Levites to praise the Lord with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with gladness and bowed their heads and worshiped.

31 Then Hezekiah said, "You have now dedicated yourselves to the Lord. Come and bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the temple of the Lord." So the assembly brought sacrifices and thank offerings, and all whose hearts were willing brought burnt offerings.

32 The number of burnt offerings the assembly brought was seventy bulls, a hundred rams and two hundred male lambs — all of them for burnt offerings to the Lord.

33 The animals consecrated as sacrifices amounted to six hundred bulls and three thousand sheep and goats.

34 The priests, however, were too few to skin all the burnt offerings; so their kinsmen the Levites helped them until the task was finished and until other priests had been consecrated, for the Levites had been more conscientious in consecrating themselves than the priests had been.

35 There were burnt offerings in abundance, together with the fat of the fellowship offerings and the drink offerings that accompanied the burnt offerings. So the service of the temple of the Lord was reestablished.

36 Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced at what God had brought about for his people, because it was done so quickly.

This is one of the most impressive descriptions of a national spiritual revival in the Old Testament. It was, first of all, brought about by the king's personal initiative, which worked inspirational upon the priests and Levites who were to do the actual work. Ultimately, it affected the relationship with God of the whole nation.

Before anything positive could be done, the old system had to be destroyed. Ahaz had defiled the temple by his idol worship. The temple must be purified before it could be restored to its proper service.

Vv. 12-14 give us a list of Levites who were assigned to the task. They were from the three Levite clans of Kohathites, Merarites and Gershonites.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary quotes the Targum, which states: "All the vessels which King Ahaz had polluted and rendered abominable by strange idols, when he reigned in his transgression against the WORD of the Lord, we have collected and hidden; and others have we prepared to replace them; and they are now before the Lord."

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary adds: "Then the Levites arose. Fourteen chiefs undertook the duty of collecting and preparing their brethren for the important work of 'cleansing the Lord's house.' Beginning with the outer courts—that of the priests and that of the people—the cleansing of these occupied eight days, after which they set themselves to purify the interior; but as the Levites were not allowed to enter within the walls of the temple, the priests brought all the sweepings out to the porch, where they were received by the Levites, and thrown into the brook Kidron. This took eight days more; and at the end of this period they repaired to the palace, and announced that not only had the whole of the sacred edifice, within and without, undergone a thorough purification, but all the vessels which the late king had taken away and applied to a common use in his palace had been restored 'and sanctified.'"

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "Before describing a particular activity, Chronicles typically lists the names of those involved. The Levites in verses 12-14 are the leaders in the work of purification (vv. 15-19), a format that is closely paralleled by the Levites of David's day (1 Ch. 15:4-10). In both instances, the first four groups in the lists are identical, and the only real difference is that the three musical families in verses 13b-14 replace the two groups in 1 Chronicles 15:9-10. Both sets of leaders must consecrate themselves for their task (vv. 15, 17, 19; cf. 1 Ch. 15:12, 14), which these Levites did by removing *everything unclean* (v. 16).

The work itself took two consecutive weeks, first clearing the courtyard up to the 'porch' (v. 17), REB, NEB; 'vestibule,' NRSV, RSV) and then the temple (v. 16). The time taken overran the proper date for Passover, for which special arrangements had to be made (ch. 30). The whole enterprise is characterized by a concern to do everything as God required, especially as the king's command was regarded as 'the words of the LORD' (v. 15, NRSV, RSV). This latter phrase may refer to God's original revelation to David about the temple (1 Ch. 28:12, 19) rather than portray Hezekiah as a prophet, since Chronicles sometimes speaks in a general way about 'the word of the LORD' (cf. 1 Ch. 10:13; 11:2-3). One example of this carefulness is that the priests alone purified the 'inner part' of the temple (v. 16, NRSV, RSV), that is, the Holy of Holies, since this was the only part from which Levites were excluded (cf. 2 Ch. 5:7; 23:6). Special care was also taken with the temple vessels (vv. 18-19), which in post-exilic times came to symbolize active temple worship (cf. Ezr. 1:7-11; Dn. 5:2-3, 23). When the pagan symbols had finally been removed in the traditional way to the *Kidron Valley* and destroyed (v. 16; cf. 2 Ch. 15:15; 30:14; 2 Ki. 23:12), the temple could be properly *purified* (v. 18) and *consecrated* (v. 19) for God's service."

Hezekiah was the first to go to the temple to worship the Lord with the required sacrifices. He took several of the city officials with him. The Hebrew text reads literally: "Then the king Hezekiah rose early, and gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of the Lord." This probably means that the king got up when the sun came up.

It is good to rise up early and spend time in fellowship with the Lord. We have this great advantage of all the Old Testament saints that we can do this in the quietness of our own home. In the Old Testament the Lord could only be worshipped at a certain place, although the Psalmist states: "The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴

Ps. 145:18

For King Hezekiah this was not merely an exercise of personal devotions. He envisioned a national revival, so he brought the city officials with him. The Hebrew calls them “the rulers of the city,” which probably means the mayor and aldermen of Jerusalem. The population of the city would see this delegation entering the temple and that would inspire them to follow their example.

In the Old Testament people could not just go to the temple to worship. One had to bring a sacrifice in order to be able to do so. Every temple visit symbolized an act of total surrender to the Lord by symbolically giving up one’s life. This was done by bringing a sacrificial animal, placing one’s hand on the victim’s head to indicate that the animal substituted for the person. What happened to the animal ought to happen to the person who brought it. It meant that the person who brought the sacrifice literally gave up his life to the Lord. This Hezekiah and the city officials did in the consecration of the temple.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “As on previous occasions, the temple was only fully restored when it became operational (*cf.* 2 Ch. 5:2 – 7:10; 15:8-15; 24:13-14). Each section of the reopening service is characterized by its own individual themes of atonement (vv. 21-24), dedication and praise (vv. 25-30), and thanksgiving (vv. 31-35).

First the leaders brought offerings *to atone for all Israel* (v. 24), or more specifically *for the kingdom, for the sanctuary and for Judah* (v. 21). Though the kingdom may be a reference to the royal house, such a meaning would be unique in the Old Testament, and it is not impossible that Chronicles’ important theme of the kingdom of God is intended. ‘The kingdom’ is used in precisely this sense in 1 Chronicles 29:11, and it would provide yet another analogy with Abijah’s speech (2 Ch. 13:8).

The *burnt offering* and the *sin offering* (v. 24) provided the atoning sacrifices. The burnt offering seems to have comprised the *bulls, rams, and lambs* (vv. 21-22), and its atoning function is paralleled in *e.g.* Leviticus 1:3-4 and Job 1:5. The *sin offering* (NIV, RSB) is singled out. Actually, it is better described as a ‘purification offering’ (NEB), since by it were removed all forms of evil and impurity, personal and impersonal. Even the sanctuary was cleansed, an idea found also in the rituals for the Day of Atonement (Lv. 16:16, 20) and for Ezekiel’s visionary temple (Ezk. 45:18-20; *cf.* 43:18-27). Hezekiah’s ceremony comprehensively removes every stain (*cf.* v. 5), as well as all God’s anger (*cf.* vv. 8, 10). It is for all *Israel* (v. 24), the people of north and south, and the larger number of animals in comparison with the Day of Atonement also underlines the sense of completeness (v. 21: *cf.* Lv. 16:3, 5, 24). Hezekiah in fact, seems to have partly modelled the occasion on the Day of Atonement, for that was the only day each year when every sin was sacrificially atoned for (Lv. 16:16, 21). Another link with the Day of Atonement is that they *laid their hands* on the goats for the purification offering (v. 23). This recalls the scapegoat ritual, in which Israel’s sins were confessed over the animal before it was banished as a further symbol that all their sins were gone (Lv. 16:21)....

The second set of sacrifices were the burnt offerings (vv. 27-28) accompanied by *praise* and *singing* (vv. 25-30). Because burnt offerings occur more than once in the rituals, it has sometimes been concluded that the ones in verses 27-28 must be the same as those in verse 24, and that verses 21-24 and verses 25-30 are contemporary with each other. In fact, burnt offerings accompanied each stage of the ritual, including the various types of fellowship offering (vv. 31-35) and the sin offering (v. 24), as well as the songs of praise. In any case, burnt offerings are

associated with a variety of attitudes in worship. Here they accompany an act in which the worshippers *dedicated* themselves (v. 31; ‘consecrated,’ NRSV, RSV), an expression normally used of ordination to the priesthood, and which offers further parallels with both David (1 Ch. 29:5) and Abijah (2 Ch. 13:9). As in David’s day, the whole people set themselves apart for God as his priests to offer worship (*cf.* Ex. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:4, 9-10). Their self-offering is dramatized in the animal sacrifice and verbalized in the sacrifice of praise. A special point is made of the fact that the singing began (v. 27) and ended (v. 29) at the same time as the burnt offering. It symbolizes not only the harmony that ought to exist between the physical and spiritual aspects of worship, but also the restoration of the true pattern of worship, especially in the relationship between atonement and praise. The praise of God is made possible only by the previous removal of sin (*cf.* vv. 21-24), and only a forgiven person can truly sing God’s praises (*cf.* Ps. 51:14-15; Rev. 7:19-17). Chronicles also implies that atonement is not to be seen as an end in itself but as a preparation for praise and thanksgiving (*cf.* vv. 25-35; *cf.* 30:27). It is these latter which the Chronicler regards as the normal activities of regular worship, expressed through music and sacrificial offering together (*cf.* 1 Ch. 16:40-41; 23:30-31; 2 Ch. 8:12-14).”

V. 17 states that the cleansing of the temple began on the first day of the first month, which, on the Jewish calendar is the month of Nisan. The whole process of purification took sixteen days. After the whole work was done the priests went to the king to report that the temple was ready to be used for worship.

The morning after Hezekiah had received the priests’ report that the temple had been completely purified and was ready for worship, he went to the temple, accompanied by the city officials. They brought with them seven bulls, seven rams, seven male lambs and seven male goats as a sin offering. True worship begins with a confession of sin. Without a realization of sinfulness, atonement would be meaningless.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “Some think ... that they were sin offering, as the account of the offering of them (2 Ch. 29:22) takes priority for them over the he-goats; others ... that they were certainly burnt offering. It scarcely appears as though much stress can be laid upon what is apparently the chief reason of [one scholar’s] opinion, in face of the immediate language of the last sentence of our 2 Ch. 29:24, ‘for the king commended the burnt offering and the sin offering for all Israel.’ The fact of no mention of burnt offering in our present verse, and of the natural construction of the description, ‘for a sin offering for the kingdom,’ etc. as applying to *all* that had preceded, seems the better argument, and all that is necessary, unless something moderately decisive be forthcoming to rebut it. The solution of all, however, is probably to our hand in Ezr. 8:35, which is a very close and significant parallel to our present verse. The first mention of the sacrifice of *paariym*, or ‘young bullocks’ is found in Ex. 24:5, and afterwards in Ex. 29:1, 3; Lev. 4:3, etc.; Ex. 8:2, 14, etc. The first mention of the sacrifice of *ʾayil* is Gen. 22:13; and, after, Ex. 29:15-21, etc.; Ex. 5:15; 8:2, 22, etc. The first mention of the sacrifices of the *paariym* is Ex. 12:3-7 and, after, Ex. 29:38, etc. The mention of sacrifices of goats is found in Ezr. 1:10; 3:12, and often besides.”

The sacrifices were brought “for the kingdom, for the sanctuary and for Judah.” The Hebrew word, rendered “kingdom” is *mamlakah*, which, in this context, probably refers to Hezekiah’s throne, or royal family.

The fact that the priests are referred to as “the descendants of Aaron” suggests that, under the previous administration, some people, who were not of Aaron’s offspring, may have performed temple rituals.

The writer of Chronicles describes the ritual in detail, because at the time of writing, the temple no longer existed. His report was a reminder to his readers of their historical heritage.

Hezekiah saw to it that the rededication of the temple and its services was accompanied by singing and instrumental accompaniment. *Barnes' Notes* observes: "All had hitherto been preparatory. Now Hezekiah gave orders that 'the burnt offering' - i.e. the daily morning sacrifice-should be offered upon the brass altar in front of the porch, thus restoring and reinstating the regular temple-service. A burst of music gave notice to the people of the moment when the old worship recommenced."

The Tyndale Commentary states: "The musical praise returned to the standards set by David (vv. 25-26, 30). David's *instruments* (v. 26) and *words* (v. 30) were revived, as were the words of *prophets* who were contemporary with him (v. 25). If the words of *David* and *Asaph* (v. 30) are the same as those psalms whose titles bear their names, the prophets and psalms became the basis of Hezekiah's praise."

The Hebrew text of v. 29 reads literally: "And when they had made an end of offering, the king and all that were present with him bowed themselves, and worshipped."

The Pulpit Commentary comments on Hezekiah's and the people's praise and worship: "Bowed; Hebrew, *kara`*, of the force and forcibleness of the verb here employed an idea may be obtained from comparison of Gen. 49:9; Num. 24:9; Jdg. 5:27; 7:6. *Worshipped*; Hebrew, *shachah*. This verb, on the other hand, proclaims the force, not of the posture of the body merely, but rather of the mind, in the rising degrees of respect, reverence, allegiance, and the worship of profound *adoration* paid to him, who is 'God over all, blessed for evermore.' The scene imaged in this description is indeed spirit-stirring, in a high degree."

In v. 31 Hezekiah addresses the population, telling them that, since they have rededicated themselves to the Lord, they can bring the required sacrifices. These sacrifices are identified as "sacrifices and thank offerings." The Hebrew word for sacrifice is *zebach*, which is the regular word for an animal sacrifice. The word for thank offering is *towdach*, which primarily refers to the lifting up of hands.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "The third group of offerings was the *sacrifices and thank-offerings* (vv. 31-35). Though associated with the burnt offerings, they were actually two separate offerings linked by the general term 'fellowship' or 'peace offerings' (*cf.* v. 35; *cf.* Lv. 7:11-21). They were communion offerings where the worshippers enjoyed fellowship together, and were often used on occasions of special thanksgiving rather than at regular times. They differed from those previously offered (vv. 21-30) in that they were individual rather than public sacrifices, brought by *all whose hearts were willing* (v. 31). This precise phrase is paralleled only in the gifts made for Moses' Tent (Ex. 35:5, 22), though a very strong connection again exists with David. The word 'willing' (v. 31) is from the same root as 'to offer freely' which appears seven times in 1 Chronicles 29, again in association with the building of the temple."

Vv. 32 and 33 distinguish between the burnt offerings, consisting of "seventy bulls, a hundred rams and two hundred male lambs" and other sacrifices, numerated as "six hundred bulls and three thousand sheep and goats." The number of consecrated priests available was sufficient for the bringing of the burnt offerings, but not for the second category of sacrifices, which amounted to almost four thousand animals. For this, the help of regular Levites, who normally were not allowed to perform the priestly task, was called upon.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary observes: "The priests were too few ... wherefore their brethren the Levites did help them. The skins of beasts intended as peace

offerings might be taken off by the officers, because in such cases the carcass was not wholly laid upon the altar; but animals meant for burnt offerings, which were wholly consumed by fire, could be flayed by the priests alone, not even Levites being allowed to touch them, except, as here, in cases of unavoidable necessity (2 Chron 35:11). The duty being assigned by the law to the priests (Lev. 1:6), was construed by consuetudinary practice as an exclusion of all others not connected with the Aaronic family.”

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “Originally, the worshipper who was moved to sacrifice was enjoined to slay, flay, and cut in pieces the victim (Lev. 1:3-13). Later the Levites performed these duties, and on great public occasions, at any rate, the priests themselves. The simple tale of this verse speaks volumes of the state of the ecclesiastical profession and of the ecclesiastical heart at this very time. Into the dishonored sepulcher already two or three unsuspected and apparently unacknowledged chinks had let in reproving light as to this, and very lately the almost unavoidable inferences respecting Urijah ... served the same purpose. How true to nature and to history, both secular and ecclesiastical also, the superiority, in sincerity and life and preparation for work, of the subordinates (*the Levites*), to those who fed on dignity rather than maintained it, in the highest sense, by religious life and conscientious practice!”

Evidently, the problem was not that there were not enough priests in Judah to serve in the temple, but a rather large number of them were not consecrated. The Hebrew word used is *qadash*, which means “ceremonial clean.”

What happened was a clear spiritual revival, involving the whole nation. Revivals are the work of the Holy Spirit, who works in response to the people’s desire. Without the Spirit’s involvement, no revival would be possible. It was, therefore, appropriate that the king and the people thanked God for what happened. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* comments: “Both he and the people rejoiced that God had prepared their hearts to bring about so great a reformation in so short a time; for, it is added, the thing was done suddenly. The king’s example and influence were here, under God, the grand spring of all those mighty and effectual movements. What amazing power and influence has God lodged with kings! They can sway a whole empire nearly as they please; and when they declare themselves in behalf of religion, they have the people uniformly on their side. Kings, on this very ground, are no indifferent beings, they must be either a great curse or a great blessing to the people whom they govern.”

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “So the life of the temple was fully *re-established* (vv. 35b-36). The chapter in fact includes all the major types and functions of sacrificial offerings in its pattern of worship: that is, for sin, for praise, and for communion. It also combines the external and internal aspects of worship as well as its Godward and manward dimensions.... Two consequences followed from these offerings. The first was to acknowledge that only God has made it all possible (v. 36; cf. 1 Cor. 12:3; Eph. 2:18). The second was that everyone rejoiced (v. 36), in complete contrast with the situation with which they had begun.”

c. Invitation to the Passover (30:1-12).

i. The assembly’s decision (30:1-5).

1 Hezekiah sent word to all Israel and Judah and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, inviting them to come to the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover to the Lord, the God of Israel.

2 The king and his officials and the whole assembly in Jerusalem decided to celebrate the Passover in the second month.

3 They had not been able to celebrate it at the regular time because not enough priests had consecrated themselves and the people had not assembled in Jerusalem.

4 The plan seemed right both to the king and to the whole assembly.

5 They decided to send a proclamation throughout Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, calling the people to come to Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover to the Lord, the God of Israel. It had not been celebrated in large numbers according to what was written.

According to *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Hezekiah reigned in Judah from 726-697 B.C. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had been taken into captivity to Assyria in 721 B.C. So when Hezekiah sent his letter of invitation to the Israelites who remained in the north, only a fraction of the original tribes was left. Not all Bible scholars, however, agree to the above dates.

Hezekiah's invitation to the northerners, who are mentioned here as Ephraim and Manasseh, was, first of all, an effort to reestablish the unity of the nation. It had been the temple worship at Jerusalem that caused Jeroboam I to institute the idol worship in the north.

We read: "Jeroboam thought to himself, 'The kingdom will now likely revert to the house of David. If these people go up to offer sacrifices at the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, they will again give their allegiance to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah. They will kill me and return to King Rehoboam.' After seeking advice, the king made two golden calves. He said to the people, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' One he set up in Bethel, and the other in Dan. And this thing became a sin; the people went even as far as Dan to worship the one there."¹⁴⁵

Some faithful worshippers of God, living in the north, had moved to the south in order to escape the idolatry that was taking over their dwelling places and to be able to worship the true God.

The Tyndale Commentary states about Hezekiah's effort to draw northerners back to the temple worship: "Chapter 30 does ... contribute two emphases of its own. The first is that of a new potential for unity between south and north. The congregation included people from the northern tribes (vv. 5-6, 10-11, 18, 25; 31:1) who responded to Hezekiah's invitation to come to the temple (v. 11). In comparison with the previous failures, this incident shows that the only really effective approach to unity has to be based on the principle of faithful worship. Where force (2 Ch. 11:1-4; 13:13) and formal agreements (2 Ch. 18:1; 19:2; 25:6-8) had failed, submitting together before God brings a new attitude. The way forward had previously been shown by incidents in the reigns of Rehoboam and Asa (2 Ch. 11:13-17; 15:9), but this event was much more significant. Far more northerners participated than previously, and the recent fall of the northern kingdom in 722 BC meant that Jerusalem now offered the only alternative for corporate worship of the Lord. Also, in comparison with the previous acts of united worship, only the Passover linked Israel's present with its origins. The importance of this unity should not be exaggerated, however, since it was certainly not the case, even in theory, that the whole population was reunited in worship at that time at the Jerusalem temple. Hezekiah was not a second Solomon, for his reign in no way witnessed a return to the conditions of the United Monarchy. Though the principle by which reunification could take place was established, in

¹⁴⁵

I Kings 12:26-30

reality comparatively few responded, and Israel as a whole was further divided by the northern kingdom having been turned into Assyrian provinces.

The second emphasis is the nature of the *Passover*, an issue which is complicated by the question whether it took place at all, and, if so, whether or not it was an innovation. The main difficulty is that 2 Kings mentions no Passover in Hezekiah's reign and further asserts that Josiah's Passover was unparalleled throughout the monarchy period (2 Ch. 35:18; cf. 2 Ki. 23:22-23). When these factors are combined with the theory that Passover and Unleavened Bread did not become a single festival until Josiah's centralized Passover, it is easy to see how Hezekiah's Passover could be regarded as an idealized version of Josiah's. This theory of the origins of the centralized Passover remains unproven, however, and other interpretations of the biblical data are possible. Firstly, it is to be noted that Hezekiah's festival is marked by various irregularities, such as a date in the second rather than the first month (v. 2), a duration of two weeks rather than one (v. 23), and the impurity of some of the participants (vv. 17-20). These were issues of considerable importance, and are not likely to have been invented by a writer such as the Chronicler who was meticulous about cultic matters. Secondly, the two Passovers vary in several important details. Several elements are included in Josiah's but not Hezekiah's Passover, such as transporting the ark (35:3), roasting the lamb after the exodus pattern (35:13), offering sacrifices until nightfall (35:14), and observing the Book of the Covenant (2 Ki. 23:21). Perhaps the most significant difference, however, concerns the Levites, about whom the Chronicler is very particular. While Josiah's Levites were expected to slaughter the animals (35:5-6), here they did so only for people who were unclean (v. 17). These variations show that Hezekiah's Passover cannot have been written up on the basis of Josiah's. Further, 2 Chronicles 35:18 does not claim that the Passover was unknown between the eleventh and the late seventh century BC, but that it had not been celebrated in Josiah's manner during that time. Though the evidence is sparse, Hezekiah's initiative is best explained by his inheriting some tradition of Passover observance. In the light of the irregularities present on this occasion, that tradition is likely to have owed more to precedent than to scriptural authority, but it was strong enough to convince Hezekiah of the potential spiritual and political impact of Passover."

The law provided the opportunity for Israelites to celebrate the Passover on another day than on the 14th day of the first month of the Jewish year, the month of Abib. We read in Numbers: "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Tell the Israelites: 'When any of you or your descendants are unclean because of a dead body or are away on a journey, they may still celebrate the Lord's Passover. They are to celebrate it on the fourteenth day of the second month at twilight. They are to eat the lamb, together with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.'"¹⁴⁶ So Hezekiah's postponement of the celebration did not constitute a breaking of the law.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary comments on the date to which the Passover celebration had been restored: "[In the second month.] In Ijar, as they could not celebrate it in Nisan, the fourteenth of which month was the proper time. But as they could not complete the purgation of the temple, till the sixteenth of that month, therefore they were obliged to hold it now, or else adjourn it till the next year, which would have been fatal to that spirit of reformation which had now taken place. The law itself had given permission to those who were at a distance, and could

¹⁴⁶ Num. 9:9-11

not attend to the fourteenth of the first month, and to those who were accidentally defiled, and ought not to attend, to celebrate the Passover on the fourteenth of the second month; see Num. 9:10-11. Hezekiah therefore, and his counsellors, thought that they might extend that to the people of large, because of the delay necessarily occasioned by the cleansing of the temple, which was granted to individuals in such cases as the above, and the result showed that they had not mistaken the mind of the Lord upon the subject.”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary adds about Hezekiah’s invitation to the northerners to join the celebration: “They established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel ... Hezekiah’s proclamation was, of course, authoritative in his own kingdom, but it could not have been made and circulated in all the towns and villages of the neighboring kingdom without the concurrence, or at least the permission, of the Israelite sovereign. Hoshea, the reigning king, is described as, though evil in some respects, yet more favorably disposed to religious liberty than any of his predecessors since the separation of the kingdom. This is thought to be the meaning of the mitigating clause in his character (2 Kings 17:2). It may be added that the great cause of religious schism between the kingdoms of Israel and Judah had been removed by the transportation of the golden calves—first, that of Dan by Tiglath-Pileser, and, secondly, that of Beth-el by Shalmanezar; and that in consequence, multitudes of the Israelites had resumed their annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem a considerable time before the issue of Hezekiah’s proclamation.” This commentary’s observation is based on the assumption that the people of the Northern Kingdom had not yet been carried off into captivity to Assyria. As we noted earlier, there is no unity of opinion among Bible scholars about some of the dates.

ii. *Letters of invitation (30:6-12).*

6 *At the king's command, couriers went throughout Israel and Judah with letters from the king and from his officials, which read: "People of Israel, return to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, that he may return to you who are left, who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria.*

7 *Do not be like your fathers and brothers, who were unfaithful to the Lord, the God of their fathers, so that he made them an object of horror, as you see.*

8 *Do not be stiff-necked, as your fathers were; submit to the Lord. Come to the sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever. Serve the Lord your God, so that his fierce anger will turn away from you.*

9 *If you return to the Lord, then your brothers and your children will be shown compassion by their captors and will come back to this land, for the Lord your God is gracious and compassionate. He will not turn his face from you if you return to him."*

10 *The couriers went from town to town in Ephraim and Manasseh, as far as Zebulun, but the people scorned and ridiculed them.*

11 *Nevertheless, some men of Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun humbled themselves and went to Jerusalem.*

12 *Also in Judah the hand of God was on the people to give them unity of mind to carry out what the king and his officials had ordered, following the word of the Lord.*

The Tyndale Commentary observes about Hezekiah’s letter: “Surprisingly, the letters do not mention the Passover, despite an invitation to *come to his sanctuary* (v. 8). Merely ‘coming to church,’ even for a special festival, was not the real issue. Rather, an appeal was made for the

people to return to the LORD (vv. 6, 9), that is, to enter into a fresh spiritual relationship with God through the Passover. The whole message is a play on the word ‘turn’ (Heb. *šub*), which also sounds very like the word for ‘captors’ (Heb. *šôbîm*). ‘Turn’ is used with several different nuances. When Israel returns to God in repentance (vv. 6, 9), their exiles will physically return (*come back*) to the Promised Land (v. 9). God will then *turn his face* from them no longer (v. 9) but *turn away* instead his *fierce anger* (v. 8), as he returns to them in compassion (v. 6; *cf.* v. 8).”

Considering the tone of the letter, we could say that it sounds more like a letter written by a prophet than one written by a king. It is obviously a call to repentance, which would bring about reconciliation, first with God and then with Israel’s neighbor, which is Judah. National unity is always based on “In God We Trust.”

The Tyndale Commentary furthermore comments: “Three further characteristics stand out from the letters. The first is that the present troubles have happened because their *fathers and brothers* have been *unfaithful* (vv. 7, 9, NIV, REB, NEB) to God and *stiff-necked* (v. 8, NIV, NRSV, RSV). Exactly the same was said to the priests and Levites in the previous chapter (29:6), and the language of both passages is typically given as a reason why Israel went into exile (*cf.* 1 Ch. 5:25; 9:1; 2 Ch. 28:19; 36:14). This leads on to the second point, that some of Hezekiah’s addressees are assumed to be in exile (v. 9) and others are a ‘remnant’ in the land (v. 6, NRSV). The latter have become *an object of horror* (v. 7, NIV, REB, NEB; Heb. *šammâ*), a well-known prophetic term associated with the judgment of exile (*e.g.* Je. 25:9, 11, 18; Mi. 6:16; *cf.* 2 Ch. 29:8). Although these descriptions assume the loss of the northern kingdom (*cf.* 2 Ki. 18:7-8), they are also well suited to the conditions of the Chronicles’ readers. They too were a remnant who needed to turn to God and trust his compassion. Thirdly, frequent quotations from other scriptures are evident, especially in relation to God’s character. God’s turning towards those who repent, for example, is found in Solomon’s dedicatory prayer (*e.g.* 1 Ki. 8:33-34; 2 Ch. 6:24-25; 7:14) and in Jeremiah (Je. 3:22; 15:19; 31:18-19) and Zechariah (Zc. 1:2-6). That he is *gracious and compassionate* (v. 9, NIV, REB, NEB) is one of the most frequent Old Testament confessions of faith (*e.g.* Ex. 34:6; Ps. 103:8, Ne. 9:17, 31), and that he is the *God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel* (v. 6) recalls his answer to Elijah’s prayers (1 Ki. 18:36).

The heart of the message, therefore, is an appeal to submit to the LORD (v. 8, REB, NEB, GNB, NIV; ‘yield,’ JB, NRSV, RSV) and ‘worship’ him (v. 8, REB, NEB, GNB; *serve*, NIV, NRSV, RSV). The beginning and end call for Israel’s return, stressing that God prefers to see his people face to face rather than turn his back on them (*cf.* vv. 8-9; 29:6). The response was predictably mixed, and many in the pagan north ‘laughed and scoffed’ (v. 10, JB), but others were receptive (vv. 11-12). More northerners than usual responded in the spirit of 2 Chronicles 7:14 and *humbled themselves* (v. 11), while in the south the *hand of God* gave unexpected unity (v. 12).”

d. Celebrating the Passover (30:13-31:1).

i. Celebrating the festival (30:13-22).

13 A very large crowd of people assembled in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month.

14 They removed the altars in Jerusalem and cleared away the incense altars and threw them into the Kidron Valley.

15 They slaughtered the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the second month. The priests and the Levites were ashamed and consecrated themselves and brought burnt offerings to the temple of the Lord.

16 Then they took up their regular positions as prescribed in the Law of Moses the man of God. The priests sprinkled the blood handed to them by the Levites.

17 Since many in the crowd had not consecrated themselves, the Levites had to kill the Passover lambs for all those who were not ceremonially clean and could not consecrate [their lambs] to the Lord.

18 Although most of the many people who came from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun had not purified themselves, yet they ate the Passover, contrary to what was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the Lord, who is good, pardon everyone

19 who sets his heart on seeking God — the Lord, the God of his fathers — even if he is not clean according to the rules of the sanctuary."

20 And the Lord heard Hezekiah and healed the people.

21 The Israelites who were present in Jerusalem celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days with great rejoicing, while the Levites and priests sang to the Lord every day, accompanied by the Lord's instruments of praise.

22 Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites, who showed good understanding of the service of the Lord. For the seven days they ate their assigned portion and offered fellowship offerings and praised the Lord, the God of their fathers.

The Tyndale Commentary has a lengthy comment on the Passover celebration under Hezekiah's reign, of which we copy the following: "(a) Unusually large numbers, especially the *many people* from the north (v. 18; cf. vv. 13, 17). The people as a whole had clearly complied with the requirements of the law (v. 5), and reflected Hezekiah's desire that representatives of all Israel were present (cf. v. 1).

(b) Removing sin and impurity. This took place in three stages. The first is the removal of the *altars* which Ahaz had set up in Jerusalem, with the debris being discarded in the *Kidron Valley* (v. 14; cf. 29:16). The second is when the people, especially the priests and Levites, purified themselves (v. 15; cf. v. 17). *Consecrated* ('sanctified,' NRSV, RSV, JB) really means 'made themselves holy,' i.e. set themselves apart for God, and involved separation from all forms of uncleanness (cf. 1 Ch. 15:12, 14; 2 Ch. 29:5, 15; 31:18). The third stage is the offering of sacrificial *blood*, which was a distinctive feature of Passover.... A special problem arose with some of the northerners who were ceremonially unclean. As a result, their animals had to be killed by the Levites (v. 17) and Hezekiah prayed for their forgiveness (vv. 18-20).... Hezekiah's intercession is one of the many significant prayers in Chronicles (cf. e.g. 1 Ch. 4:9-10; 5:20; 2 Ch. 14:11; 33:13). This one illustrates two important principles: that God honors prayer requests offered in the spirit of Solomon's dedicatory prayer (6:18-42; 7:12-16) and that prayer can overcome any formal deficiency in religious practice. Hezekiah prays for pardon (v. 18), literally, that God would 'make atonement' alongside the people's sacrifice. God's acceptance is indicated by the fact that he *heard* and *healed* the people, fulfilling his promise in 2 Chronicles 7:14. Healing is mentioned specially in Chronicles only in these two verses (though cf. 2 Ch. 36:16). Though this verse may assume some physical affliction, more probably it is God's direct answer to the request for forgiveness. This healing is therefore primarily of a spiritual nature, as frequently in the Old Testament (Ps. 41:4; Is. 53:5; Je. 30:17).

(c) Joyful praise. With their sin and uncleanness removed, the people were released into ‘great joy (v. 21, GNB) and *praise* (vv. 21-22). This is a regular feature of worship in Chronicles, and the joy frequently follows special signs of God’s forgiving grace (cf. 1 Ch. 12:40; 15:25; 29:22; 2 Ch. 29:30). Again, the Levites have a central role (cf. vv. 15-17), this time with their music (v. 21; cf. 29:25-27) and in making voluntary fellowship offerings (v. 22; NIV; cf. 29:31-35; according to NRSV, RSV, GNB, these offerings were made by the people). They participated either with ‘loud instruments’ (NRSV; cf. NIV mg., GNB mg.) or, by a slight change in the text, ‘with all their might’ (JB; cf. REB, NEB). Either way, their enthusiasm was not in doubt, nor was their ‘good skill’ (v. 22, NRSV, RSV, cf. GNB; *good understanding*, NIV, cf. NEB).”

The Hebrew text reads literally: “And Hezekiah spoke comfortably unto all the Levites that taught [the] good knowledge of the Lord.” No wonder that the different Bible versions have come up with different interpretations of this complicated sentence!

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the priests and Levites being “ashamed”: “Hebrew, *kalam*. This word, occurring in one conjugation or another thirty-eight times, expresses in every instance a genuine shame. It now was the forerunner of a practical repenting.”

ii. *Continuing the blessing (30:23-31:1).*

23 *The whole assembly then agreed to celebrate the festival seven more days; so for another seven days they celebrated joyfully.*

24 *Hezekiah king of Judah provided a thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep and goats for the assembly, and the officials provided them with a thousand bulls and ten thousand sheep and goats. A great number of priests consecrated themselves.*

25 *The entire assembly of Judah rejoiced, along with the priests and Levites and all who had assembled from Israel, including the aliens who had come from Israel and those who lived in Judah.*

26 *There was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the days of Solomon son of David king of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem.*

27 *The priests and the Levites stood to bless the people, and God heard them, for their prayer reached heaven, his holy dwelling place.*

31:1 *When all this had ended, the Israelites who were there went out to the towns of Judah, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. They destroyed the high places and the altars throughout Judah and Benjamin and in Ephraim and Manasseh. After they had destroyed all of them, the Israelites returned to their own towns and to their own property.*

The weeklong celebration that followed the Passover was the feast of unleavened bread. At the original Passover, God gave the instructions: “For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel.” The second week celebration must have been an extension of this feast.

When Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples, He didn’t take the Passover Lamb and said “This is my body.” He pronounced those words while taking the bread. The lamb did represent His ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the world. We only partake once of this sacrifice. When we accept the fact the Jesus Christ died for our sins, we move from death into life. This is a one-time experience. When Jesus identified Himself with the unleavened bread,

which was to be eaten every day of the week of celebration, He showed us that our life-giving fellowship with Him was to be a day-by-day experience. One week represents a lifetime.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “The ceremony was so successful that it was extended for a second week, as at that temple dedication (v. 23; cf. 2 Ch. 7:9-10). The second week continues in the same vein as the first, though with two variations. The large numbers are applied to the amounts of offerings rather than to the size of the crowd (v. 24; cf. 29:32-25), and the note of *joy* is accentuated (vv. 23, 25, 26). The reason for this deeper joy is that the people had become more aware of their togetherness (v. 25) and of being part of God’s long-term purposes (v. 26). To be in God’s will always ends in joy, as Jesus himself confirmed (Jn. 15:9-11; Heb. 12:2).

The sense of common purpose is particularly striking, with the *whole assembly* deciding to continue (v. 23). A unique insight into the make-up of the assembly is given in verse 25, which mentions four constituent parts, *viz.* separate assemblies for Judah and for Israel (for the latter, cf. 28:14), for priests and Levites and for ‘resident aliens’ (REB, NEB). The latter could be either the foreigners resettled in Israel by the Assyrians (cf. GNB) or an early version of proselytes The former is a particularly attractive interpretation, adding an interesting evangelistic dimension to the Passover, but in any case, the presence of foreigners is another example of a return to the spirit of the Mosaic Law (cf. Nu. 9:14). This is also one of the most comprehensive examples in the Old Testament of the inclusion of non-worshippers of Yahweh among God’s people, for neither the northerners nor the resident aliens would have had much accurate knowledge of the ways of the Lord. It is noteworthy too that they seem to be included in Israel’s worship before becoming incorporated into its political structures.

The end of the festival saw two further consequences. First, the people were blessed by the ‘Levitical priests’ (v. 27, JB). The blessing was a *prayer* which God heard (cf. v. 20), confirming the temple as a genuine house of prayer. It also illustrates again Israel’s return to the principles of the Pentateuch (cf. Nu. 6:22-27) and of Solomon (cf. 2 Ch. 6:21, 30, 33). Secondly, the people spontaneously destroyed centers of pagan worship in the former northern kingdom (*Ephraim and Manasseh*) as well as Judah (*Judah and Benjamin*). Hezekiah’s previous emphasis on removing the paraphernalia of idol worship (cf. 29:15-19; 30:14; also 2 Ki. 18:22) now became a popular movement. While 31:1 is loosely based on 2 Kings 18:4, the *Israelites* rather than Hezekiah have become the subject of the verbs. The same democratic interest was not in Chronicler’s version of David (cf. 1 Ch. 13:1-4; 15:25-28), and is probably intended in both cases to encourage the people of the Chronicler’s day to restore faith patterns of worship for themselves.”

The Hebrew text of v. 27 reads literally: “Then the priests and Levites arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place [even] unto heaven.”

No explanation is given as to how those prayers of blessing were answered. If the priests and Levites simply pronounced the Mosaic blessing: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace,”¹⁴⁷ it would have been difficult to observe any physical evidence of answered prayer.

¹⁴⁷ Num. 6:24-26

The Adam Clarke's Commentary, probably, has the best interpretation with the following: "Since the smoke of their sacrifices ascended to the clouds, so did their prayers, supplications, and thanksgivings, ascend to the heavens. The Targum says: 'Their prayer came up to the dwelling-place of his holy shechinah, which is in heaven.' Israel now appeared to be in a fair way of regaining what they had lost; but alas, how soon were all these bright prospects beclouded forever!

It is not for the want of holy resolutions and heavenly influences that men are not saved, but through their own unsteadiness; they do not persevere, they forget the necessity of continuing in prayer, and thus the Holy Spirit is grieved, departs from them, and leaves them to their own darkness and hardness of heart. When we consider the heavenly influences which many receive who draw back to perdition, and the good fruits which for a time they bore, it is blasphemy to say they had no genuine or saving grace; they had it, they showed it, they trifled with it, sinned against it, continued in their rebellions, and therefore are lost."

One visible fruit of answered prayer was the change in attitude the people experienced toward the symbols of idolatry that surrounded them. They went around the sites and cleansed the whole country of all sacred stones and Asherah poles.

Barnes' Notes observes about this outburst of spiritual zeal: "Jerusalem had been cleansed (2 Chron 30:14); now the land had to be purged. Hezekiah therefore gave his sanction to a popular movement directed as much against the 'high places' which had been maintained since the times of the patriarchs, as against the remnants of the Baal-worship, or the innovations of Ahaz. ... The invasion of the northern kingdom 'Ephraim and Manasseh' by a tumultuous crowd from the southern one, and the success which attended the movement, can only be explained by the state of weakness into which the northern kingdom had fallen...."

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "The end of the festival saw two further consequences. First, the people were blessed by the 'Levitical priests' (v. 27, JB). The blessing was a *prayer* which God heard (*cf.* v. 20), confirming the temple as a genuine house of prayer. It also illustrates again Israel's return to the principles of the Pentateuch (*cf.* 2 Ch. 6:22-27) and of Solomon (*cf.* 2 Ch. 6:21, 30, 33). Secondly, the people spontaneously destroyed centers of pagan worship in the former northern kingdom (*Ephraim and Manasseh*) as well as Judah (*Judah and Benjamin*). Hezekiah's previous emphasis on removing the paraphernalia of idol worship (*cf.* 29:15-10; 30:14; also 2 Ki. 18:22) now became a popular movement. While 31:1 is loosely based on 2 Kings 18:4, the *Israelites* rather than Hezekiah have become the subject of the verbs. The same democratic interest was noted in Chronicles' version of David (*cf.* 1 Ch. 13:1-4; 15:25-28), and is probably intended in both cases to encourage the people of the Chronicler's day to restore faithful patterns of worship for themselves."

e. Reorganizing tithes and offerings (31:2-21).

1. Heaps of gifts (31:2-10).

2 Hezekiah assigned the priests and Levites to divisions — each of them according to their duties as priests or Levites — to offer burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, to minister, to give thanks and to sing praises at the gates of the Lord's dwelling.

3 The king contributed from his own possessions for the morning and evening burnt offerings and for the burnt offerings on the Sabbaths, New Moons and appointed feasts as written in the Law of the Lord.

4 He ordered the people living in Jerusalem to give the portion due the priests and Levites so they could devote themselves to the Law of the Lord.

5 As soon as the order went out, the Israelites generously gave the firstfruits of their grain, new wine, oil and honey and all that the fields produced. They brought a great amount, a tithe of everything.

6 The men of Israel and Judah who lived in the towns of Judah also brought a tithe of their herds and flocks and a tithe of the holy things dedicated to the Lord their God, and they piled them in heaps.

7 They began doing this in the third month and finished in the seventh month.

8 When Hezekiah and his officials came and saw the heaps, they praised the Lord and blessed his people Israel.

9 Hezekiah asked the priests and Levites about the heaps;

10 and Azariah the chief priest, from the family of Zadok, answered, "Since the people began to bring their contributions to the temple of the Lord, we have had enough to eat and plenty to spare, because the Lord has blessed his people, and this great amount is left over."

The Tyndale Commentary introduces this section with the following general observations: "Hezekiah's cleansing of the temple (ch. 29) and celebration of the Passover (ch. 30) enabled him to re-establish regular worship. This involved two further tasks, reorganizing the priests and Levites (v. 2) and establishing proper financial support for temple personnel and the system of offerings (vv. 4-19). The dominant emphasis of chapter 31 falls on the practical giving of the people, however. Though the king's leadership provided an important stimulus, an effective system of worship was not possible without full popular involvement.

The apparently routine character of this chapter is deceptive, for it deals with two principles of first importance. The first is that worship cannot be left to the 'professionals.' The latter must certainly fulfil their God-given roles, but direct participation by the people is equally crucial (*cf.* 1 Cor. 14:26). For that reason, it was not only the inhabitants of the towns of *Judah* (v. 6) as well as of *Jerusalem* (v. 4) who made their contributions, but possibly also migrants from the north (vv. 5, 6). However, the most distinctive feature of the people's support is not the fact of it but its generosity. They gave 'in abundance' (v. 5, NRSV, RSV) and brought *a great amount, a tithe of everything* (v. 5), with their gifts standing in piles or *heaps* (vv. 6, 8, 9). As a result, Judah enjoyed a double blessing: recognizing that the Lord had blessed his people (v. 10), the leaders blessed *the LORD and his people Israel* (v. 8).

The second principle is the care needed to ensure that Israel's worship is carried out 'decently and in order' (*cf.* 1 Cor. 14:40). Good planning and the implementation of adequate supporting structures provide a framework in which wholehearted and meaningful worship can take place. Hezekiah therefore prepared storerooms to receive the gifts, and various officials were appointed to collect and distribute them (vv. 11-19). The key characteristic of this administrative work is that it was done faithfully (vv. 12, 15; *cf.* v. 18). The Hebrew word (^e*mûnā*) which this translates is always used in Chronicles of the Levites' carefulness over financial matters (1 Ch. 9:22, 26, 31; 2 Ch. 19:9; 34:12) and illustrates that right attitudes are essential to make any structure function effectively. In this case, the Levites' faithful observance of their duties enabled the maximum number of people to benefit from God's blessing (*cf.* Pr. 28:20; Mt. 25:21, 23).

The divine blessing which forms the climax in this chapter has several distinguishing marks. Firstly, it is the result of Hezekiah's faithfulness to the principles established by David

and Solomon. It was they who had originally organized the divisions of priests and Levites (v. 2; cf. 1 Ch. 28:13, 21; 2 Ch. 8:14), established the pattern of regular sacrificial worship (vv. 2-3; 1 Ch. 23:31; 2 Ch. 2:4; 8:13), led the way in generosity (v. 3; 1 Ch. 29:2-5; 2 Ch. 7:5), and blessed the people (v. 8; 1 Ch. 16:2; 2 Ch. 6:3). Secondly, it is associated with Hezekiah's wholehearted commitment to God's law (vv. 3, 4, 21). Thirdly, God blesses his people through their own generosity (cf. 1 Ch. 29:14-16). The sense of unlooked-for bonus is repeated elsewhere in the Bible (e.g. Mt. 14:20; 19:29; 2 Cor. 9:8), as one would expect from God's own promise (Mal. 3:8-10). God's blessing is never granted on a *quid pro quo* basis, as a reward or a right, for God can never be bound by any human action. The real guarantee of God's overflowing love is his own character."

ii. Faithful distribution (31:11-19).

11 Hezekiah gave orders to prepare storerooms in the temple of the Lord, and this was done.

12 Then they faithfully brought in the contributions, tithes and dedicated gifts. Conaniah, a Levite, was in charge of these things, and his brother Shimei was next in rank.

13 Jehiel, Azaziah, Nahath, Asahel, Jerimoth, Jozabad, Eliel, Ismakiah, Mahath and Benaiah were supervisors under Conaniah and Shimei his brother, by appointment of King Hezekiah and Azariah the official in charge of the temple of God.

14 Kore son of Imnah the Levite, keeper of the East Gate, was in charge of the freewill offerings given to God, distributing the contributions made to the Lord and also the consecrated gifts.

15 Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah and Shecaniah assisted him faithfully in the towns of the priests, distributing to their fellow priests according to their divisions, old and young alike.

16 In addition, they distributed to the males three years old or more whose names were in the genealogical records — all who would enter the temple of the Lord to perform the daily duties of their various tasks, according to their responsibilities and their divisions.

17 And they distributed to the priests enrolled by their families in the genealogical records and likewise to the Levites twenty years old or more, according to their responsibilities and their divisions.

18 They included all the little ones, the wives, and the sons and daughters of the whole community listed in these genealogical records. For they were faithful in consecrating themselves.

19 As for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who lived on the farm lands around their towns or in any other towns, men were designated by name to distribute portions to every male among them and to all who were recorded in the genealogies of the Levites.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on Hezekiah's orders to reorganize the storage facilities in the temple: "Either the old ones, which had been allowed through neglect to fall into decay, were to be repaired, or additional ones built. Private individuals brought their own first-fruits to the temple; but the tithes were levied by the Levites, who kept a faithful account of them in their several places of abode, and transmitted the allotted proportion to the priests. Officers were appointed to distribute equal rations to all in the cities of the priests who, from age or other reasons, could not repair to the temple. With the exception of children under three years of age—an exception made probably from their being considered unfit to receive solid food—lists were kept of the number and age of every male, of priests according to

their fathers' house, and Levites from 20 years of age and up (see Num 6:3; 28:24; 1 Chron 23:24). But, besides, provision was also made for their wives, daughters, and servants.”

Most of this section consists of a list of names of Levites who had the supervision of the gifts that were brought in. The names have no meaning for us and we could ask what spiritual blessing we could receive by contemplating them in a devotional manner.

Why would the Holy Spirit give us such a detailed list? The first answer could be that God considered these people important enough to be mentioned specifically. He pays attention to individuals. This implies that He pays personal attention to us, to me. God is a God of detail, to an extent that surpasses our imagination. Jesus emphasized how detailed God's interest in us is, by saying: “And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”¹⁴⁸

The Tyndale Commentary states about the administration of the gifts the people brought to the temple: “The gifts are distributed to the priestly and Levitical families in various stages.

(a) They were placed first in the temple *storerooms* (vv. 11-13). These were located either around the main building (*cf.* 1 Ch. 28:11) or near the gates (*cf.* 1 Ch. 9:26; 26:15, 17; Ne. 12:25), where they were most naturally supervised by gatekeepers (1 Ch. 9:26). A distinction seems to be made between the various types of gifts, the *tithes* for the Levites and the *contributions* and *dedicated* or consecrated things for the priests (v. 12). The *contributions* seem to be the same as the firstfruits (v. 5). In over-all charge is the priest, here called the official in charge of the temple of God (v. 13; *cf.* v. 10; also 1 Ch. 9:11; 2 Ch. 35:8; Ne. 11:1).

(b) Gifts were then distributed, first to those *priests* living in outlying *towns* whose names were not apparently recorded in genealogical lists (vv. 14-15). The *keeper of the East Gate* seems to have been the senior gatekeeper (*cf.* 1 Ch. 9:18; 26:14). The people's gifts are *freewill offerings* (v. 14), that is, given over and above what was actually required in the law.

(c) These further groups of people whose names were listed in *genealogical records* then received gifts (vv. 16-19). First the *males* who performed regular duties in the temple (v. 16), then the priestly and Levitical families living in Jerusalem (vv. 17-18), and finally the priestly families outside Jerusalem (v. 19). The latter were the registered counterparts of those mentioned in verses 14-15....”

The Pulpit Commentary comments on v. 17: “It is hard to feel certain as to the exact construction of this and the following verse. [One Bible scholar] would translate here, ‘And concerning the catalogue of the priests, it was according, etc.; and the Levites, *they were* from twenty years,’ etc. And arrived at 2 Ch. 31:18, and unable to proceed in like manner with it, he reverts to the ‘to give’ of 2 Ch. 31:15, as what is to stand before the words, ‘*to the genealogy* [or, ‘catalogue’] of all their little ones.’ He thus treats both 2 Ch. 31:16 and 2 Ch. 31:16 as parenthetical. It seems quite as probable that the ‘to give’ should be shown before 2 Ch. 31:17 as well as 2 Ch. 31:18. On the whole, this seems to suit best the entire passage.”

iii. *Hezekiah's prosperity (31:20-21).*

20 This is what Hezekiah did throughout Judah, doing what was good and right and faithful before the Lord his God.

¹⁴⁸

Matt. 10:30

21 In everything that he undertook in the service of God's temple and in obedience to the law and the commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so he prospered.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “Hezekiah finished his task because he sought God *whole-heartedly* (v. 21). In this, he complied with David’s advice (*cf.* 1 Ch. 22:19; 28:9) and followed the pattern of other kings (*cf.* 2 Ch. 15:17; 22:9; *cf.* 2 Ch. 11:16; 19:3). To seek God in this way inevitably meant giving temple worship first priority, but it also affected his whole life. As a result, Hezekiah prospered, as had several of his predecessors. Though the path to prosperity involved Hezekiah in disappointment (2 Ch. 30:10), severe crisis (32:1-23), and coming to terms with the reality of his sin (32:25-26), God never fails to bless those who look to him (*cf.* Ps. 1:1-3; 32:1-2; Mt. 5:3-12; 19:29).”

The Hebrew text of v. 20 reads literally that Hezekiah “wrought [that which was] good and right and truth before the Lord, his God.” The Hebrew words are *towb*, which also has the meaning of “beautiful,” and “cheerful,” *yashar*, which has the added meaning of “straight,” and *‘emeth*, which can also mean “stability” and “trustworthiness.” Hezekiah’s life was dominated by his fellowship with God.

God rewarded him with prosperity. The Hebrew word here is *tsalach*, which literally means “to push forward.” The word is used for the first time in Scripture in connection with Abraham’s servant Eliezer’s search for a bride for Isaac. When he arrived in Mesopotamia, and met Rebekah at the well, we read: “Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the Lord had made his journey successful.”¹⁴⁹ God gave him success in answer to his prayer.

iv. God saves Judah through Hezekiah’s faith (32:1-33)

a. Hezekiah defends (32:1-8).

1 After all that Hezekiah had so faithfully done, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah. He laid siege to the fortified cities, thinking to conquer them for himself.

2 When Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come and that he intended to make war on Jerusalem,

3 he consulted with his officials and military staff about blocking off the water from the springs outside the city, and they helped him.

4 A large force of men assembled, and they blocked all the springs and the stream that flowed through the land. "Why should the kings of Assyria come and find plenty of water?" they said.

5 Then he worked hard repairing all the broken sections of the wall and building towers on it. He built another wall outside that one and reinforced the supporting terraces of the City of David. He also made large numbers of weapons and shields.

6 He appointed military officers over the people and assembled them before him in the square at the city gate and encouraged them with these words:

¹⁴⁹ Gen. 24:21

7 "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him.

8 With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles." And the people gained confidence from what Hezekiah the king of Judah said.

Hezekiah's faith and fellowship with God did not mean that he would not be put to the test. Oswald Chambers, in his daily devotional "Still higher for His highest," writes: "The nature of faith is that it must be tested; and the trial of faith does not come in fits and starts, it goes on all the time.... The question for us is, will we so yield ourselves wholly to the realization of some purpose of God? The trial of your faith is in order to bring God into the practical details of your life."

Hezekiah's insight in the meaning of the difficulties God allowed him and Judah to experience is most amazing. A natural reaction would have been to ask if this was God's answer to his faithfulness. Is that the way God repays people who surrender their lives to Him?

Hezekiah understood that there is a greater power that protects than the physical power that threatens. He realized that the power of God was infinitely greater than anything Satan could come up with. Elisha saw this reality and prayed that God would open the eyes of his servant, Gehazi, so he could see it too.¹⁵⁰ The Apostle John would later state the same truth that Hezekiah expounds here: "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."¹⁵¹

Hezekiah's faith in God did not make him sit back and wait for supernatural protection against the threat of the Assyrian army that invaded his territory. He made some very practical arrangements that would put roadblocks on King Sennacherib's way to victory.

Water is an important entity in a country that depends on a few seasonal rain showers a year. So Hezekiah consulted with his military advisers and decided to deprive the Assyrian king of any water supply he might need in order to carry out a successful siege of Jerusalem.

Hezekiah's faith became an inspiration and encouragement for the population. They began to put their faith in God's protection also.

There is a similar illustration in the history of the Netherlands in the sixteenth century. Netherland was under the power of the king of Spain who was a staunch Roman Catholic and was strongly opposed to the Reformation that influenced that part of his territory. His administrator was the Prince of Orange, the founding father of the House of Orange, which still rules the country. The king of Spain sent troops to the Netherlands to wipe out the Reformation. William of Orange opposed this, but he had not troops to fight the Spanish army. One of his advisers asked him why he was not seeking an alliance with other European powers that could help against a Spanish invasion. His answer was "I have made an alliance with the Potentate of potentates." God honored his faith and the Reformation established itself firmly in the Netherlands.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "*Hezekiah's* efforts to restore faithful worship (chs. 29-31) forms the background to Chronicles' version of Hezekiah's confrontation with

¹⁵⁰ II Kings 6:16, 17

¹⁵¹ I John 4:4

Sennacherib of Assyria (vv. 1-23). Though this was one of the most important events in the history of the monarchy (cf. 2 Ki. 18:13 – 19:37), what Chronicles describes is no ordinary military battle. Neither the Assyrian nor the Israelite army plays any part in what is effectively a war of words. A speech by Hezekiah (vv. 6b-8) is followed by spoken and written threats by Assyrian officials (vv. 9-19). Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah then turn to prayer (v. 20), and only after that does any action take place (v. 21).”

Seen from the human angle, Judah had no chance of survival. The Assyrian army could have overrun the country and wiped out its population.

The Tyndale Commentary, after mentioning Hezekiah’s reforms of the temple worship, states: “Where Hezekiah had acted faithfully, the Assyrian king had no regard at all for Yahweh, and conflict was inevitable. These events are also a reminder that even for leaders who trust God, things do not always go smoothly, and it is surely significant that Asa and Jehoshaphat as well as Hezekiah suffered acts of foreign aggression after carrying out acts of piety (cf. 2 Ch. 14:9-11; 20:1-13; notice the repetition of *after this* or *these things* from 20:1). The genuineness of faith often emerges only in one’s reaction to trouble.

Sennacherib’s invasion is reported in detail in extant Assyrian records, where he claimed to have captured forty-six Judean towns, overrunning practically the whole of Judah outside Jerusalem (cf. 2 Ki. 18:13)....

Hezekiah’s reaction, like that of wise kings before him, was to *consult* with others (cf. e.g. 1 Ch. 13:1; 2 Ch. 20:21). As a result, they decided on a two-pronged response. The first involved three practical steps, to prevent the Assyrians gaining access to Jerusalem’s water supply (vv. 3b-4; cf. v. 30), to repair the city walls (v. 5a), and to reorganize and re-equip the army (vv. 5b-6a). Jerusalem’s water supply was vulnerable to any attack, since it was totally dependent on two springs, Gihon in the Kidron valley (v. 30) and En-Rogel two miles to the south. The *stream that flowed through the land* (v. 4) is probably a local watercourse (cf. JB) supplying parts of the city. Mention of the stream and the springs may well be a double allusion to God’s special provision for Jerusalem (cf. Ps. 46:4) and to Sennacherib’s to have personally dried up Egypt’s streams (2 Ki. 19:24; Is. 37:25). Reference to the *kings* (plural) of *Assyria* (v. 4) also suggests that Sennacherib was seen as a typical foreign invader and an enemy of God. Part of a *wall* (v. 5) which could well be Hezekiah’s has been uncovered on the western hill. At seven meters thick, it is the thickest Iron Age wall known in Palestine, and was presumably designed to withstand powerful Assyrian battering rams. It was constructed from demolished houses and seems to have enclosed a reservoir of water (cf. Is. 22:8-11), possibly brought from Gihon via Hezekiah’s famous tunnel. The ‘Milo’ (v. 5, REB, NEB, etc.; *supporting terraces*, NIV) was part of the old city of David, and the mention of repairs in this area provides a further link with David and Solomon (1 Ch. 11:8; 1 Ki. 11:27).

Hezekiah’s second response is to encourage military commanders (v. 6) *not to be afraid* of the invaders but to trust God (vv. 7-8). He clearly shared Isaiah’s view that the danger of trusting in military defenses alone was very real (Is. 22:8-11).... Hezekiah’s message concentrates on rejecting fear and accepting the difference between human and divine strength. His answer to the power of fear is to repeat a series of four imperatives previously issued by Moses, Joshua (Dt. 31:7-8, 23; Jos. 1:6-9), and David (1 Ch. 22:13, 28:30), viz. *Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged* (v. 7). The reason for his confidence is that he is utterly convinced about the supremacy of his God in every situation....

It is not surprising that the people ‘were encouraged by’ (NRSV), literally, ‘leaned on,’ Hezekiah’s words (cf. 2 Ki. 18:13, where the same word reappears). Many were clearly afraid

and tempted to rely on the defenses they had constructed. The fact that they met the Assyrians by and aqueduct (2 Ki. 18:17-18) suggests they had to endure fresh threats even while working on the water supply (2 Ki. 18:19-27; 2 Ch. 32:9-15). However, under Hezekiah's leadership unity and faith both increased. They joined together as a 'great many people' (v. NRSV, RSV) to *help* the king (v. 3) before assembling for their encouragement in one of the city's squares (v. 5; cf. 29:4)."

b. Sennacherib attacks (32:9-19).

9 Later, when Sennacherib king of Assyria and all his forces were laying siege to Lachish, he sent his officers to Jerusalem with this message for Hezekiah king of Judah and for all the people of Judah who were there:

10 "This is what Sennacherib king of Assyria says: On what are you basing your confidence, that you remain in Jerusalem under siege?

11 When Hezekiah says, 'The Lord our God will save us from the hand of the king of Assyria,' he is misleading you, to let you die of hunger and thirst.

12 Did not Hezekiah himself remove this god's high places and altars, saying to Judah and Jerusalem, 'You must worship before one altar and burn sacrifices on it'?

13 "Do you not know what I and my fathers have done to all the peoples of the other lands? Were the gods of those nations ever able to deliver their land from my hand?

14 Who of all the gods of these nations that my fathers destroyed has been able to save his people from me? How then can your god deliver you from my hand?

15 Now do not let Hezekiah deceive you and mislead you like this. Do not believe him, for no god of any nation or kingdom has been able to deliver his people from my hand or the hand of my fathers. How much less will your god deliver you from my hand!"

16 Sennacherib's officers spoke further against the Lord God and against his servant Hezekiah.

17 The king also wrote letters insulting the Lord, the God of Israel, and saying this against him: "Just as the gods of the peoples of the other lands did not rescue their people from my hand, so the god of Hezekiah will not rescue his people from my hand."

18 Then they called out in Hebrew to the people of Jerusalem who were on the wall, to terrify them and make them afraid in order to capture the city.

19 They spoke about the God of Jerusalem as they did about the gods of the other peoples of the world — the work of men's hands.

It is amazing to see how well informed the Assyrian king was about the spiritual condition of the people of Judah and Jerusalem. This suggests that there may have been pro-Assyrian elements among the population who passed on information to the Assyrians. Sennacherib knew what Hezekiah had said to the people.

His mistake was that he equated the God of Israel with the idols of the nations he had conquered. God takes such insults very personally. Some of Isaiah's prophecies speak clearly to that point. It was probably at the time of the Assyrian threat that Isaiah received the Word of God that said: "To whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared?"¹⁵² And: "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none

¹⁵² Isa. 46:5

like me.”¹⁵³ It was at that time that God promised: “I will grant salvation to Zion, my splendor to Israel.”¹⁵⁴

There is no specific indication of the time at which Sennacherib sent a delegation with the following threatening message to Hezekiah. The NIV states “later.” The Hebrew text reads literally “After this.” *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “The passage beginning with this verse and ending with 2 Ch. 32:21 represents the much fuller parallel (2 Ki. 18:17-19:37), fifty-eight verses in all. This much greater fullness is owing to the greater length at which the language of defiance on the part of Sennacherib and his appointed officers is narrated, and the matter of his subsequent letter; also the prayer of Hezekiah; and his application to Isaiah, with the reply of the latter to it. On the other side, there is very little additional in our narrative, a few words heightening the effect in our verses 18, 20, 21, constituting the whole of such additional matter. The vague mark of time, *after this*, with which our present verse opens, merely says that in due course of Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah, and attack of the fenced cities (verse 1), he proceeds to send his servants and his insolent defiances to the metropolis, Jerusalem itself. The three words in italics, ‘himself *laid* siege,’ should evidently give place to the single word ‘remained’ or ‘was;’ *i.e.* he and all his host with him remained at, or opposite to, Lachish, while his servants went to defy Jerusalem in his name.”

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “The speech by Assyrian officers (vv. 10-15) is in reality a masterly combination of several addresses (2 Ki. 18:10-25, 27-35; 19:9-13). The variety of arguments in the original speeches has been reduced to a single theme, whose significance is further underlined by the Chronicler’s own editorial summaries (vv. 16:18-19). Also, Chronicles has supplied a résumé of several *letters* sent to Hezekiah by Sennacherib (v. 17), even though in Kings only one is mentioned without any precise indication as to its contents (2 Ki. 19:14-19).

It is not entirely clear from Chronicles alone where the Assyrian army was located. The ‘large army’ (2 Ki. 18:17) which accompanied the officers to Jerusalem has been omitted, creating the possible impression that the Assyrian forces remained at *Lachish* (v. 9) and that no siege took place at Jerusalem However, since it is clear elsewhere in the chapter that the Chronicler assumes his readers are aware of the detailed version of events in Kings, it would be odd if the same were not true here.

The central question is whether Yahweh can rescue his people in their hour of need or whether he is as ineffective as the gods of Assyria’s previous defeated opponents. The key phrase, *deliver you from my hand*, based on 2 Kings 18:30, 32, 35, is constantly repeated as a direct challenge to the people’s *confidence* (v. 10) in the Lord. Sennacherib’s aim was to undermine the object of Israel’s trust, which is all the more interesting in that trust is also a common theme in Assyrian historical inscriptions. The Assyrians employ two main arguments. The first is that Hezekiah must have displeased Yahweh by destroying so many of his altars (vv. 11-12). Detailed knowledge of the internal affairs of other countries is often paralleled in contemporary Assyrian letters. The Assyrians were clearly aware of Hezekiah’s policy to centralize worship long before Josiah (2 Ch. 34-36), though their neutral stance indicates it was

¹⁵³ Isa. 46:9

¹⁵⁴ Isa. 46:13

not seen as an anti-Assyrian move. More importantly from the Chronicler's point of view was that this amounted to opposition to Hezekiah's faithfulness to God (chs. 29-31).

The Assyrian second strategy is to appeal to history (vv. 13-15). The victories by Sennacherib's predecessors (*my fathers*, vv.13, 14, 15) showed how impotent were the gods of their defeated foes. Sennacherib in contrast boasts that his achievements have been won not by Assyria's deities but by *my hand* (vv. 13, 14, 15, 17). The Chronicler has summarized his source extensively at this point, omitting not only the names of foreign gods (2 Ki. 18:34; 19:12), but also an offer of peace and plenty in Assyria for anyone who wished to surrender (2 Ki. 18:31-32; cf. the mention of *hunger and thirst* in v. 11). All this, however, merely supports his accusation that Hezekiah is deceiving and misleading the people by ignoring reality (vv. 11, 15).

Chronicles' editorial summaries confirm that these accusations were repeated (v. 16) and delivered in plain *Hebrew* (v. 18; lit. 'Judean'). This is the only direct reference in the Old Testament to the Hebrew language (though cf. Is. 19:18), which is used rather than the international language of Aramaic (2 Ki. 18:26) in order to *terrify* (v. 18) the people. The ultimate ignominy, however, is that Yahweh should be placed on a par with all other deities The Assyrians had dealt Yahweh the final *insult* (v. 17), the Hebrew term for which is central to the story of David and Goliath (1 Sa. 17:10, 25, 26, 36, 45) as well as to the Kings account (2 Ki. 19:4, 16, 22, 23). Ironically, the fate of Sennacherib's army was just as sudden and complete as that of the former Philistine hero (v. 21)."

Sennacherib personally took all the credit for his military victories. He did not consider the Assyrian idols to be superior to the idols or Yahweh of the countries he had overrun. His speech sounds like the words of an Old Testament atheist.

c. The Lord saves (32:20-23).

20 King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz cried out in prayer to heaven about this.

21 And the Lord sent an angel, who annihilated all the fighting men and the leaders and officers in the camp of the Assyrian king. So he withdrew to his own land in disgrace. And when he went into the temple of his god, some of his sons cut him down with the sword.

22 So the Lord saved Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib king of Assyria and from the hand of all others. He took care of them on every side.

23 Many brought offerings to Jerusalem for the Lord and valuable gifts for Hezekiah king of Judah. From then on he was highly regarded by all the nations.

In reporting the story in his book, Isaiah does not mention his own prayers to God in regard to the Assyrian threat. He states that Hezekiah took Sennacherib's letter to the temple and spread it out before the Lord, as if he wanted to say: "Lord, you read this!" But Isaiah does send God's answer to Hezekiah's prayer, stating that the Israelites ought to mock the Assyrians. Sennacherib did not understand that it was God who had allowed him to win wars and submit nations. He was God's tool. As long as he did what God intended him to do, he would be all right. But when he put himself above God, as Satan wanted to do, he would be treated like an animal, which is led by a hook in its nose and a bit in its mouth.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ See Isa. 37:22-29.

The Hebrew text of v. 21 reads literally: “And the Lord sent an angel, which cut off all the mighty men of valor, and the leaders and captains in the camps of the king of Assyria.” The Hebrew verb, rendered “cut off” is *kachad*, which is used elsewhere in connection with the sickness of the plague, as in connection with God’s message to Pharaoh, who refused to let the Israelites leave Egypt. God said: “For by now I could have stretched out my hand and *struck* you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth.”¹⁵⁶

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The exact matter corresponding with this one verse is embraced by verses 35-37 in the parallel (2 Ki. 19:1-37). It gives the number of slain as a hundred and eighty-five thousand. It does not speak of the heavy proportion of *leaders and captains* lost. It leads us to suppose that for all survivors it was a surprise in the morning—that silent vision of the dead in such vast array. Stating, on the other hand, in mere historic dry detail, the return of Sennacherib to his own land, his dwelling at Nineveh, and assassination, in the house of Nisroch ‘his god,’ at the hands of his own two sons, mentioned by name Adrammelech and Sharezer, who had to fly for it to Armenia (*Ararat*), it does not show the obviously designed moral touch of our compiler, *so he returned with shame of face to his own land*, nor the similarly complexioned description of the time, place, and agents of his assassination. Lastly, it gives Esarhaddon as the name of his successor on the throne.”

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “God’s immediate answer is to send an *angel* (v. 21). Though earlier in Chronicles an angel acted as God’s agent of judgment (1 Ch. 21:12-30), this one undertakes the equally important role of being sent by God as a rescuer (*cf.* Pss. 34:7; 91:11; Mt. 4:6, *etc.*). Some of the details of Assyria’s calamity are omitted from Kings, especially the casualty figures which have caused modern (and ancient?) readers so much difficulty (2 Ki. 19:35-37). Instead, Chronicles concentrates on the link between prayer and answer. The latter is in two parts, since, though Sennacherib’s army returned home almost immediately, Sennacherib’s death twenty years later in 681 BC is also part of God’s response.... The murder of Sennacherib is confirmed in Babylonian and Assyrian inscriptions, though only one son is mentioned there by name....

Chronicles confirms that God had *saved* his people (v. 22). Salvation in Chronicles usually has the sense of military victory, and is very often employed in a summarizing fashion (1 Ch. 11:14; 18:6, 13; 2 Ch. 20:9).... God’s salvation is also specific: *from the hand of Sennacherib* (v. 22) contrasts directly with *from my hand* (vv. 13, 14, 15). ‘His enemies’ (v. 22) has been added in most EVV, but, though this is a reasonable suggestion, MT simply has ‘all (others)’ (*cf.* NIV). Mention of *rest* (NIV mg.) on every side follows LXX (v. 22, NRSV, RSV; ‘peace,’ GNB, JB), and is consistent with 1 Chronicles 22:9; 2 Chronicles 14:5-7, *etc.*, though MT actually has ‘guided, led.’ Foreign recognition of Hezekiah is the Chronicler’s typical way of expressing God’s follow-up in victory (*cf.* 1 Ch. 14:17; 2 Ch. 9:23-24; 17:10-11; 20:29; 26:8).”

Although this is not clearly stated, we may assume that those, who brought presents to the temple, were his own people. The gifts Hezekiah received personally may have come from the heads of the nations surrounding Judah. They realized that Hezekiah must have had supernatural protection that saved him and his nation from being swallowed up by the superior

¹⁵⁶

Ex. 9:15

forces of Assyria. It was felt that a king who enjoyed this kind of protection was a man to be reckoned with. That gave King Hezekiah an elevated standing in world opinion.

The Hebrew text of v. 23 reads literally: “So that he was magnified in the sight of all nations from thenceforth.” The Hebrew verb used is *nasa`*, which literally means “to lift.”

d. Hezekiah’s successes and failures (32:24-33).

i. Hezekiah’s prayers answered (32:24-26).

24 In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. He prayed to the Lord, who answered him and gave him a miraculous sign.

25 But Hezekiah's heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown him; therefore the Lord's wrath was on him and on Judah and Jerusalem.

26 Then Hezekiah repented of the pride of his heart, as did the people of Jerusalem; therefore the Lord's wrath did not come upon them during the days of Hezekiah.

Chronicles mentions the incident of Hezekiah’s sickness and healing in an extremely brief manner. The full story is given in Second Kings¹⁵⁷, and Isaiah.¹⁵⁸

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “After the success of Hezekiah’s praying in verse 20, two further examples combine to illustrate different ways in which God answers prayer. They are taken from two separate incidents in 2 Kings 20:1-19, both of them probably dating from 705-701 BC, that is, before the events of verses 1-23. The first concerns an unidentified life-threatening illness from which Hezekiah was miraculously and suddenly healed (v. 24; cf. 2 Ki. 20:1-11; Is. 38:1-22). This is a comparatively rare case in the Old Testament of a healing miracle, though as here such events often involve prophets (cf. e.g. Ex. 15:22-26; Nu. 21:7-9; 1 Ki. 17:17-24; 2 Ki. 4:8-41). The *sign* refers to the movement of a shadow contrary to the laws of physics (2 Ki. 20:8-11; Is. 38:7-8, 22). The second incident concerns a prayer of repentance rather than one for healing (vv. 25-26; cf. 2 Ki. 20:12-19; Is. 39:1-8). Hezekiah had incurred God’s *wrath* by issuing a foolish invitation to Babylonian envoys (vv. 25, 26; cf. v. 31). *Pride* was the root of his problems, but though the Hebrew expression, literally, ‘his heart was lifted up,’ was also used of Uzziah (cf. 2 Ch. 26:16), Hezekiah’s reaction was exactly the opposite. He and the people ‘humbled themselves’ (GNB; cf. NRSV, RSV *repented*, NIV), a term that is almost the central theme of 2 Chronicles 29:36). This was sufficient to avert God’s anger, even though Hezekiah’s motives were not entirely pure (2 Ki. 20:19; Is. 38:8). The punishment was delayed until more than a century later (2 Ki. 20:16; Is. 38:5-7).”

The Tyndale Commentary’s observation that the cause of Hezekiah’s illness was unidentified is not correct. Isaiah speaks about a boil. We read: “Then Isaiah said, ‘Prepare a poultice of figs.’ They did so and applied it to the boil, and he recovered.”¹⁵⁹ Some boils can be life-threatening, depending upon where they appear on the human body.

¹⁵⁷ II Kings 20:1-11

¹⁵⁸ Isa. 38:1-8

¹⁵⁹ II Kings 20:7; Isa. 38:21

Hezekiah's initial response to his miraculous healing was not pride, but humble gratitude. Isaiah reports Hezekiah's prayer in full detail, which demonstrates his gratitude and humbleness of heart. In the part of the prayer we copy, we read: "But what can I say? He has spoken to me, and he himself has done this. I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul. Lord, by such things men live; and my spirit finds life in them too. You restored me to health and let me live. Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back. For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. The living, the living — they praise you, as I am doing today; fathers tell their children about your faithfulness."¹⁶⁰

Hezekiah demonstrates a lack of understanding of life after death. It appears that most Old Testament saints believed that the grave would be the end. In this the king expressed the mentality of his time.

It was after his healing that Hezekiah began to believe that God had healed him because of his own outstanding qualities. That caused pride to take over. When he became internationally known, his fellowship with God lost its vigor.

Also the fact that the shadow cast by the sun on the stairway of Ahaz went back several degrees made Hezekiah believe that God considered him important enough to change the law of nature for his benefit.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments: "But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him. The conduct of Hezekiah in showing his armory and treasure-house to the Babylonian ambassadors might seem a trivial offence if offence at all, and not rather an act of common civility to strangers who had come from a distant country, or of respect to the sovereign who sent them. But in judging of actions the divine eye is especially fixed on the intention (2 Chron. 32:31). In this respect Hezekiah failed. Either he valued himself too much on account of the signal tokens of divine favor he had received, as if they had been merited by his righteous conduct; or trusted in his riches, as if they could have proved the means of his defense; or perhaps he offended in both these respects. Whatever might be the particular ground of displeasure, God declared by the prophet Isaiah that he should be carried away captive, etc. (Isa 29:7-8.)."

ii. Hezekiah's wealth (32:27-30a).

27 Hezekiah had very great riches and honor, and he made treasuries for his silver and gold and for his precious stones, spices, shields and all kinds of valuables.

28 He also made buildings to store the harvest of grain, new wine and oil; and he made stalls for various kinds of cattle, and pens for the flocks.

29 He built villages and acquired great numbers of flocks and herds, for God had given him very great riches.

30 It was Hezekiah who blocked the upper outlet of the Gihon spring and channeled the water down to the west side of the City of David.

¹⁶⁰ Isa. 38:15-19

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “Riches and honor (Heb. *ʾōšer wəḵābôd*; ‘wealth and fame,’ REB, NEB) are regularly combined in Chronicles, almost invariably as visible signs of divine blessing, as with David (1 Ch. 29:28), Solomon (2 Ch. 1:11, 12; 9:22; cf. 1 Ki. 3:13), and Jehoshaphat (2 Ch. 17:5; 18:1). However, because they are properly divine qualities (1 Ch. 29:12), they are to be regarded not as rights but as what God has *given* (v. 29; cf. Ec. 6:2; Pr. 22:4). Such gifts are often elsewhere linked with gifts of wisdom (Pr. 3:16; 8:18). Hezekiah’s wealth comprised various kinds of *valuables* (V. 27; ‘costly objects,’ NRSV), buildings (v. 28), large *flocks and herds* (v. 29), and water engineering projects (v. 30a). The last clearly includes the Siloam tunnel, especially as *outlet* (Heb. *môšā*) is also found in the tunnel inscription. This work is certainly connected with that in verses 3-4, and probably also with the building of a new wall (v. 5), and all of it was associated with an increase in Jerusalem’s population under Hezekiah and a westward expansion of the city.”

Hezekiah’s project of creating a means of bringing water into the city of Jerusalem may have been the first example of creating a daily water supply for city dwellers. Before that, the inhabitants of city, probably, had to get their water from wells or streams outside the city and carry it home by the bucket. This may be the first instance of public engineering in the history of mankind.

The Pulpit Commentary writes: “What Hezekiah ‘stopped’ was the spring, or more strictly access to it, and guided its prized waters down, probably by an underground channel, to Siloam, or else to the pool in the city which he had constructed and enclosed by that ‘another wall without’ (2 Ch. 32:5), west of the ‘city of David.’”

iii. *Hezekiah’s successes and failures (32:30b-31).*

30b He succeeded in everything he undertook.

31 But when envoys were sent by the rulers of Babylon to ask him about the miraculous sign that had occurred in the land, God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart.

The Hebrew text of v. 30b reads literally: “And Hezekiah prospered in all his works.” The Hebrew verb “to prosper” is *tsalach*, which is often translated “being successful.” It is the same word the author of Psalm One uses to describe the righteous person, of whom it is said: “He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.”¹⁶¹

Verse 31 states that God tested Hezekiah “to know everything that was in his heart.” Obviously, God did not need to test him in order to find out what Hezekiah was inside. David said: “O Lord, you have searched me and you know me.”¹⁶² No human thoughts or motives are unknown to God. He knows infinitely more about us than we know ourselves. God’s testing of Hezekiah was not for God’s benefit, but for Hezekiah’s.

¹⁶¹ Ps. 1:3

¹⁶² Ps. 139:1

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “When God wants to *know everything that was in his heart*, this does not mean that God is ignorant, for he knows every heart (1 Ch. 29:17; 2 Ch. 6:30; Ps. 94:11). Rather, he wishes to ‘make [something] known’ (cf. Gn. 18:21; Dt. 8:2), that is, to provide an opportunity for people to show heartfelt repentance. God tests in order to refine, to stimulate repentance and to deepen faith (cf. Gn. 22:1; Ex. 20:20; Dt. 8:16). This positive aim separated God’s testing from Satan’s temptations, for the devil merely incites (1 Ch. 21:1; Jb. 2:3) in order to devour and destroy (Mt. 4:1-10; 1 Pet. 5:8). God’s purpose is also to be distinguished from the curiosity of the Babylonians, who were only attracted by what seemed to them to be the latest astrological novelty.”

It is obvious that Hezekiah lacked humility. He did not react to God’s blessings upon him by saying, like David: “Who am I, O Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?”¹⁶³

iv. Sources for Hezekiah (32:32-33).

32 The other events of Hezekiah's reign and his acts of devotion are written in the vision of the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel.

33 Hezekiah rested with his fathers and was buried on the hill where the tombs of David's descendants are. All Judah and the people of Jerusalem honored him when he died. And Manasseh his son succeeded him as king.

The interesting Hebrew word in v. 32 is *chesed*, which is here rendered “acts of devotion.” The word is often used in connection with God’s mercy. The KJV translates it sometimes with the beautiful term “loving-kindness,” as in: “For thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes: and I have walked in thy truth.”¹⁶⁴ *Chesed* refers to God’s love in connection with His covenant. It is love in the context of a legal relationship, as in a marriage.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “*Acts of devotion* (v. 32; ‘works of piety,’ REB, NEB) is apparently a post-exilic expression (cf. 2 Ch. 35:26, Ne. 13:14) which covers not only Hezekiah’s religious reformation ... but everything associated with his ‘devotion to the LORD’ (GNB). As frequently in Chronicles, further information is available from a prophetic source included in a historical work (v. 32; cf. 2 Ch. 16:11; 20:34). The *vision of the prophet Isaiah* is very similar to the title of the biblical book of Isaiah (1:1), and it is possible that the compilers of both Isaiah and Chronicles were dependent on the same source. As with other kings approved in Chronicles, Hezekiah’s burial was accorded special *honor* (v. 33; cf. 2 Ch. 16:14; 35:25). This was possibly marked by a prominent location in the royal cemetery ..., on the ‘ascent’ (NRSV, RSV) or hill (NIV).”

G. Three kings and repentance (33:1 – 36:1)

¹⁶³ II Sam. 7:18

¹⁶⁴ Ps. 26:3 - KJV

i Manasseh (33:1-20)**a. Manasseh's unparalleled evil (33:1-9).**

1 *Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years.*

2 *He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.*

3 *He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had demolished; he also erected altars to the Baals and made Asherah poles. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them.*

4 *He built altars in the temple of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, "My Name will remain in Jerusalem forever."*

5 *In both courts of the temple of the Lord, he built altars to all the starry hosts.*

6 *He sacrificed his sons in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced sorcery, divination and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, provoking him to anger.*

7 *He took the carved image he had made and put it in God's temple, of which God had said to David and to his son Solomon, "In this temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my Name forever."*

8 *I will not again make the feet of the Israelites leave the land I assigned to your forefathers, if only they will be careful to do everything I commanded them concerning all the laws, decrees and ordinances given through Moses."*

9 *But Manasseh led Judah and the people of Jerusalem astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the Lord had destroyed before the Israelites.*

Manasseh was Judah's most evil king. His reign was the longest of any Judean king recorded. He was born during the fifteen years that were added to his father Hezekiah's life in answer to his prayer. If Manasseh was Hezekiah's only son, it would mean that the line of David would have ended if Hezekiah had died at the time of his illness, recorded earlier.

The New Unger's Bible Dictionary writes about Manasseh: "Ascending the throne at the early age of twelve, he yielded to the influence of the idolatrous, or Ahaz, party and became in time a determined and even fanatical idolater. As he grew up he took delight in introducing into his kingdom the superstitions of every heathen country. The high places were restored, the groves replanted, the altars of Baal and Asherah rebuilt, and the sun, moon, and all the host of heaven were worshiped. The gods of Ammon, of Moab, and of Edom were zealously worshiped everywhere. Babylonian and Egyptian paganism was common; incense and offerings rose on the roofs of the houses to the fabled deities of the heights; wizards practiced their enchantments, and the valley of Hinnom was once more disgraced by the hideous statue of Molech, to whom parents offered up their children as burnt sacrifices. In the very Temple of the Lord stood an image of Asherah, and white horses harnessed to a splendid chariot sacred to the sun were placed in the entrance of the court. This apostasy did not go unrebuked by the prophets, whom the king endeavored to silence by the fiercest persecution recorded in the annals of Israel (2 Kings 21:2-16; 24:3-4). Fuller particulars are preserved by Josephus, who says that executions took place every day (Ant. 10.3 .1). According to rabbinical tradition Isaiah was sawn asunder by order of Manasseh, and after his death the prophetic voice was heard no more until the reign of Josiah."

The Tyndale Commentary states: “This paragraph, which is closely based on 2 Kings 21:1-10a, is dominated by Manasseh’s *evil* actions (vv. 1, 6, 9) and the contrast between them and God’s declared purposes (vv. 4, 7-8).

According to the opening formula (vv. 1-2a), Manasseh reigned for fifty-five years (v. 1). This is usually dated to 696-642 BC ..., though a co-regency with Hezekiah might be included for the first decade. Curiously, the names of the royal mothers are omitted from now on, though since the same also applies to two phrases normally occurring in the death formulae, *viz.* ‘with his fathers’ and ‘in the city of David,’ the changes are probably due to textual reasons....

The *carved image* in the temple (vv. 7-9) is dealt with separately from other pagan symbols, and God’s promise about the temple (vv. 4, 7-8) and the extent of Manasseh’s evil (vv. 6, 9) are both mentioned twice.”

It is difficult to understand how the son of one of the most pious kings of Israel would learn nothing from the life and testimony of his father. The fact that Hezekiah had reacted to the miracle of his healing with pride instead of humility, may have had its effect upon the young Manasseh. It seems that a healthy father-son relationship had been completely lacking.

Instead of surrendering to the Lord at a young age, Manasseh seems to have made a pact with Satan, who inspired him to wipe out any trace of Yahweh worship in Judah and replace it with idol worship of the worst kind, such as Israel had never known.

One of the amazing facts is that the detestable practices of the original inhabitants of Canaan were revived during Manasseh’s reign. The Hebrew word used to describe those practices is *tow`ebah*, meaning “abomination.” In Leviticus the word is used in connection with homosexual relationships, as in the verse: “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.”¹⁶⁵

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary comments on Manasseh’s reign: “This foolish young prince, in contradiction to the good example and good education his father gave him, abandoned himself to all impiety, transcribed the abominations of the heathen (v. 2), ruined the established religion, unraveled his father’s glorious reformation (v. 3), profaned the house of God with his idolatry (v. 4,5), dedicated his children to Moloch, and made the devil’s lying oracles his guides and his counsellors, v. 6. In contempt of the choice God had made of Zion to be his rest for ever and Israel to be his covenant-people (v. 8), and the fair terms he stood upon with God, he embraced other gods, profaned God’s chosen temple, and debauched his chosen people. He made them to err, and do worse than the heathen (v. 9); for, if the unclean spirit returns, he brings with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself. That which aggravated the sin of Manasseh was that God spoke to him and his people by the prophets, but they would not hearken, v. 10. We may here admire the grace of God in speaking to them, and their obstinacy in turning a deaf ear to him, that either their badness did not quite turn away his goodness, but still he waited to be gracious, or that his goodness did not turn them from their badness, but still they hated to be reformed. Now from this let us learn, 1. That it is no new thing, but a very sad thing, for the children of godly parents to turn aside from that good way of God in which they have been trained. Parents may give many good things to their children, but they cannot give them grace. 2. Corruptions in worship are such diseases of the church as it is very apt to relapse into again even

¹⁶⁵

Lev. 18:22

when they seem to be cured. 3. The god of this world has strangely blinded men's minds, and has a wonderful power over those that are led captive by him; else he could not draw them from God, their best friend, to depend upon their sworn enemy."

b. Manasseh's repentance and God's favor (33:10-20).

10 The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention.

11 So the Lord brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon.

12 In his distress he sought the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.

13 And when he prayed to him, the Lord was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God.

14 Afterward he rebuilt the outer wall of the City of David, west of the Gihon spring in the valley, as far as the entrance of the Fish Gate and encircling the hill of Ophel; he also made it much higher. He stationed military commanders in all the fortified cities in Judah.

15 He got rid of the foreign gods and removed the image from the temple of the Lord, as well as all the altars he had built on the temple hill and in Jerusalem; and he threw them out of the city.

16 Then he restored the altar of the Lord and sacrificed fellowship offerings and thank offerings on it, and told Judah to serve the Lord, the God of Israel.

17 The people, however, continued to sacrifice at the high places, but only to the Lord their God.

18 The other events of Manasseh's reign, including his prayer to his God and the words the seers spoke to him in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, are written in the annals of the kings of Israel.

19 His prayer and how God was moved by his entreaty, as well as all his sins and unfaithfulness, and the sites where he built high places and set up Asherah poles and idols before he humbled himself — all are written in the records of the seers.

20 Manasseh rested with his fathers and was buried in his palace. And Amon his son succeeded him as king.

One of the amazing facts during Manasseh's reign is that the population followed the bad example of their king without much opposition. We do not read how God spoke to the king and the nation, but it is most likely that it was through the prophets, of whom Isaiah was one of the main ones. We read that neither king nor people paid any attention to God's message.

God dealt with Manasseh and his sin by allowing his enemies to conquer him and take him into exile.

Evidently, Assyria was the world power at that time and it was the Assyrian army that took Manasseh into captivity. Manasseh was led away in a most humiliating fashion. He was treated as an animal that is captured and has a hook put in its nose by which it is pulled. That must be very painful, as well as degrading. Having denied the God in whose image he was created, God allowed him to be treated as the animal he had become.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “Sadly, neither Manasseh nor the people seemed initially aware of any danger (v. 10), and so Manasseh was taken captive to Babylon. It is notable that this happened because the LORD brought the Assyrians against him, as he did ultimately with the Babylonians (v. 11; cf. 2 Ch. 36:17). Manasseh’s fate was not in Assyria’s hands (cf. 32:7-8) but in God’s.

No mention is made of Manasseh’s exile in Assyrian sources, even though Manasseh appears in the annals of Esarhaddon (680-669 BC) and Ashurbanipal (668-626 BC) as a rather unwilling vassal forced to provide supplies for Assyria’s building and military enterprises. It is quite possible that he rebelled against these impositions and at some point, though other specific events known from Mesopotamian sources have also been suggested as the occasion of his exile. The most probable of these is that he associated with the rebellion in 652-648 BC of Shamash-shum-ukin king of Babylon. He was the brother of Ashurbanipal, the Assyrian king, and there was discontent in various parts of the Assyrian empire, especially the west, during this period. Once Shamash-shum-ukin had been dealt with, the Assyrians could well have brought Manasseh to account. At any rate, Manasseh’s being captured with ‘hooks’ and ‘fettters’ (v. 11, RSV) suggests some misdemeanor rather than that he had been invited with Esarhaddon’s other vassals in 672 BC to ensure support for Ashurbanipal’s succession to the throne. Manasseh’s presence in *Babylon* is not surprising, since Assyria had had a long interest in Babylon, which was under their direct control for the whole of Esarhaddon’s reign and after Shamash-shum-ukin’s demise.”

The Hebrew text of v. 12 reads literally: “And when he was in affliction he besought before the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.” The Hebrew word rendered “affliction” is *tsarar*, which has the primary meaning of “cramp.” This may refer to a physical as well as a spiritual experience.

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary has the following interesting comment: “Here is a very large addition in the Chaldee: ‘For the Chaldeans made a brazen mule, pierced full of small holes, and put him within it, and kindled fires all around it; and when he was in this misery, he sought help of all the idols which he had made, but obtained none, for they were of no use. He therefore repented, and prayed before the Lord his God, and was greatly humbled in the sight of the Lord God of his fathers.’”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary writes: “In the solitude of exile or imprisonment, Manasseh had leisure for reflection. The calamities forced upon him a review of his past life, under a conviction that the miseries of his dethronement and captive condition were owing to his awful and unprecedented apostasy (2 Chron. 33:7) from the God of his fathers. He humbled himself, repented, and prayed for an opportunity of bringing forth the fruits of repentance. His prayer was heard; because his conqueror not only released him, but, after two years’ exile, restored him with honor and the full exercise of royal power, to a tributary and dependent kingdom.

Some political motive, doubtless, prompted the Assyrian king to restore Manasseh, and that was most probably to have the kingdom of Judah as a barrier between Egypt and his Assyrian dominions. But God overruled this measure for higher purposes. Manasseh now showed himself, by the influence of sanctified affliction, a new and better man: for he made a complete reversal of his former policy, by not only destroying all the idolatrous statues and altars he had formerly erected in Jerusalem, but displaying the most ardent zeal in restoring and encouraging the worship of God.”

The text of Manasseh’s prayer is found in the Apocryphal addition to the King James Bible, of which we copy the following: “O Lord, Almighty God of our fathers, Abraham, Isaac,

and Jacob, and of their righteous seed; who hast made heaven and earth, with all the ornament thereof; who hast bound the sea by the word of thy commandment; who hast shut up the deep, and sealed it by thy terrible and glorious name; whom all men fear, and tremble before thy power; for the majesty of thy glory cannot be borne, and thine angry threatening toward sinners is importable: but thy merciful promise is unmeasurable and unsearchable; for thou art the most high Lord, of great compassion, longsuffering, very merciful, and repents of the evils of men. Thou, O Lord, according to thy great goodness hast promised repentance and forgiveness to them that have sinned against thee: and of thine infinite mercies hast appointed repentance unto sinners, that they may be saved. Thou therefore, O Lord, that art the God of the just, hast not appointed repentance to the just, as to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, which have not sinned against thee; but thou hast appointed repentance unto me that am a sinner: for I have sinned above the number of the sands of the sea. My transgressions, O Lord, are multiplied: my transgressions are multiplied, and I am not worthy to behold and see the height of heaven for the multitude of mine iniquities. I am bowed down with many iron bands, that I cannot lift up mine head, neither have any release: for I have provoked thy wrath, and done evil before thee: I did not thy will, neither kept I thy commandments: I have set up abominations, and have multiplied offences. Now therefore I bow the knee of mine heart, beseeching thee of grace. I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned, and I acknowledge mine iniquities: wherefore, I humbly beseech thee, forgive me, O Lord, forgive me, and destroy me not with mine iniquities. Be not angry with me for ever, by reserving evil for me; neither condemn me to the lower parts of the earth. For thou art the God, even the God of them that repent; and in me thou wilt shew all thy goodness: for thou wilt save me, that am unworthy, according to thy great mercy. Therefore I will praise thee for ever all the days of my life: for all the powers of the heavens do praise thee, and thine is the glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

The reason for including this apocryphal text is curiosity; not belief in its authenticity. According to *The Pulpit Commentary*, “The apocryphal ‘Prayer of Manasseh’ is not at all likely to be authentic.”

The important point is that God took Manasseh’s prayer and humiliation very seriously and acted promptly upon it.

Quoting an ancient Rabbinical commentary, *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states: “While he was thus praying, all the presiding angels went away to the gates of prayer in heaven; and shut all the gates of prayer, and all the windows and apertures in heaven, lest that his prayer should be heard. Immediately the compassions of the Creator of the world were moved, whose right hand is stretched out to receive sinners, who are converted to his fear, and break their hearts’ concupiscence by repentance. He made therefore a window and opening in heaven, under the throne of his glory; and having heard his prayer, he favorably received his supplication. And when his WORD had shaken the earth, the mule was burst and he escaped. Then the Spirit went out from between the wings of the cherubim; by which, being inspired through the decree of the WORD of the Lord, he returned to his kingdom in Jerusalem. And then Manasseh knew that it was the Lord God who had done these miracles and signs; and he turned to the Lord with his whole heart, left all his idols, and never served them more.” Having stated this, Adam Clarke observes that the comment is childish and should not be taken seriously!

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary writes about Manasseh’s prayer: “He prayed to him for the pardon of sin and the return of his favor. Prayer is the relief of penitents, the relief of the afflicted. That is a good prayer, and very pertinent in this case, which we

find among the apocryphal books, entitled, *The prayer of Manasseh, king of Judah, when he was holden captive in Babylon*. Whether it was his or no is uncertain; if it was, in it he gives glory to God as the God of their fathers and their righteous seed, as the Creator of the world, a God whose anger is insupportable, and yet his merciful promise unmeasurable. He pleads that God has promised repentance and forgiveness to those that have sinned, and has appointed repentance unto sinners, that they may be saved, not unto the just, as to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but to me (says he) that am a sinner; for I have sinned above the number of the sands of the sea: so he confesses his sin largely, and aggravates it. He prays, Forgive me, O Lord! forgive me, and destroy me not; he pleads, Thou art the God of those that repent, &c., and concludes, Therefore I will praise thee for ever, &c.”

The Tyndale Commentary comments on the result of Manasseh’s repentance: “Verses 14-16 describe God’s healing of the land (*cf.* the language of 2 Ch. 7:14). Three separate reforms are mentioned, each of them typical of the Chronicler’s understanding of practical faith. Manasseh repaired and extended Jerusalem’s city wall (v. 14a), reorganized the army outside Jerusalem (v. 14b), and restored temple worship in line with his turning from idols to serve the living God (vv. 15-16; *cf.* 1 Thes. 1:9). Building and repairing Jerusalem’s walls is mentioned repeatedly in Chronicles (*e.g.* 1 Ch. 11:8; 2 Ch. 26:9; 27:3-4). Manasseh’s work is probably connected with the westward and northward expansion of the city which began under Hezekiah (2 Ch. 32:5; Is. 22:10-11), though afterwards (v. 14) may indicate co-operation with Ashurbanipal’s need to strengthen his defenses against possible trouble from Egypt following the defeat of Shamash-shum-ukin. If verse 14 were translated ‘... extended the outer wall of the city of David westwards, from Gihon in the valley to the entrance at the Fish Gate ...,’ it would clearly suggest a westward movement, since the *city of David*, *Gihon*, and *Ophel* were all located in the south-east. The Fish Gate is thought to have been in the north-west of the city (*cf.* Zp. 1:10; Ne. 3:3; 12:39). Reorganization of the army (*cf.* v. 14b) is another common feature of faithful kings in Chronicles (*cf.* 2 Ch. 11:5-12; 14:6; 17:12-19).

Manasseh’s religious reforms represented a direct reversal of earlier policies (vv. 2-9), since each of the items removed in verse 15 is mentioned in verses 3, 7. Some form of regular worship was recommenced (v. 16), though its range seems rather limited (*cf.* 1 Ch. 23:31; 2 Ch. 2:4; 8:13; 31:3). This view seems borne out by the sequel. Although Manasseh ‘commanded’ (v. 16, REB, REB, NRSV, RSV) Judah to ‘worship’ (*serve*, EVV) the Lord, pagan worship continued throughout the country during the next two reigns (v. 17; 2 Ch. 33:22; 34:3-7, 33). As with all previous attempts to eradicate the signs and symbols of Canaanite religion, in practice its undemanding morality and sensuous practices proved irresistible to the majority of the people (*cf.* 2 Ch. 14:3; 15:17; 17:6; 20:33). Despite the formal changes, the people as a whole saw no need for a change of heart (*cf.* Is. 29:13; J3. 3:10; 2 Tim. 3:5).

The concluding formula (vv. 18-20) differs significantly in at least three ways from 2 Kings 21:17-18. Firstly, it underlines the centrality of Manasseh’s conversion for the Chronicler’s understanding of his reign, especially his *prayer* and that he *humbled himself* (v. 19; *cf.* vv. 12-13). Secondly, whereas the prophets or *seers* (vv. 18, 19) were persecuted under Manasseh (2 Ki. 21:10-16), Chronicles reports their courage in speaking to him and writing about him. On the basis of previous passages, the *records of the seers* (v. 19) are probably the same as, or at least incorporated in, *the annals of the kings of Israel* (v. 18; *cf.* 2 Ch. 20:34; 24:27; 32:32). Thirdly, Chronicles has summarized the details of Manasseh’s burial (*cf.* 2 Ki. 21:26), the most likely reason for the change is a textual one, unless, as with the Millo, ‘the garden of Uzza’ (2 Ki. 21:26), was no longer identifiable in the Chronicler’s time.”

ii. Amon is unrepentant (33:21-25)

21 Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem two years.

22 He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, as his father Manasseh had done. Amon worshiped and offered sacrifices to all the idols Manasseh had made.

23 But unlike his father Manasseh, he did not humble himself before the Lord; Amon increased his guilt.

24 Amon's officials conspired against him and assassinated him in his palace.

25 Then the people of the land killed all who had plotted against King Amon, and they made Josiah his son king in his place.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary observes in connection with the shortness of Amon's reign: "The remark of the rabbis is not wholly without foundation, that the sons of those kings who were idolaters, and who succeeded their fathers, seldom reigned more than two years. So Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, 1 Kings 15:25; Elah, the son of Baasha, 1 Kings 16:8; Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, 1 Kings 22:51; and Amon, the son of Manasseh, as mentioned here, 2 Kings 21:19."

The painful issue in this report is that the son learned to imitate his father's sin, but not his repentance.

The Tyndale Commentary states: "Amon's reign lasted a mere two years (642-640 BC), but he plays a significant role in Chronicles. This emerges particularly from two typical expressions of Chronicles which do not occur in Kings, viz. he *did not humble himself* and he *increased his guilt* (v. 23). The former contrasts Amon with his father (unlike his father Manasseh, he did not humble himself; cf. vv. 12, 19), and is regarded as one of the causes of the exile in its only other occurrence in Chronicles (2 Ch. 36:12). The distinction between father and son was not that they *did evil*, for Amon did *as his father Manasseh* (v. 22; cf. v. 2), but that Amon did not repent, even though Manasseh's example must have been well known to him....

Because he did not repent, Amon increased his guilt (v. 23). Though in all its other occurrence in Chronicles, guilt is directly associated with God's wrath (1 Ch. 21:3; 27:24; 2 Ch. 19:10; 24:18; 28:9-10, 13, 25), the consequences were not inevitable. Guilt could be expunged through the temple sacrifices, as exemplified by David's forgiveness at the site of the future temple (1 Ch. 21:3; 22:1). Alternatively, Amon could follow the ways of Ahaz (2 Ch. 28:9-10) and of the final pre-exilic generation, both of whom suffered God's wrath through the judgment of exile (2 Ch. 28:5-8; 36:16). Although the cloud of exile hangs of chapters 28-36 (e.g. 29:8-9; 33:10-11; 34:23-25; 36:15-20), Manasseh and Amon in their contrasting ways show that a fatalistic attitude in the face of God's judgment is quite unjustified."

Amon's relationship with his palace personal must not have been friendly. Although, according to the proverb, no king is great to his own valet, few valets tend to assassinate their monarch. Amon must have evoked the hatred of his personnel, to the point where they plotted to kill him.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "The details of Amon's death are unknown, and though most commentators assume that it was his policy towards Assyria that had caused offence, this remains unproven. It is more important to recognize that all other example of conspiracies in Chronicles are interpreted as God's judgment (2 Kings 24:25-26; 25:27), and

presumably the same applies here. The *people of the land* (v. 25) play a consistent role in Chronicles, appointing a new king when the unexpected death of his predecessor had led to a crisis (2 Ch. 22:1; 26:1; 36:1). This group clearly had a position of some authority, and previous examples suggest they included more than just family heads or elders (*cf.* 1 Ch. 11:1-3; 2 Ch. 10:1-17). Though the final paragraph in 2 Kings 21:25-26 is omitted, a statement about *Josiah's* succession is already found in 2 Kings 21:24 and makes a perfectly adequate introduction to chapter 34.”

iii. Josiah (34:1 – 36:1)

The Tyndale Commentary writes: “Apart from the introductory and concluding paragraphs (34:1-2; 35:25 – 36:1), Josiah’s reign is divided into three sections: (a) his faithfulness in seeking God (34:3-33); (b) his Passover (35:1-19); (c) his death (35:20-24).”

The same Commentary continues: “The biblical accounts of Josiah’s reign raise several important background questions on which only the briefest assessment is possible here. It is now generally agreed, for example, that the main factors in the reform were religious rather than political. Although the reform coincided with a significant decline in Assyrian influence, attempts to compare stages of the reforms with Josiah’s increasing independence of Assyria are uncertain possibly largely irrelevant. Secondly, though a close connection between Josiah’s scroll and Deuteronomy has been accepted for a long time, the implications of this for the origins of Deuteronomy are much more uncertain, since neither Kings or Chronicles provides direct evidence of the thesis, advocated repeatedly since 1805, that the scroll was composed as part of a Deuteronomic reform movement....”

a. Josiah seeks God faithfully (34:1-7).

1 Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years.

2 He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left.

3 In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David. In his twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of high places, Asherah poles, carved idols and cast images.

4 Under his direction the altars of the Baals were torn down; he cut to pieces the incense altars that were above them, and smashed the Asherah poles, the idols and the images. These he broke to pieces and scattered over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them.

5 He burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and so he purged Judah and Jerusalem.

6 In the towns of Manasseh, Ephraim and Simeon, as far as Naphtali, and in the ruins around them,

7 he tore down the altars and the Asherah poles and crushed the idols to powder and cut to pieces all the incense altars throughout Israel. Then he went back to Jerusalem.

Josiah became king while still a child. It is doubtful that, at the age of eight, he would be able to exercise a meaningful authority over Judah. We read in Second Kings, that the people,

who had assassinated Manasseh, put Josiah on the throne.¹⁶⁶ According to *The Tyndale Commentary*, Josiah reigned from 640-609 BC. These dates cannot be stated with absolute certainty, and we see that they vary from commentary to commentary. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, for instance, puts the dates between 637 - 608 B.C.

The Tyndale Commentary writes: “The opening formula (vv. 1-2) introduces an ongoing link between Josiah and both David and Joash. As well as mentioning *David* explicitly in verse 2, Josiah follows him in seeking God (vv. 3, 21, 26), taking responsibility for the temple (v. 8), organizing the Levitical musicians (vv. 12-13), and obeying God (v. 31). Joash and Josiah both became king as minors (v. 1; cf. 2 Ch. 24:1), and both undertook a major repair of the temple (vv. 8-12a). Not turning to *the right of to the left* (v. 2) usually means obedience to God’s law (cf. Dt. 5:32; 17:20; 28:14; Jos. 1:17; 23:6), and sets the tone for Josiah’s response to the temple scroll (vv. 19-33).

Josiah reigned for *thirty-one years* (v. 1; i.e. 640-609 BC), but not for the first time Chronicles has used chronological markers to divide a reign (vv. 3, 8; cf. 2 Ch. 14-16). The first marker starts while Josiah was a ‘youth’ (v. 3a, REB, JB) of fifteen (the *eighth year of his reign*, v. 3a) when he *began to seek* God. Though Solomon had once been debarred from building the temple because he was only a youth (Heb. *na`ar*, 1 Ch. 22:5; 29:1), no such age restriction applies to seeking God (cf. Mt. 18:3-4; 1 Tim. 4:12). ‘Seeking’ in Chronicles describes the habit of looking to God in every situation, and also the attitude which God looks for in those who pray (2 Ch. 7:14; 30:19). *Began* implies the start of a spiritual pilgrimage for young Josiah (cf. the same Heb. verb *dāraš* in vv. 21, 26). Other kings who sought God include David (1 Ch. 28:19; 28:8-9), Solomon (2 Ch. 1:5), and Hezekiah (2 Ch. 31:21).

The next stage of Josiah’s reign is a reformation which results directly from his seeking God. It is described as a purging, first of *Judah and Jerusalem* (vv. 3b-5) and then in ‘all the land of Israel’ (vv. 6-7, NRSV, RSV). The two areas are clearly set apart, the first by an inclusion around verses 3b-5 formed by the word *purge*, the second by the phrase he went *back to Jerusalem* at the end of verse 7. Josiah’s actions in the south are effectively repeated in the north. Even the same expressions are used: for example, he *tore down* (Heb. *nitteš*) *the altars* (vv. 4, 7) and *cut to pieces* (Heb. *giddea`*) *the incense altars* (vv. 4, 7) before he ‘ground them to powder’ (Heb. *hedāq*, vv. 4, 7, REB).”

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary comments on Josiah’s breaking down of the altars of Baal worship: “How often have these been broken down, and how soon set up again! We see that the religion of a land is as the religion of its king. If the king were idolatrous, up went the altars, on them were placed the statues, and the smoke of incense ascended in ceaseless clouds to the honor of that which is vanity, and nothing in the world; on the other hand, when the king was truly religious, down went the idolatrous altars, broken in pieces were the images, and the sacrificial smoke ascended only to the true God: in all these cases the people were as one man with the king.”

The “high places” may originally have been places where altars for Yahweh were erected and where people worshipped before the temple in Jerusalem was built. But later, they became symbols of idolatry, where people continued to sacrifice to various idols, instead of worshipping

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the Lord. We read that in several instances, even when the king worshipped God, the people continued in idolatry.¹⁶⁷ Josiah carried out the most effective cleansing of the country of any king of Israel or Judah.

b. Josiah repents over God's word (34:8-33).

i. The plan to repair the temple (34:8-13).

8 In the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, to purify the land and the temple, he sent Shaphan son of Azaliah and Maaseiah the ruler of the city, with Joah son of Joahaz, the recorder, to repair the temple of the Lord his God.

9 They went to Hilkiah the high priest and gave him the money that had been brought into the temple of God, which the Levites who were the doorkeepers had collected from the people of Manasseh, Ephraim and the entire remnant of Israel and from all the people of Judah and Benjamin and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

10 Then they entrusted it to the men appointed to supervise the work on the Lord's temple. These men paid the workers who repaired and restored the temple.

11 They also gave money to the carpenters and builders to purchase dressed stone, and timber for joists and beams for the buildings that the kings of Judah had allowed to fall into ruin.

12 The men did the work faithfully. Over them to direct them were Jahath and Obadiah, Levites descended from Merari, and Zechariah and Meshullam, descended from Kohath. The Levites — all who were skilled in playing musical instruments—

13 had charge of the laborers and supervised all the workers from job to job. Some of the Levites were secretaries, scribes and doorkeepers.

It sounds amazing that it took so long before Josiah's attention became fixed upon the place that should have been the center of Yahweh worship. It wasn't until Josiah's eighteenth year on the throne of Judah that the temple in Jerusalem came into focus. The extent of idol worship and the fact that the country had been littered by altars dedicated to various gods, must have taken most of the king's attention up to this time.

The Tyndale Commentary divides the temple restoration and reforms into four stages, of which the repair of the building is the first.

The fact that the temple had been in disrepair for an extended period of time, meant that no sacrifices had been brought.

The king appointed a committee of three to initiate and oversee the temple repairs. Shaphan may have been the king's personal secretary. One Bible scholar calls him the minister of finance. Maaseiah seems to have been the mayor of Jerusalem. Joahaz is called "the recorder." The Hebrew word is *mahazkiyr*, which is derived from the verb *zakar*, meaning "to mark," or "to write down."

These three took charge of the money that had come in for the temple, but that had, evidently, never been put to work. We assume that it had been put in a "holding account."

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "Contributions from the north (*Manasseh, Ephraim and the entire remnant of Israel*, v. 9) had probably been brought into the temple (v. 9) as a result of the campaign in verses 6-7. Josiah clearly assumed jurisdiction over religious affairs here (*cf.*

¹⁶⁷ II Kings 12:3; 14:4; 15:4, 35 etc.

vv. 6, 9, 21, 33) even though he may not have enjoyed formal political control. A sense of common feeling with the Chronicler's own audience is implied by describing the northerners as a *remnant* (vv. 9, 21), since 2 Kings 22 has no equivalent term. Indeed, their faithful contributions to the temple funds (v. 9) may well have jolted the minds of some readers to do likewise."

It appears that the temple needed major renovation. During the time of infidelity to Yahweh, no needed repairs to the temple had been carried out.

The carpenters and masons who needed to do the repair work did not work on a voluntary basis. They were paid for their labor. The high priest Hilkiah was given the money, which was passed on to the Levites, who gave it to those who oversaw the laborers.

In v. 12 is an interesting piece of information about the Levites who were overseeing the work of restoration of the temple. We read that they "were skilled in playing musical instruments."

The Adam Clarke's Commentary comments on this: "Did the musicians play on their several instruments to encourage and enliven the workmen? Is not this a probable case for their mention here? If this were really the case, instrumental music was never better applied in anything that refers to the worship of God. It is fabled of Orpheus, a most celebrated musician, that such was the enchanting harmony of his lyre, that he built the city of Thebes by it: the stones and timbers danced to his melody; and by the power of his harmony rose up, and took their respective places in the different parts of the wall that was to defend the city! This is fable; but as all fable is a representation of truth, where is the truth and fact to which this refers? How long has this question lain unanswered! But have we not the answer now?"

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "Josiah's administrative arrangements largely follow those of Joash. As treasurers ('keepers of the threshold,' NRSV, RSV, *i.e.* *doorkeepers*, NIV; *cf.* 1 Ch. 26), the *Levites* were responsible to the king and his officials (*cf.* 2 Ch. 24:5, 8, 11). The funds then passed from the high priest to the supervisors, the workmen, and the specialist craftsmen (vv. 10-11). Two reasons are given for the success of the operation. One was that the men worked *faithfully* (v. 12), a word often associated in Chronicles with the Levites' attitude to financial matters (*cf.* 1 Ch. 9:26, 31; 2 Ch. 19:9; 31:12, 15, 18). This is in contrast with the *kings of Judah*, that is Ahaz, Manasseh and Amon, who had allowed things to *fall into ruin* (v. 11). The other was that the Levites provided effective leadership (vv.12b-13). This is another Levitical practice emphasized in Chronicles but not in Kings, which may well reflect conditions from the Chronicler's time (*cf.* 1 Ch. 15:21; 23:4; Ezr. 3:8, 9; *cf.* 2 Ch. 2:2, 18). The information about Levites in verses 12b-13 can be read in two ways. They preferred option is to treat the Levites' musical skill (v. 12) as a passing comment comparable with a similar note about Levitical occupations at the end of verse 13 (*cf.* REB, NEB). Alternatively, one must assume the highly doubtful ploy of putting musicians in charge of construction work! Either way, the Levites were fulfilling a wide range of traditional tasks originally assigned to them by David (*cf.* 1 Ch. 26)."

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "The mention of those Levites whose business was music is rather a surprise, and is not found in the parallel."

ii. *Discovery of the scroll (34:14-18).*

14 While they were bringing out the money that had been taken into the temple of the Lord, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the Lord that had been given through Moses. 15 Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the Lord." He gave it to Shaphan.

16 Then Shaphan took the book to the king and reported to him: "Your officials are doing everything that has been committed to them.

17 They have paid out the money that was in the temple of the Lord and have entrusted it to the supervisors and workers."

18 Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.

This section, which describes the discovery of "the Book of the Law," has given much fuel to twenty century Bible scholars, who disregarded the doctrine of divine inspiration of Scripture. The school of "Higher Criticism" holds that the book was not discovered, but actually written at that time.

It is generally assumed that the book that was found was a copy of Deuteronomy. It is unlikely that it was the complete Pentateuch, since that could not have been contained in one single scroll.

The Tyndale Commentary states: "Hilkiah's discovery is entitled both *the Book of the Law* (vv. 14-15) and *the Book of the Covenant* (v. 30). It is traditionally identified with Deuteronomy, though probably not the whole book, since it was read twice in one day (2 Ki. 22:8, 10). Some commentators have been less pragmatic, however, like a medieval Archbishop of Canterbury who assumed that Josiah listened to the whole book in one sitting: 'What a contrast to our present-day kings and magnates! If once a year they hear the word of God preached, they find it nauseating and leave the church before the end of the sermon!'

One of the strongest links with Deuteronomy is its repeated reference to a Book of the Law (Dt. 289:61; 29:21; 30:10; 31:26; cf. Jos. 1:8; 8:31, 34; 23:6; 24:26). Another is the phrase *all the curses written in* (v. 24; in place of 'everything written in,' 2 Ki. 22:16I, referring to the contents of the Book of the Law in Deuteronomy 29:29, 21, 27; Jos. 8:34. Further connections with Deuteronomy include the centralizing of worship (vv. 3-7, 33; cf. Dt. 12), the centralized Passover (35:1-19; cf. Dt. 16:1-8), and above all the covenant ceremony (vv. 29-32; cf. Dt. 31:10-13). Hilkiah's scroll was also recognized as having Moses' authority (v. 14), just like the Book of the Law in Joshua's day (Jos. 8:31, 34; 23:6), and there is little doubt that its antiquity increased the sense of authority.

EVV's translation of the title as Book of the Law is somewhat misleading. For example, it was almost certainly a written scroll (cf. Je. 36:2; Ezk. 2:9). Also 'law' (Heb. *tôrâ*) is better understood as 'teaching, instruction,' so that a better alternative might be 'Scroll of the Teaching' or even 'Scroll of [God's] Instruction.' God's *tôrâ* and covenant are designed for life and blessing rather than death and curse, enabling his people to trust him with all their heart and soul (cf. v. 31 and Dt. 30)."

iii. *Recognition of God's word (34:19-28).*

19 When the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his robes.

20 He gave these orders to Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Abdon son of Micah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king's attendant:

21 "Go and inquire of the Lord for me and for the remnant in Israel and Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the Lord's anger that is poured out on us because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written in this book."

22 Hilkiyah and those the king had sent with him went to speak to the prophetess Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum son of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the Second District.

23 She said to them, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me,

24 'This is what the Lord says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people — all the curses written in the book that has been read in the presence of the king of Judah.

25 Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and provoked me to anger by all that their hands have made, my anger will be poured out on this place and will not be quenched.'

26 Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, 'This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard:

27 Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before God when you heard what he spoke against this place and its people, and because you humbled yourself before me and tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the Lord.

28 Now I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place and on those who live here.'"

So they took her answer back to the king.

One of the sections that must have hit King Josiah hardest was probably the one that states: "When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees."¹⁶⁸

The fact that Josiah had been unaware of the existence of the scroll did not mean that he was not guilty. Those who break a law they don't know about are not less guilty than those who sin purposely. If a person leans against a freshly painted fence post, not knowing that the paint is still wet, the paint will stain his clothing.

It was Josiah's conviction of sin and repentance that kept him from condemnation, not his ignorance.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "Josiah seems to have quickly realized that what was being read to him was God's own word (vv. 19-21). ... Josiah also recognized that the *LORD's anger was great* because his people had *not kept the word of the LORD* (v. 21). God's anger is a recurring theme in chapters 28-36 (*cf.* 2 Ch. 28:9, 11, 13, 25; 29:8, 10; 32:25; 33:6; 36:16), for Israel's disobedience went back for generations (*our fathers*, v. 21; 29:8-9; 36:16). Josiah was therefore right to be worried about the consequences, for the ultimate penalty of exile was no idle threat (2 Ch. 28:9; 30:9; 36:16).

Despite this, Josiah knew that God's anger could still be turned away by humble repentance (*cf.* 2 Ch. 29:10; 30:8; 32:26; 33:13), though an assurance about its permanent removal had to wait until Jesus came and died (Rom. 5:9; 1 Thes. 1:10). In fact, Josiah was deeply convicted about his people's plight, as he showed by two separate responses. First *he tore*

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Deut. 17:18,19

his clothes and *wept* (vv. 19, 27), which was a traditional sign of distress (*cf. e.g.* Gn. 37:34; 2 Ki. 19:1; Jb. 1:20). Then he sent his officials to a *prophetess* (v. 22) in order to *enquire of the LORD* (v. 21). Though ‘enquire’ translates the same word as ‘seek’ (v. 3), here it has the sense of asking for specific guidance (and in v. 26) rather than describing Josiah’s basic orientation towards God. As on this occasion, its meaning can be closely linked with *humbled yourself* (v. 27), especially in connection with Chronicles’ favorite promise of God’s deliverance (2 Ch. 7:14). Josiah’s choice was not easy, and contrasts with the behavior of two other kings whom the Chronicler probably had in mind. Jehoiakim also had God’s word read to him, but he just tore it up and had it burnt (Je. 36). Similarly Joash, who has already been compared with Josiah (*cf.* vv. 8-13), was resistant when challenged about angering God (2 Ch. 24:18-20). On the other hand, Jehoiakim’s officials who were descended from *Shaphan* and *Abdon* (Akbor, 2 Ki. 22:12) were attentive to God’s word, even protecting Jeremiah from the king (Je. 36:10-19; *cf.* Je. 26:22, 24).”

The Pulpit Commentary comments on Josiah’s consultation of the prophetess Huldah, instead of contacting Jeremiah: “The question may suggest itself, Why was not Jeremiah (2 Ch. 35:25; 36:21) at once consulted? Probably he was at Anathoth, and not immediately accessible. ... Nothing is known of Huldah, nor of Shallum, her husband, except what lies in this and the parallel place.”

The Tyndale Commentary writes: “Huldah’s prophecy (vv. 23-38) is largely carried over from 2 Kings 22:15-20, which contains several key concepts familiar in Chronicles. Over all, the spoken word of prophecy confirms the written word of the law. The message is in two sections (vv. 23-25, 26-28), of which the first underlines that exile was certain. God himself will *bring the disaster* (v. 24, 28), because the people have *forsaken* him (v. 25). This latter term (Heb. ‘*azab*’) is widely used in Chronicles as an expression for sin (*cf.* 2 Ch. 12:1, 5; 15:2; 24:18) though the emphasis in this and other passages in chapters 28-36 is on a cumulative turning away from God by successive generations (*cf.* vv. 21, 25 and 29:6; 30:7). The point is further strengthened by the addition of *all the curses* (v. 24; *cf.* 2 Ki. 22:16), a clear allusion to the covenant curses (Dt. 27:9-26; 28:15-68), and implying that the covenant had been broken irretrievably. Where previously God’s anger might have been turned away (2 Ch. 29:10; 30:8), it could be quenched no longer (v. 25).

Hope was still not totally extinguished, however, for the second section promises *peace* in the midst of *disaster* (v. 28). People like Josiah, whose hearts were (lit.) ‘soft’ or ‘tender’ (v. 27; *responsive*, NIV; ‘penitent,’ NRSV, RSV; ‘willing,’ REB, NEB), could still know God’s grace for themselves. The Hebrew phrase ‘soft heart’ elsewhere speaks of fear and timidity (*cf.* Dt. 20:3, 8; 2 Ch. 13:7), but its meaning here is confirmed by the repeated *humbled yourself* (v. 27). Since, in Chronicles, self-humbling is always the antidote to forsaking God (*cf.* 1 Ch. 28:9; 2 Ch. 7:14, 19; 15:2), God promises Josiah he would *not see* the disaster himself and would be buried in *peace* (v. 28). Though Josiah died in violent circumstances (2 Ch. 35:20-24), this does not invalidate God’s promise which really means that the exile would not take place during Josiah’s lifetime. In any case, to be ‘gathered to one’s fathers’ is an expression concerned with burial rather than a euphemism for dying (1 Ki. 14:20; 22:40; 2 Ki. 20:21; *cf.* 2 Ch. 35:24b).”

iv. Covenant renewal (34:29-32).

29 Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem.

30 He went up to the temple of the Lord with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the Levites — all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the Lord.

31 The king stood by his pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord—to follow the Lord and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, and to obey the words of the covenant written in this book.

32 Then he had everyone in Jerusalem and Benjamin pledge themselves to it; the people of Jerusalem did this in accordance with the covenant of God, the God of their fathers.

Josiah endeavored to involve the whole nation in repentance and in the renewing of fellowship with God. That would comprise, first of all the priests and Levites, who ought to have been the ones to take the initiative in repentance.

One obvious lesson in this story is that the Holy Spirit does not work in the human heart without the Word of God.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “Josiah’s covenant was characterized by the ‘obedience of faith’ (cf. Rom. 1:5). The people agreed to *keep* God’s commands and to ‘put into practice’ (GNB) the ‘terms of the covenant’ (v. 31, REB, NEB). They had in mind primarily a renewal of the Sinai covenant, as indicated by the phrases *commands, regulations, and decrees* (v. 31; cf. e.g. Dt. 6:1; 11:1) and *with all his heart and all his soul* (v. 31; cf. e.g. Dt. 6:5; 11:13: 30:2). Elements of the Davidic covenant were also incorporated, since the ceremony was led by the *king* (vv. 29, 31, 32) and took place in the *temple* (v. 30; cf. 2 Ch. 7:13-14, 17-18). Even if it was only temporary, Judah had returned to their foundations, for they had acted *in accordance with the covenant of God, the God of their fathers* (v. 32).”

The Hebrew text of v. 32 reads literally: “And the king stood in his place, 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 his heart and to perform with all his soul, the words of the covenant which are written in this book.”

The NIV’s rendering of the Hebrew word *omed* with “pillar” is interesting. The word simply means “spot.” But the king’s “spot” was, evidently, a certain pillar in the temple.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “Though the Hebrew word for ‘place’ occurs only in post-exilic parts of the Old Testament, this change may also reflect the absence of pillars such as Jakin and Boaz in the second temple (cf. 2 Ch. 3:17)... The Chronicler has emphasized that ‘all who were present in Jerusalem and in Benjamin’ (NRSV, RSV) assented to the new arrangements, and that they did so by reviving an older covenant rather than making a new one. He also stresses that it was the king who made the people pledge themselves (NIV, NRSV; ‘swear an oath,’ NEB; ‘made’ them ‘stand to it,’ RSV) to the covenant. This suggests that Josiah’s personal faith was not necessarily copied by the people, an observation that is confirmed by both Jeremiah and subsequent events (cf. Je. 3:10; 2 Ch. 36:14-16).

Finally, the people’s obedience to the terms of their covenant is summarized along the lines of 2 Ki. 23:4-25 (v. 33). The earlier details are not repeated, presumably because some of the same kind of things had already taken place (vv. 3b-7). Again, however, there are hints that the people needed some coercion. Josiah made them serve [*i.e.* ‘worship’] the Lord, which they did, but only *as long as he lived*. Nevertheless *all who were in Israel* complied, as exemplified above all by the ensuing Passover (35:1-19) to which representatives from north and south were presumably present (cf. 35:3).”

c. Josiah celebrates the Passover (35:1-19).

i. Passover preparations (35:1-6).

1 Josiah celebrated the Passover to the Lord in Jerusalem, and the Passover lamb was slaughtered on the fourteenth day of the first month.

2 He appointed the priests to their duties and encouraged them in the service of the Lord's temple.

3 He said to the Levites, who instructed all Israel and who had been consecrated to the Lord: "Put the sacred ark in the temple that Solomon son of David king of Israel built. It is not to be carried about on your shoulders. Now serve the Lord your God and his people Israel.

4 Prepare yourselves by families in your divisions, according to the directions written by David king of Israel and by his son Solomon.

5 "Stand in the holy place with a group of Levites for each subdivision of the families of your fellow countrymen, the lay people.

6 Slaughter the Passover lambs, consecrate yourselves and prepare [the lambs] for your fellow countrymen, doing what the Lord commanded through Moses."

The fact that the first feast that was celebrated at the king's orders was the Passover makes us question whether the book that had been found in the temple and that was read to Josiah was actually Deuteronomy. The details of Passover celebration are mainly found in Exodus.

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "Josiah's Passover represents a return to orthodoxy without parallel since the days of Samuel (v. 18). Although in practice it can be compared only with the irregularities of Hezekiah's festival (2 Ch. 30:2-3, 17-20, 23), it is possible to detect four characteristics which the author may have had in mind: (a) the date (v. 1) (b) the respect for Moses (vv. 6, 12) and Davidic (vv. 3-4, 15) authority, (c) Levites' faithfulness (vv. 4-6, 10-15), and (d) the breadth of attendance (v. 18)....

By changing the instruction 'Celebrate the Passover' (2 Ki. 23:21) to the statement *Josiah celebrated the Passover* (v. 1), Josiah is shown to have complied with his own requirements. He was also obedient to Pentateuchal law (Lv. 23:5; Nu. 28:16) and practice (Ex. 12:6), for example, in the matter of the date on the *fourteenth day of the first month* (v. 1), which contrasted with Hezekiah's unorthodox event (30:2). This date in the first month causes a problem, however, for the discovery of the law scroll (34:8; 2 Ki. 22:3) and celebration of the Passover (v. 19; 2 Ki. 23:23) took place in the same year. Since this means that there would have been little or no time to make radical changes of the kind implied by verse 18, this Passover may well have preceded the scroll's public appearance as part of the wider reform movement (34:3b-7). This might explain the existence of features such as the Levites' role (v. 11) or the merging of the Passover with other sacrifices (vv. 12, 14), which are not found in the Pentateuch and were presumably due either to custom or to Josiah's own adaptations (*cf.* vv.10, 16). Perhaps this might also be why reference to the 'Book of the Covenant' is omitted (2 Ki. 23:21)."

It is interesting to read that the priests needed encouragement as well as the command to do the work.

The priestly work is called “duty,” or “charge.” It is the translation of the Hebrew word *mishmereth*. The first time the word is used in Scripture is where God says about Abraham: “Abraham obeyed me and kept my *requirements*, my commands, my decrees and my laws.”¹⁶⁹

The Hebrew word rendered “encourage” is *chazaq*. We find that word in the story of Lot’s salvation from the destruction of Sodom, where we read: “When he hesitated, the men *grasped his hand* and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the Lord was merciful to them.”¹⁷⁰

Josiah’s instruction to the Levites to put the ark in its place in the Holy of Holiest in the temple raises the question why the ark was not there to begin with. *The Tyndale Commentary* observes: “The command *Put the sacred ark in the temple* ... (v. 3) is problematic ... since the ark’s removal is never mentioned, either in connection with Manasseh’s idolatry (33:4, 7) or Josiah’s spring cleaning. Perhaps therefore *Serve the LORD* ... (*i.e.* ‘worship ...’; *cf.* 34:33) should be treated as the main clause and the opening words translated as either ‘Leave the sacred ark ...’ or ‘Since the sacred ark...’. Alternatively, the ceremony by which the ark was deposited in the temple may have been re-enacted to underline Josiah’s fresh start. A further difficulty is that in contrast to Hezekiah’s practice and the implications of Pentateuchal law (Dt. 16:5-6; 2 Ch. 30:17), the Levites slaughtered all the Passover lambs (v. 6; *cf.* v. 11). Hezekiah’s emergency arrangements had presumably become standard practice.

Authority for these instructions is based on David and Solomon (vv. 3-4) and on Moses (v. 6). The two kings had authorized a change in Levites’ duties (1 Ch. 23-26; 2 Ch. 8:14-15) once the ark had come to rest (v. 3; *cf.* 1 Ch. 23:25-26), while the appeal to Moses is a general reference to the Passover laws (especially Ex. 12:1-13; Dt. 16:1-8).”

ii. Passover provision (35:7-9).

7 Josiah provided for all the lay people who were there a total of thirty thousand sheep and goats for the Passover offerings, and also three thousand cattle — all from the king's own possessions.

8 His officials also contributed voluntarily to the people and the priests and Levites. Hilkiah, Zechariah and Jehiel, the administrators of God's temple, gave the priests twenty-six hundred Passover offerings and three hundred cattle.

9 Also Conaniah along with Shemaiah and Nethanel, his brothers, and Hashabiah, Jeiel and Jozabad, the leaders of the Levites, provided five thousand Passover offerings and five hundred head of cattle for the Levites.

The term “lay people” is the rendering of the Hebrew words *ben am*, which can be rendered “sons of the people.”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments: “The design of the minute directions given here was to facilitate the distribution of the paschal lambs. These were to be

¹⁶⁹ Gen. 26:5

¹⁷⁰ Gen. 19:16

eaten by the respective families according to their numbers (Ex. 12:3). But multitudes of the people, especially those from Israel, having been reduced to poverty through the Assyrian devastations, were to be provided with the means of commemorating the Passover; and, therefore, the king enjoined the Levites, that when the paschal lambs were brought to them to be killed (2 Chron. 35:7-9), they should take care to have everything put in so orderly a train, that the lambs, after due presentation, might be easily delivered to the various families to be roasted and eaten by themselves apart.”

The Tyndale Commentary observes: “Gifts by Josiah (v. 7) and other leaders (vv. 8-9) for the sacrifices follows a generous precedent originally set by David (*cf.* 1 Ch. 29:2-5; 2 Ch. 7:5; 30:24). *Administrators* (v. 8; ‘chief officers,’ REB, NEB, NRSV, RSV) is a neutral term used for the senior priests, including the high priest *Hilkiah* (34:9, 14, 18), though it is restricted elsewhere to the high priest (1 Ch. 9:11; 12:28).

As well as being generous, the leaders provided *voluntarily* (v. 8; ‘willingly,’ REB, NEB, NRSV, RSV) for the people. Though this word might be translated ‘for the voluntary offerings’ (JB; *cf.* 31:14), Chronicles generally emphasizes the willing attitude with which people offered their gifts and themselves to God (1 Ch. 29:5-14; 2 Ch. 17:16; 29:31). The same spirit is also evident in the Levites’ desire to be fully prepared (vv. 4, 6), including their recognition of the need for self-preparation (v. 4; *cf.* 1 Ch. 29:5; 2 Ch. 17:11). Preparation for worship is especially important in Chronicles, and may be compared with Hezekiah’s concern for self-purification at the Passover (29:15, 17).

One might include the *cattle* (v. 7, 8, 9) among the Passover animals, which could come from flock or herd’ (Dt. 16:2) except that they are separated from the *Passover offerings*. They are probably provided therefore for the associated burnt offerings (vv. 12, 14). The total number of offerings is more than double that at Hezekiah’s Passover (2 Ch. 30:24), a further indication of the greater generosity and significance of this occasion.”

iii. Passover offerings (35:10-16).

10 The service was arranged and the priests stood in their places with the Levites in their divisions as the king had ordered.

11 The Passover lambs were slaughtered, and the priests sprinkled the blood handed to them, while the Levites skinned the animals.

12 They set aside the burnt offerings to give them to the subdivisions of the families of the people to offer to the Lord, as is written in the Book of Moses. They did the same with the cattle.

13 They roasted the Passover animals over the fire as prescribed, and boiled the holy offerings in pots, caldrons and pans and served them quickly to all the people.

14 After this, they made preparations for themselves and for the priests, because the priests, the descendants of Aaron, were sacrificing the burnt offerings and the fat portions until nightfall. So the Levites made preparations for themselves and for the Aaronic priests.

15 The musicians, the descendants of Asaph, were in the places prescribed by David, Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun the king's seer. The gatekeepers at each gate did not need to leave their posts, because their fellow Levites made the preparations for them.

16 So at that time the entire service of the Lord was carried out for the celebration of the Passover and the offering of burnt offerings on the altar of the Lord, as King Josiah had ordered.

The Tyndale Commentary writes: “*The service was arranged* is a rare but significant phrase occurring additionally in the Old Testament only at 2 Chronicles 8:16; 29:35, meaning that everything had been done as God required. Since it appears elsewhere only in concluding summaries, its appearance in verse 10 underlines the importance of preparing properly for worship, including the contribution of the king and lay leaders (vv. 2, 7-8).

The Passover ceremony was in two parts, the offering of sacrifice (vv. 11-12) and eating the Passover meal (vv. 13-15). The high point of the sacrifice was when the priests *sprinkled the blood* (v. 11) on the *altar* (v. 16). This was an adaptation to temple ritual of the dramatic action in Egypt when each household had smeared lamb’s blood around their doors (Ex. 12:7, 13, 22-23). *Burnt offerings* (vv. 12, 14) are not otherwise part of the Passover, though for several reasons they are not to be regarded as the parts of the Passover sacrifices burnt on the altar Firstly, burnt offerings frequently accompanied other sacrifices as at Hezekiah’s reopening ceremony (2 Ch. 29:24, 28, 31, 35). Secondly, the partial merging of this Passover with fellowship offerings ... makes an association with burnt offerings quite appropriate. Thirdly, burnt offerings could easily have been attached to the Passover as part of the ritual for Unleavened Bread (*cf.* v. 17; Nu. 28:16-25). However, these were probably special burnt offerings for the Passover, since like the Passover they were for ‘groups of families’ (v. 12, REB, NEB). They were provided to *offer to the LORD* (v. 21), that is, to be consumed on the altar (*cf.* Lv. 1:9) with nothing reserved for a meal, in line with the general regulations for burnt offerings as written in *the Book of Moses* (v. 12).

The second part of the Passover celebration was the Passover meal, which is described in verse 13a and distributed in verse 13b-15. Attention is focused on the Levites, who are characterized by their obedience to God and a concern for others. The animals, for example, were *roasted as prescribed* (v. 13), that is, as at the Egyptian Passover (Ex. 12:8-9), *while served them quickly* (v. 13; *i.e.* fast food!) alludes to the haste in which that first Passover was eaten (Ex. 12:11). Similarly, the musicians (v. 15), NIV, GNB; not ‘singers,’ as REB, NEB, NRSV, RSV; see on 1 Ch. 15:16; 23:28-31; 25:6-7) followed the instructions given by David and his contemporary musical directors (*cf.* 1 Ch. 25:1-8). The *fat portions* (v. 14, NIV, REB, NEB) is a reference to the fellowship or peace offering (*cf.* Lv. 3:9-17), which had been partially assimilated to the Passover since both included a fellowship or communion meal.

The Levites’ special concern for their fellow *priests* (v. 14), *musicians* and *gatekeepers* (v. 15), as well as for (lit.) ‘your brothers the lay people’ (vv. 5, 6; *cf.* v. 13b), offers a better model of how to behave at a communion meal than the attitudes shown by the Corinthian Christians (1 Cor. 11:17-22, 27:34)! They distributed the food first to the lay people (v. 13b), but also made sure that those on duty did not lose out (vv. 14-15). *Made (the) preparations* (vv. 14, 15) really means ‘made the arrangements for,’ since the verb is the same as ‘arranged’ in verses 10, 16 (REB, NEB; *cf.* also 2 Ch. 29:35).”

iv. Passover obedience (35:17-19).

17 The Israelites who were present celebrated the Passover at that time and observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days.

18 The Passover had not been observed like this in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel; and none of the kings of Israel had ever celebrated such a Passover as did Josiah,

with the priests, the Levites and all Judah and Israel who were there with the people of Jerusalem.

19 This Passover was celebrated in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign.

The Passover, besides commemorating Israel's delivery from slavery in Egypt, marked the beginning of the New Year.

When God gave the Passover instructions to Moses, He said: "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household."¹⁷¹

The Hebrew word, rendered "present" in v. 17, is the translation of the word *matsa`*, which literally means "to find," or "to be found." It appears in Scripture for the first time in the verse "But for Adam no suitable helper was found."¹⁷² The suggestion is that, since the Passover had not been celebrated according to the original instructions, most Israelites had neglected it and it took an effort to get people to unite for the celebration.

It is also true that the original Passover celebration was to be a family affair, not a national holiday.

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "Josiah's faithfulness is confirmed in this summary. Firstly, the Passover is as elsewhere combined with the *Feast of Unleavened Bread* (v. 17; cf. Ex. 12:8; Nu. 28:16-17; Dt. 16:1-8; 2 Ch. 30:13, 21; Mk. 14:1; 1 Cor. 5:7-8). If *Samuel* (v. 18) is to be understood as representing the period from Moses to the monarchy, his name is an allusion to the Passover in Joshua 5:10-11. In addition to the reason given above, explaining the uniqueness of this occasion, verse 18 emphasizes the wide range of people involved. Three groups are mentioned, *the priest and Levites, all Judah and Israel, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem*. 'All Judah and Israel' includes people from north and south, implying a larger attendance than at Hezekiah's Passover (cf. 30:25)."

d. Josiah's death (35:20 – 36:11).

20 After all this, when Josiah had set the temple in order, Neco king of Egypt went up to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah marched out to meet him in battle.

21 But Neco sent messengers to him, saying, "What quarrel is there between you and me, O king of Judah? It is not you I am attacking at this time, but the house with which I am at war. God has told me to hurry; so stop opposing God, who is with me, or he will destroy you."

22 Josiah, however, would not turn away from him, but disguised himself to engage him in battle. He would not listen to what Neco had said at God's command but went to fight him on the plain of Megiddo.

23 Archers shot King Josiah, and he told his officers, "Take me away; I am badly wounded."

24 So they took him out of his chariot, put him in the other chariot he had and brought him to

¹⁷¹ Ex. 12:2, 3

¹⁷² Gen. 2:20

Jerusalem, where he died. He was buried in the tombs of his fathers, and all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for him.

25 Jeremiah composed laments for Josiah, and to this day all the men and women singers commemorate Josiah in the laments. These became a tradition in Israel and are written in the Laments.

26 The other events of Josiah's reign and his acts of devotion, according to what is written in the Law of the Lord—

27 all the events, from beginning to end, are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah.

36:1 And the people of the land took Jehoahaz son of Josiah and made him king in Jerusalem in place of his father.

It is questionable that Josiah's faithfulness to the Lord and his efforts to restore Israel and Judah to its true relationship with God were shared by the majority of the people. Idolatry had a stronger pull on the public at large than consecration to the God of Israel. Israel never lived up to its call to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."¹⁷³

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on Josiah's efforts to bring the nation back to the service of YHWH: "He most probably calculated that the restoration of the divine worship, with the revival of vital religion in the land, would lead, according to God's promise, and the uniform experience of the Hebrew people, to a period of settled peace and increased prosperity. His hopes were disappointed. The bright interval of tranquility that followed his re-establishment of the true religion was brief. But it must be observed that this interruption did not proceed from any unfaithfulness in the divine promise, but from the state into which the kingdom of Judah had brought itself by the national apostasy, which was drawing down upon it the long-threatened, but long-deferred judgments of God."

The Tyndale Commentary comments: "A sharp change of key marks the transition to the final paragraph on Josiah, though the Chronicler himself supplies the new key signature with the words *After all this* (v. 20). The contrast is between Josiah's 'setting the temple in order' (NRSV) and *Neco's* invasion thirteen years later in 609 BC. Significantly, Hezekiah's sufferings in similar circumstances are introduced in an almost identical way (*cf.* 2 Ch. 32:1).

The Chronicler has interpreted the basic account of Josiah's death in Kings in three distinct ways. First, Josiah's reaction to Neco's invasion is heavily ironic and, indeed contradicts all that he has previously stood for. On the military level, though the Pharaoh had no quarrel with Josiah, and his threat was far less serious than Sennacherib's (*cf.* 32:1), Josiah was defeated whereas Hezekiah had been delivered (32:20-22). The spiritual contrast is the more damaging, however, for whereas Josiah had formerly listened carefully to God's word (*cf.* 2 Ch. 34:27; 35:6, 12), now he 'did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God' (v. 22, NRSV, RSV). How Josiah was supposed to recognize God's guidance is not specified, though sanctified common sense would have been a perfectly adequate response. Also, like other biblical writers, the Chronicler never limits God's ways of speaking. For example, the expression *by the mouth of God* is used as naturally of Neco as it is of Jeremiah (*cf.* 36:12, 21, 22), and God regularly

¹⁷³ See Ex. 19:6.

employs foreigners as his spokespersons (e.g. 2 Ch. 2:11-12; 9:8; 36:22-22-23). Though Neco is surprisingly blunt in claiming that *God has told me to hurry* (v. 21) and that *God is with me* (v. 21; contrast 2 Ch. 13:12; 32:7-8), his language is no more shocking than that of other non-Israelites (e.g. Gn. 20:3-7; Mt. 26:19).

The historical background to this incident is partially clarified through extra-biblical sources. *Neco* was *en route* to Syria to link up with Ashur-ubalit, the last king of Assyria, who the previous year (610 BC) had moved to *Carchemish* in a desperate attempt to preserve the tattered remains of his empire. Together they hoped to resist the advance of Babylon, *the house with which I am at war* (v. 21). It is even possible that Egypt and Assyria had both communicated in writing Neco's need to travel via an Egyptian garrison at *Megiddo*. Whether Josiah decided to intercept the Egyptians for internal reasons or as the result of Babylonian pressure remains unknown, but if, as some believe, he was anticipated by the people of Gaza, the consequences were similarly disastrous (cf. Je. 47:1).

Secondly, the manner of Josiah's death is also interpreted ironically by being paralleled with Ahab's demise (vv. 22-24; cf. 2 Ch. 18:29-34). The links are quite explicit, for each king *disguised himself* (vv. 22; cf. 2 Ki. 18:29), archers delivered the fatal blow (v. 23; cf. 2 Ki. 18:34), each king admitted *I am wounded* (v. 23; cf. 2 Ki. 18:33), and was propped up in a *chariot* (v. 24; cf. 2 Ki. 18:34) before he died. The ultimate irony is that despite Josiah's previous record, he died in the same way as someone who was known to 'hate the LORD' (2 Ch. 19:2).

Thirdly, however, the Chronicler highlighted God's grace and his faithfulness. It is confirmed that Josiah died in Jerusalem (as distinct from being conveyed 'dying' in a chariot), that he was buried in *the tombs of his fathers* rather than just his own tomb (v. 24; cf. 2 Ki. 23:30), and that he was extensively *mourned* (vv. 24b-25). Far from being embarrassed by Huldah's prophecy, therefore, the Chronicler is at pains to stress that God kept his promises about Josiah's peaceful burial and the exile's continuing delay despite Josiah's stupidity and violent death (cf. 2 Ch. 34:28). Jeremiah's laments for Josiah are not otherwise known, since the written *Laments* (v. 25) have a different title from the Old Testament book of Lamentations.

'Faithful deeds' (v. 26, NRSV; *acts of devotion*, NIV) is a post-exilic expression (cf. 2 Ch. 32:32; Ne. 13:14) which illustrates the reality and extent of Josiah's obedience to God's word (*the Law of the LORD*). The unfortunate circumstances of his death therefore did not prevent his achievements from being properly remembered. Nor did the existence of a political vacuum stop *the people of the land* ensuring *Jehoahaz's* succession (36:1), as they had done with Ahaziah (2 Ch. 22:1), Uzziah (26:1), and Josiah himself (33:25), though this was the last opportunity they had to do so. Even so, Josiah's passing removed the last obstacle to the coming catastrophe, and the new king's anointing ceremony no longer seemed worth mentioning (cf. 2 Ki. 23:30)." It was Josiah's interference in this campaign that cost the king of Judah his life.

H. Four kings and the end of the kingdom (36:2-20)

i. The fall of Jehoahaz (36:2-4)

2 Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months.

3 The king of Egypt dethroned him in Jerusalem and imposed on Judah a levy of a hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold.

4 The king of Egypt made Eliakim, a brother of Jehoahaz, king over Judah and Jerusalem and changed Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim. But Neco took Eliakim's brother Jehoahaz and carried him off to Egypt.

The Tyndale Commentary introduces the whole section of vv. 2-20 with the following: “This chapter covers the last four kings of Judah, a brief justification of the exile, and an announcement of the possibility of a return. The end comes remarkably swiftly, like a bird of prey suddenly swooping down after circling repeatedly over its victim. The manner of presentation is unparalleled in Chronicles, even though the material bears some resemblance to the account of the same events in 2 Kings. The most noticeable feature is that the last four kings are dealt with not in their own right but as being engulfed by a common experience of exile. The final collapse under Zedekiah is therefore merely the final stage in a process that has long been inevitable....

The fact that this is the only section of 2 Chronicles 10-36 where Chronicles has dealt more briefly than Kings with the same subject clearly indicates a special purpose. That purpose is revealed in three distinctive emphases. The first is that responsibility for the exile did not belong to any individual or generation, but implicated the whole nation. The sense of corporate guilt is very strong, and is made explicit in verses 15-16. The second is that the exile is remarkably comprehensive, both in its character and its effects. For the land, the monarchy, and the temple *there was no remedy* (v. 16), and only a *remnant* is left (v. 20). The only basis for future hope is that the Lord remains in charge throughout. The third and most surprising emphasis is that despite everything, an alternative still exists. The gathering clouds of judgment have never entirely obscured the brightness of God’s grace, though now it shines through the exile rather than instead of it (vv. 22-23; *cf.* 28:14-15; 30:9; 33:12-13).

The book ends, therefore, on a definite note of hope, which neither persistent sin nor the reality of judgment is able to overcome. However, one should not be misled into thinking that this implies that final judgment will never come (*e.g.* Mk. 13:24-31; 1 Thes. 5:1-7; *cf.* Heb. 1:10-12). Though the exile provides further evidence that God is always gracious and compassionate (*cf.* 2 Ch. 30:9), the opportunity to call on his mercy will not always exist. It is therefore wise to take God’s invitation seriously (v. 23).

The reigns of *Jehoahaz* (vv. 2-4), *Jehoiakim* (vv. 5-8), and *Jehoiachin* (vv. 9-10) are presented in standardized form. Whereas the names of the queen mothers and details about their deaths have been omitted, three topics occur repeatedly, that the kings did *evil* (vv. 5, 9), that they went into exile (vv. 4, 6, 10), and that the temple vessels were removed (vv. 7, 10). The patterning is clearly deliberate, especially as some of the material is additional to Kings (*cf.* vv. 6-7). The overriding aim is to provide a corporate interpretation, illustrating that the kings’ exiles were not so much separate events but different manifestations of the same phenomenon. Individual actions and even deaths are less important than that the kings experienced exile together because of the attitudes described in verses 12-16.”

Jeremiah calls Jehoahaz by the name Shallum, prophesying about his exile and that he would never return to Judah. We read: “For this is what the Lord says about Shallum son of Josiah, who succeeded his father as king of Judah but has gone from this place: ‘He will never

return. He will die in the place where they have led him captive; he will not see this land again.”¹⁷⁴

The name Jehoahaz means literally “Yahweh has grasped.” Shallum stands for “the requited one.”

Jehoahaz was taken into exile to Egypt by Pharaoh Neco. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states about Neco: “The great event of his reign (610 B.C. - 594 B.C.) was his expedition across Syria to secure for himself a share in the decaying empire of Assyria. In the days of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, Egypt had been tributary to Assyria, and, when it began to break up, Egypt and other subject kingdoms saw their opportunity to throw off its yoke.”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on Jehoahaz’ brief reign: “The people of the land took Jehoahaz. Immediately after Josiah’s overthrow and death, the people raised to the throne Shallum (1 Chron. 3:15), afterward called Jehoahaz, in preference to his older brother Eliakim, from whom they expected little good. Jehoahaz is said (2 Kings 23:30) to have received at Jerusalem the royal anointing—a ceremony not usually deemed necessary in circumstances of regular and undisputed succession. But in the case of Jehoahaz, it seems to have been resorted to in order to impart greater validity to the act of popular election, and, it may be, to render it less likely to be disturbed by Necho, who, like all Egyptians would associate the idea of sanctity with the regal anointing. He was the youngest son of Josiah, but the popular favorite—on account, probably, of his martial spirit (Ezek. 19:3), and determined opposition to the aggressive views of Egypt. At his accession, the land was free from idolatry; but this prince, instead of following the footsteps of his excellent father, adopted the criminal policy of his apostatizing predecessors, and through his influence, directly or indirectly used, idolatry rapidly increased.”

The Tyndale Commentary writes about Jehoahaz: “The king who fits the over-all pattern least is *Jehoahaz* (vv. 2-4; 609 BC), whose reign lacks any theological evaluation (*cf.* 2 Ki. 23:32) and is without any reference to the temple. In practice, though, Chronicles assumes what is said about him in Kings and in Jeremiah 22:11-12 (where he is called Shallum), and the pattern should not be pushed into absolute rigidity. No basis exists for assuming that his tribute (v. 3) came from the temple, ... since it is known that he was forced to levy some kind of income tax (2 Ki. 23:35).

The payment did him no good, however, for he was ‘deposed’ (v. 3, NEB, NRSV, RSV; *dethroned*, NIV, *cf.* REB), perhaps because his appointment by the people of the land (v. 1) meant he was not sufficiently pro-Egyptian. Neco did not intend to take the same risks with his older brother Jehoiakim, changing his name as a symbol of his subservience. A slight textual change confirms that Jehoahaz went to Egypt under duress: ‘he came’ (2 Ki. 23:34) has become *carried him off* (v. 4).”

ii. The fall of Jehoiakim (36:5-8)

5 Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord his God.

¹⁷⁴ Jer. 22:11, 12

6 Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon attacked him and bound him with bronze shackles to take him to Babylon.

7 Nebuchadnezzar also took to Babylon articles from the temple of the Lord and put them in his temple there.

8 The other events of Jehoiakim's reign, the detestable things he did and all that was found against him, are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. And Jehoiachin his son succeeded him as king.

Chronicles does not mention any details about the evil acts Jehoiakim committed during his reign. Second Kings reports that he committed the same kind of sins Manasseh had perpetrated and that he “filled Jerusalem with innocent blood.”¹⁷⁵

The Tyndale Commentary states: “All that is said of *Jehoiakim* (vv. 5-8; 609-598 BC) is that *Nebuchadnezzar* probably took him into exile and removed some *articles from the temple* (vv. 6-7). Though both events are typical of the exilic pattern of the chapter, Jehoiakim’s exile has caused difficulty since it is not mentioned elsewhere. A further problem is that it is not immediately clear whether Jehoiakim actually went to Babylon or was merely threatened with deportation. Since, however, the phrase ‘bound him in fetter to take him to Babylon’ (RSV) is used elsewhere only of the exile of Manasseh and Zedekiah (note the almost identical expression in Je. 39:7; cf. 2 Ki. 25:7 = Je. 52:11; 2 Ch. 33:11), it seems that he did make the journey eastwards. Further, the background to verses 6-7 is greatly enhanced if the Babylonians’ theft of the temple vessels is the same as that described in Daniel 1:1-2. The latter took place in the same year (605 BC) as a series of warnings by Jeremiah to Jehoiakim about an impending Babylonian attack (Je. 25:1; 36:1; 45:1; 46:2; especially Je. 25:1-11) after Nebuchadnezzar’s decisive victory at Carchemish. The Babylonian Chronicle also states that after Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar conquered the whole area of Hatti,’ that is the whole of Syria-Palestine. Jehoiakim would certainly have had to accept Babylonian sovereignty at once, and also in the following year when Nebuchadnezzar captured Ashkelon and ‘all the kings of Hatti came before him and he received their heavy tribute.’ Jehoiakim could have been taken to Babylon on either occasion, though obviously found it no easier to accept Babylonian sovereignty than he did God’s authority!

Nebuchadnezzar’s theft of the temple articles (v. 7; ‘vessels,’ REB, NEB, NRSV, RSV; ‘furnishings,’ JB) is a highly symbolic act. To the post-exilic community (cf. Ezr. 1:7-11; Dn. 5:2-3, 23), these articles represented continuity with David (1 Ch. 28:14-18) and Solomon (2 Ch. 4:1-22) and living worship in the temple. They were probably deposited in one of Nebuchadnezzar’s temple(s) (v. 7; cf. Ezr. 1:7), though the Hebrew word can mean ‘palace’ (REB, NEB, *etc.*).

Only Jehoiakim of the four kings in this chapter receives a concluding formula (v. 8). This may well imply that he died in Judah (cf. 2 Ki. 24:6), though the lack of any mention of his burial reflects the prophecies of Jeremiah (22:18-19; 36:30) and is a regular mark of dishonor in Chronicles (cf. 2 Ch. 23:21; 33:24). The *detestable things* (v. 8; ‘abominable,’ NRSV, RSV) would include the accusations leveled against him by Jeremiah (cf. Je. 22:12-23; 25:1-26:32). *All that was found against him*, though, is usually a neutral phrase and is perhaps better translated ‘what happened to him’ ... cf. *hannimsa`* in 2 Ch. 34:30-33; 35:7, 18), referring to the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s words.”

¹⁷⁵

II King 24:3-4

The Pulpit Commentary observes about the closing words of this section, which state mentions “the other events of Jehoiakim's reign”: “As our compiler has literally told us none at all, we need but note his expression here as a convenient formula, indicating his own intentional brevity, and the fact that he was privy to all in the original sources, which he nevertheless now omitted; yet see ... Jeremiah 7:9; 19:13, etc. The telling expression, what *was found in him*, is too readily to be filled up from the parallel, in its vers. 3, 4. *Jehoiachin his son*. In ... 1 Chronicles 3:16 he is called *Jeconiah*, and in ... Jeremiah 22:24 he is called *Coniah*.”

iii. The fall of Jehoiachin (36:9-10)

9 *Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months and ten days. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord.*

10 *In the spring, King Nebuchadnezzar sent for him and brought him to Babylon, together with articles of value from the temple of the Lord, and he made Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, king over Judah and Jerusalem.*

The Tyndale Commentary comments: “Jehoiachin is dealt with so briefly (vv. 9-10) that his reign appears to have no significance except as a further illustration of the themes of exile and temple despoliation. However, his exile is of considerable importance in 2 Kings 24:10-16 and Jeremiah 22:24-30, and is also reported in the Babylonian Chronicle: ‘he [Nebuchadnezzar] besieged the city of Judah and ... seized the city and capture the king. He appointed there a king of his own choice, received its heavy tribute and brought it to Babylon.’”

The next king is described as Jehoiachin's ‘brother’ (v. 10, NRSV, RSV), though, since Zedekiah was actually his ‘father's brother’ (REB, NEB; cf. NIV, GNB), ‘brother’ is best understood as *relative* (NIV mg.; cf. JB; as in 2 Ch. 22:8). Most Hebrew MSS of Chronicles give his age on accession as ‘eight’ (v. 9, REB, NEB, NRSV, RSV, JB), but since it is known from Babylonian sources the five years later he had five children, the reading ‘eighteen’ (2 Ki. 24:18, with P and some LXX MSS) is definitely preferable. Chronicles adds and extra *ten days* to the length of his reign of three months (cf. 2 Ki. 24:8; in 597 BC), but this is unlikely to be connected with the previous problem.”

Nebuchadnezzar's theft of the temple articles (v. 7; ‘vessels,’ REB, NEB, NRSV, RSV; ‘furnishings,’ JB) is a highly symbolic act. To the post-exilic community (cf. Ezr. 1:7-11; Dn. 5:2-3, 23), these articles represented continuity with David (1 Ch. 28:14-18) and Solomon (2 Ch. 4:1-22) and living worship in the temple. They were probably deposited in one of Nebuchadnezzar's temple(s) (v. 7; cf. Ezr. 1:7), though the Hebrew word can mean ‘palace’ (REB, NEB, etc.).

Only Jehoiakim of the four kings in this chapter receives a concluding formula (v. 8). This may well imply that he died in Judah (cf. 2 Ki. 24:6), though the lack of any mention of his burial reflects the prophecies of Jeremiah (22:18-19; 36:30) and is a regular mark of dishonor in Chronicles (cf. 2 Ch. 23:21; 33:24). The detestable things (v. 8; ‘abominable,’ NRSV, RSV) would include the accusations leveled against him by Jeremiah (cf. Je. 22:12-23; 25:1-26:32). All that was found against him, though, is usually a neutral phrase and is perhaps better translated ‘what happened to him’ ... cf. *hannimsa`* in 2 Ch. 34:30-33; 35:7, 18), referring to the fulfillment of Jeremiah's words.”

The Pulpit Commentary observes about the closing words of this section, which state mentions “the other events of Jehoiakim's reign”: “As our compiler has literally told us none at all, we

need but note his expression here as a convenient formula, indicating his own intentional brevity, and the fact that he was privy to all in the original sources, which he nevertheless now omitted; yet see ... Jeremiah 7:9; 19:13, etc. The telling expression, what was found in him, is too readily to be filled up from the parallel, in its vers. 3, 4. Jehoiachin his son. In ... 1 Chronicles 3:16 he is called Jeconiah, and in ... Jeremiah 22:24 he is called Coniah.”

iii. The fall of Jehoiachin (36:9-10)

9 Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months and ten days. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord.

10 In the spring, King Nebuchadnezzar sent for him and brought him to Babylon, together with articles of value from the temple of the Lord, and he made Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, king over Judah and Jerusalem.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on the problem of Jeconiah's age: “‘Eight’ should have been ‘eighteen,’ probably from a mistake in transcribing the numeral letters of the Hebrew text ..., as appears from 2 Kings 24:8, and also from the full development of his ungodly principles and habits (see Ezek. 19:5-7). His reign being of so short duration cannot be considered at variance with the prophetic denunciation against his father (Jer 36:30). But his appointment by the people gave umbrage to Nebuchadnezzar, who, ‘when the year was expired’ (2 Chron. 36:10) - *i.e.*, in the spring, when campaigns usually began-came in person against Jerusalem, captured the city, and sent Jehoiachin in chains to Babylon, removing at the same time all the nobles and most skillful artisans, pillaging all the remaining treasures both of the temple and palace (see the notes at 2 Kings 24:8-17).”

iv. The fall of Zedekiah and of the kingdom (36:11-20).

11 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years.

12 He did evil in the eyes of the LORD his God and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke the word of the LORD.

13 He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him take an oath in God's name. He became stiff-necked and hardened his heart and would not turn to the LORD, the God of Israel.

14 Furthermore, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the LORD, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem.

15 The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place.

16 But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.

17 He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man nor young woman, old man or aged. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar.

18 He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the LORD's temple and the treasures of the king and his officials.

19 They set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there.

20 He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary observes: “Was there ever such a set of weak infatuated men as the Jewish kings in general? They had the fullest evidence that they were only deputies to God Almighty, and that they could not expect to retain the throne any longer than they were faithful to their Lord; and yet with all this conviction they lived wickedly, and endeavored to establish idolatry in the place of the worship of their Maker! After bearing with them long, the divine mercy gave them up, as their case was utterly hopeless. They sinned till there was no remedy.”

I don't know if Adam Clarke's observation about the kings of Israel being weak and infatuated is the right kind of evaluation. They were wicked and followed their path of evil with considerable energy. It is true that Zedekiah consulted Jeremiah at one point during the siege of Jerusalem, but that seems to have been rather to find a way out of a hopeless situation than a genuine desire to know the will of the Lord.¹⁷⁶

Fausset's Bible Dictionary puts the dates of Zedekiah's reign from at 599-588 BC. *Halley's Bible Handbook* put it at 597-586 BC. According to the latter, Zedekiah visited Babylon in the fourth year of his reign.

A very interesting feature in this story is the fact that Nebuchadnezzar made Zedekiah swear an oath in the Name of Elohim. Evidently, the Babylonian king thought that no Jew would ever swear falsely by that name. The heathen king had a better understanding of moral values than the Israelite. He considered inconceivable that anyone would challenge the god he pretended to serve. We assume that he made the monarch of every nation he conquered was forced to swear such an oath of allegiance in the name of the idol he worshiped.

The Fausset's Bible Dictionary writes about Zedekiah's oath: “Had Zedekiah kept his oath of fealty he would have been safe, though dependent. But weak, vacillating, and treacherous, he brought ruin on his country and on himself. It was through the anger of Jehovah against Judah that Zedekiah was given up to his own rebellious devices, 'stiffening his neck and hardening his heart from turning unto the Lord God of Israel' who warned him by Jeremiah; like Pharaoh of old (2 Chron. 36:12-13), he would 'not humble himself' (Jer 38:5; 39:1-7; 52:1-11; and Jer 21; 24; 27; 28; 29; 32; 33; 34; 37; 38).”

The Tyndale Commentary states: “The king is condemned not for any specific actions (events in his reign are dealt with at length in Je. 27:1 – 28:17; 32:1 – 34:22; 37:1 – 38:23) but for his over-all rebelliousness towards God and man. This is illustrated by negative versions of two expressions from 2 Chronicles 7:14 (*did not humble himself*; also 2 ch. 33:23; *would not turn*, and by other typical phrases which indicate his similarity with the generation which died in the wilderness (*stiff-necked*; cf. Ex. 32:9; 33:3, 5; Dt. 9:6; 2 Ch. 30:8) and with the Pharaoh who opposed Moses (hardened his heart; cf. Ex. 8:15, 32)...

Though he could be weak-minded (Je. 38:14-28), Zedekiah basically opposed Jeremiah, who 'spoke from the mouth of the LORD' (NRSV, RSV; cf. vv. 15-16, 21-22). He was accordingly criticized by both Jeremiah (Je. 37:2) and Ezekiel, the latter in connection with

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breaking his *oath* to the king of Babylon (*cf.* Ezk. 17:18-20). His pride and hardness of heart also contrast with Josiah, whose heart was tender and who humbled himself at God's word (2 Ch. 34:27)."

The people's attitude is, if anything, worse. They piled their sins one upon another, becoming *more and more* unfaithful (v. 14) and rejecting the prophets *again and again* (v. 15). Three complaints are made in particular, that they were unfaithful (v. 14) defiled the temple (v. 14) and laughed at the prophets (vv. 15-16). All three are frequent themes throughout Chronicles, and it is as if the entire message of Chronicles were being summed up.

Being *unfaithful* (Heb. *mā'al*) is about failing to give God what is due to him and taking it for oneself. It is regarded throughout Chronicles (*e.g.* 1 Ch. 2:7; 5:25; 10:13; 2 Ch. 12:2; 28:19; 33:17) as one of the chief underlying causes of exile (*cf.* 1 Ch. 5:25-26; 9:1; 2 Ch. 29:6; 30:7). A particularly close connection exists with 1 Chronicles 5:25-26, since in both passages unfaithfulness is characterized by idolatry and is punished by God's sending an invading army to take his people into exile. Unfaithfulness is also often associated with unholiness. Here it involves defiling the temple which God has *consecrated* (v. 14), of which a good example from Zedekiah's time is found in Ezekiel 8. Such behavior, however, was an invitation to God to invoke the promised judgment of 2 Chronicles 7:19-22 and destroy the temple.

Rejection of the prophets is an ever-present theme in Chronicles (*e.g.* 1 Ch. 10:13; 2 Ch. 24:19) and elsewhere in the Bible (*cf.* Ne. 9:26; Je. 44:4; Mt. 23:30-31; Acts 7:52). The sense of unending failure is accentuated here by a series of participles, which have no specific time reference in Hebrew (v. 16; *cf.* REB, NEB, 'never ceased to deride ... scorn ... scoff'). The use of several rare words allows the Chronicler's own thought to come through in a distinctive manner. Deride ('ridiculed,' JB, GNB) and scorn ('made fun of,' ...) are unique in the Old Testament, while *messengers* is a rare late term for prophets (*cf.* Is. 42:19; 44:26; Hg. 1:13; Mal. 3:1).

Eventually, however, the end must come when God's *wrath* is finally poured out (v. 16). The cataclysm which has been threatened since Ahaz (2 Ch. 28:9, 13, 25; 29:8, 10; 30:8) has been held back only because of the faith and repentance of individual leaders (*cf.* 2 Ch. 29:10; 39:8-9; 32:25-26; 33:6; 34:21, 25). Now there is *no remedy*, a chilling phrase meaning literally 'no healing.' It implies the cancellation of God's promise to heal his land and that therefore even prayer will be utterly useless (2 Ch. 7:14; *cf.* 30:20). The saddest thing is that all this has happened because they have turned their backs on God's love, neither recognizing nor listening to the messengers of God's 'compassion' (v. 15, NRSV; *pity*, NIV, REB, NEB). In the end, the exile came about not because Israel sinned, but because they spurned God's offers of reconciliation (*cf.* Dt. 7:7-8; Ho. 11:1-4).

The final events are passed over very quickly. First of all, the people were *handed over* to the Babylonians, and, because Israel wanted none of God's compassion, 'no compassion' was received from their conquerors (v. 17, NRSV, RSV; *cf.* v. 15). The temple and palace were then looted (v. 18) before the city itself was destroyed (v. 19). The *temple* and the *wall* (v. 19) may have been singled out because they became the focus of the rebuilding projects in the books of Ezra (chs. 1-6) and Nehemiah (chs. 1-6) respectively. The over-all impression is of unrelieved destruction. 'All, every' (Heb. *Kōl*) is used fivefold in verses 17-19, which together with *young* and *old* (v. 17), *large and small* (v. 18), and finally (lit.), 'to destruction' (v. 19) confirms that there was no respite, no escape."

I. Beginning to rebuild God's house (36:21-23).

21 *The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah.*

22 *In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing:*

23 *"This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:*

"The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you-may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up."

The law on the Sabbatical Year is found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. We read in Leviticus that God instructed Moses: "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the LORD. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. Whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you--for yourself, your manservant and maidservant, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you, as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.'¹⁷⁷

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on the "sabbath rests": "The return of every seventh was to be held as a sabbatic year, a season of rest to all classes, even to the land itself, which was to be fallow. This divine institution, however, was neglected-how soon and how long, appears from the prophecy of Moses (Lev. 26:34), and of Jeremiah in this passage..., which told that for divine retribution it was now to remain desolate seventy years. Since the Assyrian conquerors usually colonized their conquered provinces, so remarkable a deviation in Palestine from their customary policy must be ascribed to the overruling providence of God."

The Tyndale Commentary observes: "What appears to be the end is not the end, however, for God's word in the law and the prophets must still be fulfilled (vv. 21-23). In other words, the very existence of a future for Israel is due entirely to the fact that God has spoken. Though Israel has reached a dead end, God has certainly not done so.

To start with, the law of Leviticus 26:34-35, 43 must be fulfilled that the land will experience its *rest* or *sabbath* as well as *desolation* (v. 21). This is clearly a significant passage for the Chronicler's concept of restoration, since its wording is also reflected in the central promise of 2 Chronicles 7:14.

Then *the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah* (v. 21, 22) find a double fulfillment. Firstly, the seventy years of exile must be completed (v. 21), and, in accordance with Jeremiah's prophecies, this period is restorative (Je. 29:10) as well as punitive (Je. 25:11-14). This seventy-year period is probably best understood qualitatively rather than quantitatively, as a symbol of a human lifespan (*cf.* Ps. 90:10). An entire generation had to be removed to prevent any human being of stealing God's credit by attempting to resurrect a future out of the remains of the past. More mathematical approaches measure the time from the first exile (605 BC) to Cyrus' edict

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(539 BC) or from the destruction of the temple (587 BC) to the reopening of the second (516 BC), but this seems less satisfying.

Jeremiah's prophecies are fulfilled, secondly, by God taking action to initiate his rebuilding program, with God in his own way maintaining the surprise element to the very end. This time he fulfills his word through a foreign emperor's proclamation (vv. 22-23)! ... The extract that is quoted from the edict includes a reinterpretation of God's original promises to David in 1 Chronicles 17:4-14 and 2 Chronicles 7:12-21. 'To build him a house' (v. 23, NRSV, RSV, REB, NEB; *cf.* Ezr. 1:2) is a deliberate echo of the central promise of the Davidic covenant (*cf.* 1 Ch. 17:11-12; 22:10; 28:6; 2 Ch. 6:9-10). Cyrus of course is thinking only of the house in *Jerusalem*, but in the Chronicler's thought this phrase is inevitably connected with both houses of the Davidic covenant, the dynasty as well as the temple. In the end, therefore, the end is also a fresh start. God's promises continue through the exile, on through his own generation and into the future. The actual ending is unexpectedly sudden, but, as with the original conclusion of Mark's Gospel (Mk. 16:8), it is apparently deliberate. The final phrase, *let him go up*, which is a single word in Hebrew, breaks off in the middle of Ezra's version of the edict. Its effect is to emphasize that the reader's expected final response to the book is to exercise faith in God's promises. Though for those who first received the words a physical journey was involved (*cf.* 1 Ch. 9:2-34), the invitation is still valid and awaits whatever response is appropriate while God keeps his promise to build his house, that is, his church (*cf.* Mt. 16:18; Eph. 2:19-22). Today, as in the Chronicler's day, only houses that are ultimately founded on the words of God will remain secure when all others will be shaken and fall (*cf.* Mt. 7:24-27; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; Heb. 12:25-29)."

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the last two verses: "*In the first year of Cyrus King of Persia*. A period of half a century has elapsed between the latest date of the foregoing verses (circ. B. C. 586) and the date signaled here (circ. B.C. 538-6). With the proclamation of Cyrus begins in fact the manhood, with all its mystic, it wonderful, and it still non progressing struggles, of the Jew. His simple childhood, willful youth, are indeed for ever gone. But he and his nation are with unspeakably painful travail born. No life of a nation that is or ever has been merits the devout observation and study that this unchallengeably does. Our present verse and the one succeeding it are, sentence for sentence, the same with the opening verses of the Book of Ezra, which may possibly once have joined on to Chronicles, as one work, though we think this unlikely. Cyrus ... was the son of a royal Persian, Cambyses; his mother was Mandane, daughter of Astyages, the last King of Media. The name appears on the monuments, written *Kurus*. Cyrus defeated his grandfather Astyages, B.C. 599, ending thereby the Median royal line; and he defeated Croesus, B.C. 546, possessing himself thereby of the kingdom of Lydia; he took Babylon as above, B.C. 538. He himself died in battle, B.C. 529. *That the word of the Lord by ... Jeremiah might be accomplished* (see Jeremiah 25:11-14; 29:9-11). *The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus*. The fact is told us, and this, no doubt, as on a thousand other unexpected of far more intrinsic and vital interest in the Bible, is sufficient. It would have been interesting to know, however, even here, the mode in which Cyrus was appealed to. As, *e.g.*, it has been plausibly suggested that Daniel may have been in part instrumental in the work, and that, again, in part perhaps by directing the attention of Cyrus to Isaiah 44:28; 45:1.

Hath the Lord God of heaven given me ... The Lord his God be with him. The adopting by Cyrus of the Hebrew 'Jehovah' in both these places cannot escape notice. There can be no room to doubt that Cyrus was acquainted with the sacred literature of the Hebrews, and especially with the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, as with the language of Daniel. It may have been partly a graceful act on the part of Cyrus to word his proclamation to the Jews

thus, or it may have been simply, what under the circumstances came most naturally to him, with little or no intention in it either way. The numerous passages in Ezra parallel in matter with this verse do not need specification here. Now begins the new period of Jewish life, with fiercer probation, with unbounded and various trial, and probably of world-length continuance.”

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