

2 Chronicles Devotionals

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Today in the Word - Moody Bible Institute

2 Chronicles 1:11–12

I will give thee riches.

Solomon had chosen wisdom and knowledge that he might honor God in the sight of his people. And in return God honored him, and supplemented his choice with abundant wealth.

This reminds one of the constant teaching of Jesus. He who seeks his life loses it; but to lose it is to save it in the best and deepest sense. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added.

The conception of life given in the Bible differs by a whole heaven from the maxims and practices of some good and earnest people. Their notion is that they must work for their living, "keep the wolf from the door," educate their children for successfully meeting the demands of life. These objects are legitimate; but they were never meant by God to be the supreme aim of His servants.

His object in our creation, redemption, and regeneration, was that we might serve His redemptive purposes in the world, manifest His character, do His will, win souls for His kingdom, administer the gifts with which He had entrusted us. He asks us to rise to this high calling, and give our whole life to its realization. He will be responsible for all else. It is surely His will that we should give ourselves to useful trades, and fill our days with honest toil; but the main purpose should ever be His glory, and the exemplification in word and act of His holy character. If we ask for wisdom to do this well, we shall get all else into the bargain. God is a Being of perfect honor and integrity. And if we dare to make His service the main end of life, we shall find that no good thing will fail. He paves the streets of heaven with gold, and will not withhold it from His children, if they really need.

2 Chronicles 1

Wisdom and knowledge will be given you. - 2 Chronicles 1:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

In Harper Lee's classic novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch was sitting outside on his porch in a small Southern town when a local judge stopped by. The judge asked him to serve as the defense lawyer for an African-American man charged with rape. Atticus agreed. That decision, the key moment in the novel, exposed him and his children to ridicule, hostility, prejudice, and even physical attack. Atticus, one of the most respected characters in literature, made it because key principles of justice and racial equality were at stake.

In today's reading, Solomon also had a difficult decision to make. The Lord appeared to him and offered him anything he wanted—what should he request? Perhaps this offer can be regarded as God's "coronation gift" to the young king. It was also a test, which he passed: instead of asking for riches or success, he humbly asked for the wisdom to carry out his God-given responsibilities (v. 10).

This opening chapter also highlights the need for a temple. At this time, the ark of the covenant was in Jerusalem but the tabernacle and altars were at Gibeon. This was an awkward and even sinful situation, not in line with the Law. Solomon's temple would restore things to the way God had designed. That's why Bezalel, the lead craftsman in the construction of the original tabernacle, is mentioned prominently (v. 5).

This month's book study of 2 Chronicles complements the study of 1 Chronicles from last July. Tradition identifies Ezra the priest as the writer of both books, though no author is identified in Scripture. He wrote to encourage and exhort the Jewish exiles who had returned from captivity and who were rebuilding their lives and nation. Much of the material retells narratives also found in 1 and 2 Kings, but was adapted or supplemented for a different audience and historical context.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

By asking God for wisdom first, Solomon showed where his heart's treasure lay, that is, in which direction his deepest desires pointed. How about you? What's your most valued treasure? By what "true north" does your heart set its compass? Would those around you know it from your actions? Say with the psalmist: "My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God . . . Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere" (Ps. 84:2, 10).

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2 Chronicles 2

Now I am about to build a temple for the Name of the Lord my God and to dedicate it to him. - 2 Chronicles 2:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

The St. Lawrence Seaway was one of the major building projects of the twentieth century. This intricate system of locks, dams, and canals stretches 2,300 miles, and together with the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes, it connects middle America with the Atlantic coast. Starting as long ago as 1680, various businesses and government bodies worked on the project. When completed in the mid-1800s, the canal was only four meters deep, not enough for oceangoing ships. Eventually, Canada and the United States cooperated on the modern version, completed in 1959. More than two billion tons of cargo worth more than \$400 billion move through the St. Lawrence Seaway every year.

Solomon had the help of his father David in preparing for the monumental project of building a temple for the Lord, the spiritual climax of the golden age of Israel. Even with his father's preparations, though, the task must have been daunting. So when he took the first step toward actually doing it, God encouraged him with a positive response. He wrote a letter to King Hiram of Tyre, requesting materials and workers for the project. Hiram agreed to his proposals and sent the master craftsman Hiram-Abi, born of parents from both countries, to oversee the labor. In the parallel stories of temple and tabernacle, Solomon is implicitly compared to

Bezalel and Hiram-Abi to Oholiab. Most commentators interpret Hiram's letter as using standard cultural expressions, but it's possible that he was also a follower of the true God.

It seems clear that God wanted to keep His global plan for all nations in view. Though Israel was the "chosen nation," there was no problem with the involvement of "unchosen people" in building His temple. The art, architecture, and building materials of foreigners would be woven into the project. For his part, Solomon kept God's infinite greatness in view, recognizing the inadequacy of any structure to contain the Almighty (v. 6).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If Solomon's elaborate preparations for the temple seem far removed from your situation, we have a suggestion: Prepare for your Sunday church service in the same worshipful spirit. If dashing out the door juggling keys and kids' Sunday school papers sounds familiar, perhaps you need to think the process through more carefully. What might you do to more effectively prepare your heart and mind—and the hearts and minds of your family and friends—to meet with the living God?

2 Chronicles 2:11

Because the Lord loveth His people, He hath made thee King over them. (r. v.)

How truly might these words be addressed to our blessed Lord! Because God loved the world, He gave His only-begotten Son, His well-beloved, to be both Prince and Savior. And it is in knowing, loving, and serving Him that we can realize our Supreme blessedness.

God's loving appointment in making Jesus King will be apparent when we remember how beautiful He is in His personal character; how closely He is identified with our nature; the might of His arm with which He shields, the patience wherewith He bears, the redemption which He has wrought out and brought in for all who believe. What could God's love have done better to approve itself?

Is He your King? Never till He is so, will you know the fullness of God's love. Those who question or refuse His authority are always in doubt about the love of God to themselves and to the world. Those, on the other hand, who acknowledge His claims, and crown Him as King, suddenly find themselves admitted to a standpoint of vision in which doubts and disputations vanish, and the secret love of God is unfolded. Then they experience the wise and gentle tendance of the Divine love in its most entrancing characteristics. All is love where Jesus reigns.

Nothing is more indicative of God's benevolence than His incessant appeal to men to make Jesus King. The demand may sometimes involve severe agony and suffering for those who have acknowledged other lords too long; but God persists in His demand, because only in serving Jesus can the human heart be truly blessed.

Go, spread your trophies at His feet, And crown Him Lord of all!

2 Chronicles 3:1-5:1

Who is able to build a temple for him, since the heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain him? - 2 Chronicles 2:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

When the Jewish exiles returned under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, one of their first orders of business was to rebuild Solomon's temple. Unfortunately, they had neither the resources nor the manpower to rebuild it on its previous grand scale. When the foundation was laid and dedicated, in fact, happiness and sadness were mixed. On that day, many people shouted with joy and thankfulness, but there were also many who wept because they remembered the glory of the old temple. By comparison, the smaller new one illustrated how far the nation had fallen (see Ezra 3).

These returned exiles made up the original audience for 2 Chronicles. The story of Solomon and the temple was not to them a curious bit of history, but a vital link to their spiritual heritage and identity. That's why a strong sense of history permeates the narrative. The temple's location, Mount Moriah, was where tradition says that Abraham offered up Isaac (Genesis 22). Solomon also knew it as the place where David's prayer to stop a plague was answered (1 Chronicles 21). The two pillars, "Jakin," meaning "he establishes," and "Boaz," meaning "in him is strength," served as reminders of the covenant (3:17; cf. Deut. 26:18-19; Rev. 3:12). The twelve bulls symbolized the twelve tribes, and were arranged as the Israelite camp had been during the Exodus (4:4; Numbers 2).

Hiram-Abi and the other craftsmen did their work faithfully and artistically. Building the temple took seven years, which, considering that it was not really a very large structure, shows that much care was taken in the creation and construction of every detail. In the end, the main building measured 90 by 30 feet, plus a portico of 105 by 30 feet. So, if a building can't contain God, why all the effort? Building the temple was an act of worship, showing the heart of the king and the nation. The temple would remind them of

God's glory and their covenant relationship with Him.

APPLY THE WORD Speaking of the temple, do you have a special place for meeting with the Lord? If not, pray for Him to show you one. It might be a spot in a forest or on a beach, or perhaps a special room in your house that catches the morning light just so, or perhaps an out-of-the-way nook where no one ever comes. While we know that we can worship God anywhere, the atmosphere of a particular place can spiritually influence and prepare our hearts and minds.

2 Chronicles 3:17

He set up the Pillars before the Temple,... Fachin and Boaz.

The meaning of these names is significant— He shall establish, and In it is strength. Each speaks of Him of whom the whole temple was a type. The Lord Jesus has established the work of redemption so that it shall never be removed; has established the covenant, ordered in all things and sure; has established His Church, so that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it; has established us before the face of His Father forevermore.

There is much in the New Testament about the established life. It is the desire of Peter that the scattered saints should be perfected, established, and strengthened. Paul desires to see the Roman Christians, that he may impart some spiritual gift so that they may be established: he desires that the Colossians may be built up in Christ, and established in the faith. The Epistle to the Hebrews says that it is good for the heart to be established with grace. Let us ask that Jesus should establish us in the Divine life, rooting and grounding us in love and faith, so that we may not be moved away from the Gospel, but abound therein with thanksgiving.

It is only as we abide in Jesus, that we shall become steadfast, unmovable, and always abounding.

But Christ is also our strong Helper. We have no strength of our own; but He is strong; and in Him we have righteousness and strength. Let us make our refuge in Him, as the conies, who are a feeble folk, do in the rock. They who abide in Jesus derive from Him fresh supplies of strength for each moment's need. They hear Him saying, "Fear not, I will strengthen, yea, I will help thee"; and they learn to say with Paul: "I can do all things in Christ that strengtheneth me."

2 Chronicles 4:18

The Weight could not be found out.

This was as it should be. There was no attempt to keep an accurate account of what was given to the service of God. Even Solomon's left hand did not know what his right hand did. There is a tendency in all of us to keep a strict account of what we give to God. We note it down in our ledgers; we rigorously observe the compact into which we have entered with Him; but the loftiest form of devotion overleaps such calculation.

This liberality of the people reminds us of Mary's. She never thought of the great cost of the precious spikenard which she broke over the Master's person. It was her joy to give her all; and it was only when Judas came on the scene, that we learn how many hundred pence it was worth. Thus the churches of Macedonia abounded from their deep poverty unto the riches of their liberality, so that, beyond their power, they gave to the cause of God.

This lavish generosity is the reflection of God's. There is no measure in His bounty. It is heaped up, pressed down, and running over. He never says, I will give up to a certain amount, and hold my hand; but He continues to give like the overflowings of the river of Egypt, or the abundance of the spring flowers, which cover the earth as with a carpet. Ah, what a God is ours, who loves with a love that passeth knowledge; and when He gives, exceeds abundance, however much we may have asked or thought. How truly may we say with the psalmist. "Many, O Lord my God, are the wonderful works that Thou hast done, and Thy thoughts which are to us-ward. They cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered."

2 Chronicles 5:2-6:11 5

I will be their God, and they will be my people. - 2 Corinthians 6:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

Most people like to keep some record of their journeys through life. Some write in personal diaries. Others put together photo albums or take up scrapbooking. Some use video cameras and software to create home movies—an update on the vacation slide shows of a previous generation. Others collect souvenirs and knick-knacks from their worldwide travels. Then there's everyone's favorite, the Christmas newsletter, in which (ideally) the major events of a given year are summarized in a burst of conciseness and creativity.

The objects placed in the ark in today's reading similarly served as records of the journey of the nation of Israel. The two tablets of

the Law were reminders of the Mosaic covenant and God's faithful covenant love. You may have heard that a pot of manna and Aaron's rod (that budded) were also in the ark at some point, but this is uncertain. Hebrews 9:4 seems to indicate so, but Numbers 17:10 puts Aaron's rod in front of the tabernacle. Perhaps these tokens were in different places at different times, and they appear to have been lost by Solomon's day. Even so, the people would have remembered them as symbols of God's miraculous care and provision.

The dedication of the temple took place in 959 B.C. during the Feast of Tabernacles, a harvest festival (Lev. 23:34-43). This weeklong feast also commemorated the Exodus. Solomon made sure the entire occasion was invested with both solemnity and joy. All the key leaders were present and every part of the nation was represented. The priests and Levites had consecrated themselves and been assigned specific duties. Sacrifices were offered, accompanied by prayers, congregational worship, and music. The king pronounced a formal blessing. God's covenant with David was invoked as a key link in the chain of history (see 2 Samuel 7). The descent of God's glory on the temple signified His presence, approval, and guidance, just as it had with the tabernacle so long ago (5:13-14; Ex. 40:34-38).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The two tablets of the Law from Mount Sinai that were placed in the ark functioned as physical symbols and reminders of Israel's spiritual history. No doubt you also have spiritually meaningful papers or objects around your home—for example, a framed baptismal certificate, or a bookmark from a church missions conference, or a photo of your small group having a picnic in the park. Give thanks for these occasions to remember and use them to reflect on God's guidance in your life.

2 Chronicles 5:13

Then the House was filled with a Cloud.

This was the bright Shekinah cloud, the symbol of the Divine Presence, which had shone for Moses in the bush, and led the march through the desert. It was as though God had found a rest. And as it settled upon the Most Holy Place, it was as though God said, This is my rest forever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it.

The Most Holy Place is the symbol of our spirit, meant to be the abiding-place and home of God; and shall we not invite the blessed Shekinah cloud to enter thither, addressing it in the words of the Psalm, "Arise, O Lord, into thy resting-place, Thou and the ark of Thy strength." Because where He comes to abide He abundantly blesses the provision, and satisfies the poor with bread; He clothes His priests with salvation, and makes His saints shout aloud for joy: He erects the horn of strength and prepares the lamp of light. What were the conditions of this incoming?—

First, Unity.—"The trumpeters and singers were as one." We must put away strife, divisions, variance, and evil-speaking. Our heart and life must be full of love. When the disciples were with one accord, in one place, the Spirit descended.

Second, Heartiness.—"They lifted up their voice." There was every symptom of sincerity and fervor.

Third, Thanksgiving and Praise.—"They praised the Lord, saying, He is good, for His mercy endureth forever." No refrain occurs oftener in the Bible than this. It is an exquisite expression of the heart's joy and rest in God. Let us sing it in our darkest, as well as gladdest hours, full of trust, thanksgiving, and praise.

2 Chronicles 6:12-42 6

Hear from heaven, your dwelling place; and when you hear, forgive. - 2 Chronicles 6:21

TODAY IN THE WORD

Prayer works—and as of early 2007, we now have an academic's word for it. David Hodge of Arizona State University undertook "A Systematic Review of the Empirical Literature on Intercessory Prayer" in cases of people with medical or psychological problems. Looking at seventeen research studies that have been done on this topic to date, he concluded that the evidence suggests that "prayer offered on behalf of another yields positive results . . . This is the most thorough and all-inclusive study of its kind on this controversial subject that I am aware of."

Yes, God answers prayer. We knew this before Dr. Hodge's study, and Solomon certainly knew it many centuries ago. His prayer of dedication for the temple, which began with thankfulness for God's covenant promises, mainly consisted of petitions for significant areas of the nation's spiritual life (cf. 1 Kings 8:23-53). These included requests for His continued faithfulness, His special attention to prayers offered from the Temple, His forgiveness, His justice, and His favor and blessing. A thread runs through this prayer that when bad things happened to Israel, the cause would be sin. So when Solomon prayed about military defeat, he asked the Lord to forgive when the people repented. And when he prayed about famines and plagues, he again asked the Lord to forgive when the people repented. When he prophetically prayed about captivity, he did the same. No doubt Ezra intended verses 36-39 to be an

extra exhortation to the returned exiles! Thematically, the cycle of sin and forgiveness is illustrated throughout the rest of 2 Chronicles.

A substantial theology—that is, picture of God—can be found in this prayer. He is infinite and transcendent, but also personal and relational. He makes and keeps promises. He is just and holy. He controls the events of history. He mercifully forgives sin. He has a plan for the nations that includes answering the prayers of foreigners and spreading His glory worldwide (vv. 32-33).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Solomon's prayer demonstrated his familiarity with God's Law. Why not imitate his example and compose a "Scripture prayer collage"? A "Scripture prayer collage" is a prayer that you would like to pray, written not in your words but in words drawn straight from the Bible. Many of our traditions honor spontaneity in prayer, and there's certainly a time for that as well, but today let your words dwell in the Word. Your verbal collage will not only express your heart, but as God's Word, it will change your heart, too.

2 Chronicles 6:27

When Thou teachest them the good way wherein they should walk. (r. v.)

This sentence is exactly parallel with the previous one, When Thou dost afflict them. The obvious meaning then is, that God sometimes taught Israel the good way wherein they should walk, by afflicting them and shutting up the heaven so that there was no rain. This was notably the case in the days of Elijah. Possibly, these words were in his heart, when he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not for the space of three years and six mouths. Perhaps the prophet felt that in no other way could the people be brought back to their senses, and reconciled to God, except by learning the futility of idol-worship. So he asked God to teach them the good way, by shutting up the bad one.

What a lesson for ourselves: God often teaches us by bitter disappointment and pain. Our familiar paths are barricaded by thorns, our familiar hiding-places are blocked up, our fountains are poisoned, and all our pleasant things are laid waste. We sometimes suppose that this is in wrath; may it not rather be in love? God is teaching us the good by showing us the evil: is urging us to tread in the pleasant ways of wisdom, by allowing us to prove the sharp flints and thorns of transgression. Then Ephraim bemoans himself thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a calf unaccustomed to the yoke; turn Thou me, and I shall be turned. Then the soul cries, I will go and return to my first husband, for then was it better with me than now.

Sit in God's school, and learn from His Word and Spirit, that He may not be compelled to have recourse to such severe measures as these. Why shouldst thou be afflicted, when He is willing to instruct and teach thee in the way that thou shouldst go!

2 Chronicles 7

Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. - 2 Chronicles 7:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

One of the great hymns of the church is the classic, "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty." Some of its lyrics, translated from German, read: "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation! O my soul, praise Him, for He is thy health and salvation! All ye who hear, now to His temple draw near; Join me in glad adoration! . . . Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore Him! All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before Him! Let the "amen" sound from His people again; Gladly forever adore Him!"

From the dedication of Solomon's temple to your congregation singing hymns, the spirit of worship and praise for our God is the same. When Solomon finished his public prayer of dedication, "fire came down from heaven" and "the glory of the Lord filled the temple" (v. 1). The same thing had happened at the dedication of the tabernacle (Lev. 9:23-24), as well as on other occasions when He wanted His power and presence to be unmistakable. Kneeling facedown was an expression of awe and worship, underlined by their verbal covenant affirmation, "He is good; his love endures forever" (v. 3).

God also appeared to Solomon again, officially answering his prayer with promises and affirmations, as well as warnings. As long as Israel remained faithful and didn't serve other gods, the temple would remain. But if they did sin and come under His judgment, they could humbly repent and seek the Lord, knowing He would forgive their sin and heal their land (v. 14).

The complete celebration in today's chapter took fifteen days—seven days of dedicating the temple and altar, seven days for the Feast of Tabernacles, and one day for a national assembly. At its conclusion, the people returned home "joyful and glad in heart for the good things the Lord had done for David and Solomon and for his people Israel" (v. 10).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Your home likely has less gold workmanship than Solomon's temple! Even so, you can still dedicate it to the Lord. If you haven't

done so already, we suggest that you and your family pray through your house room-by-room, committing each person and every activity in it to God's service and glory. In the kitchen, for example, you could pray about topics such as godly hospitality. In the children's bedroom, you could entrust their character and future choices to the One who loves them even more than you do.

2 Chronicles 7:1

The Fire came down from Heaven, and consumed the Burnt-Offering.

It was a very gracious and immediate response to the prayer of King and people. If we make room for God, He always comes and fills. If we seek Him, He is instantly with us. Directly the soul confesses, it is forgiven; or consecrates itself, it is accepted; or claims deliverance from the power of sin, it is cleansed. Do you really want the Lord to come to you? His glory has even now begun to shine in on you, to grow and enlighten you forevermore.

The fire stands for the Divine Presence. Oh to have always a consciousness of it! Nothing would so soon arrest and destroy the impurity and evil within; as sunshine does fungus-growth. We are told that the fire was to be kept burning on the altar: it was never to go out. Thus, we should always perpetuate and practice the presence of God, feeding the fire with the fuel of prayer and meditation.

Fire also stands for the Divine Purity. As the Plague of London was stamped out by the Great Fire which destroyed the nests where it had bred; and as the furnace rids the ore of dross— so the Holy Spirit in thy heart and mine is a guarantee of holiness and righteousness all our days.

Fire also stands for Divine Fellowship. It consumed that part of the offering which was placed on the altar; and it seemed as if the Divine nature was therefore feeding upon the sacrifice, whilst the remainder of it was consumed by the offerer. Thus, also, we have communion with God, as we eat the bread and drink the wine in the Lord's supper. We feed on Christ in adoration, faith, and identification. God feeds on the completeness of Christ's obedience, and the glory of His character. Thus we have fellowship with the Father and the Son, by the Holy Ghost.

2 Chronicles 8

As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God. - 1 Kings 11:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

According to The Gallup Poll in July of this year, the American public had strong opinions about the most important issues facing elected leaders. Iraq remained at the top of the list, as it has since March 2004. Following that were terrorism and national security, the economy, energy, illegal immigration, health care, and education. Also included on the list was the notion of "fixing government": job approval ratings for Congress were in the mid-20 percent range, the lowest observed by Gallup in a decade. Certainly there is no shortage of important issues that people would like to see addressed by their elected leaders, a challenge that is increasingly relevant with the presidential election next year.

Solomon also dealt with various national policy issues. Some involved battles, but he was not primarily a warrior, as his father David had been. Instead, he focused on politics, diplomacy, and trade. He undertook building projects. He shored up national security by strengthening border posts and equipping his army with chariots and horses. He solidified relations with neighbors such as Egypt. To give his daughter in marriage to Solomon, Pharaoh must have regarded him as a worthy equal. Though such wives would later help lead him astray, Solomon was still faithful to the Lord at this time. He built his new wife her own palace in order to keep her away from Jewish holy places (v. 11). He also finished David's work of organizing the priests and Levites to carry out different worship-related tasks.

As the king expanded his trading projects, he partnered with Hiram and the Phoenicians, experts in shipbuilding and sailing. His ships would surely have docked at the kingdom of Saba, or Sheba (southwest Arabia), more than a thousand miles away. Their king may have worried that such voyages could disrupt his caravan trade, which may in turn have prompted him to send his queen on the famous visit we'll read about tomorrow.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you know that map of the world in the lobby of your church? The one that you've walked by so many times you no longer really see it? The next time you're at church, we encourage you to stop there and spend some time praying. As we consider Solomon's national and international projects today and tomorrow, you may feel led to consider the church's national and international projects as well. Who are your church's "home missionaries"? What do they do? How can you help?

2 Chronicles 8:11

The places are holy, whereunto the Ark of God hath come.

On this account Solomon said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David, king of Israel. What a fatal admission! She was the daughter of Pharaoh, and therefore it was no doubt considered a splendid match for the young king; and yet she could not dwell within the precincts of the old city of David, hallowed by the presence of the Ark. "He brought her out of the city of David, into the house that he had built for her." So from the very outset there was division of interests, making way no doubt for much of the waywardness of Solomon's character in after life, so that we are told "his wives turned away his heart."

One of the first questions that youth and maiden should put in considering the question of marriage is, whether there can be perfect sympathy in the best and deepest things; for how can two walk together except they be agreed?

The blessedness of the marriage tie depends on whether the twain are one in spirit, in a common love for Christ, and endeavor for His glory. Nothing is more terrible than when either admits in the secrecy of the heart, concerning the other, My husband or my wife cannot accompany me into the holy places where I was reared, and in which my best life finds its home.

All friendship should follow the same law. We must abide together in the secret place of the Most High, if our friends and we are to be friends indeed. All places may be made holy where the Ark of God's covenant comes. Where it goes, love may safely follow; but woe to the love that cannot! Its inability proves its lack of elements of permanence and perfect satisfaction.

2 Chronicles 9

He has made you king over [Israel], to maintain justice and righteousness. - 2 Chronicles 9:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

Earlier this year, Forbes announced its annual list of "The World's Richest People." The magazine identified a total of 946 billionaires worth an average of \$3.6 billion each, including 178 people who attained billionaire status for the first time this year. Some countries are climbing the charts fast, such as Russia, which now boasts 53 billionaires, and India, which took over the #1 ranking in Asia with 36 billionaires. The top spot on the list is occupied, as it has been for 13 years straight, by Microsoft founder Bill Gates.

Had Forbes kept its list in Old Testament times, Solomon would have been a shoo-in to take the top spot (vv. 22-24). Nonetheless, when the queen of Sheba visited, her plan was to cut him down to size through a two-pronged "attack." First, she brought along the most difficult philosophical and religious questions she could; second, she brought gifts calculated to amaze her host, including exotic spices and four-and-a-half tons of gold. Instead, it was she who was completely "overwhelmed" by Solomon's wisdom and wealth (v. 4).

Here, through an objective pagan evaluation, we see that Solomon really was as incredible as the writer of 2 Chronicles has been making him out to be. The queen's farewell speech is interesting (vv. 5-8). As in the case of Hiram, most commentators think her praise of God is merely praise of Solomon, phrased in culturally appropriate terms. But her words are so specific that we must conclude that the king had at least tried to explain to her the one true God and His dealings with Israel. So who knows with what seeds of belief she returned home!

Chapter 9 marks a climax in the narrative so far, in the sense that God's promises in chapter 1 have been fulfilled. The queen of Sheba and others, coming from the "ends of the earth" to testify to Solomon's wisdom and wealth, were in the big picture testifying to the greatness and faithfulness of God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Solomon had many projects both home and abroad—as does the church. While "home missions" (see yesterday) includes prison ministry, food pantries, crisis pregnancy centers, and youth outreach, international missions is also a rich topic for learning and prayer. Pay another visit to that map in your church's lobby. Whom does your church support overseas? How might you get involved? "From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the Lord is to be praised" (Ps. 113:3).

2 Chronicles 9:1

She came to probe Solomon with hard questions.

She came to the right place, for Solomon passed all the kings of the earth in wisdom; and all the kings of the earth sought his presence, to hear the wisdom that God had put into his heart. Bring your hard questions to Christ; He is greater than Solomon. To Him is given riches and wisdom, and He is made unto us wisdom. Before the touch of His light the darkest perplexities must resolve themselves. Though He speak no audible word, the hardest questions are answered to the eyes and ears of such as wait before Him.

She came in the right spirit, bringing him gold and spices and precious stones. Those who would get from Christ must be willing to give to Him. There must be a reciprocity; and if we hope to receive from Him from those infinite stores of which He has the key, we must count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, and must be prepared to count them as refuse if only we may will Him.

She came to a right conclusion. He answered all her questions, and she returned congratulating his servants and blessing God. To each of us, life is full of perplexities, to which we can find no solution, however much we strain our eyes and weary our minds. But away there in the light Christ stands, with the perfect plan of every maze in His possession, with a key for every riddle, and solution for every enigma. Wait patiently. Each tough knot will be untied; and there will come into our hearts a radiancy, a bounding joy like that with which the Queen of Sheba turned to go to her own home. The half of the greatness of thy wisdom, O Word of God, can never be told!

2 Chronicles 10-11

When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. - Proverbs 11:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

Abraham Lincoln, who had said, "Government cannot endure permanently half slave, half free," was elected President on November 6, 1860. Six weeks later, South Carolina seceded from the Union, followed within the next two months by six other states. By the time Lincoln was sworn in on March 4, 1861, the Confederate States of America had already come into existence. On April 12, the Confederate army captured Fort Sumter. When Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 militia, four more states seceded. The American Civil War had begun.

Civil war, brother against brother, is an ugly thing. How did the nation of Israel, so soon after the golden age of David and Solomon, find itself on the verge of civil war? The seeds of this situation lay in discontent with taxation and forced labor, a result of decades of building projects. Jeroboam led a delegation asking Rehoboam, the new king, to take it easier. Rehoboam wisely asked for a delay to seek counsel, but then foolishly took the wrong advice. His friends apparently thought that authority and power were the same thing, and that power was shown in exploiting others. The idea of a king as the shepherd of his people and responsible before God had been lost somewhere!

God worked through the expression of Rehoboam's foolishness; in fact, the Lord had already promised Jeroboam the northern kingship (10:15). He also sent His prophet Shemaiah to prevent armed conflict from breaking out, though Rehoboam still set up defensive posts. To his credit, he obeyed the prophet, though otherwise he didn't show much respect for the Lord. Like his father, he took many wives, in violation of the Law (11:21; cf. Deut. 17:17). To the north, things were not much better. Jeroboam appointed his own priests and worshiped animal idols (11:15; cf. Lev. 17:7). Therefore, the priests and Levites headed south, and Jerusalem and the temple remained the spiritual heart of the divided nation.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

A wise application from today's devotional is to consider carefully from whom you seek advice. Rather than heed the reasonable counsel of experienced men, Rehoboam chose to follow the advice of his peers. Were they "yes men"? Inexperienced or immature? Proud or aggressive? We don't really know. But their advice was foolish and the results of following it proved disastrous. Are the counselors in your life more like them or more like the first set? Make sure you listen to the truth-tellers God has put into your life.

2 Chronicles 10:15

For it was brought about of God. (r. v.)

This revolt must have seemed to be the result of an unfortunate mistake on the part of the ill-advised young king. He and the young men that gathered around him thought that the best way of ruling people was by showing a strong hand, and adopting a policy of non-compliance; with their very natural requests. But as the result, the Ten Tribes, never very closely bound to David's line, sprang away from it, leaving, as Ahijah had foretold, only two out of the twelve pieces of the rent garment. Here, however, a deeper explanation is given: "It was brought about of God." It seemed to be altogether a piece of human folly and passion; but now we are suddenly brought into the presence of God, and told that beneath the plottings and plannings of man He was carrying out His eternal purpose.

To detect this Divine purpose lying beneath the cross-currents of human affairs is the prerogative of the saints. In a recent book, the Duke of Argyll has argued from the purpose-iveness of nature. With as much certainty we may apply that word to history, politics, the course of current events. All is under law. God doeth according to His will among the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His

purpose." Without contravening the action of man's free choice He carries out His great designs and works His sovereign will. Let us trust in this Almighty Providence, which underlies all events and catastrophes, and pursues its beneficent objects undeterred by our sins. He makes the wrath of man to praise Him, and weaves the malignant work of Satan into His plans.

2 Chronicles 11:16

Such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel came to Jerusalem.

All the tribes were represented in those great convocations around the Temple and Ark of God. The territory of the northern tribes was now under Jeroboam; the gulf between the two kingdoms was marked and distinct. Everything was done by the son of Nebat to make it difficult for his people to cross the frontier; but their spiritual affinities prevailed. They were stronger than the antipathy which Rehoboam's haughty behavior had excited; stronger than the fear of incurring odium with their own king; stronger than the inconvenience of the long journey. In spite of everything, those whose hearts were set on seeking the Lord God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Lord God of their fathers.

Does not this foreshadow the unity of the Church of Christ? Territorial distinctions, the risk of incurring disfavor, the necessity of making a sacrifice, these things are as nothing compared with the attraction of our common Lord. Amid wide disunion and disparity of every kind, there is one mighty bond which draws believers of every nation, kindred, tribe, and people together. Each morning we all ascend the steps of the same temple of prayer; each evening we join in one great hymn of praise; at each Lord's Supper we sit at the same table. Eating of one Bread, we know that we are one Loaf; drinking of one Cup, we profess our indebtedness to the same precious Blood for our hope and ground of acceptance (1 Corinthians 10:17, r. v., marg.).

We must set our hearts, if we desire to execute any great purpose in our life: otherwise we shall be daunted and checkmated by the strong opposition of men and things.

2 Chronicles 12:1-14:1 12-14

This is what the Lord says, "You have abandoned me; therefore, I now abandon you." - 2 Chronicles 12:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

Gerhard Brinkmann, 88, was visiting a friend's grave site in the town of Halberstadt, Germany. A young man approached him and demanded his money and watch. "I told him to come closer if he wanted it," recounted Brinkmann. "As he did I landed a full-force right hook on his chin." Brinkmann was the German lightweight boxing champion in 1936, and despite the passage of time he still had plenty of power left. The would-be mugger thought he had chosen an easy target—but the "old man" knocked him out and won an unlikely victory.

That's the way today's story ends as well—with an unlikely victory that upon investigation seemed bound to happen. Because Rehoboam had led the nation away from covenant obedience, God allowed Judah to be defeated in battle by Shishak, king of Egypt (12:1-2). (This event is corroborated in secular history, since Shishak had a relief carved on the wall of a temple in Thebes to memorialize his victory.) The passage makes clear that the size of the armies and the number of mercenaries involved was irrelevant to the outcome. The reason for the defeat was covenantal, not military. When Shemaiah the prophet arrived with a message from the Lord, the king repented and the nation was rescued, but not entirely. There were lessons to be learned (12:8), but this event was enough of a lesson for Rehoboam's lifetime.

His son Abijah, though evaluated negatively on the whole, still had enough sense to appeal to the covenant to rebuke Jeroboam and his idolatry (13:5, 10-12; cf. 1 Kings 15:3). As a result, despite being the smaller country with the smaller army, he won a decisive military success. The huge number killed clearly indicates divine intervention, again driving home the lesson that victory and defeat are in the hands of the Lord. This defeat broke the back of Jeroboam's power and prevented him from causing any further trouble.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

God taught Rehoboam a humbling lesson by allowing him to be defeated in battle and making him watch foreigners cart away some of the treasures from Solomon's temple. Perhaps there has been a time in your life when God taught you a similar humbling lesson. In response to today's passage, reflect and write about this lesson in your spiritual journal or diary. What did God want to teach you through that painful experience? How do you look back on it now and see His goodness at work?

2 Chronicles 12:14

He did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord.

In the margin of the A. V. for prepared the alternative rendering fixed is suggested. The R. V. gives set, "he set not his heart to seek the Lord." This is very true of all of us. Before temptation comes we almost always have a warning of some kind. The barometer

falls; the sea birds come in to the shore; the leaves of the trees are bent back. The Spirit of God contrives to give the soul some signal that at any moment it may expect an assault. The question always is at such a time, Is the heart set on seeking and doing the will of God? If it be, if without reserve the whole nature is determined to do God's will at any cost, there is no fear of the enemy effecting an entrance. All day the thunder of its artillery may boom around, but from every side the foe will be repelled, until presently the storm will roll far down the wind.

If, on the other hand, there is any vacillation; if, whilst ostensibly avowing our determination to do the right thing, we secretly whisper in our deepest consciousness that we intend to go as far as we can in self-indulgence, and would be almost thankful if circumstances compelled us to yield—we are almost certain to fall. The will must be whole in its resolves; the heart must be consecrated in its most secret determinations; no traitor may be harbored, who may open the postern gate. Oh to say with David, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed"! But this steadfastness is one of those preparations of the heart which can only be obtained through the gracious indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Hence we pray with David, "Renew a steadfast spirit within me." And while we pray, we must never forget our Lord's command to watch also.

2 Chronicles 13:14

Behold, the battle was before and behind.

Abijah's address is full of true and noble utterances, especially when he describes God as being the Captain of the Host; and this spirit soon permeated his people, so that when the battle was sorest, and they were hemmed in by their foes, it was natural for them to turn to the Lord, and for the priests to give a blast on the trumpets, like that with which the new moon and the solemn feasts were inaugurated.

The point for us to remember is that our enemies may shut us in on all sides, preventing reinforcements from north, south, east, and west; but no earthly power can ever shut off God from above us. The way upward is always kept clear; the ladder which links the beleaguered soul with God and heaven can never be blocked, except by transgression and sin.

The Priest is always with thee, child of God. His help is always at hand. Neither death, nor, life, nor height, nor depth, nor principalities, nor powers, can ever separate thee from the down-coming of God's love.

The battle is often before and behind. From behind come memories of past failure, the consequences of mistakes, the misunderstandings which have alienated us from others, and made it difficult for us to live as we would; on the other hand perplexities and anxieties seem to bar our future path. But when the battle is before and behind, remember that God besets His people behind and before, and covers them with His hand. The invisible film of His protection makes the soul invulnerable. The life that is hid with Christ in God is beyond the reach of harm.

2 Chronicles 14:2-15:19

All Judah rejoiced about the oath because they had sworn it wholeheartedly. - 2 Chronicles 15:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

Evangelist Billy Sunday, described by one newspaper of his day as a "whirling dervish," was known for his energetic and dramatic style. In the early 1900s, he used colloquial language, applied modern business methods to organizing evangelistic crusades, and won an estimated 300,000 converts. "I want to preach the gospel so plainly," he said, "that men can come from the factories and not have to bring a dictionary." Over a period of four decades, 100 million Americans heard him speak in more than 300 crusades.

As Billy Sunday brought revival to many American towns and cities, so in today's reading King Asa brought revival to Judah. We're not told how he became a true believer, but it seems that there were still God-worshippers in leadership positions who influenced him toward obedience. From the very start of his reign, Asa battled idolatry, tried to remove the high places used for idolatry, and led the nation in seeking the Lord. God gave him a decade of peace to carry out these reforms, then enabled him to face a military threat from Egypt. Zerah, the Egyptian general, worked for Osorkon I, son of Shishak, who invaded Judah in order to recreate his father's victories and win glory for himself. But this time the results were quite different. Asa prayed for God's help and asked that His glory would win the victory (14:11).

Though the king tried to remove the high places, it appears he was unsuccessful. He could tear down altars, but he couldn't root out faithlessness from people's hearts. Against what might have been very natural discouragement, God sent a prophet named Azariah (about whom nothing else is known) to encourage and exhort the king to redouble his efforts (15:7-8). In response, Asa called a national assembly during the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), during which the covenant was renewed. He also showed his uncompromising commitment to the Lord by punishing his own grandmother for her idolatry (15:16).

APPLY THE WORD You might already know that the rest of 2 Chronicles is an up-and-down story. One king leads a revival, the next

strays back into idolatry. As our study continues, we suggest that you keep a running list headed "Principles for Revival." That is, what conditions and actions help or hinder Israel's various spiritual reawakenings? What general truths can

2 Chronicles 14:11

Lord, there is none beside Thee to help. (r. v.)

Remind God of His entire responsibility.— "There is none beside Thee to help." The odds against Asa were enormous. There was a million of men in arms against him, beside three hundred chariots. It seemed impossible to hold his own against that vast multitude. There were no allies who would come to his help: his only hope therefore was in God. There was none beside to help. It may be that your difficulties have been allowed to come to so alarming a pitch, that you may be compelled to renounce all creature aid, to which in lesser trials you have had recourse, and cast yourself back on your Almighty Friend.

Put God between yourself and the foe.— To Asa's faith, Jehovah seemed to stand between the might of Zerah and himself, as one who had no strength. Nor was he mistaken. We are told that the Ethiopians were destroyed before the Lord and before His host, as though celestial combatants flung themselves against the foe in Israel's behalf, and put the large host to rout, so that Israel had only to follow up and gather the spoil. Our God is Jehovah of Hosts, who can summon unexpected reinforcements at any moment to the aid of His people. Believe that He is there between you and your difficulty, and what baffles you will flee before Him, as clouds before the gale.

Identify your cause with His.— "In Thy name are we come.... Let not man prevail against Thee." It is a great matter when a small State is so identified with a strong European power, as that an insult to one of its officials is deemed a *causa belli* by the more powerful Government; and whenever we are so delivered from selfish aims, as to be able to show that our cause and God's are one, we are invincible.

2 Chronicles 15:12

They entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers.

We hear but little talk in the present day of the covenant, the mention of which was dear to God's people of olden time. There is this difference between it and the covenants which we make with God. That is permanent, these evanescent. That is founded upon the oath and promise of God; these on the resolutions and endeavors of man. That is full of promises of what God will be and do; these recount what we are prepared to sacrifice and suffer. And though we sign them with blood drawn from our veins, they will disappoint and fail.

Do not think too much of entering into and keeping a covenant with God; but remember that the Lord Jesus, on our behalf, has entered into covenant relation with the Father, and the Father with us in Him. This is the new covenant. It is drawn out at length in Hebrews 8. Very little is said about our side, but it is full to overflowing of God's. Nothing is said of our fidelity to our obligations, because man has been too often weighed in the balances and found wanting; and because the Lord Jesus Christ, as our representative, has already fulfilled all the conditions of obedience and devotion on which its provisions depend. He has also graciously undertaken to realize those conditions by the Holy Spirit in us.

Every time we put to our lips the cup of the new covenant, we humbly remind God of all He has promised, and ask Him to do as He has said. At the same time we may confidently ask the great Surety of the covenant to accomplish in us such a mind as may love and keep our Father's law. And what He did for our fathers, who were naturally just such as we are, He will certainly do for us.

2 Chronicles 16

Were not the...Libyans a mighty army...? Yet when you relied on the Lord, he delivered them into your hand. - 2 Chronicles 16:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

According to the World Almanac, the length of the border between the "Lower 48" states in the United States and Canada is almost 4,000 miles. The border between Canada and Alaska is another 1,500 miles. It is known as the longest, undefended border in the world, and is rather a historical anomaly. Typically countries have resorted to elaborate fortifications to keep their neighbors out—examples include the Maginot Line constructed by France along their border with Germany and the Great Wall in China; in the case of the former East Germany, a country built a notorious wall to keep their citizens from fleeing.

King Baasha of the northern kingdom of Israel also tried to solve his border problem with fences and fortifications. Because Jerusalem had been the capital city of Israel, and the temple the nation's spiritual center, a steady stream of northern defectors had been crossing south to Judah. Baasha aimed to put a stop to that. In response, Asa, instead of calling on the Lord as he had done when faced with the Egyptian threat, hired Syrian troops to invade Israel from the north. He assumed Baasha couldn't fight a two-front war and would have to withdraw. And he was right—he was even able to take the fortification materials and use them to build

up his own defenses.

Smart move, right? Wrong. There's no indication Asa sought the Lord or took counsel from any prophet or priest. Instead, he put his faith in his new "allies." To put the exclamation point on this merely human problem solving, he paid with gold taken in part from the temple treasury. So God sent Hanani the "seer" (another word for prophet) to rebuke the king and tell him the punishment would be more war (16:9). Asa made a bad situation worse by lashing out in pride and anger, imprisoning Hanani and oppressing the people. His stubborn rebelliousness persisted through a later personal health crisis, and he died unrepentant.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

It is clearly but sadly recorded that Asa put his trust in Ben-Hadad's troops rather than in the Lord. What had happened to his earlier faith and boldness? We don't know exactly, but first love growing cold is a trap that can spring on anyone (cf. Rev. 2:4-5). Perhaps it already has you in its grip. One book that can help is *When I Don't Desire God: How to Fight for Joy*, by John Piper.

2 Chronicles 16:9

To show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him.

The emphasis is clearly on the word perfect. That was the point between Hanani the seer, and Asa the king. Asa's mistake and sin lay in his resorting to Benhadad, king of Syria, as an ally against Baasha. Evidently he did not perfectly trust the delivering power of God; and in this failure of his faith, he forfeited the all-sufficient help which would have more than availed. As the seer said very truly, simple trust in God had brought deliverance from the Ethiopians and Lubim, though they were a much huger host than Baasha's; and the same attitude in respect of Baasha would have secured a like result. God was only awaiting the appeal of Asa's faith, to show Himself strong. What a mistake to send to Syria!

Now, dear reader, this is very pertinent for your life and mine. We often complain that we are bereft of help, and send off for Benhadad. And all the while the eyes of the Lord are looking pitifully and longingly at us. Nothing would give Him greater pleasure than to show Himself strong on our behalf. This, however, He cannot do until renouncing all other confidants and helpers, our heart is perfect in the simplicity and frankness of its faith. What an exquisite thought is suggested by the allusion to the eyes of the Lord running to and fro throughout the whole earth. At a glance He takes in our position; not a sorrow, trial, or temptation visits us without exciting His notice and loving sympathy. In all the whole wide earth there is not one spot so lonely, one heart so darkened, as to escape those eyes. Oh for the perfect confidence which will allow Him to act! It is for lack of this that we remain unhelped, and spend our days in the midst of wars and tumults.

2 Chronicles 17

His heart was devoted to the ways of the Lord. - 2 Chronicles 17:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

You know what happens when weeds start growing in your yard, don't you? They spread slowly, and eventually you eliminate them all on the first try with an inexpensive weedkiller from the local Wal-Mart, right? Wrong! The truth is you procrastinate a bit, and before you know it they've taken over the back half of the yard. You try a weedkiller, but it seems to have no effect. Then a new kind of weed springs up in a different part of the yard. You go buy more serious chemicals after consultations at the hardware store. And so the battle continues. Idolatry was like that in Judah. The more a king tried to stamp it out, the more it seemed to spring up or spread anew. Like his father Asa, King Jehoshaphat started strong, following the ways of the Lord and fighting idolatry (v. 6). God rewarded him with peace and prosperity. Obedience doesn't guarantee positive outcomes, but they would have reminded the nation that covenant obedience brought blessings while disobedience brought judgment. In addition, this time of peace would have been a direct contrast with the later years of Asa, during which God punished Judah with war. In effect, He used the events of history, which illustrates His unending sovereignty, to call the nation back to Himself.

Jehoshaphat understood that one key to spiritual thriving is God's Word. Knowledge of it can be the first step towards revival. So he also sent out priests, Levites and government officials to teach (or re-teach) people the Scriptures and to remind them about God's covenant with His people and His care for them through history.

The king's census was a bit puzzling, as the numbers seem high. It might be a count of available men, not active duty soldiers. Some translators have suggested "hundred thousand" is simply "units." In any case, the point is that God rewarded Jehoshaphat's faith with blessings—given in the culturally familiar forms of peace, military strength, and tribute from neighboring nations.

APPLY THE WORD Jehoshaphat created the equivalent of a traveling Bible institute when he sent out priests, Levites and government officials to teach the people the Scriptures (vv. 7-9). Thanks to modern technology, that same opportunity exists today! Moody, for example, has a far-reaching program that provides Bible courses in a variety of formats. To learn about the options, visit

www.moody.edu and click on Education, then Distance Learning Center, or call 1-800-DL MOODY to request more information.

2 Chronicles 17:6

His heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord.

Sursum corda! Lift up your hearts! How beautiful is this ejaculation in the Communion Service of the Church of England, and the response, "We lift them up unto the Lord." I never hear it without the thrill of a holy impulse passing through me. It is possible, and it is meet and right, to lift up our hearts from the sordid cases and pressing responsibilities of daily life, into the calm, serene presence of God our Father.

Lift up your heart to God, as a child its face to be kissed. Lift it up free from mistrust and sinful stain, and unkind feeling toward any. Lift it up in holy joy and inspiration. Lift it up as a censer filled with the hot coals, from which sweet fragrance exhales. And God will bend down to lift it higher, and fill it with His peace and joy and purity.

In hours of depression look up, be lifted. Sursum corda! When the foe is pressing you most severely, look up, your redemption draweth nigh. When the river has to be crossed, when the last farewell must be said, when the flesh fails, let your mind and heart thither ascend, and there continually dwell where Jesus has entered as your Forerunner.

If you would lift up your heart, you must be in the ways of the Lord, as the good Jehoshaphat. You must seek the Lord God, and walk in His commandments. You must take away the high places and groves of idolatry and impurity. Beware of the world's birdlime! Shake yourself from the bands and bonds that would detain you. Oh, heart of mine, why is thy flight so low? Lift thyself up and sit down with Christ in the heavenly places! "Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. Let not mine enemies triumph over me!"

2 Chronicles 18:1-19:3 18-19

Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? - 2 Chronicles 19:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

Near the end of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first book in J. R. R. Tolkien's epic *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Frodo the hobbit faced a difficult choice. He stood at a crossroads. He had been traveling with his companions toward an evil land to destroy a powerful ring. Due to several circumstances he found himself having to choose between staying with his companions, the "fellowship" of the title, or journeying on alone, in which case his almost impossible mission would seem to become a certainly impossible one. This second option was actually the correct one, and Frodo made the right choice and went on alone.

In a similar way, Jehoshaphat stood at a crossroads in today's reading. Would he continue following the Lord or would he go down the road of his neighbor Ahab? He had married a son to one of Ahab's daughters, thereby forming an alliance (18:1). When Ahab proposed to make it a military alliance, he honored and flattered Jehoshaphat by throwing him a banquet. Jehoshaphat wanted to submit the plan to the Lord, but Ahab was ready with a well-rehearsed show put on by 400 "prophets." This was laying it on rather thick—one can almost hear the annoyance in Jehoshaphat's voice as he requested a real prophet (18:6).

False versus true prophecy is serious business, as even Ahab knew (though apparently Zedekiah did not). He reluctantly sent for Micaiah. After mocking the chorus of "yes men," Micaiah told a parable about God's sovereignty and foretold Ahab's defeat and death. Ahab moved forward anyway and God's words came true.

God was sending Jehoshaphat the equivalent of a billboard with flashing lights! Micaiah's truth was mostly wasted on Ahab, but Jehoshaphat could have listened and responded. He unwisely joined in the battle with Ahab anyway, but eventually took the prophetic words to heart. Jehu's godly rebuke further showed him his error and helped keep him from heading down the wrong road (19:2).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In today's reading, Jehoshaphat came to a crossroads—a defining experience, his response to which would set the course for the rest of his life. No doubt you've been faced with several such crossroads times in your life as well. As we did several days ago, we encourage you today to reflect on and write about one such experience in your spiritual journal or diary. Consider the choice, its implications, God's guidance, the motivation for your eventual decision, and the results as you can see them so far.

2 Chronicles 18:1-27

As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what my God says. - 2 Chronicles 18:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

Fake goods do serious damage to world economies. The International Chamber of Commerce estimates that about \$375 billion worth of goods were pirated or counterfeited last year, amounting to about eight percent of all world trade. American businesses alone lose between \$200–\$250 billion per year. Drugs and medicines, shoes, toys, cosmetics, electronics, and auto parts are just some of the items being ripped off and sold as the genuine article. “It affects virtually every type of product made,” said one leader.

Fake goods hurt legitimate businesses, and false prophets undercut true religion. There were plenty of them dotting on King Ahab in today’s reading. He and King Jehoshaphat of Judah were discussing military plans when Jehoshaphat suggested that they seek the Lord’s will from a prophet. Obliging, Ahab’s “yes men” tickled their ears with promises of victory. But Jehoshaphat was not satisfied, and even Ahab saw right through their shameless flattery. So a real prophet of God, Micaiah, was sent for. His reputation at the palace showed that today’s encounter was not a one-time episode but typical of his entire ministry.

Micaiah arrived to find two kings in their royal robes in a public setting near the city gate, and a gaggle of false prophets, including the dramatic and creative Zedekiah, foretelling victory. Even the messenger tried to hint which way the wind was blowing. But Micaiah, as a man of integrity and purity of purpose, could speak only what God said (v. 13). He prophesied that the battle would be lost and Ahab killed. He even laid bare the spiritual dynamics of the situation, labeling the false prophets as demonic agents permitted by God to entice Ahab to his doom (v. 22).

APPLY THE WORD Micaiah knew that as a prophet of the Lord he could speak nothing else but the words that God gave him. That was his calling and his purpose.

2 Chronicles 18:7

I hate him; for he never prophesied good unto me, but always evil.

This was a very naïve confession. Of course, Micaiah could not speak good of Ahab, whose life was diametrically opposed to all that was God-like and holy. Micaiah had no animosity toward the king of Israel; it was not a personal matter with him. He simply read from the page of the future as God opened it to his eyes, and in which the out-working of the king’s evil life was disclosed in gloomy characters. It was as absurd to hate him because he read such dark lessons from the inevitable future, as for a householder to shoot his dog, that bays all night, to warn his master against the burglar engaged in rifling his home.

The Bible, the pastor, the whole Church of God, are hated by worldlings for the same reason, because they cannot speak hopefully of their future. It is as though a card-playing crew were to hate the watchman who told them that the course of their vessel was straight for the surf and rocks of the shore. If men will persist in violating God’s law, in breaking through the hedge of thorns, and in pursuing their own wild ways, they cannot possibly expect the blessedness of the Beatitudes. However, their hatred against those who warn them is really directed toward God. They are indignant that they cannot have their way; their proud spirit would like to overturn the very order of the universe rather than that it should be thwarted. They cannot endure the contrast between God’s children and themselves. Do not be surprised if the world hate you. It shows that you are no more of the world than your Master was. Jesus said: “If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also.”

2 Chronicles 19:2

Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?

This looks back to 2 Chronicles 18:1, where we learn that Jehoshaphat, though he had riches and honor in abundance, joined affinity with Ahab. Riches and abundance are dangerous things. They usually weaken our character, and incline us to worldly alliances; and it was to their subtle and pernicious influences that Jehoshaphat fell a victim. Ah! what a fall it was to hear him saying, “I am as thou art, and my people as thy people.” Well might Jehu take up the rôle which his father had filled before Asa, and protest. But let us seriously question whether, though there are good things found in us, we may not be falling into the same mistake, and sin. Are there not ways in which we say to men of the world, with whom we mix, “I am as thou art”?

There is a great tendency in the present day to boast in the closeness with which we can approach the world without injury. We join in the social life, read the same books, go to the same amusements, talk of the same themes; and it is almost impossible in a drawing-room to tell the difference between the Jehoshaphats and the Ahabs. So also, in our methods of doing good. The real difficulty lies away back in our want of engagedness with Christ. It is of little use to find fault with the outward, as long as the heart is wayward. Love to the Lord Jesus is our only safeguard. The love of Christ must constrain us. Personal attachment to Christ will wean us away from this close identification with the world. But if we persist in identifying ourselves with the world, which God has doomed, we must not be surprised to find that wrath is on us from the Lord: and He will chasten us for love’s sake.

2 Chronicles 19:4-21:3 19-21

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. - 2 Chronicles

20:32

TODAY IN THE WORD

Dave McGillivray of Boston loves to run. By his fiftieth birthday several years ago, he had already run 116 marathons and eight Iron Man triathlons. On his birthday, he runs one mile for every year of his life. He frequently runs or does other athletic feats to raise money for charity, including a run across America (3,452 miles in 80 days), a 24-hour run, a 24-hour swim, a 24-hour bike ride, and starting his own nonprofit foundation. He calculates that in his life he's run a total of about 130,000 miles.

Here's a guy who could say a thing or two about finishing a race well! To "run the race" of the spiritual life requires this same kind of passion and dedication. Today's reading shows that Jehoshaphat was one of the few kings of Judah who "finished his race" well. The lesson God taught him through his alliance with Ahab must have made an impression and sent him back in the right direction. He probably also learned what not to do by reflecting on how his father Asa had failed to repent after Hanani's rebuke and been punished by the Lord. God further got Jehoshaphat's attention by sinking several ships he sent on a trading venture in partnership with another wicked king of Israel, Ahaziah (20:35-37).

Jehoshaphat responded humbly to these warnings, and God again blessed him with a time of peace and military victory. Unfortunately, many of the people still worshiped idols (20:33).

Nonetheless, one of the king's most important reforms was to set up a court system for civil and religious cases (19:4-11). The judges were to seek justice alone, not showing favoritism to the rich or powerful, and certainly not accepting bribes or gifts to "tip the scales" of justice. The foundation of such ideal justice was to be the fear of the Lord: remembering that all leaders are accountable to an all-knowing, perfectly holy God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Though the term justice may bring to mind courts and prisons, it's a term with biblical roots that run far richer and deeper than that. If you're up for an intellectual challenge, we urge you to listen to a lecture, "Teaching Justly for Justice," by Nicholas Wolterstorff, Yale University professor and renowned Christian philosopher. This lecture, given at a 2005 conference on "Spirituality, Justice, and Pedagogy," can be downloaded in audio or video formats from this link: www.calvin.edu/kuyers/lecture.php?ID=11.

2 Chronicles 20:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

The brief account of Ahab's last battle that we read about yesterday leaves us with a few questions about the involvement and survival of King Jehoshaphat.

Today's reading makes no further mention of the ill-fated battle. It notes only some of the positive accomplishments of Jehoshaphat's reign. We noted earlier that this man was one of the good kings of Judah, and these verses confirm that. Jehoshaphat enjoyed God's favor for the steps he took to rid Judah of perversion and idolatry.

But the questions linger. If Ahab was wrong in defying the prophet Micaiah's warning from God and going into battle, wasn't Jehoshaphat guilty of disobeying God too? And what was this good king doing linking up with Ahab in the first place?

We find some answers in 2 Chronicles, where more details of Jehoshaphat's reign are recorded. He had allied himself with Ahab through marriage (2 Chron.18:1)-a very common diplomatic tactic in that day. So the occasion at which Ahab persuaded Jehoshaphat to help him take back Ramoth was a visit to the "in-laws" (18:2).

But God was not pleased with this alliance, and Jehoshaphat was rebuked by a prophet when he returned to Jerusalem after barely escaping from the battle with his life (2 Chron. 19:1-3).

But aside from this piece of bad judgment, Jehoshaphat was a religious reformer and a king who wanted his people to know and obey the Scriptures. He sent teachers with God's Law in their hands to the various towns of Judah (2 Chron. 17:7-9), and God honored the king for his devotion.

And much like Joshua before him, Jehoshaphat once won a great battle without ever firing an arrow (2 Chron. 20:1-30). An invasion by the Moabites and Ammonites, two traditional enemies of God's people, may have been part of the discipline God brought on Jehoshaphat for his alliance with Ahab.

But the king and people of Judah humbly sought the Lord. God promised that the battle would be His, and the people were told to take their positions and watch what God would do. As they sang and praised, God Himself wiped out their enemies. Jehoshaphat's reign was largely a time of revival and peace (2 Chron. 20:30).

APPLY THE WORD What a great word God gave Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah as the battle loomed: ""The battle is not yours, but God's"" (2 Chron. 20:15). Is that a word you need to hear today? If you are facing something that seems overwhelming right now, give it to the Lord. Praise Him for His care, and watch Him work. If you know someone else who is going through a hard time, take time to share this encouraging verse with that person.

2 Chronicles 20:21

He appointed singers unto the lord, that should praise the beauty of holiness.

Dost thou praise the beauty of holiness? Is holiness beautiful to thee? Art thou in love with it as it is presented in the glorious Lord? Canst thou turn from the noise and anxiety of life's battle to dwell on the loveliness of God and of the devout life, and to praise Him whose mercy endureth forever? It is a rare accomplishment, acquired only through the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. In each of us there should be the priest-side of character as well as the warrior: the love for what is beautiful in holiness as well as for the strong and active in service.

But the special characteristics of this battle was that the good king put the singers in the forefront of the army, and praised for a victory which was only assured to him by faith. Yet so sure was he of it, that he could praise before he entered into the battle.

There is much to help us here in our daily combat for God and truth. Let us fill the morning hour with holy song, in the heart, if not with the voice; let a psalm or hymn be part of the daily reading; let there be the confidence that God is going to bless, which cannot restrain its jubilant expression. So in all prayer, wait on God till you feel that you can praise Him for what you have asked Him to bestow.

When they began to praise, the Lord did all the rest. Before the onset of His Divine reinforcements the enemy fled. His people bad but to gather spoil, and then the praise which had anticipated the battle was consummated as they returned, in the valley of blessing.

There's a song in the valley of blessing so sweet, And angels would fain join the strain, As with rapturous praises we bow at His feet Crying, "Worthy the Lamb that was slain!"

2 Chronicles 21:4-22:9 21-22

The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction. - Galatians 6:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 2006, revenues in the American pornography industry totaled \$13.3 billion—more than professional football, basketball, and baseball combined. This figure includes \$3.62 billion in video sales and rentals, \$2.84 billion in Internet pornography, and \$2.19 billion in cable, pay-per-view, and mobile phone pornography. MSNBC has estimated that 60 percent of all Web traffic is sexual in nature. Forty million American adults, 77 percent of them men, regularly visit pornographic Web sites. Even more troubling, according to a Barna Research Group survey, 38 percent of adults believe there is nothing wrong with using pornography. These kind of statistics call us to be salt and light in the area of sexual morality.

Today's reading shows people in dire need of spiritual renewal. We might even regard it as a three-part lesson in "how to backslide." First, lust after power. To consolidate his hold on the throne, Jehoram murdered his own brothers! Second, follow other gods. Jehoram and Ahaziah worshiped idols and led the nation astray, flagrantly breaking their covenant responsibilities. And third, imitate bad examples. Jehoram and Ahaziah walked in the ways of the wicked northern kings and listened to bad advisers. As today's verse shows, such men were bound to reap what they sowed.

The passage also communicates three positive lessons. First, God keeps His promises no matter what. Because of His covenant with David, God preserved the kingly line and didn't allow the fruit of destruction to ripen completely (21:7), though Judah did suffer several military setbacks. Second, God communicates His Word in all situations. Even someone as far gone as Jehoram received a warning letter from Elijah (late in his career before his translation to heaven). And third, be sure your sins will find you out. Never imagine that you've "gotten away with it," as Jehoram may have thought before his painful bowel disease.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Have you lately found yourself, like the two kings in today's reading, backsliding away from the Lord? Then praise God that you've picked up His Word today. It's no accident—He's calling you back to Himself! Recall to mind promises such as John 6:37: "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away." These words are still good, no matter what you've done, and God's forgiveness and grace are more than ready to welcome you home.

2 Chronicles 21:10

The same time also did Libnah revolt from under his hand.

As long as the kings of Judah remained true to their allegiance to God they were able to keep in subjection the surrounding nations; but just so soon as they revolted from God these peoples revolted from them. It was as though power descended into them from the source of all power; and when the link between themselves and God was broken, that between them and their subordinates was broken also.

This applies very widely: To our passions.— If they master you, rebelling against and revolting from your hand, it is because there is some flaw in your consecration, and you have forsaken to some extent the Lord God.

To our families.— When the heads of a home are in perfect unity with each other and God, they may generally expect that their children will grow up submissive and obedient. Their authority will be recognized and honored. Revolt in the home indicates very often some lapse in obedience and loyalty to God.

To our influence over men.— When the soul is in blessed fellowship with God, power flows into it from Him, before which strongholds are overthrown. "I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord," said the prophet. "I am a man under authority, and have soldiers under me," said the centurion.

Give yourself entirely to Jesus. Obey Him absolutely; receive by faith from Him living power and grace; be a channel through which He may pour Himself; and you will find that men and things will fall into line at your bidding, and you shall receive power. Our Libnahs will not revolt, unless we forsake the Lord God of our fathers.

2 Chronicles 22:10-23:21 22-23

Let the righteous rejoice in the Lord and take refuge in him; let all the upright in heart praise him! - Psalm 64:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

Anthusa is a name that may not be very familiar to you. A Christian widow living in Antioch in the fourth century, she feared secular influences would corrupt the mind and soul of her only son, John. So she herself taught him as a child in both classical and Christian learning, and only after this foundation was laid did she send him out to study with a scholar. John went on to become one of the most famous Christian preachers in history—John "Chrysostom," or "golden-mouthed."

Anthusa is one of many women of faith in the history of the church. Though she stood behind the scenes, her influence was incalculable. The same can be said of Jehosheba in today's reading. Though she was Jehoram's daughter and Ahaziah's sister, she did not walk in their sinful ways but was instead obedient to the Lord. When the ruthless Athaliah murdered the royal family and seized the throne of Judah, Jehosheba rescued baby Joash and his nurse, no doubt at tremendous personal risk. Then she and her husband, Jehoiada the priest, hid the boy in the temple for six years—an exciting narrative reminiscent of the story of baby Moses. God used the two of them to preserve the Davidic kingly line and to help turn the nation back to Him.

When the time was right, Jehoiada set up a combination of coup and coronation. Athaliah was a brutal, unpopular queen, so he was able to enlist widespread support from the people, the government leaders, and the army. The seven-year-old Joash's coronation featured a crown and a scroll (Scriptures), representing both his authority and his covenant responsibilities. When Athaliah investigated all the commotion at the temple, she stepped into a well-planned trap and was captured and executed. Her temple of Baal was destroyed and the false god's priests killed. In the name of the young king, Jehoiada again set up national worship as the Law instructed, including sacrifices, music, and rituals of purification.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Athaliah and Jehosheba provide vivid, contrasting models for contemporary women. Make a two-column list of their personal qualities, both those that can be seen directly and others that you can infer. At home or in the workplace, what situations might be analogous to the one in today's reading? How can you follow the bold example of Jehosheba, who acted to save life and promote godliness? How can you avoid the example of Athaliah, whose decisiveness and dynamism were used so sinfully?

2 Chronicles 22:12

Hid in the House of God.

Safe from Athaliah, who would have ruthlessly destroyed him if she had had an inkling of his existence, the young Joash was reared beneath the care of Jehoiada and his wife within the precincts of the house of God. He was hidden in the secret place of the Most High, and abode under the shadow of the Almighty. There let us also live. Let us know what it is to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our life, and all this day. Let us cultivate the life which is hid with Christ in God.

It is well often to remind ourselves that we are in God, and that the film of His envioning presence is about us like a wall of thick-ribbed steel. We are in Him as the jewel in the casket; as the chick under the feathers of the hen; as the child in the warm embrace of its mother. And so long as we stay there we are invulnerable. Therefore our great enemy is continually endeavoring to allure us into the open; he knows he can do as he likes with us, if only he can induce us to venture beyond our hiding-place. Therefore, beware of any temptation to worry, to amass this world's goods, or to seek the indulgence of appetite; it is by such lures and baits that Satan seduces unwary souls from their safe hiding.

If a day in God's courts is better than a thousand, what must it be to dwell in the house of the Lord all one's days, to behold His beauty, and enquire in His temple. The rarest visions, the fairest fellowship, the most entrancing joys, the most confident outlook on life and the hereafter, are the accompaniments of such a residence. The altar of incense, the laver of daily cleansing, the light of the Shekinah, the holy psalm and song, the great altar of sacrifice, are familiar objects to the hidden soul.

2 Chronicles 23:21

And the city was quiet after they had slain Athaliah with the sword.

This was a great revolution, admirably planned and carried into effect. It was intolerable that such a woman as Athaliah should desecrate the throne and temple. Jehoiada, by his prudence and courage, deserved well of the entire nation in ridding the world of her presence. No half measures would have availed to meet the case.

There are times in every life when strong and strenuous action is inevitable if the cause of God is to be promoted and saved. In many of us there is a willingness to tolerate evil, rather than arouse ourselves to grasp it with a firm hand, and, if needs be, drag it up by its roots. Be strong, yea, be strong, is an injunction that has to be emphasized even to men who are greatly beloved. The easiest thing for Jehoiada would have been to shut himself up in the temple, and leave things to take their course. The noblest thing was to come forth, and boldly confront the rampant evil of his time. So God's call rings out for helpers in the great fight against sin. Its notes penetrate into the retirement of Christian homes, to noble women and devoted men, demanding that they should come forth to resist impurity, the love of strong drink, the strong tendency toward extravagance, luxury, and waste. The world is full of Athaliahs, and it is not befitting that the Jehoiadas should remain at their holy rites and services if there is a paramount need for action in the world's battlefield, in the strife against wrong.

The children of God are citizens of the New Jerusalem, but they are also certainly citizens here; and they must not stand aside from great public issues, allowing them to be decided by ungodly and wicked men.

2 Chronicles 24

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. - 2 Chronicles 24:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

Randy Alcorn wrote about what he calls The Treasure Principle: "You can't take it with you—but you can send it on ahead. . . . If we give instead of keep, if we invest in the eternal instead of in the temporal, we store up treasures in heaven that will never stop paying dividends. Whatever treasures we store up on earth will be left behind when we leave. Whatever treasures we store up in heaven will be waiting for us when we arrive." This is the secret that can unlock a lifetime of joyful giving.

The same spirit driving our giving today motivated the Israelites' giving in the days of Joash. He launched a project to restore the temple, which had fallen into disrepair. Athaliah had actually taken articles from it and used them for Baal worship. Though Jehoiada and the Levites were slow to act, the people themselves were ripe to return to the Lord. They demonstrated their changed hearts by filling the box at the temple door with their gifts again and again. Workers were immediately hired to do the construction and refurbishing—they were men of integrity, since they honestly reported a financial surplus after the work was finished.

Unfortunately, Joash's godliness was explicitly linked to the influence of Jehoiada. When his mentor died, the king was unable to stand for righteousness by himself. Did he depend too much on the priest? Or did Jehoiada keep him on too short a leash, never really developing his leadership skills? What was going on behind the scenes at the start of the temple restoration? We're left with many unanswered questions. One thing we know is that Joash succumbed to pride (v. 17). He then fell into idolatry, ignored a warning from God, and experienced judgments, a pattern we've seen before. Worst of all, he arranged for the murder of Jehoiada's son, Zechariah—this event triggered Joash's assassination, showing that God's justice cannot be forestalled. Tellingly, Jehoiada was buried with the kings; Joash was not.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

When Joash issued a royal proclamation and put a box by the temple doors, the people responded with generous giving. More than

just money, this showed their renewed love and faith in the Lord. Giving serves the same purpose today, so we urge you to get out your checkbook and examine the register. Do you give the Lord the “firstfruits” of your paycheck? Do you do so with a cheerful heart (2 Cor. 9:7)? In attitudes or actions, are any changes needed? Make them without delay!

2 Chronicles 24:20-27 242

The Righteous One takes note of the house of the wicked and brings the wicked to ruin. - Proverbs 21:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

George Santayana said it best: “When experience is not retained, infancy is perpetual. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” The leadership of the divided kingdom of Israel evidently had no concept of the history of their nation, the faith or sins of their forefathers, or the mighty works of their God. Joash failed to remember even the most recent history in his life, let alone that of his nation. As a result, his reign came to a swift and shameful end.

Joash forgot the faith and kindness of Jehoiada, his foremost advisor. He had already rejected the covenant to remain faithful to God, but he didn't even have the decency to pay respect to Jehoiada's son, Zechariah. When Zechariah chastised him for his wickedness, he had him stoned in the courtyard of the temple, desecrating what should have been a holy place. Ironically, Zechariah's father had spared Athaliah (Joash's childhood attacker) the same indignity when he was ushering Joash to the throne (2 Chron. 23:14).

It didn't take long for Joash to experience the penalty for his wickedness, and the form of retribution was reminiscent of the stories we've studied so far. The Aramean army resembled the army of Gideon, but this time it was the large army of Judah that was overtaken by a much smaller one. Just as Joash had conspired against Zechariah, his own officials turned to conspire against him. But the identity of the conspirators reminds us of yet another grievous deed: they were the sons of a Moabite woman and an Ammonite woman, descendants of the daughters of Lot.

The consequences of the sins of God's people had a way of revisiting generation after generation of Israelites. The quantity and quality of faith appeared to be dwindling, and the magnitude of their sins grew exponentially. Clearly, Israel needed a better plan, a better ruler, and a better way to preserve their faith in the one true God. Tomorrow we will examine that coming hope in the King of Kings.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The more we study the effects of sin, the more reasons we have to stay pure and true in obedience to God. Sin multiplies the more we engage in it, and time alone never heals the wounds it causes. On the contrary, the punishment for sin grows in severity and scope the longer we wait to confess and repent. Ask the Holy Spirit to convict you of any sin abiding in your heart. Don't wait another day to turn your heart toward Him. We have seen how merciful God is. Sin, however, is relentless.

2 Chronicles 24:20

The Spirit of God clothed itself with Zechariah the son of Jehoiada. (r. v. marg.)

As we put on a cloak or dress, so does the Spirit of God, as it were, hide Himself in those who surrender themselves to Him, so that it is not they who speak and act, but He within them. Have you at any time been conscious of having the clothing of the Holy Spirit? Remember that cloth or leather must yield itself easily to the movements of its wearer, and not less pliable and supple must we be to the Spirit of God.

When the Spirit of God is thus within us, and speaks or acts for us, we may expect, as Zechariah found it, to come into collision with the entire drift and current of society around us, and to incur odium and hatred. Men do not like to be told that they cannot prosper because they have forsaken God; but we have no alternative than to witness against their sins. Does the Spirit clothe Himself with you, my friend, as you anticipate the work of to-day? Are you using Him, or is He to use you? Are you seeking to clothe yourself with His power for some personal ambition, or are you desirous that He should array Himself in you, so that the glory may evidently be His? In the agony of battle; when great deeds are to be done, no one stops to think of the uniform of the soldier, but only of the might beneath it.

But for this you must be prepared to pay the cost, and be willing to cross the cherished purposes of men, as the Spirit of God by your voice or deed witnesses against them. They stoned Zechariah at the command of the king; but years after the Lord Jesus referred to it, for no faithful martyr seals his witness with his blood without some quick glance of recognition from the Master, and some record on the imperishable tablets of his heart.

2 Chronicles 25

The righteous will live by his faith. - Habbakkuk 2:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

The wholehearted faith of Caleb was one of his most remarkable attributes. When he was one of only two spies to recommend entering the Promised Land, it was promised that he would live through the subsequent years of wandering “because he followed the Lord wholeheartedly” (Deut. 1:36). When that generation died off and the next entered the land, Caleb at age 85 was still there, as strong and vigorous and wholehearted as ever. He was given the city of Hebron, though he had to drive out the Anakites to take it (Josh. 14:6-14). His faith never faltered!

By contrast with Caleb, Amaziah in today's reading is an anemic example of halfhearted faith. Verse 2 says it all: “He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but not wholeheartedly.” On the positive side, he took limited vengeance on his father Joash's killers, obeying the Law's strict guidelines (vv. 3-4). On the negative side, his military ambitions showed pride. When he hired northern Israelite mercenaries, he may have hoped God would judge his actions differently from those of previous kings who had formed alliances with pagan nations. But through an unnamed prophet, the Lord let him know that putting one's confidence in human strength was a bad move in any case. To this rebuke, Amaziah responded with some faith—he sent the hired soldiers home and even gave up their wages as a lost investment.

The king's mixed actions led to mixed results. God gave Judah a victory over Edom. This victory, however, was marred by cruel murders of some prisoners-of-war and entirely undone by Amaziah's astoundingly foolish worship of the Edomite “gods” he had just defeated.

Meanwhile, the mercenaries, furious that their lust for violence and booty had gone unsatisfied, took out their aggressions by plundering towns on the way home. This led Amaziah to another foolish decision—challenging Israel to a war. God engineered his defeat as a judgment on his idolatry, and like his father he ended up a victim of assassination.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Spend some time today to meditate on “wholeheartedness” versus “halfheartedness”—with Caleb and Amaziah as the instructive contrasts—then make a creative work that explores and illuminates the differences. For instance, you might draw a comic strip version of the episode in which the twelve spies reported back to Joshua. Or you could write a children's story with two contrasting protagonists. Another idea is to take a familiar hymn tune and write new lyrics on this theme.

2 Chronicles 25:9

The Lord is able to give thee much more than this.

Amaziah had many good qualities, but he did not clearly see how impossible it was for Israel to be allied with Judah without invalidating the special Divine protection and care on which Judah had been taught to rely. We must understand that God cannot be in fellowship with us if we tolerate fellowship with the ungodly. We must choose between the two. If we can renounce all creature aid, and trust simply in the eternal God, there is no limit to the victories He will secure; but if, turning from Him, we hold out our hand toward the world, we forfeit His aid. O child of God, let not the army of Israel go with thee! Do not adopt worldly policy, methods, or partnership. However strong you make yourself for the battle in alliance with these, you will fail. Indeed, God Himself will make you fall before the enemy, that you may be driven back to Himself.

But you say that you have already entered into so close an alliance that you cannot draw back. You have invested your capital, you have gone to great expenditure. Yet it will be better to forfeit these than Him. Without these aids, and with only God beside you, you will be able to rout Edom, and smite ten thousand men. Would that men knew the absolute deliverance which God will effect for those whose hearts are perfect toward Him!

The soldiers of Israel committed depredations on their way back. This was the result of the folly and sin of Amaziah's proposal. We may be forgiven, and delivered, and yet there will be after-consequences which will follow us from some ill-considered act. Sin may be forgiven, but its secondary results are sometimes very bitter. We must expect to reap as we sow.

2 Chronicles 26

As long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success. - 2 Chronicles 26:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

Long before Israel had kings, God through the Law provided guidelines and warnings for them. Kings should not acquire large numbers of horses, that is, they should not put their confidence in military strength. They should also not take many wives—though that was a common form of diplomacy in that day—because these women would arrive with foreign idols and could distract or

corrupt the king's spiritual devotion. Another warning was against accumulating riches, for similar reasons. Perhaps the most important instruction was for the king to study the Scriptures as an antidote to pride (Deut. 17:14-20).

Pride comes before a fall, as we've seen time and time again in 2 Chronicles. In the exceptionally long (52 years) reign of Uzziah, we see the same pattern we've seen before: good beginnings, followed by backsliding fueled mainly by pride. Uzziah began well. He sought the Lord and did what was right. He had a godly adviser, Zechariah. As a result, Judah experienced military successes and a time of peace. It appears Uzziah was a highly skilled military leader—his army was well-trained and he himself designed several new weapons. In addition to being a warrior, the king was also a builder and a farmer who embarked on many construction and agricultural projects to benefit his people.

Uzziah had many reasons to be proud—and pride was his downfall (v. 16). The turning point was an incident in which he entered the temple to burn incense, though the Law said only priests should do so. The group of priests who confronted him was courageous indeed, given what a powerful and popular king Uzziah was. He didn't accept their rebuke, and for his blasphemy the Lord immediately struck him with leprosy. He never entered the temple again and had to let his son take over the day-to-day ruling of the kingdom. Sadly, though he had years to think things over, we have no indication he ever repented of his sin.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Scripture memorization is an excellent way to arm yourself against temptation. To help guard yourself against the pride that felled Uzziah and others in 2 Chronicles, we suggest committing these two verses to memory: "A man's pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honor" (Prov. 29:23), and "For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world" (1 John 2:16).

2 Chronicles 26:15–16

He was marvellously helped, till he was strong.

Great and marvellous are Thy works, O God; that our soul knoweth quite well. Thou hast showed marvellous loving-kindness. We must sing to Thee; for Thou hast done marvellous things. It is marvellous that Thou shouldst have set Thy love upon us; that Thou shouldst have watched over our interests with unwearied care; that our sins, or unbelief, or declensions, have never diverted Thy love from us. "Marvellous" is the only word we can use, as we think of the condescension of the well-beloved Son to the manger-bed; of the agony and bloody-sweat; of the cross and passion— and all for us who were His enemies. But it is most marvellous of all that Thou hast made us children, heirs, and joint-heirs with Christ. To think that we shall shine as the sun of Thy kingdom, that we are to sit upon His throne, and be included in that circle of love and life of which the throne of God and the Lamb is the center! Surely the marvels of Thy grace will only seem the greater when eternity with its boundless ages gives us time to explore them.

The danger, however, is that we should become strong in our own conceit, and credit ourselves with the position which is due to the grace of God alone. Oh for the truly humble spirit of the little child, that we may never vaunt our selves! The laden ship sinks in the water; the fruit-burdened bough stoops to the ground; the truest scientist is the humblest disciple. Oh to be submerged and abashed for the marvellous help of God!

God cannot trust some of us with prosperity and success, because our nature could not stand them. We must tug at the oar, instead of spreading the sail, because we have not enough ballast.

2 Chronicles 27

Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding. - Proverbs 3:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

Writing history for the former exiles who had returned home, Ezra the priest had several key purposes for the books known today as 1-2 Chronicles. He wanted the people to remember and recommit themselves to their identity as God's people. He wanted them to understand clearly the requirements and implications of God's covenant. He wanted them to feel the glory of their history, including the golden days under Solomon. He wanted them to see the centrality of true worship in the life of the nation, as symbolized primarily in Solomon's temple. And at a more everyday level, he wanted them to learn from the mistakes of those who had gone before them.

In today's narrative, learning from the mistakes of those who had gone before him seems to be Jotham's main virtue. This was the main way in which he gained wisdom and did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Specifically, he learned from the stubborn pride of his father, Uzziah, and didn't follow his example of blasphemously offering incense in the temple (v. 2). He would have seen that pride in action throughout his youth, including a decade of co-regency with his leprous and unrepentant father.

As a result of his steadfast obedience (v. 6), Jotham put together a modestly successful career as king. He started building projects. He won a victory over the Ammonites. In terms of peace and prosperity, he regained some but not all of the ground lost in Uzziah's later years. Unfortunately, however, he failed to solve Judah's heart problem—the people continued their “corrupt practices” of building altars in high places and worshiping idols.

While Jotham wasn't personally guilty of idolatry, the nation continued to illustrate a clear historical cycle, one which parallels the personal/kingly cycle summarized yesterday: Worship of false gods violated the covenant with the one true God. This brought judgment and disaster, which in turn brought on repentance and revival. The nation regained peace and strength.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Just as Jotham learned from the sins and errors of his predecessors, we hope you too have been learning from the mistakes of the wicked kings in 2 Chronicles, as well as taking away principles to follow from the good days of Solomon, Asa, and Jehoshaphat. Whether from good examples or bad ones, what are three specific lessons you've learned so far this month? Which one would you like to put into practice the soonest? What specific plans have you made for doing so?

2 Chronicles 27:6

Jotham became mighty, because he ordered his ways. (r. v.)

There is a lower sense in which this holds good in daily and business life. You can hardly imagine a really successful man being untidy and disorderly. Method is the law of success; and a truly holy soul is sure to be orderly. I do not remember ever meeting one who really walked with God who did not make orderliness one of the first principles of life.

The Lord Jesus would have the men sit down in rows before He broke the bread; and He wrapped together His grave-clothes before He left the sepulchre. It was, therefore, in keeping with the whole tenor of His example when the apostle prescribed that all things should be done decently and in order.

Clear handwriting, especially the direction of an envelope, to give the postman as little trouble as possible; the careful folding of our cast-off garments, to save the maids needless work; the leaving our room that we have been occupying as little disturbed in its arrangements as may be; the gathering up of luncheon fragments from the green banks, where we have sat to view the entrancing prospect; the arrangement of papers, and accounts, and magazines, so that we can readily lay our hand upon whatever is required; the adopting of mental order in prayer and conversation, and in the thinking out of plans and purposes; neatness in dress— these are all part of the right ordering of life which makes for its success and comfort, and greatly for peace in the home. They are the habits of the soul that walks before God, and which is accustomed to think of Him as seeing in secret, and as considering all our ways. In this way we may become mighty, and by being faithful in that which is least come to great charges.

2 Chronicles 28

Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord. - 2 Chronicles 28:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

As it does today, the abortion debate raged during the days of the Roman Empire. The basic argument was that children's rights were subordinate to the rights and needs of society and family. The Romans further adopted the Stoic belief that life begins at birth, meaning not “life” as such but the status of personhood. Abortion was common, but also opposed by some on various grounds, not including the rights of the fetus. The early Christians, by contrast, not only strongly opposed abortion but also took the rather revolutionary stance of seeing the unborn fetus as a person.

In one form or another, sacrificing children—often literally—has been a pagan religious practice throughout history. In today's reading, Ahaz was judged severely for joining in human sacrifices to the Ammonite god Molech (vv. 3-4). These were especially associated with the Hinnom Valley, south and west of Jerusalem, a location later known as Gehenna and used as a garbage dump. Largely because of such idolatrous practices, “Gehenna” became a synonym for “hell” (see Matt. 5:22). What did Ahaz do there? He worshiped Molech, Baal, and other false gods. He sacrificed his own children in the fire. He burned incense on the high places, with the implication that he also engaged in related sexual immorality. Not only was all this disobedient, but irrational as well. Why would anyone abandon a God who had given victory in order to worship gods who had been defeated?

God punished Ahaz through military defeats, but during this time He still remained faithful. He sent the prophet Oded to tell the northern kingdom of Israel that their victory over Judah was His doing, but that they had gone overboard. The leaders heeded these words and gave up their plunder and prisoners—they even gave them food, clothing, and transportation back home. Ahaz took no notice of this grace of God and made the additional mistake of making an alliance with Assyria. Though that failed as well, the king continued full steam ahead on his road to Gehenna (vv. 22-25).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Choose one concrete way to be salt and light in a society that often unjustly devalues life. You might volunteer at a crisis pregnancy center, as implied by today's illustration on abortion. You could also work to provide shelter and food for the homeless, helping to "rehumanize" those who've fallen through the cracks of the system. Another option might be to volunteer for an after-school tutoring program, aiding children in realizing their educational potential. Your pastor might suggest other ideas relevant to your community.

2 Chronicles 28:15

They clothed all that were naked, and gave them to eat and drink.

A great burst of generosity was here, for Israel had every reason to be incensed against Judah for the raid made on their territory. But, instead of pushing their advantage to the uttermost, they returned good for evil, and anticipated the words of the apostle, "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head."

Have you in your life people who have done you injury, and against whom you entertain hard thoughts? You do not injure them in return, but you cannot pray for them. So far as you can, you avoid them; you make no attempt to overcome the evil that is in them. But to act thus is to come short of Christ's standard. It is your duty, not merely to keep at a distance and give a wide berth, but by love to destroy the evil, to transform the enemy into a friend, and to create love and friendship where hostility and alienation had reigned. It is God's way, and in this we are bidden to be perfect, as our Heavenly Father is perfect.

Will you try it? Will you begin by doing kind acts to those who have harmed you? Not because as yet you feel as you would, but because it is right. Then as you dig the trench in right-doing, look up to God, and He will pour into your heart the warm gush of affection. If you sincerely will His will in this matter, and act as the Good Samaritan did to the Jew, and exercise faith, God will come to your aid whilst you clothe others and minister to them, you will find their hard heart melted, and yourselves clothed with the beautiful garments of salvation, and of a meek and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is of great price.

2 Chronicles 29

Consecrate yourselves now and consecrate the temple of the Lord, the God of your fathers. - 2 Chronicles 29:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

Consider the many Christians who make a positive difference in the lives of young people. College and youth pastors on staff with churches often speak a timely word into the lives of students searching for meaning and purpose in life. The same is true for those on ministry staff with such organizations as Campus Crusade and the Navigators, as well as Christian English teachers who work in countries such as China. Christian camp counselors also often make a unique impact during formative summer programs. Christian writers and musicians may change the course of lives of young people they've never even met.

Behind the story of Hezekiah, there must have stood at least one such person. How could a wicked father like Ahaz produce a godly son like Hezekiah? God, ever caring for His people, must have had an "inside person" who influenced the development of the heir to the throne. From a human perspective, 2 Chronicles should be a record of steady decline and decay from the days of Solomon to the Babylonian conquest. Instead, we find a back-and-forth cycle in which God's faithfulness was the engine for every revival and human faithlessness was the cause of continued backsliding.

Hezekiah reigned from 729-686 B.C., though before 715 B.C. he was only co-regent with his father. Those were difficult years—the northern kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria in 722 B.C. But Hezekiah focused on worshipping the Lord and obeying the covenant. One of his first steps was to cleanse and rededicate the temple. After the dark days of Ahaz, the doors had to be opened and the entire temple repaired and purified. Once that formidable work was done, genuine worship began again, including burnt offerings, freewill offerings, music and singing, and the participation of representatives from throughout the nation. This renewal was brought about, as they all very well knew, not by their own efforts but by God's grace (v. 36).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Too often when it comes to fundraising, the church is tempted to follow the wisdom of the world in order to get "guaranteed results." But there's a lot of fundraising wisdom in Hezekiah's actions, and God is the only one who can guarantee results. This is an area where you can pray diligently for your church leadership, that they would use godly wisdom to follow the Lord in the area of finances. You can pray, too, for your own financial attitudes and actions to be pleasing to God.

2 Chronicles 29:27

When the burnt-offering began, the song of the Lord began also.

This chapter contains a parable of the cleansing of the heart, meant to be a temple for God; but the doors of prayer are unopened, the lamps of testimony unlit, the burnt-offerings of self sacrifice neglected; and, as the result, grass grows thick in courts which should have been trodden by the feet of Levite minstrels engaged in holy song. If ever that song is to break out again, it can only be after a thorough cleansing and renovation of the inner shrine. You tell me that you cannot sing the Lord's song; then I know you have gone into the strange land of backsliding. You acknowledge that for some time now you have taken no delight in God or His service; then I am sure that the temple is badly in need of renovation.

Cleanse the house of the Lord. Bring out-all the uncleanness. By self-examination, confession, and repudiation, be clean of all the filth which has accumulated through months and years of neglect. Resume the position of entire devotion, as a prepared and sanctified soul. Offer the sin-offering for the past, and prepare the burnt-offering of entire consecration for the future. And when that is offered, when you determine to be wholly God's, lay yourself, with all the interests of your life, at the feet of Jesus, for His disposal; then the song of the Lord will begin again.

The music of your life is still, because you are out of accord with the will of God; but when by surrender and consecration there is unison, your heart will be filled with songs without words, and love like an ocean in the fullness of her strength. When the rich, selfish bachelor suddenly finds himself compelled to care for his dead brother's little children, he is startled to find that a new song has begun in his life.

2 Chronicles 29:27a

July 22 - Our Daily Walk

SURRENDER LEADING TO SONG

"And when the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David king of Israel."-- .

THE HEBREW Psalmody became famous throughout the world. Even their fierce conquerors recognized the sublime beauty of the Hebrew temple music. By the waters of Babylon they urged them to sing one of the Songs of Zion, not knowing how impossible it was for the captives to sing the Lord's song in a strange land! For sixteen years no song had poured forth from the sacred shrine. Ahaz had shut the doors, dispersed the Levites, and allowed the holy fabric to remain unkempt, unlit, and unused. There were no sacrifices on the Altar, no sweet incense in the Holy Place, no blood on the Mercy-Seat, no Song of the Lord!

For too many Christians this, alas, is a picture of their life. The soul, intended to be a holy temple for God, shows signs of disorder and neglect. The lights are not lit, the sweet incense of prayer does not ascend, the doors of entrance to fellowship and exit to service are closed. Outwardly the ordinances of the religious life are preserved, but inwardly silence and darkness prevail, into which bat-like thoughts intrude. Thorns have come up in the court of the Holy Place, where the scorpion makes her nest. The Song of the Lord had died out of heart and life.

Why should not this miserable condition be ended to-day? Why should you not be cleansed from the traces of sin and neglect through the Blood of the Cross? Why should you not come back into fellowship with God, who waits to receive and forgive? Surrender yourself to Him now. Do not be general, but specific in your consecration. Weld yourself to some life or lives that sorely need help. Give not words only, but deeds and blood. Merge your little life in the life of Christ, as the streamlet in the wide ocean. And as you yield yourself to Christ first, and next to all who need you for His sake, you will find the Song of the Lord breaking forth again in your heart like a spring, which was formerly choked with debris.

PRAYER We pray Thee, Heavenly Father, to cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love Thee, and worthily magnify Thy Holy Name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

2 Chronicles 29:27b

November 25 - Our Daily Walk

HOW THE SONG OF THE LORD BEGAN

"When the burnt offering began, the Song of the Lord began."-- 2 Chronicles 29:27

"They sing as it were a new Song before the Throne." -- Rev14:3.

HEZEKIAH, AT the age of twenty-five, came to the throne, and set himself to reverse his father's evil policy. The doors of the Temple were re-opened, and under his direction the Levites were commissioned to cleanse the desecrated courts of the rubbish and filth that had been allowed to accumulate. After eight days of strenuous labour, they were able to report that their work was successfully accomplished; that the altar of burnt-offering and the table of shewbread were ready for the renewal of their wonted service. It was

good news, and in the early morning of a memorable day, the king, accompanied by his princes and officers of state, took part in a solemn service of re-dedication. Amid the tense expectancy of the vast congregation which had assembled, Hezekiah commanded that the burnt sacrifice should be offered; and "when the burnt-offering began, the song of the Lord began also."

These ancient sacrifices have passed for ever. "Sacrifice and offering Thou dost not desire; mine ears hast Thou pierced (nailing me to Thy Cross); burnt-offering and sin-offering hast Thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come, I delight to do Thy will, O my God!" To yield up one's life to the Saviour, to surrender our lives for others for His sake, to maintain the steadfast resolve of self-sacrifice,—this surely fulfils the conception of the burnt-offering, which the king ordered that morning as the symbol of national devotion to the Will of God. Can we wonder that the Song of the Lord began also? Does not that same Song arise in every heart when the sacrifice of love and obedience begins?

It is the self-contained life that has made itself snug within its four walls, sound-proof, sorrow-proof, as it thinks, and love-proof, which is song-less and pitiable.

Our Lord said: "Whosoever shall lose his life for My sake shall find it." That finding is the correlative and source of the "Song of the Lord." Unite thyself with Jesus on the Cross, and one day thou wilt find thyself sharing with Him the New Song of accomplished Redemption!

PRAYER Give us loving and thankful hearts. May Thy mercies bind us like cords to the horns of the Altar. Let our whole nature be consecrated for Thine indwelling, and as the burnt-offering begins, may the Song of the Lord begin also in our hearts. AMEN.

2 Chronicles 30:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

One day a woman brought her son to the Greek philosopher Diogenes. "He is rude and behaves badly," she complained. "What can I do to improve his conduct?" With characteristic bluntness, the philosopher replied: "Strike his mother in the face." Parental example often shapes the conduct of a child. If the example is a good one, this can be a blessing. But what if the example is bad? Are children doomed to follow in their parents' footsteps, making the same foolish choices and suffering the same consequences?

2 Chronicles 30:18–19

The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God.

A very touching prayer, that opens up deep thoughts as to the progress of the true knowledge of God in Israel, and of the comparative value of heart preparation and ceremonial cleansing. Here were crowds of well-meaning people who had come from all parts of the land in answer to Hezekiah's invitation. Unaccustomed to temple usage, strangers to the temple rites, they had participated in the festivities of this great Passover without submitting first to the necessary ablutions. Their heart was prepared to seek God, they were proud of the great past, they desired to stand right with the Lord God of their fathers; but they were sadly ignorant and careless. The only thing to be done was to pray that their ignorances and negligences might be forgiven.

It is thus that Jesus pleads in heaven; and there are many that obtain mercy on the ground of His merit, because when they sin they do so ignorantly, and from want of knowledge rather than from want of heart. The devout ritualist who lays an excessive stress on outward forms; the man who has sensuous and distorted views of Christ, but sincerely desires to be accepted through Him; the soul that touches the hem of the garment as though the healing power were independent of the will-power of the Redeemer; the dying malefactor, who, in his last hours, catches at some distorted representation of Christ which is filtered through to him from the chance word of an uninstructed preacher— these are included in the fruitful pleading of the Great High Priest, who has compassion on the ignorant and on those who are out of the way. You may not understand doctrine, creed, or rite; but be sure to seek God. No splendid ceremonial nor rigorous etiquette can intercept the seeking soul.

2 Chronicles 30:1-31:1 30-31

The Lord your God is gracious and compassionate. He will not turn his face from you if you return to him. - 2 Chronicles 30:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

Pastor and theologian John Stott explained in *The Contemporary Christian*: "Protestants use a [certain] vocabulary to describe the continuously needed restoring and refreshing of the church. Our two favourite words are "'reformation', indicating the kind of reformation of faith and life according to Scripture which took place in the sixteenth century, and "'revival', denoting an altogether supernatural visitation of a church or community by God, bringing conviction, repentance, confession, the conversion of sinners and the recovery of backsliders. "'Reformation' usually stresses the power of the Word of God, and "'revival' the power of the Spirit of God, in his work of restoring the church."

Through Hezekiah, God brought both reformation and revival to Judah. In addition to renewing the temple (see yesterday's devotional), the king also renewed the celebration of the Passover. Setting aside recent strife in favor of a deeper covenant unity, he even invited people from what remained of northern Israel to come and join in. The letter he sent showed his heart: he wanted the entire nation to return to God, reunite in repentant worship centered around the temple, and be restored to the Lord's covenant favor. Though many mocked the messengers, some responded openly and humbly.

Hezekiah changed the date of Passover, mainly on practical grounds, since there was insufficient time to prepare the priests and gather the people. In fact, the Law was flexible on this point (see Num. 9:10-11). Despite the delay, many participants still had not purified themselves, but the king prayed for their forgiveness and God graciously "healed the people" (30:20). The entire occasion was a high point in post-Solomon Israelite history (30:26). This was no short-lived emotional rush, but a genuine recommitment followed by a zealous campaign to wipe out places and practices of idolatry. Hezekiah did everything with careful attention to the Law, following David's and Solomon's worship examples.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Sometimes spiritual revival or renewal involves rediscovering history and tradition. So we encourage you to read Christian History & Biography magazine. You'll find sample articles and an e-newsletter at www.christianitytoday.com/history, and a CD-ROM of back issues is available for purchase. The magazine's founder identified its key purpose: "We will develop a sense of continuity and see how the unfolding of God's purposes transcends any single generation, century, denomination, geography, or ideology."

2 Chronicles 31:21

He did it with all his heart and prospered.

The man who does his business with all his heart, is sure to prosper. To put your heart into your work is like genius manipulating common materials, till their worth becomes priceless, just because of what has been put into it.

The heart stands for the emotions and affections. What the furnace is to the factory or steamship, that the heart is in the economy of our nature. It is a great thing to love our life-work, to have an aim that kindles us whenever we think of it. Those who are so happily circumstanced, cannot be sufficiently thankful. But what of those who are bound to a work which they did not choose and do not like, who find their daily toil irksome and distasteful— is there any help for them? Can they possibly learn to do such work from their hearts? Certainly: because of Him who set it, and for whom it may be done.

Love performs the most onerous duties with all its heart, if they conduce to the comfort and help of those whom it loves more than itself. Does not a mother or wife perform tasks from which the hireling would shrink? She does them with all her heart, not considering for a moment the loathsomeness and hardness of the demand. So if we look at our life-work as God-appointed; if we realize that He has fixed it for us, who determined the orbits of the stars; if we can hear the voice of Jesus saying, "Do this for Me"— there is no further thought of hardship or distaste. Remember to do all your life-work for Jesus; do all in His name and for His glory; ask Him to fill your heart with submissive, loyal obedience, and you will find that when you introduce the personal element of Christ-service into the meanest acts, they will glisten like a piece of gold-tapestry.

2 Chronicles 31:2-21 312

In obedience to the law and the commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. - 2 Chronicles 31:21

TODAY IN THE WORD

During the days, weeks, and months following 9/11, generosity abounded. Thousands of volunteers stepped forward to do whatever they could. A special Amtrak train with relief supplies left Washington for New York City. For weeks following the tragedy, truckloads of items such as boots and goggles for the rescue workers arrived from all over America. Corporations donated vehicles, computers, office supplies, and many other items needed during the recovery and clean-up period. By the first anniversary, the Red Cross reported receiving nearly \$1 billion in 9/11 donations, serving 14 million meals at the site, and providing hundreds of thousands of health and mental health consultations.

An outpouring of generosity from people marked the revival we've been studying. Hezekiah's personal generosity led to financial openhandedness from the other leaders and the general populace. In fact, the giving was so great that the king had to appoint officials to be in charge of receiving gifts and distributing funds. Conaniah and Kore had quite a bit of work to do! The people brought "heaps" of tithes and freewill offerings for the maintenance of the temple and the support of the priests and Levites (v. 10). They followed the biblical principle of "firstfruits," or giving to the Lord first instead of whatever was left over. No one can outgive God, though, and the kingdom prospered greatly during this time (v. 21).

There were at least two more key elements in this spiritual revival under Hezekiah. First, order (v. 2). The king organized the priests

and Levites in divisions according to various categories of duties. The genealogical records were brought out (v. 18)—these were integral in tracking the identity of the covenant people. Such actions might seem ordinary, but they reflect a God-honoring desire to do worship “in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor. 14:40). And second, obedience. Hezekiah honored the covenant by trying to obey all that was written in the Law.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Hezekiah led the people of Israel toward spiritual renewal as a community, but the substance of that renewal consisted in individuals getting their hearts right with God. In light of today's reading, perhaps it's time for a personal rededication or recommitment on your part as well. If you have sin to confess, confess it and be forgiven. If you've given up meeting with God's people, head back to church (Heb. 10:25). If you've neglected prayer and the Word, return to these essential and joyful disciplines.

2 Chronicles 32:20

Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah, prayed and cried to heaven.

It was the indignity done to Jehovah that stirred these two holy men to the heart. Not that their lives, and the lives of their people, and the beautiful holy city, were in danger; but that Sennacherib spoke against the God of Jerusalem, as against the gods of the people of the earth, which were the work of the hands of man. Oh that we were possessed with a similar zeal for God, so that we might look at sin as it affects Him, and lament over the awful wrongs which are continually being perpetrated against His holy, loving nature! What an argument this would give us in prayer!

This constitutes a special reason why we should plead for a revival of religion throughout our land. Men speak and act so shamelessly, as though God had abdicated His throne, and was hardly to be taken account of. They sin against Him with so high a hand, and treat His laws with so much contumely. Are there no Hezekiahs and Isaiahs who will pray and cry to the God of our fathers to do again the great works He did in their days, and in the old time before?

Then the Lord would save us, and guide us on every side (2 Chronicles 32:22). There never was a more conspicuous and glorious deliverance than when the angel of God wrought for Israel against Assyria. The Lord became a place of broad rivers and streams across which the enemy could not pass. As the mother bird settling down on her nest, He covered the city with His outspread wings. And the rich spoils of the foe were left for the beleaguered garrison. Pray on, beloved; the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King; He will save us.

2 Chronicles 32

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. - 2 Chronicles 32:26

TODAY IN THE WORD

Ken Taylor, best known for The Living Bible and as the founder of Tyndale House Publishers, wrote when he was 87: “What, then, remains for me to do? That is what God must tell me. My remaining time, brief as it may or may not be, is always in God's hands. I will be His servant to the end, and then suddenly be transformed from a servant into a son! Then I can serve Him even better, and please Him even more . . . [I am] anxious beyond all things to enjoy Christ's love for me, to express my love to Him, and His love to others.”

These are words from a life deeply rooted in obedient faithfulness. Though he accomplished many things, Hezekiah unfortunately did not conclude as strongly as this. In today's reading, we find both a high of faith and a disappointing finish. The high of faith was Judah's defeat of Sennacherib and the Assyrians in 701 B.C. (a story also told in 2 Kings 18-20 and Isaiah 36-39). The king made prudent preparations, including repairing the city walls, forging new weapons, drafting new soldiers, and blocking the Gihon springs so that the enemy would have difficulty finding water. Yet while carrying out these responsibilities, he didn't put ultimate faith in them, but rather in the power of God (vv. 7-8). He understood that God's glory was the real issue at stake, as highlighted in Sennacherib's letter, which equated Israel's God with (conquered) idols from neighboring nations (vv. 14-15). As the narrative shows, God won a miraculous victory in answer to prayer.

Hezekiah's disappointing finish started, of course, with pride. He showed ingratitude and pride in response to a divine healing, though he repented of that. Later, when Babylonian envoys came to inquire about the miraculous sign God had given to confirm the healing—a golden opportunity to give praise to the Lord—Hezekiah instead showed off his treasures. Regrettably, he failed God's final test (v. 31).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The life of Hezekiah presents a veritable buffet of possible “Today Along the Way” applications. So we're going to lay out a small smorgasbord today and let you take your choice: (1) Give a special gift to your church, as the Israelites did toward the rebuilding of the temple. (2) Host a “worship feast” in your home and praise God with your friends. (3) Start keeping an answered prayer list or a

2 Chronicles 33:12

When he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God.

So long as this story stands on the page of revelation, no sinner need despair of mercy. There was hardly a sin possible to man that Manasseh did not commit. “He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.” And he made his people do worse than the heathen.

Then came awful sorrow. Bound in fetters, exposed to consummate cruelty and disgrace, he was carried to Babylon, and thrust into the dungeons, where other captive princes were immured, with little chance of liberation or permission to revisit his native land. But there the Spirit of God did His work. He humbled himself greatly, and prayed. What tears, and cries, and bursts of heart-broken penitence, were his! How those walls were saturated with the breath of confession, and those stone floors indented by his kneeling at perpetual prayer! And God came near to his low dungeon, and graciously heard his supplication, and brought him back again.

Yes, and He will do as much for you. The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth from all sin; the grace of God is exceedingly abundant with faith and love; all sins and blasphemies may be forgiven to the sons of men. Turn to Him with brokenness of soul, and He will not only forgive, but bring you again; and give you, as He did Manasseh, an opportunity of undoing some of those evil things which have marred your past. For the rest, it is good not to wait for affliction to stir us up to seek God, but to abide in Him for love's dear sake.

2 Chronicles 33

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. - Romans 1:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

In at least two war-torn countries, United Nations peacekeeping forces have been accused of sexually abusing children. In Liberia, young girls have been forced to exchange sex for food and other necessities. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, U.N. peacekeepers have had sex with local girls in exchange for eggs, bread, milk, or a dollar or two. Desperation, the trauma of war, the cultural dishonor of being a rape victim, plus the obvious power disparities, lead these girls to turn to prostitution or sexual slavery as the only way to provide for their families.

We're shocked to read of such things. To prey on children is horrifying at any time, but under these circumstances is especially despicable. When Ezra wrote about idolatry among God's people, he conveyed this same sense of utter abhorrence for sin. As different as Hezekiah was from his father Ahaz, so, unfortunately, was his son Manasseh different from him. Manasseh seemed intent on committing as many forms of idolatry and wickedness as he possibly could. He rebuilt the high places. He set up Baal altars and Asherah poles. He worshiped the “starry hosts” and other elements of nature (cf. Deut. 4:19). He sacrificed his sons to Molech. He even engaged in sorcery and other occult practices. To make things worse, he worshiped idols in the temple itself!

The sin of the people of Judah at this time actually exceeded the sin of the Canaanites whom God had judged in the original conquest under Joshua (v. 9; cf. Deut. 18:9-13). So it's little wonder God punished these covenant-breakers with a loss in battle. At this, Manasseh repented, was restored by God, and tried to undo his previous evils. By this time, however, he was able to make little impact on the nation in general (v. 17), and apparently none on his son Amon (v. 23). The horrifying lessons were surely clear to the original readers of 2 Chronicles after the Exile, just as hopefully they are for us today.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Just like cleats keep you from slipping and sliding on an athletic field, Scripture memorization keeps you from slipping and backsliding spiritually. For that reason—to avoid taking a single step down the path of Manasseh and Amon—we recommend memorizing 1 Corinthians 16:13 and Hebrews 12:1-3. The first is a short but potent reminder: “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.” The second is for more ambitious memorizers and reminds us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

2 Chronicles 34:15, 18

I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord.

It is supposed that this was the Book of Deuteronomy; though we have no sympathy whatever with a modern notion with respect to its discovery. In our judgment that book is rightly ascribed to Moses. Apparently, however, it had long been missing, and the young

king was filled with horror when he heard the list of evils that were associated with apostasy. “He rent his clothes.”

We should read the Bible with a particular application to the days in which we live. It is well enough to accept its statements as being generally true and credible; but it is better to realize their pertinence to ourselves and our circumstances. The book of the law had been sadly neglected in the years preceding Josiah’s accession; and through the neglect of God’s Word the people had become indifferent to His commands, and deaf to the appeals of His prophets. Josiah turned the lantern on the evils of His time, and saw how God was feeling with respect to them.

The Bible is a book for all time. What it said, it says. What it was, it is. You tell me it was written so many centuries ago; but I reply the ink is still wet on its immortal pages. They have been read and pondered by generations; but the light of its eye is not dim, nor its natural force abated. Sin is the same, man the same, God the same, in all ages. And the Bible’s claim to be God’s Word is substantiated by the fact that it is possessed of living power, and of the same perennial freshness as the sun, or the spring, or the ocean, or the faces of the little children. Would that we might daily read it as we read the newspaper, damp from the press, realizing that it is our Father’s great message for the life of every day!

2 Chronicles 34:31

TODAY IN THE WORD

When the workman brought the book to the king, it didn’t look like anything special. But when the king read it, he grew deeply distressed. It spoke of great disaster that was coming upon his kingdom and his people. What could he do? No military or financial solution would help. So he gathered all the people together, and did the only thing he could. He recommitted himself to the Lord and renewed His holy covenant that had been badly broken. The account of King Josiah finding the book of the Law (a portion of Deuteronomy) is one of the most dramatic stories in the Bible (2 Chr 34:14–33). But it’s a story with a sad ending. Despite Josiah’s reforms, he couldn’t change the nation’s heart and thereby prevent the coming disaster. He died before the onslaught and was spared seeing his nation destroyed.

This previous public reading of God’s covenant during Josiah’s reign may have been in Jeremiah’s mind in today’s prophecy. This covenant, also called the Sinaitic covenant, used the language of international treaties current at that time. These treaties, or covenants, clearly spelled out the blessings for those who kept the required stipulations and the curses for treaty violators.

Like previous prophets, Jeremiah called the nation back to its covenantal responsibilities. Had they remained faithful, they would have enjoyed prosperity in the land. But the coming destruction only confirmed that they had broken the covenant (vv. 10–11).

In their great distress, the faithless people would cry out to their false gods, but these “gods” could do nothing. Only the living God had power to help. But because the people had refused to turn to Him, and had rejoiced in their wickedness, He would eventually become deaf to them.

APPLY THE WORD The failure to keep the old covenant eventually led to the new covenant, sealed by the blood of Jesus Christ. As believers, we live by grace and not by works.

2 Chronicles 34:1-13 34t

You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. - Exodus 20:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

Who or what is a leader? President John Quincy Adams answered: “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.” As Josiah matured into a godly king, he ably fulfilled this definition of leadership. His actions inspired the nation back to faith and a true covenant relationship with the Lord.

After Amon was assassinated—perhaps Manasseh’s repentance had done some good after all, since the people couldn’t stand his son’s wickedness—Josiah was placed on the throne as an eight-year-old boy. This was likely a situation similar to Joash’s, with godly influences and mentors wielding power in the palace, though in this case we’re not told who the “Jehoiada and Jehosheba” might have been.

Josiah began to seek the Lord relatively young, at the age of 16, and by age 20 he was confident enough to use his royal power to oppose the nation’s idolatry. The first step was to clean house. His battle against idolatry reads like a military campaign: He went out, fought, conquered, then returned to Jerusalem. And he made a thorough job of it—even in translation, the verbs make an amazing list of acts of destruction. He tore down, cut to pieces, smashed, broke, scattered, burned, purged, and crushed to powder, and for good measure he scattered the ashes on idolators’ graves as a warning to the people not to start up the false worship again

after he'd left. He was zealously ruthless for the glory of God!

The second step was to repair the temple and thus fill the spiritual vacuum (cf. Luke 11:24-26). Again, the priests and Levites purified and organized themselves for genuine worship. Again, the tithes and gifts of the people were used to rebuild a Temple that stood in ruins. This time, not only the people of Judah were involved, but also the remnants of the northern kingdom, especially people from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (v. 9).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Are you in a position of leadership? If you are, whether in your church, community, workplace, or home, carve out some time today to place your leadership position in service to the Lord. He establishes leaders to accomplish His purposes in His timing. If you are not in leadership, you can serve God by praying diligently for those He has placed over you, and by seeking to follow their godly direction. God desires humility from both leaders and the people they serve.

2 Chronicles 34:14-33 341

Your statues are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. - Psalm 119:111

TODAY IN THE WORD

The work of Theodore Seuss Geisel, popularly known as Dr. Seuss, testifies to the power of the written word. His classic children's book, *The Cat in the Hat*, celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year! You probably know the book, but what you might not know is that Dr. Seuss originally wrote it to teach kids to read and to help them enjoy reading. He was required to work from a very short list of beginner-level words, and the project took him one-and-a-half years. The final story used a mere 236 words.

The power of God's written Word is on display in today's narrative. The "Book of the Law" found during the temple renovations was probably the entire Pentateuch, though some scholars think it was only Deuteronomy. Had there really been enough time to lose it since the days of Hezekiah? Yes, given how wicked Manasseh and Amon had been, but it's still somewhat amazing that such a vital sacred book could have been lost by the time Josiah took the throne. In just a handful of generations, specific knowledge of the covenant had been lost, so much so that it seems the king was hearing its provisions for the first time. It's almost as if the covenant were "born again" in this episode!

Josiah was a spiritually discerning leader. He realized immediately the importance of the scroll and how the nation had already broken the covenant and stood under judgment. Tearing his robes showed he comprehended fully the seriousness and sorrow of their sin (v. 21). He led the people in a formal pledge renouncing idols and rededicating themselves to the Lord. Thanks to his leadership, during his lifetime they "did not fail to follow the Lord" (vv. 32-33). The message from the prophetess Huldah indicated that his repentance and humility in response to the Word postponed God's judgment on Judah. The interaction of human choices and divine sovereignty remains a mystery, but obedience is always the best choice.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Josiah's revival was firmly anchored in the power of God's Word. Recognizing the importance of the Bible is surely one reason why Today in the Word is a regular habit for you, too. Our next month's topic will begin soon, a book study on 2 Corinthians. Why not start preparing now? We suggest the entry for "Corinthians, First and Second."

2 Chronicles 35:4, 6, 10, 14, 15, 16

Prepare.

No great court function can be carried through successfully, without careful preparation. And Josiah's passover was so vast and rare a success because of the large amount of previous preparation, as is described in this chapter. The priests and Levites were prepared by careful washings and ceremonial rites. The course of the sacrifices was ordered according to the law of Moses. The routine of sacred song and praise was also provided for. Nothing was left to haphazard or chance.

We are taught to rely on the promptings and inspirations of the Holy Spirit; and it is certain that He would use us more on special errands, if we were to trust and obey Him better. But these extraordinary ministries should not lead us to a life of haphazard. We should prepare ourselves for service so far as we may, laying our plans, anticipating the calls and exigencies of coming days, and preparing for the demand which almost certainly will be made on us. We may have to give our special words and addresses and arrangements to the winds; but we shall always need that preparedness of heart which is necessary for those who are to be used of God.

Remember what is said of the vessels that were purged from uncleanness, sanctified, meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work. Be always in your own place, clean so far as you can be, filled with the Holy Ghost, with the handle of your life

turned toward the Master's hand, that at any moment He may take hold of you, and use you for His holy service. By the diligent study of His Word, as well as by earnest prayer and waiting upon God, you will be prepared to do His will.

2 Chronicles 35:1-36:1 35-36

The Passover had not been observed like this since the days of the prophet Samuel. - 2 Chronicles 35:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

These days, our world is filled with rankings. U.S. News & World Report issues its annual, controversial rankings of colleges, universities, and graduate schools. CNN and Money magazine make a list of the "100 Best Places in America to Live." Sports Illustrated compiles "power rankings" of major sports teams. Forbes, as we've mentioned before, lists the richest people in the world. We're daily bombarded with lists of the best movies, best books, best music, best cars, best restaurants, best investments, best news stories, best places to retire, best places to vacation, and best new gadgets.

Interestingly, Josiah was ranked as the best king Judah had had, presumably during the era of the divided kingdom. Second Kings 23:25 says: "Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses." His spiritual accomplishments were impressive. He rebuilt the temple and placed the ark in its proper place. He reorganized the worship duties of the priests and Levites and started offering sacrifices again. He led the people in renewing the covenant, including outpourings of gifts and freewill offerings. Perhaps most significantly, he also celebrated Passover. This was the first Passover since Hezekiah, and the only Passover since Samuel's day to be celebrated exactly according to the Law (v. 18).

After a long and successful reign, Josiah died on the battlefield. The Babylonian army was on its way to defeat a weakened Assyria. Egypt wanted to go to Assyria's aid, but Josiah, who favored Babylon, tried to cut them off. Why did the king go to his doom? Apparently he couldn't believe that God would speak to him through a foreigner (v. 21). At the battle of Megiddo ("Armageddon" means "mountain of Megiddo"), he was shot down by Egyptian archers. Jeremiah, whose public prophetic ministry dates from this event, lamented the fallen king.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In 2 Chronicles, we see a strong correlation between revival and giving. That's why today's application is to do additional Bible study on the virtue of generosity. Passages you should take a look at include Exodus 36:1-7, on the Israelites' gifts to build the tabernacle; Matthew 6:1-4 and Luke 21:1-4, on Jesus' guidelines concerning generosity; and 2 Corinthians 8-9, on the generosity of the Macedonians and the motivations for cheerful giving.

2 Chronicles 36:15

Rising up betimes.

What a touching and graphic phrase! How did God yearn over that sinful and rebellious city! Sending His messengers, "rising up betimes, and sending" — like a man who has had a sleepless night of anxiety for his friend or child, and rises with the dawn to send a servant on a mission of inquiry, or a message of love. How eager God is for men's salvation!

From God's eagerness, may we not learn a lesson of anxiety for the souls of men? We do not long after them enough, or rise betimes to urge them to repent. Did we realize what heaven is, or hell, what men are missing or incurring, what our duty is, as saved ourselves, we should rise up betimes to seek their eternal interests.

But if God rises betimes to seek men, should they not do the same to seek Him? Think you not, that when Adam heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden at morning prime, he would be up and away to meet Him on the up land lawns of Paradise? Can we wonder that our Master would rise up a great while before day, to meet His Father on some unfrequented height? Let us not cling to beds of sloth when God is awaiting us; let us heed His loving remonstrances, that we may be saved in the overthrow of the world; and let us, like Lot, pass on the word to others enwrapped in fatal slumber around us, bidding them to escape to the mountains, before the sun rise on the earth, lest they be consumed.

It was the practice of Sir Henry Havelock, during his campaigns in India, always to have two hours for prayer and Bible study before the march. If the camp was struck at 6:00 a. m., he would rise at 4:00.

2 Chronicles 36:2-23 362

As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people both now and forevermore. - Psalm 125:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

A typical book or movie review does not give away key plot points, and certainly does not tell the ending. Reviewers can discuss events, characters, and themes in general terms, but courtesy dictates that climaxes and conclusions not be revealed. If they wish to discuss such things, they put a “spoiler warning” at the top of their column. Then readers can choose not to read the review, so as to experience the book or movie with a fresh and open mind, or to go ahead and read it, if suspense is not a main factor for them.

At the conclusion of 2 Chronicles, Ezra placed a major “spoiler”—a look into the future telling that defeat and exile would be followed by restoration and rebuilding (vv. 22-23). In Ezra's historical narrative, the downward spiral of Judah's history was drawing to a close and the nation would be conquered by Babylon in 605 B.C. A 70-year captivity would begin, extending to 535 B.C., when the foundations of the new temple would be laid. These facts were well known to his post-exilic audience, so the real purpose of the “spoiler” was to make sure they understood their place in the story. By looking into the “future,” when that was the present of his original hearers and readers, Ezra brought home the historical lessons and exhortations of his narrative. In fact, the end of this book was a bridge to his next book, as verses 22-23 are the same as Ezra 1:1-3.

As we read the sorry tale of the last kings of Judah, the historical cycle comes into focus once more: “The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy” (vv. 15-16).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Here's an easy application: Hope! Or maybe it's not so easy. Maybe you've hit rock bottom and are really struggling. Maybe you've been, as it were, defeated and carried into captivity. Let the conclusion of 2 Chronicles encourage you with the fact that our faithful God is in control and His promises are rock-solid sure. That's the best and only basis for hope. “He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him” (Ps. 126:6; cf. Ps. 90:13-17).

2 Chronicles 36:22-2 Jeremiah 52:31-34; 3622

I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt. - Zechariah 1:16a

TODAY IN THE WORD

The story is told of a European village who had long prized the stunning stained-glass windows in its cathedral. During World War II, however, air raids threatened to destroy these municipal treasures. So the people dismantled the centuries-old masterpieces and hid them, section by section, in their homes. Throughout the war, the cathedral silently awaited the return of its former glory. Finally, after the war, artisans painstakingly reassembled the beautiful windows, which had suffered no damage or loss.

After Jerusalem's destruction, thoughts of restoration must have seemed inconceivable. Lamentations ends with no indication that Jerusalem would ever be restored. Yet an apparent historical footnote tucked away at the end of Jeremiah 52 quietly attests to God's loyal love.

Recall that Jehoiachin was the third of Judah's last four kings, all of whom were evil. Unlike the other three kings, Jehoiachin's life was spared even though he spent thirty-seven years in a Babylonian prison (v. 31). We are not told why the new Babylonian king, Evil-Merodach, treated Jehoiachin so well (vv. 32–34), but “behind the scenes” God had a greater plan.

Even though Jehoiachin was an evil king, he was still part of the Davidic line. In 2 Samuel 7:16, the Lord promised David, “Your throne will be established forever.” Jeremiah may have wondered when he wrote Lamentations how God could keep His promise. But God faithfully spared Jehoiachin to preserve this Davidic line, which eventually led to our Lord Jesus Christ (see Matt. 1:11–12).

Matthew's genealogy also shows that Jehoiachin had a grandson named Zerubbabel, who turned out to be instrumental in rebuilding the temple when the exiles returned to Jerusalem in 537 B.C. (see Ezra 3:7–13).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Ezra 3:11 records this joyous song: “With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord: ‘He is good; his love to Israel endures forever.’ And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

2 Chronicles 36:15-23

You are a chosen people . . . belonging to God. - 1 Peter 2:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

The Christmas story of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer cheers the hearts of children. His bright red nose, which other reindeers mock, ends up saving Christmas by guiding Santa's sleigh on a stormy Christmas Eve. He and his other friends from the Island of

Misfit Toys prove that being a misfit serves a purpose that no ordinary toy could!

Today's reading notes that Esther didn't seem like the most promising candidate for Queen of Persia. She was a misfit of sorts. In verses five and six, the family tree of her uncle, Mordecai, reveals that they were about three generations removed from the Jewish exile into Babylon. Our reading from 2 Chronicles describes how over one hundred years earlier, the Jewish people faced the shame of watching their holy temple pillaged and their people captured. Only the poorest of the poor remained in the land. The rest were forcibly settled in Babylon. When the Persians later defeated the Babylonians, Jews were given permission to return to Judah if they wished. Many, including Mordecai and Esther, chose to remain in Persia.

This young girl belonged to two cultures. Her Hebrew name, Hadassah, was a reminder of her family's roots in a distant land (v. 7), and this heritage might be viewed unfavorably in Persia (cf. 2:10). On the other hand, her Persian name, Esther, indicated the culture in which she had been raised. It would be natural to feel alienated from both worlds.

Not only did Esther not fit easily in the culture, her sense of belonging within a family had also been lost. Verse seven tells us that Esther was an orphan. Her parents died, leaving her in the care of an uncle who apparently had no other family. The text makes no mention of either siblings or cousins.

With a background such as this, we would understand if someone had an identity crisis. Had Esther gotten stuck in the cycle of self-pity, the story might have ended here. But we will soon see that these misfortunes in Esther's life were not obstacles in God's plan. They became the very means for Esther to serve as God's instrument.

APPLY THE WORD Today's key verse gives Christians the truth about our identity: we are a people called by God, made holy and purposed for declaring His glory. No personality flaw, no physical disfigurement, no personal inadequacies make us misfits in God's kingdom. Everyone belongs because we belong to God! Is there anything that makes you think you are a misfit in God's kingdom? Ask God for the faith to see this not as an obstacle to His purposes but as something useful for Him.

OUR DAILY BREAD Devotionals

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2 Chronicles 1:11-12

SOLOMON'S REQUEST

And God said to Solomon: "Because . . . you have not asked riches or wealth or honor . . . but have asked wisdom and knowledge . . . wisdom and knowledge are granted you; and I will give you riches and wealth and honor" (2 Chronicles 1:11-12).

When offered one wish, Midas, a legendary Phrygian king, asked that all he touched might turn to gold. His golden desire granted, Midas realized as soon as he wanted to eat that the gift was a curse, not a blessing. Although he got what he wanted, he didn't want what he got.

King Solomon also was offered one wish. But he did not waste it on a selfish, greedy request. Instead, he asked for wisdom that he might judge God's people justly. In requesting wisdom above riches, Solomon revealed right reasons for wanting to be wise. He asked not for his own benefit.

Wise people know how to learn; they never seek knowledge for their own sake. They know how to talk; they speak the truth in love. They know how to act; they pursue justice and evade evil. Perceptive people balance their words and actions. They say and do the right things at the right time for the right reasons.

The discerning person soon realizes that biblical wisdom is more about practice than philosophy. Wise people live skillfully. They apply heavenly counsel to earthly conduct.

In sending His Son to the unwise world, God applied knowledge. As Paul said, Jesus is God's wisdom applied to the world's problems (1 Cor. 1:24) . We do not always think like God; but as His image-bearers by creation and new birth, we can be more perceptive. He left us with a word to the wise—imitate the life of Jesus.

2 CHRONICLES 1:1-12

"Now give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people" (2 Chronicles 1:10).

A Persian philosopher, when asked how he had acquired so much knowledge, answered, "By not being too proud to ask questions

when I was ignorant."

Even though Solomon was Israel's mighty king, he too was willing to admit his ignorance. But he wanted more than mere knowledge. When the Lord said to him, "Ask! What shall I give you?" (2 Chronicles 1:7), Solomon made only one request. He asked for the insight and ability to judge God's people righteously. God gave him this, and He added wealth and honor as a bonus.

Solomon had his priorities right. He kept the people's welfare, not his own, in mind. Too often we want wisdom in order to achieve wealth and honor, but God doesn't work that way. He gives it to those who will honor Him whatever may happen.

Teenagers stand on the threshold of becoming adults and agonize over the question, "What should I do with my life?" Adults face job changes, family responsibilities, and many other far-reaching decisions. In times like these we need to search our hearts and ask, "Why do I want wisdom?" When we get our priorities straight, we can claim the promise of James 1:5, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally . . . and it will be given to him." It's always appropriate to ask God for wisdom when our heart's desire is to honor Him and do what's right. —D. J. De Haan

They are wise who take God for a teacher.

2 Chronicles 5:7-14 Thank God For Music

When the trumpeters and singers were as one, . . . the glory of the Lord filled the house of God. —2 Chronicles 5:13-14

Music plays a big part in the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation, God enlists musicians to work on His behalf. He uses music to call people to worship and to send them to war, to soothe ragged emotions and to ignite spiritual passion, to celebrate victories and to mourn losses. Music is an all-occasion, all-inclusive art form. There are followers and leaders, simple songs and complex songs, easy instruments and difficult instruments, melodies and harmonies, fast rhythms and slow rhythms, high notes and low notes.

Music is a wonderful metaphor for the church because everyone participates by doing what he or she does best. We all sing or play different notes at different times, but we all perform the same song. The better we know our parts, and the better we follow the conductor, the more beautiful the music.

One of the best uses for music is praise. When Solomon's temple was completed, the musicians praised and thanked God. As they did, "the glory of the Lord filled the house of God" (2 Chron. 5:14).

We thank God for beautiful music, for it's like a preview of heaven, where the glory of God will dwell forever and where praise for Him will never cease.

Those who praise God on earth will feel at home in heaven.

2 Chronicles 6:1-11 Promises You Can Bank On

For all the promises of God in [Christ] are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. —2 Corinthians 1:20

After a global financial crisis, the US government enacted stricter laws to protect people from questionable banking practices. Banks had to change some of their policies to comply. To notify me of such changes, my bank sent me a letter. But when I got to the end I had more questions than answers. The use of phrases like "we may" and "at our discretion" certainly didn't sound like anything I could depend on!

In contrast, the Old Testament quotes God as saying "I will" numerous times. God promises David: "I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Sam. 7:12-13). No uncertainty in those words. Recognizing God's faithfulness to His promises, King Solomon says in his prayer of dedication for the temple: "You have kept what You promised Your servant David my father; You have both spoken with Your mouth and fulfilled it with Your hand" (2 Chron. 6:15). Centuries later, the apostle Paul said that all of God's promises are "yes" in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20).

In a world of uncertainty, our trust is in a faithful God who will always keep His promises.

Whatever trouble may assail,

Of this we can be sure:

God's promises can never fail,

They always will endure. —Hess

Faith knows that God always performs what He promises.

2 Chronicles 6:2, 14

DEDICATING THE TEMPLE

"I have built You an exalted house, and a place for You to dwell in forever. . . . There is no God in heaven or on earth like You" (2 Chronicles 6:2, 14).

Writing of our response to God, Thomas Carlyle, the nineteenth-century essayist, concluded, "The man who does not habitually worship is but a pair of spectacles behind which there is no eye."

Solomon, like Carlyle, recognized people's need to worship. With the help of more than 150,000 workers, he built the most magnificent praise house ever. Opulent in its use of gold, silver, bronze, and fine cloth, the temple dazzled the ancient world.

On dedication day hundreds of singers and musicians, including 120 trumpeters, praised the Lord. They sang of His goodness and enduring love.

The glory of God filled the temple, but the earthly structure could not contain Him. God cannot be put in a box; He is not a genie. Worshipful people declare who God is and what He has done, but they never try to bring Him down to human level or limit Him to a single place.

The thief on the cross truly worshiped Jesus, for he recognized who He was and what He could do. Many of us do not; we wear prescription lenses but have no eyes.

2 Chronicles 7:12-18

LOOK AT ME

"If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray, and seek My face,...then I will...forgive their sin." - 2 Chronicles 7:14

It was one of those split-second exchanges between a 16-year-old girl and her father, but it spoke

volumes. While he was out of town, she had broken her curfew and stayed out too late with her boyfriend. Now she had to talk to Dad about it. Embarrassed and afraid, she sat quietly looking down at her hands in her lap while the discussion went on. She apologized and they decided on a suitable discipline.

"Look at me," Dad said. She didn't want to, but she did. Instead of a hard look of displeasure, she saw

tears and a look of deep love. She threw her arms around him, and they both knew that everything would be all right between them.

To keep everything right between us and our heavenly Father, we have to seek His face (Ps. 27:8). We may feel guilt, disappointment, anger, or hurt toward God. But that is when we must respond to His invitation to look at Him -- especially if fellowship has been broken.

Our greatest concern should be the fear of losing a close relationship with Him. Our greatest delight

should be seeing His face in the Word and through the wonderful privilege of prayer. That way we will

have the assurance that everything is all right between us.- D C Egener

The more we go to God in prayer,
Intent to seek His face,
The more we'll want to be with Him
Before the throne of grace.-- Sper

The heart of prayer is prayer from the heart.

2 Chronicles 7:1-14 Our Moral Compass

August 4, 2009 — by Dennis Fisher

If My people . . . turn from their wicked ways, then I will . . . forgive their sin and heal their land. —2 Chronicles 7:14

Bible in a Year:

Psalms 66-67; Romans 7

When Abraham Lincoln was introduced to author Harriet Beecher Stowe, he reportedly said that she was “the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war.”

Although President Lincoln’s comment wasn’t entirely serious, Stowe’s novel Uncle Tom’s Cabin was instrumental in abolishing slavery in the US. Its graphic depiction of racism and the injustice of slavery helped lead to the start of civil war. Ultimately, Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation declared that all slaves “shall be free.” Thus, Stowe’s novel helped to change a nation’s moral compass.

Centuries earlier, King Solomon was told about what would change the moral compass of God’s people Israel. It was to start with humility and confession. The Lord told Solomon: “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 I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14).

As a Christian community, we should first take an inventory of our own personal lives. As we humbly seek God in prayer and repentance of sin, changes begin in our lives. God may then use us to change a nation’s moral compass.

Revive us again,
Fill each heart with Thy love;
May each soul be rekindled
With fire from above. —Mackay

Nothing is politically right which is morally wrong. —O’Connell

2 Chronicles 10a

Submissive Leadership

“submitting to one another in the fear of God.” —Ephesians 5:21

A mild-mannered man was reading a book on being self-assertive and decided to start at home. So he stormed into his house, pointed a finger in his wife’s face, and said, “From now on I’m boss around here and my word is law! I want you to prepare me a gourmet meal and draw my bath. Then, when I’ve eaten and finished my bath, guess who’s going to dress me and comb my hair.” “The mortician,” replied his wife.

King Rehoboam tried that kind of self-assertiveness and it turned Israel against him. When he came to the throne, the people pleaded for less oppressive taxation. His older advisors urged him to heed their request, but his young friends told him to be even more demanding than his father. As a result of listening to his peers, 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel seceded and formed a new kingdom (2 Chronicles 10:16-17).

Good leaders don’t rely on domineering self-assertion—not at home, nor in church, nor in business. Rather, they balance self-assertiveness (which isn’t wrong in itself) with the principle of submitting to one another (Ephesians 5:21). They listen respectfully, admit when they’re wrong, show a willingness to change, and mix gentleness with firmness. That’s submissive leadership—and it works! —Herb Vander Lugt

Submissive leadership requires
A kind and gentle honesty
That will attend to others’ needs
And win their love and loyalty. —D. De Haan

The only leaders qualified to lead are those who have learned to serve.

2 Chronicles 14:1-11 Panic Or Pray?

October 11, 2012 — by Marvin Williams

Help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on You, and in Your name we go against this multitude. —2 Chronicles 14:11

An 85-year-old woman, all alone in a convent, got trapped inside an elevator for 4 nights and 3 days. Fortunately, she had a jar of water, some celery sticks, and a few cough drops. After she tried unsuccessfully to open the elevator doors and get a cell phone signal, she decided to turn to God in prayer. “It was either panic or pray,” she later told CNN. In her distress, she relied on God and waited till she was rescued.

Asa was also faced with the options of panic or pray (2 Chron. 14). He was attacked by an Ethiopian army of a million men. But as

he faced this huge fighting force, instead of relying on military strategy or cowering in dread, he turned to the Lord in urgent prayer. In a powerful and humble prayer, Asa confessed his total dependence on Him, asked for help, and appealed to the Lord to protect His own name: "Help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on You, and in Your name we go against this multitude" (v.11). The Lord responded to Asa's prayer, and he won the victory over the Ethiopian army.

When we are faced with tight spots, meager resources, a vast army of problems, or seemingly dead-end solutions, let's not panic but instead turn to God who fights for His people and gives them victory.

In my distress, anxiety, and fear, Lord, teach
me to rely on You and draw close to You. Then I
know I'll be able to stand strong in Your power
and won't be dependent on my own strength.

Prayer is the bridge between panic and peace.

2 Chronicles 12:1-8 Down The Up Staircase

If My people . . . will humble themselves, and pray . . . and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin. —2 Chronicles 7:14

The video starts with a puppy at the top of the stairs afraid to go down. Despite much encouragement from people cheering at the bottom, Daisy can't figure it out. She wants so badly to join them, but fear keeps her pacing the landing. Then a bigger dog comes to help. Simon runs up the steps and then back down, showing Daisy how easy it is. Daisy is not convinced. Simon tries again. This time more slowly. Then he watches Daisy try again. But Daisy still is too scared. Once again Simon goes to the top and demonstrates the technique. Finally Daisy dares to let her back legs follow the front ones. Simon stays beside her. She makes it. Everyone celebrates!

What a beautiful picture of discipleship. We spend much of our time trying to teach others to climb up, but the more important, and more difficult, thing to learn is how to "go down." Throughout Scripture we read that God desires humility of us. Because the people of Judah humbled themselves, the Lord said, "Therefore I will not destroy them" (2 Chron. 12:7).

On numerous occasions, God demonstrated humility by coming down (Ex. 3:7-8; 19:10-12; Micah 1:3). Finally God sent Jesus, who spent His life teaching the technique we are to follow (Phil. 2:5-11).

More like the Master I would ever be,

More of His meekness, more humility;

More zeal to labor, more courage to be true,

More consecration for work He bids me do. —Gabriel

No one will learn anything at all unless he first learns humility.

INSIGHT: The Scriptures reveal how God responds to the humble heart. When King Rehoboam humbled himself, God responded by providing deliverance (v.7). In 2 Chronicles 1, King Solomon was given an invitation to ask God for anything he desired but requested only wisdom to rule his people. Because of his humble request, God chose to give him the additional blessings of wealth and honor (vv.6-12).

2 Chronicles 15:1-15 Whose Side Is God On?

August 20, 2008 — by Julie Ackerman Link

The Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. —1 Chronicles 28:9

I do not boast that God is on my side," wrote Abraham Lincoln. "I humbly pray that I am on God's side."

Lincoln's words paraphrase the thoughts Azariah expressed to King Asa of Judah. After the Spirit of God came upon Azariah, he said, "The Lord is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you" (2 Chron. 15:2).

Throughout history, people have done despicable deeds while boldly claiming that God was on their side. But being a Christian doesn't guarantee that God is "on our side" any more than being an ancient Israelite guaranteed that God was on theirs (Isa. 3:14-15). God is on the side of those who are on His side—who know His heart and mind and do His will—not those who insist on convincing God and others that their way is right.

Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord indicated that He sides with the oppressed (Isa. 58:6-7,10). For Christians, that means it is right to be on the side of those who are being wronged.

Instead of jumping into a situation with the presumption that God is on our side, we need to be certain that we are on His.

Who will leave the world's side? Who will face the foe?
Who is on the Lord's side? Who for Him will go?
By Thy call of mercy, by Thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side—Savior, we are Thine! —Havergal

It's dangerous to mistake our wishes for God's will.

2 Chronicles 15:1-12 Step Up!

[Asa] took courage, and removed the abominable idols from all the land . . . ; and he restored the altar of the Lord. —2 Chronicles 15:8

When a woodchuck started eating our garage (well, just the trim), I bought a live trap with plans to transplant the little guy to a park. I baited it with an assortment of goodies and opened the trap door. The next morning, I was excited to see a little critter in my trap—until I noticed that it was no woodchuck. I had snared a skunk.

I went online to see how to untrap the skunk without having it . . . well, you know. The solutions were extremely cautious in their descriptions of how to protect yourself while releasing the animal. Plastic bags. Gloves. Tarps. Blankets. Goggles. The task looked daunting and dangerous.

Then my son-in-law Ewing stepped up. He simply walked over to the trap, opened the door, and coaxed our striped friend on its way with a few sprays from the garden hose.

Sometimes our fears can lead to inaction. We worry so much about protecting ourselves that we fail to simply step up. When King Asa learned that the Lord wanted him to remove the idols from Israel, he “took courage” (2 Chron. 15:8). He could have had a rebellion on his hands for doing this. But he stepped up, and as a result the nation rejoiced (v.15).

Facing a spiritual challenge? The Lord will help you step up with courage and trust Him for the outcome.

Let the road be rough and dreary,

And its end far out of sight,

Foot it bravely, strong or weary;

Trust in God and do the right. —Macleod

Courage is fear that has said its prayers.

INSIGHT: While the books of Samuel and Kings follow the monarchy from the days of Saul all the way into the divided kingdom, the books of Chronicles devote only one chapter to Saul (1 Chron. 10). The writer spends most of his time and effort recording the reigns of David and Solomon, presenting their reigns as the high point of Israel's history.

2 Chronicles 16:1-10 To Show His Strength

September 15, 1997 — by David C. Egner

The eyes of the Lord run to and fro . . . , to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. —2 Chronicles 16:9

Although it's God's desire to reveal His power to us, we seldom give Him the chance.

We're like the accountant who was told by his boss to falsify company records. Afraid of being fired, he chose to comply—even though as a believer in Christ he knew he was lying and breaking the law. Worse than being out of a job, he ended up in jail. He missed the opportunity to trust God and give Him a chance to show His power.

I'm afraid we're not much different. We're like King Asa, a good king who foolishly chose to make a treaty with Ben-Hadad rather than trust God. Asa had reason to worry—Judah was at war with Israel. But Hanani the prophet told Asa, “Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and have not relied on the Lord your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped” (2 Chr. 16:7). As a result, the rest of Asa's reign was plagued by war (1 Ki. 15:16).

God continues to show Himself strong to those who remain loyal to Him. Whenever we rely on a crooked boss or a clever scheme or a pack of lies, we are headed for trouble. But if we stay true to God when we're under fire, we give Him the opportunity to show us His power.

In God we trust, let others trust their rulers,
We trust in God to save us from alarm;
Like broken reeds, the works of man will fail us,
Our God alone can keep us from all harm. —Smith

Our problems can be opportunities to discover God's solutions.

2 Chronicles 16:1-13 A Brilliant Idea

July 18, 2005 — by Albert Lee Help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on You. —2 Chronicles 14:11

An ancient Indonesian fable tells of a turtle that could fly. He would hold on to a stick with his mouth as it was carried by geese. When the turtle heard the onlookers on the ground saying, "Aren't those geese brilliant!" his pride was so hurt that he shouted, "It was my idea!" Of course he lost his grip. His pride became his downfall.

For 41 years, Asa was a strong and humble king. He brought peace and prosperity to the kingdom of Judah. During the early years of Asa's reign he prayed, "Lord, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power; help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on You" (2 Chronicles 14:11).

But toward the end of his reign, when the army of the northern kingdom of Israel confronted him, Asa sought help from the king of Syria instead of from God. Because of his foolishness, his rule weakened and his nation experienced wars. What went wrong? Proud of past achievements, Asa had forgotten to depend on the Lord, so the Lord was no longer showing "Himself strong" on Asa's behalf (16:9).

God is still looking for those who will allow Him to show Himself strong in their lives. Living a humble, God-dependent life is truly a brilliant idea!

We must depend upon our God
With deep humility,
Lest pride should rob us of His strength
And bring futility. —D. De Haan

No one is stronger than the one who depends on God.

2 Chronicles 16:9 : Judges 16:4-17 A Lock Of Hair

October 27, 2010 — by Dennis Fisher

The Lord . . . [shows] Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. —2 Chronicles 16:9

After his return from the moon, Neil Armstrong was often plagued by the media. Seeking greater privacy, he moved his family into a small town. But notoriety was a nuisance even there. Armstrong's barber found out that people would pay good money to get a lock of his hair. So after giving the space hero several haircuts, he sold the clippings to a buyer for \$3,000! Armstrong was shocked at the barber's opportunism.

The Scriptures tell of another story of disloyalty and a haircut. As a symbol of God's calling of Samson as a Nazirite, he was never to cut his hair (Judg. 13:5). When the Spirit of God came upon him, he was given super-human strength over his enemies (15:14). Wanting to overpower him, the Philistines hired Delilah, a woman who had a relationship with him, to find out the secret of that strength. He foolishly told her that his power would be gone if his hair were cut. She lulled him to sleep and had him shorn (16:5,19).

Greed can drive us to be disloyal to others and to God, causing us to make sinful choices. Our desire should be to exhibit a heart that is fully committed to love the Lord and others. He shows "Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him" (2 Chron. 16:9).

O Lord, may my heart be loyal to You
In all that I say and all that I do;
When a trusted person is not a true friend,
I know that on You I can always depend. —Hess

Loyalty is the test of true love.

2 Chronicles 16:6-13 Beneficial Power

September 12, 2013 — by Joe Stowell

The eyes of the Lord run to and fro . . . , to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. —2 Chronicles 16:9

Boxing and strong-man competitions have a unique aspect to them. In the events, the athletes compete individually for the purpose of demonstrating their superior strength. It's like arm wrestling—you do it to prove that you are the strongest person in the room.

One aspect of God's glory is His almighty power. But how does He show His strength? He doesn't do it by rearranging the galaxies before our very eyes, changing the color of the sun at a whim, or freezing a lightning bolt as a trophy to His strength. Instead, in His love and compassion for needy people like ourselves, God has chosen to "show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him" (2 Chron. 16:9).

The pattern is consistent throughout Scripture. From the dividing of the Red Sea, to the marvel of manna in the wilderness, to the miraculous virgin birth, and ultimately to the power of the resurrection, our Almighty God has chosen to demonstrate His strength to bless, preserve, and protect His people.

Be assured that He delights in showing Himself strong in the challenges of our life. And when He proves His power on our behalf, let's remember to give Him the glory!

Lord, thank You for choosing to expend Your
divine power on the needs of my life. When my
strength is weak, teach me to trust that Your mighty
arm is able to guard, protect, and deliver!

All of God's promises are backed by His wisdom, love, and power.

2 Chronicles 16:1-9

From God's Viewpoint

The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. —2 Chronicles 16:9

Astronaut Jack Lousma described how earth looks from space. He wrote: "With the naked eye we could see freeways, airports, and cities . . . , white clouds and the snow on the mountains. We could see the green-and-brown patchwork of the farmers' fields and the beautifully painted deserts. . . . When we were over Chicago, we could see most of Hudson Bay . . . , Washington, DC, and Baltimore. We could see two-thirds of the way down the Mississippi River and out to Denver."

What intrigues me about this amazing out-of-this-world vantage point is its vast range yet intricate detail. It reminds me of God's perspective of His universe and of the inner world of each of His children. The Bible says that the "eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth" (2 Chronicles 16:9). Even more striking is the fact that He knows all about us—even our secret thoughts! (Psalm 139:1-4).

Two conclusions can be drawn from these verses. We can never drift outside the range of His loving care, and we can never hide from His holiness. This both reassures us and unsettles us, for it's a love that never lets us go, nor does it let us get away with any wrong. And there is no greater love than that. —Dennis De Haan

We cannot fully know God's greatness,
Wisdom, power, and care;
But it's enough to know that He
In love hears every prayer. —Hess

Because the Lord is watching over us, we don't have to fear the dangers around us.

[What Can I Do With My Worry? - Turning anxiety into trust](#)

2 Chronicles 17

2 Chronicles 17:1-11 A Devoted Heart

He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. —2 Chronicles 20:32NIV

A successful Christian businessman shared his story with us at church. He was candid about his struggles with faith and abundant wealth. He declared, "Wealth scares me!"

He quoted Jesus' statement, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:25 niv). He cited Luke 16:19-31 about the rich man and Lazarus and how in this story it was the rich man who went to hell. The parable of the "rich fool" (Luke 12:16-21) disturbed him.

"But," the businessman stated, "I've learned a lesson from Solomon's verdict on the abundance of wealth. It's all 'meaningless' " (Eccl. 2:11 niv). He determined not to let wealth get in the way of his devotion to God. Rather, he wanted to serve God with his assets and help the needy.

Throughout the centuries, God has blessed some people materially. We read of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 17:5, "The Lord established the kingdom . . . so that he had great wealth and honor." He did not become proud or bully others with his wealth. Instead, "his heart was devoted to the ways of the Lord" (v. 6). Also, "he followed the ways of his father Asa and did not stray from them; he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord" (2Chr 20:32).

The Lord is not against wealth for He has blessed some with it—but He's definitely against the unethical acquisition and wrong use of it. He is worthy of devotion from all His followers.

Giving thanks to God often helps us learn contentment with what we do have. What are you thankful for?

Wealth or no wealth, devoted hearts please the Lord.

INSIGHT: Jehoshaphat's devotion to the Lord is evidenced by his obedience to God's Word (2Chr 17:4). He removed idols (2Chr 17:6) and sent teachers all over the country to teach the Scriptures (2Chr 17:7-9). When in trouble, he trusted in God (2Chr 20:6-12).

2 Chronicles 17:1-10 A Father To Follow

September 13, 2013 — by Jennifer Benson Schuldt

[Jehoshaphat] sought the God of his father, and walked in His commandments. —2 Chronicles 17:4

When I think of my father, I think of this saying: "He didn't tell me how to live; he lived, and he let me watch him do it." During my youth, I watched my dad walk with God. He participated in Sunday morning church services, taught an adult Bible-study class, helped with counting the offering, and served as a deacon. Outside of church, he faithfully defended the gospel and read his Bible. I saw him express his love for the Lord through outward actions.

Asa, king of Judah, modeled devotion to God for a season in his life (2 Chron. 14:2). He removed the idols from his kingdom, restored the altar of the Lord, and led the people into a covenant with God (15:8-12). Asa's son Jehoshaphat carried on this legacy by seeking "the God of his father and walk[ing] in His commandments" (17:4). Jehoshaphat purged the land of idol worship (v.6) and sent out priests and Levites to teach God's law in all of the cities of Judah (vv.7-9).

Jehoshaphat's reign resembled that of his father; he faithfully honored Asa's godly example. Yet even more important, Jehoshaphat's "heart took delight in the ways of the Lord" (v.6). Today, if you're looking for a father to follow, remember your heavenly Father and take delight in His ways.

We magnify our Father God
With songs of thoughtful praise;
As grateful children we confess
How perfect are His ways. —Ball

We honor God's name when we call Him our Father and live like His Son.

2 Chronicles 17:3-10

Is Fear Healthy?

The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom. —Proverbs 15:33

During a severe thunderstorm, a mother tucked her child into bed and turned off the light. Frightened by the tempest, he asked, "Mommy, will you sleep with me?" Hugging him, she replied, "I can't, dear. I have to sleep with Daddy." Stepping out of the room, she heard, "That big sissy!"

Fear is real. But it's not always negative. In 2 Chronicles 17:3-10, we read about a healthy, positive fear that prevented neighboring

countries from going to war against Judah. What had caused this fear? We are told that "the fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms of the lands that were around Judah, so that they did not make war against Jehoshaphat" (v.10).

A respectful fear of the Lord was also what King Jehoshaphat desired for his own people. So he made it a priority that they be taught God's Word. He knew that if the people were in awe of the Almighty, they would humble themselves and obey Him. Doing what was right would bring prosperity to Judah and respect from neighboring countries.

Proverbs 15:33 declares, "The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom." Those who fear Him act with wisdom; they walk faithfully before Him as they obey His commands. —Albert Lee

God dwells in light and holiness,
In splendor and in might;
And godly fear of His great power
Can help us do what's right. —D. De Haan

The right kind of fear will keep us from doing wrong.

2 Chronicles 18:28,19:3 Choose Your Alliances Carefully

December 6, 2005 — by Albert Lee

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. —2 Corinthians 6:14

The Star Alliance is an affiliation of airlines that seeks to maximize passenger benefits. If you're traveling on a member airline, you can accumulate frequent-flyer miles after transferring flights and enjoy faster check-in. The Alliance's Web site calls it "a more civilized way to fly the world."

But not all alliances are mutually beneficial. In 2 Chronicles, we read that Ahab, the wicked king of Israel, formed an alliance with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, when they joined armies against Syria. Why did Jehoshaphat establish this foolish bond with Ahab?

No reasons are given, but we know why Ahab encouraged Jehoshaphat to put on his kingly robes while Ahab disguised himself for the battle. He knew the Syrians would try to kill the king. The opposing army surrounded Jehoshaphat. He cried to the Lord for help and God diverted the troops. Despite Ahab's treacherous scheme to save his own skin, he was killed by a stray arrow.

Although Jehoshaphat escaped, Jehu the prophet confronted him, saying: "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord?" (2 Chronicles 19:2).

Helping people in need is godly. But making unwise alliances with those who hate God may prove disastrous. Be sure to choose your alliances carefully.

It is good to join hands with the righteous,
Helping others you meet on your path;
But to make an alliance with evil
Will incur God's displeasure and wrath. -Hess

Right and wrong can never be partners.

2 Chronicles 20:1-13

Never Act in Panic

The great preacher F. B. Meyer gave some sound advice on what to do in a crisis. He wrote, "Never act in panic, nor allow man to dictate to you; calm yourself and be still; force yourself into the quiet of your closet until the pulse beats normally and the 'scare' has ceased to disturb. When you are most eager to act is the time when you will make the most pitiable mistakes. Do not say in your heart what you will or will not do, but wait upon God until He makes known His way. So long as that way is hidden, it is clear that there is no need of action, and that He accounts Himself responsible for all results of keeping you where you are." -H. G. Bosch

2 Chronicles 20:15-22 Power In Praise

Praise the Lord, for His mercy endures forever. —2 Chronicles 20:21

Willie Myrick was kidnapped from his driveway when he was 9 years old. For hours, he traveled in a car with his kidnapper, not knowing what would happen to him. During that time, Willie decided to sing a song called "Every Praise." As he repeatedly sang the words, his abductor spewed profanity and told him to shut up. Finally, the man stopped the car and let Willie out—unharmful.

As Willie demonstrated, truly praising the Lord requires us to concentrate on God's character while forsaking what we fear, what is wrong in our lives, and the self-sufficiency in our hearts.

The Israelites reached this place of surrender when they faced attackers. As they prepared for battle, King Jehoshaphat organized a choir to march out in advance of their enemy's army. The choir sang, "Praise the Lord, for His mercy endures forever" (2 Chron. 20:21). When the music started, Israel's enemies became confused and destroyed each other. As the prophet Jahaziel had predicted, Israel didn't need to fight at all (2 Chron. 20:17).

Whether we're facing a battle or feeling trapped, we can glorify God in our hearts. Truly, "The Lord is great and greatly to be praised" (Ps. 96:4).

Dear God, You are holy and good. I worship You today despite the problems that cloud my vision of You. Let my soul tell of Your glory forever.

Worship is a heart overflowing with praise to God.

2 Chronicles 20:1, 15-22 A Dangerous Challenge

October 6, 2013 — by Jennifer Benson Schuldt

The battle is not yours, but God's. —2 Chronicles 20:15

While millions watched on television, Nik Wallenda walked across Niagara Falls on a 1,800-foot wire that was only 2 inches in diameter. He took all the precautions he could. But adding to the drama and danger of both the height and the rushing water below, a thick mist obscured Nik's sight, wind threatened his balance, and spray from the falls challenged his footing. Amid—and perhaps because of—these perils, he said that he "prayed a lot" and praised God.

The Israelites also praised God in the middle of a dangerous challenge. Theirs involved a large group of warriors who had gathered to fight them (2 Chron. 20:2). After humbly asking God for help, King Jehoshaphat appointed a choir to march out into battle in front of the Israelite army. The worshipers sang: "Praise the Lord, for His mercy endures forever" (v.21). When they began to sing, the Lord caused the enemy forces to attack and destroy each other.

Praising God in the midst of a challenge may mean overriding our natural instincts. We tend toward self-protection, strategizing, and worry. However, worshiping can guard our hearts against troubling thoughts and self-reliance. It reminds us of the lesson the Israelites learned: "The battle is not [ours], but God's" (v.15).

Lord, I praise You, for Your mercy is everlasting.
Help me to remember that every battle in
this life is Yours. The outcome belongs to
You because You are sovereign.

No matter what is in front of us, God is always behind us.

2 Chronicles 20:1-22 Battle Praise

May 20, 2003 — by Julie Ackerman Link

When they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushes against the people . . . who had come against Judah. —2 Chronicles 20:22

Visitors to the Military Museum in Istanbul, Turkey, can hear stirring music that dates back to the early years of the Ottoman Empire. Whenever their troops marched off to war, bands accompanied them.

Centuries earlier, worship singers led the people of Judah into battle, but there was a big difference. Whereas the Ottomans used music to instill self-confidence in their soldiers, the Jews used it to express their confidence in God.

Threatened by huge armies, King Jehoshaphat of Judah knew that his people were powerless to defend themselves. So he cried out to God for help (2 Chronicles 20:12). The Lord's answer came through Jahaziel, who said, "Do not be afraid nor dismayed . . . , for the battle is not yours, but God's" (v.15).

Jehoshaphat responded by worshiping and then by appointing singers to lead the army (vv.18,21). As the people sang, "Praise the Lord, for His mercy endures forever," God confused the invaders and they killed one another (vv.22-24).

No matter what battles we may face today, the Lord will help us when we cry out to Him. Instead of retreating in fear, we can march

ahead with confidence in God's power and sing praise to Him.

Does all the world seem against you
And you're in the battle alone?
It's often when you are most helpless
That God's mighty power is known. —Anon.

Praise is the voice of faith.

2 Chronicles 20:1-17

NOTHING LEFT BUT GOD

"Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's." - 2 Chronicles 20:15

A wise Bible teacher once said, "Sooner or later God will bring self-sufficient people to the place where they have no resource but Him: no strength, no answers, nothing but Him. Without God's help, they're sunk."

He then told of a despairing man who confessed to his pastor, "My life is really in bad shape." "How bad?" the pastor inquired. Burying his head in his hands, he moaned "I'll tell you how bad - all I've got left is God." The pastor's face lit up. "I'm happy to assure you that a person with nothing left but God has more than enough for great victory!"

In today's Bible reading, the people of Judah were also in trouble. They admitted their lack of power

and wisdom to conquer their foes. All they had left was God! But King Jehoshaphat and the people

saw this as reason for hope, not despair. "Our eyes are upon You," they declared to God (2 Chronicles 20:12). And their hope was not disappointed as He fulfilled His promise": "The battle is not yours, but God's" (2 Chronicles 20:15).

Are you in a position where all self-sufficiency is gone? As you turn your eyes on the Lord and put

your hope in Him, you have God's reassuring promise that you need nothing more. - J E Yoder

In You, O Lord, we take delight,
Our every need You will supply;
We long to do what's good and right,
So, Lord, on You we will rely.

When God is all you've got, you've got more than enough.

2 Chronicles 20:5-17 What Now?

October 27, 2006 — by David C. McCasland

We have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You. — 2 Chronicles 20:12

During the years that I taught junior high students in an overcrowded school, I used to say (only slightly in jest) that my morning prayer was in 2 Chronicles 20:12—"O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You."

When Judah's King Jehoshaphat spoke those words, it was a matter of life and death. As a coalition of armies marched against Jerusalem, the people of Judah gathered to seek God's guidance and help (v.13).

During threatening times of disruption and change, we need to ask, "Lord, what do You want to do with this moment?" And like King Jehoshaphat, we should begin our prayer with praise to our sovereign and powerful Father in heaven (vv.5-9).

God told the king and his people: "Do not be afraid nor dismayed . . . , for the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow go down against them. . . for the LORD is with you" (vv.15-17).

In stressful, confusing situations, we might ask a worried "What now?" But if we look to the Lord and trust in His care, our fear will be replaced with peace.

O Lord, whenever we're afraid,

We'll put our trust in You

To lead, protect, and guide our way,

And help us make it through. —Sper

Faith ends where worry begins, and worry ends where faith begins.

2 Chronicles 20:7; Read John 15:9-17 - “Good Buddy”

May 7, 2006 — by Anne Cetas You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. —John 15:14

The congregation listened intently as the pastor began to pray: “Dear heavenly Father . . .” Suddenly he was interrupted by a voice saying, “Hey there, good buddy!”

Everyone began to laugh when they realized the voice was coming from the organ. It was picking up the conversation of a truckdriver on his CB radio! Not much was accomplished in the service that day, because the congregation continued to chuckle about the voice that made them think God was responding to their pastor and calling him His “good buddy.”

Moses knew what it was like to be a friend of God—a relationship that went beyond buddies. The Lord often talked with Moses “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33:11). The patriarch Abraham was also called God’s friend (2 Chronicles 20:7).

But can you and I be a friend of God? In our Bible reading for today, Jesus, the supreme example of loving friendship, called His disciples friends (John 15:13,15). He put it simply: “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you” (v.14).

And what does He command? That we love Him with all our heart and love others as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31). That’s how we can be God’s friend.

Friendship with Jesus,

Fellowship divine,

Oh, what blessed, sweet communion,

Jesus is a friend of mine. —Ludgate

The dearest friend on earth is but a mere shadow compared to Jesus. —Chambers

2 Chronicles 20:15 - A Dangerous Challenge

While millions watched on television, Nik Wallenda walked across Niagara Falls on a 1,800-foot wire that was only 5 inches in diameter. He took all the precautions he could. But adding to the drama and danger of both the height and the rushing water below, a thick mist obscured Nik’s sight, wind threatened his balance, and spray from the falls challenged his footing. Amid—and perhaps because of—these perils, he said that he “prayed a lot” and praised God.

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Praising God in the midst of a challenge may mean overriding our natural instincts. We tend toward self-protection, strategizing, and worry. However, worshiping can guard our hearts against troubling thoughts and self-reliance. It reminds us of the lesson the Israelites learned: “The battle is not [ours], but God’s” (v.15). —Jennifer Benson Schuldt

Lord, I praise You, for Your mercy is everlasting.

Help me to remember that every battle in

this life is Yours. The outcome belongs to

You because You are sovereign.

No matter what is in front of us, God is always behind us.

2 Chronicles 20:17 Read: Exodus 33:12-17 Anywhere With Jesus

September 9, 2007 — by David H. Roper

Do not fear or be dismayed; . . . for the LORD is with you. —2 Chronicles 20:17

When our son Brian was small, I took him with me to pick up our babysitter. As I approached the house, I noticed that her dog, usually penned in the backyard, was lying on the front porch. At first glance, the dog looked benign. But to my alarm he sprang to his feet and attacked Brian, who leaped for my leg, shinnied up to my waist, and somehow ended up wrapped around my neck and shoulders.

I, on the other hand, was left to fend off the dog. We danced for a while—the dog trying to get in a bite and I a kick—until, to my relief, the owner came around the house and called off the beast. All of us—dog, boy, and I—escaped unscathed.

Later, as we were walking to the car, Brian looked up to me and said, “Dad, I’ll go anywhere with you.” His confidence was misplaced; I can fail him. But I often think of his words when I grapple with fear.

As Moses faced uncertain circumstances, he implored God, “Show me now Your way, . . . that I may find grace in Your sight” (Ex. 33:13). The Lord replied, “My Presence will go with you” (v.14).

Whenever we enter frightening circumstances or face furious assaults, we can say with confidence, “Lord, I’ll go anywhere with You.”

Anywhere with Jesus I am not alone,

Other friends may fail me—He is still my own;

Though His hand may lead me over dreary ways,

Anywhere with Jesus is a house of praise. —Pounds

You need not fear where you’re going when God is going with you.

2 Chronicles 20:19

Don’t Drown in a Mud Puddle

A saintly Christian man who was talking about the spiritual dimension of life said, “If you’re going to drown, don’t do it in a mud puddle.” He simply meant that he could understand why a person would struggle with his faith as a result of going through unusually deep waters of pain or grief. But he considered it utterly absurd that a believer would allow his testimony to be marred and his service rendered useless because of resentment over a small hurt or an ordinary disappointment.

In our text for today, King Uzziah let pride and envy cause him to break God’s clearly prescribed law regarding worship. He apparently resented the fact that he as king could not perform the task assigned to the high priest. So with presumption he intruded into the sanctuary, and God afflicted him with leprosy. After about 50 years of excellent rule, he had “drowned in a mud puddle.” How tragic!

Christians today can fall prey to a similar lack of discernment. A deacon lost the respect of his neighbors because he started a big ruckus with the unsaved man next door over a bush on their lot line. Another man was hurt and left the church in a huff because the class he had been leading for a long time wanted another teacher. Both men allowed little problems to mar their witness.

How do you handle the hurts, disappointments, rebuffs, griefs, and irritations that are common to all of us? Be careful to maintain balance! You don’t want to drown in a mud puddle.—H. V. Lugt

2 Chronicles 21:4-20 The Man Nobody Missed

May 7, 2003 — by Herbert Vander Lugt

He reigned in Jerusalem eight years and, to no one’s sorrow, departed. —2 Chronicles 21:20

A man told me that his oldest brother had died. When I expressed surprise that I had not heard the news already, he said, “We never had it announced in any way. He cared about nobody and nobody cared about him.”

At first I was shocked by what I heard, and then I remembered a sermon I had read many years ago, titled, “The Man Nobody Missed.” In 2 Chronicles 21 we read about that man, King Jehoram. Early in his reign he killed all his brothers and other potential rivals. He led the nation in the worship of false gods, had a troubled 8-year reign, and died from a terrible, painful disease “to no one’s sorrow” (v.20).

It’s a sad story. Jehoram wasn’t missed when he died, because he had been a self-centered and godless person. The Bible gives Jehoram this short and tragic epitaph: “He did evil in the sight of the LORD” (v.6).

Let's remember that the extent to which we care about our relationships—both with God and the people He has put in our lives—will determine how much we will be missed when we pass on. If we keep this in mind and live to please God and show love to others, we'll be missed when we depart this earthly scene.

One life for Christ is all I have,

One life for Him so dear,

One life for doing all I can

With every passing year. —Brandt

Make others happy wherever you go, not whenever you go.

2 Chronicles 22:1-9

THE POWER OF INFLUENCE

"Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth?" - Galatians 3:1

All those years of training in good grammar couldn't stand up to a few hours of being with a friend who

mangles the language. That was my observation recently as I overheard my second-grade son Steven talking with one of his friends.

I had listened as Steven's buddy used poor English again and again,. I was surprised by his word choices, but I was really taken aback when I heard Steven talking the same way. He doesn't usually talk like that -- at least he didn't until a little peer pressure got to him.

It was another illustration of the power of others to change the way we think. We carefully guide our children to use proper speech patterns, but the influence of one friend can undo all that.

Think about how this principle affects much more important choices. Consider Ahaziah in 2 Chronicles. He was influenced by his mother to do wrong (2 Chronicles 22:3). As a result, "He did evil in the sight of the Lord" (2 Chronicles 22:4). His godly grandfather Jehoshaphat surely had some influence on Ahaziah, but it was the evil persuasion of Athaliah that marked his course.

We can be manipulated! So we must be careful about who or what influences us and stay close to our Father, the source of all that is good and right. -- J D Branon

Be sure that those in whom you trust
Are led by God each day;
For if they let the devil guide,
They could lead you astray.-- JDB

**Choose your companions with care -
you may become what they are.**

2 Chronicles 24:15-22 Speaking The Truth

October 10, 2009 — by Dennis Fisher

He sent prophets to them, . . . but they would not listen. —2 Chronicles 24:19

In the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch is a respected small-town lawyer in the segregated South during the 1930s. When he takes on a case that pits an innocent black man against two dishonest white people, Atticus knows he will face terrible prejudice from the jury. But his conscience compels him to speak the truth boldly in the face of opposition.

The Old Testament prophets were often sent to preach the truth to a stubborn people. "[God] sent prophets to them, to bring them back to the Lord; and they testified against them, but they would not listen" (2 Chron. 24:19). Their message often resulted in persecution and sometimes even death (Heb. 11:32-38).

During Christ's ministry on earth, His message also resulted in angry opposition (Luke 4:21-30). Yet, in the sovereignty of God, the terrible miscarriage of justice that sentenced Jesus to death on the cross purchased our redemption. Now, as representatives of the risen Christ in this world, we are to promote reconciliation, justice, and integrity (Mic. 6:8; 2 Cor. 5:18-21). And in so doing, this may mean speaking the truth in the face of opposition. This is the charge to every believer until that day when Christ sets all things right

(Rev. 20:11-15).

The life that counts must toil and fight,
Must hate the wrong and love the right;
Must stand for truth, by day, by night—
This is the life that counts. —Anon.

It's better to declare the truth and be rejected than to withhold the truth just to be accepted.

2 Chronicles 25:1-16

Battlefield Baggage

Why have you sought the gods of the people, which could not rescue their own people from your hand. --2 Chronicles 25:15

If you've recently experienced a great spiritual victory, take a minute to check your luggage. You may have returned from the battle with something you definitely don't need.

Amaziah, King of Judah, followed the advice of a man of God before he went to war, and the Lord gave him a great victory (2 Chr. 25:7-12). Then, incredible as it seems, Amaziah "brought the gods of the people of Seir, set them up to be his gods, and bowed down before them and burned incense to them" (v.14).

There seems to be a critical time following every spiritual victory when we are particularly vulnerable to our own foolish mistakes. We may become proud, thinking we won the battle on our own. We may withdraw in a wave of depression and fear, wondering how we can possibly sustain the spiritual advance that has been made. We may suddenly reach out to embrace the very evil we set out to destroy.

Amaziah brought back the gods of the people whose army he had just defeated. Who could imagine it? And yet his battlefield baggage led to his downfall as king.

We need to follow up every spiritual triumph with a humble recommitment to the almighty God who gave it. --D C McCasland

Lord, grant us strength from day to day--
How prone we are to go astray!
The passions of our flesh are strong;
Be Thou, O God, a shield from wrong. --DJD

The greatest enemy in the Christian life may be overconfidence.

[David & Manasseh](#)

[How Do You Live the Christian Life?](#)

2 Chronicles 26:1-23

A Strong Finish

God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. --James 4:6

Long-distance runners know the importance of a strong finish. They know that many races are won or lost in the final steps.

Uzziah made a splendid start when he became king at age 16. Through his faithfulness to God, he restored his nation to honor and glory. Then he became proud and believed that the rules no longer applied to him.

Uzziah entered the temple to burn incense--a privilege restricted to the priests. Even when confronted about his sin, he arrogantly refused to listen--until leprosy broke out on his forehead. God had gotten his attention.

Uzziah stumbled before the finish line. He was disqualified. Instead of a record of great victories, he left his throne in disgrace.

King Uzziah doesn't stand alone in history. Many men and women who once walked humbly with God become proud and walk away from Him. They persist in disobedience and refuse to hear the voice of God or the rebuke of friends. The way they finish spoils their race.

Have you wandered off course because you stopped following the Lord? You can get back on track and by God's grace get your "second wind." Humble yourself before God and you can still finish strong. --H W Robinson

O Lord, it's true, I've wandered far
From what I know is right;
But now I want to come back home
And please You day and night. --K. De Haan

People who think they don't need God are in a no-win situation.

2 Chronicles 26 Hearts Lifted Up

February 8, 2004 — by Albert Lee

As long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper. —2 Chronicles 26:5

It's tragic to witness someone starting out well in life and then finishing poorly. That's the life story of Uzziah. He had been appointed king at the tender age of 16. Despite being so young, we read that "he did what was right in the sight of the Lord . . . He sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God; and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper" (2 Chronicles 26:4-5).

Uzziah's fame spread and his army grew stronger (v.8). He had 2,600 chief officers and 307,500 soldiers who helped him defeat his enemies (vv.12-13).

Sadly, we then read, "When he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction" (v.16). Uzziah had failed to remember the One who had given him success and those who had given godly counsel. He sinned against the Lord when he burned incense in the temple, and God struck him with leprosy (vv.16-19). He remained "a leper until the day of his death" (v.21).

To finish well, we need to avoid having a heart that is "lifted up." Let's remind ourselves often of the warning in Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." And let's keep seeking the Lord, obeying Him, and thanking Him for all He has done.

Blessed Savior, make me humble,

Take away my sinful pride;

In myself I'm sure to stumble,

Help me stay close by Your side. —D. De Haan

You won't get indigestion by swallowing your pride.

2 Chronicles 26:3-15 The Tragic Flaw

His fame spread far and wide, for he was marvelously helped till he became strong. —2 Chronicles 26:15

In literature, a tragic flaw is a character trait that causes the downfall of a story's hero. That was true of Uzziah, who was crowned king of Judah at age 16. For many years, he sought the Lord; and while he did, God gave him great success (2 Chron. 26:4-5). But things changed when "his fame spread far and wide, for he was marvelously helped till he became strong. But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction" (vv.15-16).

Uzziah entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar (v.16), openly defying God's decree. Perhaps pride convinced him that God's rules applied to everyone except him. When Uzziah raged against the priests who told him this was not right, the Lord struck him with leprosy (vv.18-20).

In literature and in life, how often we see a person of good reputation fall from honor into disgrace and suffering. "King Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house, . . . cut off from the house of the Lord" (v.21).

The only way we can prevent the nectar of praise from becoming the poison of pride is by following the Lord with a humble heart.

Humility's a slippery prize

That seldom can be won;

We're only humble in God's eyes

When serving like His Son. —Gustafson

The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but man is tested by the praise he receives. —Proverbs 27:21NIV

2 Chronicles 26:3-19 Living Low

When he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction. —2 Chronicles 26:16

Dwight L. Moody said, "When a man thinks he has got a good deal of strength, and is self-confident, you may look for his downfall. It may be years before it comes to light, but it is already commenced." This was true of King Uzziah.

Everything seemed to be going so well in his life. He was obedient, submitted to spiritual mentorship, and sought God's guidance during most of his reign. As long as he asked God for help, God gave him great success—evidenced by his many accomplishments (2 Chron. 26:3-15).

Uzziah's life was one of great power and human success until he became blinded by it. His pride was evidenced in several ways: he challenged God's holiness by trespassing the temple and presuming upon a position he would never be able to have (2 Chron. 26:16); he viewed God's power as good but not absolutely necessary for his leadership (2 Chron. 26:5,16); he refused godly correction and counsel (2 Chron. 26:18-19); he bypassed his opportunity to repent; and he ignored, instead of feared, the consequences of his sin (2 Chron. 26:18-19).

When God gives us success in any area of our lives, let's not forget the Source of our success. May we choose humility, for God gives grace to the humble.

Is thy heart right with God,

Washed in the crimson flood,

Cleansed and made holy, humble and lowly,

Right in the sight of God? —Hoffman

God lifts us high when we choose to live low.

2 Chronicles 26a

Who Is Great?

Not unto us, O Lord, . . . but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, because of Your truth. —Psalm 115:1

During World War II, Harry Truman became President of the United States when Franklin Delano Roosevelt died. Truman said he felt as if a great weight had been dropped on him, and he asked people to pray for him. It is said that his old colleague Sam Rayburn tried to help him be humble when he said, "They'll tell you what a great man you are, Harry, but you and I both know you ain't."

In 2 Chronicles 26 we read about Uzziah, who was a remarkable king. He took office when he was 16 and ruled over the nation of Judah for 52 years (vv.1-3). He was God-fearing and led the nation into a long era of prosperity. His fame spread far and wide, but he apparently listened to people tell him how great he was. In his pride he assumed the role of the priest, a role God had clearly reserved for the descendants of Aaron. For this act of disobedience God afflicted him with leprosy (v.19).

There are no truly great men or women, only a great God who enables some to be effective leaders and outstanding benefactors of mankind. Realizing this will help us to overcome envy when others are highly praised, and it will keep us from becoming proud if someone tells us how great we are. Only God is truly great and worthy of praise. —H V Lugt

Not I, but Christ, be honored, loved, exalted;

Not I, but Christ, be seen, be known, be heard;

Not I, but Christ, in every look and action;

Not I, but Christ, in every thought and word. —Whiddington

We think too much of ourselves when we think too little of God.

[Who Qualifies To Be A Church Leader?](#)

2 Chronicles 26:3-15 Till He Became Strong

July 19, 2009 — by Albert Lee

His fame spread far and wide, for he was marvelously helped till he became strong. —2 Chronicles 26:15

In George MacDonald's fairy tale Lilith, giants live among normal people. These giants must conduct their daily affairs very carefully. When they sleep, their snoring is disruptive. When they turn over, houses may be crushed under their weight.

In the Bible, Uzziah became a "giant" of a man after becoming king at age 16. The keys to his success are recorded in 2 Chronicles 26. His father Amaziah set a good example for him (v.4). The prophet Zechariah instructed him (v.5). He had an army of fighting men and capable generals who helped him (vv.11-15). And God prospered him (v.5).

Clearly, King Uzziah became a "giant" through the Lord's blessing. But after attaining success, he grew careless and stumbled badly. The clue to his demise is found in the phrase "he was marvelously helped till he became strong" (v.15).

Those last four words serve as a dire warning to us all. Uzziah's "heart was lifted up, to his destruction" (v.16). He usurped the priestly duties and became leprous (vv.16-21).

We have all been marvelously helped—by our Lord God, by those He has given to set an example for us, and by those who serve alongside us. When we become strong, we must take heed, or we too will stumble.

When all goes well and I feel strong,

Oh, help me, Lord, to see

That I must place my confidence

In You and not in me. —Anon.

I have never met a man who has given me as much trouble as myself. —D. L. Moody

2 Chronicles 30:21-27 The Miracle Goes On

May 5, 2004 — by Dave Branon

Their voice was heard; and their prayer came up to His holy dwelling place, to heaven. —2 Chronicles 30:27

Did you ever think of a prayer meeting as a miracle? That thought came to my mind one evening at church after we divided into small prayer groups. As someone in each group prayed, I heard several people talking to God at the same time. It sounded like a jumble of words. But that's the miracle. God was hearing each prayer—along with millions of others being lifted to Him around the world in many different languages.

For those of us who reach frustration levels when two children are talking to us at the same time, it is indeed a miracle that God can hear so many of His children simultaneously.

Consider the story of Hezekiah's Passover celebration. He called for the Israelites to join him in Jerusalem for praise and prayer (2 Chronicles 30:1). Multitudes came for what turned into a 2-week-long worship service. Huge numbers of people rejoiced and praised God at the same time (v.25). As the religious leaders prayed, "their voice was heard; and their prayer came up . . . to heaven" (v.27).

The miracle goes on. Today, throughout the world, millions of people are praying to God. Let's rejoice in knowing that He hears each prayer.

God hears us when we call to Him,

He does not miss one voice;

The knowledge that He always hears

Should cause us to rejoice. —Sper

You'll never get a busy signal on the prayer line to heaven.

2 Chronicles 32:1-8

Continuing To Trust

With us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles. --2 Chronicles 32:8

Under King Hezekiah's dynamic leadership, the land of Judah experienced spiritual revival. Idols were smashed, the temple was restored, and people once again worshiped the Lord (2 Chr. 29-31). Hezekiah "did what was good and right and true before the Lord his God" (31:20). But then, on the heels of his obedience, he was suddenly besieged by Sennacherib, the vicious warrior-king of Assyria (32:1).

Hezekiah could have been angered by this discouraging turn of events. Instead, he continued to trust God. He rallied the people, saying, "With us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles" (32:8). What a remarkable demonstration of faith!

I could use a healthy portion of Hezekiah's spirit. There is something within me that wishes God would always reward my faithfulness with prosperity and protection. But God is working far beyond what I can see and is accomplishing His purposes. My present difficulties are never the final measure of His blessing and love.

Hezekiah modeled true faithfulness. He determined to obey the Lord without demanding guarantees of a trouble-free life. Like him, we can be confident of God's presence and power, and trust Him even in the darkest hours. --D C McCasland

Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies,
But His smile quickly drives it away;
Not a doubt nor a fear, not a sigh nor a tear,
Can abide while we trust and obey. --Sammis

Obstacles seem large when you take your eyes off the Lord.

[How Does God Keep His Promises?](#)

[How Much Does God Control? Loving a God who is all-powerful and good](#)

2 Chronicles 32:1-8a

When One Is A Majority

I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around. —Psalm 3:6

When King Hezekiah saw that the king of Assyria intended to capture Jerusalem, he immediately went into action to defend the city. But when he had done all that was humanly possible, he realized it would not be enough. So he called the people together, and in the face of their desperate situation he reassured them, saying, "Be strong and courageous . . . for there are more with us than with him" (2 Chronicles 32:7).

How could he possibly make such a statement? Hezekiah gave the answer. He said, "With [Sennacherib] is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles" (v.8). Sennacherib had power, soldiers, and prestige—an "arm of flesh." The inhabitants of Jerusalem had the Lord God!

Think of your own situation. Is the enemy pressing in upon you from all sides? Does everything appear hopeless? Remember, you have God's help. He is on your side! When you face insurmountable trials—when you are completely surrounded and outnumbered—look to the Lord. Find your confidence in Him, saying with the psalmist: "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around" (Psalm 3:6).

With God, one is a majority! —R W De Haan

Does all the world seem against you?
Are you in the battle alone?
It's often when you are helpless
That God's mighty power is shown. —Anon.

With God on our side we are never outnumbered.

[Joseph: Overcoming Life's Challenges](#)

[What Can I Do With My Worry? - Turning anxiety into trust](#)

2 Chronicles 32:8

A Majority of One

"With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God". --2 Chronicles 32:8

When Sennacherib, king of Assyria, invaded Judah, Hezekiah knew that the city of Jerusalem would come under attack, so he went into action to defend the city. He built up the broken wall and raised up another outside of it. He also "made weapons and shields in

abundance" and "set military captains over the people" (vv.5-6).

But it would take more than that to save the city from the onslaught of the powerful armies of Sennacherib. So Hezekiah called the people together to encourage them. In the face of their seemingly hopeless situation, he declared, "There are more with us than with him" (v.7).

How could he say this? He gives the answer in the very next verse: "With [Sennacherib] is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles." That was their hope. Sennacherib had power, men, and prestige--"an arm of flesh"--but the inhabitants of Jerusalem had the Lord!

Is there some "enemy" pressing in on you today? Do you feel as though the opposition is about to crush and destroy you? Does everything seem hopeless? Take heart, child of God! With the Lord on your side, you are never outnumbered. --R W De Haan

A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing. --Luther

One plus God is always a majority.

2 Chronicles 32:25,31 Read: 2 Kings 20:12-21 The Hidden Rattler

April 12, 2006 — by Herbert Vander Lugt

A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor. —Proverbs 29:23

When I was a boy, our family lived on a farm. One spring, we killed 13 rattlesnakes in a brief period of time.

A rattler can be easily destroyed if you know where it is and how far it can reach when it strikes. So my brothers and I never worried about the snakes we could see. We were genuinely concerned, however, about stepping on one whose presence we had not detected.

King Hezekiah was subtly "bitten" by a hidden temptation, not seduced by a gross and obvious evil. He allowed a measure of pride and self-reliance to blight his career. He should have put his full trust in the Lord for protection from his enemies, but instead he sought safety through an alliance with idolatrous men (2 Chronicles 32:25,31).

It's too bad that this otherwise good king marred his reign by this sin. We need to be on guard lest we allow pride to build up in our hearts until we, like Hezekiah, succumb to the wiles of the enemy. We may be prepared to stand against obvious invitations to sin that would besmirch our name, but we may not be ready for life's subtle temptations.

Beware of "hidden rattlers"—they're the most dangerous of all!

The devil has many enticements,

There's danger wherever you go;

But if you are tempted in weakness,

Ask God for more grace, and say, "No!" —Palmer

If you want to master temptation, let Christ master you.

2 Chronicles 33:1-16

A FRESH START

When he was in affliction, he ... humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. -2 Chronicles 33:12

A young man was driving an old worn-out car on a desolate road in a downpour when the engine died. As he coasted to the side of the road, another car stopped and the driver got out and asked what was wrong. The stranger opened the hood, tinkered with something, and signaled the driver to turn the ignition key. When the car started, the amazed driver shouted, "Thanks, I was afraid the engine had failed for the last time."

The rescuer replied, "Every car has at least one more start in it if you can get a spark. The same principle applies to people. Someday you will have occasion to apply this knowledge. Remember, as long as a single spark of life remains, it's not too late for

anyone to make a fresh start."

Thirty years later, this once-stranded driver is a chaplain in a large prison. He testifies that those words about a fresh start have come back to him again and again.

Just as God gave Manasseh a new start when he repented (2 Chronicles 33:12-13), this chaplain has seen God work miracles with hardened men.

If your life is in disarray, don't despair. Through repentance and faith you can begin again. "As long as a spark remains, it's not too late to make a fresh start." - H V Lugt

We're thankful, Lord, that when we fall
We can begin anew
If humbly we confess our sin,
Then turn and follow You.- Sper

It's never too late to make a fresh start with God.

2 Chronicles 34:1-13

Early Influences

[Josiah] did what was right in the sight of the Lord. —2 Chronicles 34:2

Josiah, whose father and grandfather were extremely wicked, became one of the best kings in Judah's history. What made him so different? What made him so committed to doing what was right? Undoubtedly he was influenced by the people who were close to him in his early years. His mother most likely shaped and molded his life, as did the "people of the land" who secured the throne for him when he was only 8 years old (2 Chronicles 33:25-34:1).

The people whose lives touch ours when we are young, or when we become believers, make a great impact on us. Looking back over my 80 years, I can see this clearly. My parents had the greatest influence in my decision to trust Christ at a tender age.

My blind grandmother also touched my life when she talked about the goodness of the Lord and recited Bible passages from memory. Several faithful pastors, school teachers, and others have left an imprint on my life for God and for good.

Thank God for all who helped and guided us as children, and who by their example pointed us to Christ. And let's always do our best to be a Christlike influence on the children and new believers in our lives. —H V Lugt

Thinking It Over
What people are within my sphere of influence?
Does my example impact others for good or for bad?
Whose example must I follow? (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Our best heritage is a godly example.

[How Can A Parent Find Peace Of Mind?](#)

2 Chronicles 34:2

Invisible Observer

[Josiah] did what was right in the sight of the Lord . . . ; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. --2 Chronicles 34:2

Some people are demanding that the high school football coach in their community be fired because the team doesn't have a winning record. According to the mother of one player, they object to his demand that his players "don't cheat, play dirty, or try to take out an opposing player by hurting him."

I am told that some coaches expect their players to do whatever they think they can get away with to win a game. The primary concern is to escape the eyes of the referees.

Personally, I like the emphasis of the coach who was being criticized for his high standards. He's a Christian, and he wants his players to know that they are being observed by a much higher authority--One who sees everything, including what the referees miss.

The Bible tells us that Josiah "did what was right in the sight of the Lord" (2 Chr. 34:2). Undoubtedly, many people criticized him

bitterly for tearing down their religious shrines, but that mattered little. He was more concerned about doing what was right in "the sight of the Lord."

Today, and every day, let's make it our aim to do what is right in the eyes of our invisible and all-important observer in heaven. That's what matters most. --H V Lugt

Thinking It Over

Have you been tempted to cheat or lie to get what you want? How do you feel when you give in to temptation? How do you feel when you do what is right? Why?

Doing right is never wrong.

[Right & Wrong: A Case For Moral Absolutes](#)

[Why Would Anyone Want To Be Holy?](#)

2 Chronicles 34:19-33 'Begin With Me'

August 27, 2000 — by David C. McCasland

Because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before God . . . , I also have heard you. —2 Chronicles 34:27

Josiah became a king when he was 8 years old, a seeker at 16, a reformer at 20, and a humble servant of God at age 26. His dramatic spiritual growth and leadership resulted from listening to God's Word and then obeying what he heard.

While the temple in Jerusalem was being repaired and purified, the long-neglected Book of the Law was found and read aloud to young King Josiah. When he heard it, he humbled himself, tore his robes, and wept in the presence of God (2 Chronicles 34:19,27). Josiah realized the enormous sin of those who had led the nation before him, and he decided that deep and lasting change had to begin with him. His public renewal of the covenant and His commitment to follow the Lord and keep His commands ignited a revival that swept the entire nation (vv.31-33).

What's wrong with the nation where you live today? Greed? Violence? Indifference toward God? How long has it been sinking into a moral and spiritual quagmire? Are you feeling too young, or too old, or too powerless to do anything about it?

Josiah—seeker, reformer, servant of God, a 20-something king who wept for his people—has shown us the way.

Lord, send a revival, and let it begin in me.

O Lord, how we need a revival!

Please let it begin in me.

O God, may I seek You and serve You

With love and humility. —Fitzhugh

To renew your love for Christ, review Christ's love for you.

2 Chronicles 34:14-21 The Best Find

February 16, 2007 — by Anne Cetas

I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord. —2 Chronicles 34:15

In 1987, a West Michigan couple, the Zartmans, bought four books at an estate sale. They were excited to find that the books contained two collections of letters and sermons by the preacher and hymnwriter John Newton (1725–1807), who wrote the beloved hymn "Amazing Grace." Also included was a two-volume set of his sermons based on Handel's Messiah.

Newton's family had preserved these writings by passing them down through the years. Then in the 1840s his heirs brought the books to the US. They are currently being used by an organization that plans to republish all of Newton's works in 2007 in commemoration of the 200th anniversary of his death. The books will then be donated to a museum in England.

An even greater find is recorded in 2 Chronicles 34:15. During Josiah's reign as king of Judah, he ordered the repair of the temple. In the temple, Hilkiah the high priest found the Book of the Law that had been given to Moses by the Lord. When Josiah "heard the words of the Law" (v.19), he felt convicted and later stood before his people to make a covenant to keep all that was written in the book (v.31).

The Bible is still the best book we can discover. In it we learn what God wants us to do to please Him.

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found;

Was blind, but now I see. —Newton

The written Word reveals the Living Word.

2 Chronicles 34:14-21 Mosquito Paradise

September 25, 2007 — by Dennis Fisher

I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord. —2 Chronicles 34:15

The builders of the Panama Canal overcame many enormous challenges: the moving of tons of earth, the redirecting of a river, and the cutting down of miles of jungle. But the tiny mosquito threatened to shut down the whole project. The Isthmus of Panama was an ideal breeding ground for this pest. As mosquitos infected canal workers with yellow fever and malaria, the death toll began to soar.

Fortunately, a physician who had studied these diseases arranged for an army of workers to spray the area with a chemical to kill mosquitos. The number of illnesses dropped dramatically.

In the Old Testament, we read of Judah's epidemic of idolatry and its accompanying moral sickness. When the Word of God was rediscovered, King Josiah exclaimed, "Great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the Word of the Lord" (2 Chron. 34:21). Josiah understood the Scripture's preventive cure for moral sickness. He began to apply its spiritual truths, and soon a revival swept the land that restored the nation's spiritual health.

When we neglect the reading of God's Word, we invite spiritual illness. Let's be sure to set aside time to absorb its life-giving message.

The Bible will transform our lives

And turn us from our sin,

If we will study and obey

God's principles within. —Sper

The Bible is God's prescription for the health of our soul.

2 Chronicles 36:11-17 It's A Long Story

June 29, 2004 — by Mart De Haan

He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed. —Proverbs 29:1

In August 1989, a major fire broke out under an elevated section of New Jersey's Interstate 78. The intense heat buckled parts of the highway and forced the closing of the East Coast artery. The governor said it was the worst transportation crisis in years.

An investigation brought to light a longstanding problem. It revealed that the fire broke out in a dump site in which construction debris had been collecting for many years. The owners of the site had been convicted of a multimillion dollar conspiracy to allow the illegal dumping of construction debris. But appeals in federal and state courts frustrated New Jersey's efforts to clean up the area. Not until the day after the fire did a state appeals court finally order the operator of the dump to stop accepting trash and begin clearing the site.

That fire tells a basic story of life. Most of our problems don't just happen. They are the result of a long series of bad decisions. Second Chronicles 36 illustrates this and reminds us that God will not allow His children to continue in sin. Even though He is longsuffering, His patience has a limit. If we don't correct the problem ourselves, we can be sure that He will discipline us.

Let's clean up the trash in our lives today.

Lord, help me see my hidden sin,

Those secret wrongs that lurk within;

I would confess them all to Thee-

Transparent I would always be. —D. De Haan

The most deadly sins do not leap upon us, they creep up on us.

2 Chronicles 36:15-21 Who Knows Best?

June 10, 2006 — by Julie Ackerman Link

They mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets. —2 Chronicles 36:16

“I love my job,” said Maggie, a young nurse, “but it’s so frustrating when I tell people what they need to do to stay healthy and they don’t follow my advice.”

I smiled in empathy. “I felt that way when I started my editorial career,” I told her. “It was frustrating when authors would disregard the advice I gave them about improving their manuscripts.”

Then I realized the spiritual implication. “If you and I feel frustrated when people don’t follow our professional advice,” I said, “imagine how God feels when we ignore His.” He’s the only One with perfect knowledge of what’s good for us, yet we often behave as if we know better.

This was the case in ancient Israel. Thinking that they knew more than God did, the people followed their own way (2 Chronicles 36:15-16). As a result, Jerusalem and the house of God fell into the hands of the Babylonians.

This is also the case with us when God’s instructions seem difficult. We may conclude that He had exceptions in mind for our particular circumstance.

God graciously teaches what is best (Isaiah 48:17-18) but doesn’t force us to do it. He patiently presents what is right and good, and allows us to choose it.

What freedom lies with all who choose

To live for God each day!

But chains of bondage shackle those

Who choose some other way. —D. De Haan

God’s teaching may not always make sense, but it’s always senseless to think we know better.

2 Chronicles 36:15 Don’t Touch the Fence!

Read: Jeremiah 18:1-12

The Lord . . . sent word to them . . . again and again, because he had pity on his people. 2 Chronicles 36:15

As a young girl I went with my parents to visit my great-grandmother, who lived near a farm. Her yard was enclosed by an electric fence, which prevented cows from grazing on her grass. When I asked my parents if I could play outside, they consented, but explained that touching the fence would result in an electric shock.

Unfortunately I ignored their warning, put a finger to the barbed wire, and was zapped by an electrical current strong enough to teach a cow a lesson. I knew then that my parents had warned me because they loved me and didn’t want me to get hurt.

God’s warnings are proof of His #compassion for us.

When God saw the ancient Israelites in Jerusalem crafting and worshiping idols, He “sent word to them . . . again and again, because he had pity on his people” (2 Chron. 36:15). God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah, but the people said, “We will continue with our own plans” (Jer. 18:12). Because of this, God allowed Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Jerusalem and capture most of its inhabitants.

Maybe God is warning you today about some sin in your life. If so, be encouraged. That is proof of His compassion for us (Heb. 12:5-6). He sees what’s ahead and wants us to avoid the problems that will come.

Lord, give me the ability to hear not just Your words but also Your heart. Help me to learn from the mistakes of those whose stories You have given us. Help me to honor You with my life.

God's warnings are to protect us, not to punish us.

INSIGHT: We sometimes wonder whether God can change His mind. Today's passage in the book of Jeremiah helps us answer this question. God tells Jeremiah that sometimes His actions are affected by our actions. God has decided to act in certain ways depending on how we act. This is God's freedom. He is not changing His mind; He has simply determined how He will respond to our stubbornness or our repentance. We don't determine what God will do; in His goodness He has told us how He will respond to us. J.R. Hudberg