

# *Bible* Lessons



“Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me, and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Psalms 139:23-24

*Volume 54, No 3*  
*July • August • September*  
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# Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People

Volume 54

July • August • September

No 3

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*Publishing the Bible truths in the interest of Jesus Christ and His Church.  
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### NOTICE

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## PROLOGUE

As mentioned in the Prologue section of the second quarter Bible Lessons 2022 booklet, upon completion of this particular series of lessons and after the advice and input of others who have more experience in preparing these booklets, it was decided to make each lesson cover two Sundays. This quarter will complete “A Series of Small Steps Can Lead Away from God.” Once again, each Sunday School teacher is encouraged to let God lead them on how to break up the discussion, i.e., whether to read all the scriptures the first Sunday and then on the second Sunday pick up where the discussion left off, or whether to read the scripture passages both Sundays and fit the Life Applications, other writings and questions in as time permits. Our prayer is that the Lord will bless and guide.

### THEME CONTINUED FOR BIBLE LESSONS

#### 3RD QUARTER 2022

#### *A Series of Small Steps Can Lead Away from God*

Not long ago I saw a demonstration where someone turned their outstretched hand from palm up to palm down without seeming to rotate their wrist. Through a series of six simple arm moves, their face up palm changed to downward facing without visibly rotating their wrist. You may have seen this demonstration before, but I had not. After doing it myself a few times, I began to understand the mechanics of the moves, and it made perfect sense. Shortly after learning the palm up to palm down trick, I came across a passage of scripture that reminded me of the series of small steps that took the kingdom of Israel from the glory of the Jordan crossing clear down to their captivity. They started out with the greatest of kings, God Himself, and were never conquered in battle when they depended solely on Him. They ended up, however, completely defeated and in a foreign land where the earthly king they once desired so much could do them no good. We can look back over history and see how the seemingly insignificant decisions of certain people had such a profound effect on the whole. The theme for this quarter will take us through the phases God’s chosen people went through as decisions were made one step at a time. What can we learn from history?

—Clifford Cole

JUNE 26 AND JULY 3, 2022

THE HORSES AND CHARIOTS OF ABSALOM AND ADONIJAH

**1 Samuel 8:10** And Samuel told all the words of the LORD unto the people that asked of him a king.

**11** And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint *them* for himself, for his chariots, and *to be* his horsemen; and *some* shall run before his chariots.

**2 Samuel 15:1** And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him.

**2** And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was *so*, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city *art* thou? And he said, Thy servant *is* of one of the tribes of Israel.

**3** And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters *are* good and right; but *there is* no man *deputed* of the king to hear thee.

**4** Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!

**5** And it was *so*, that when any man came nigh *to him* to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him.

**6** And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

**13** And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom.

**14** And David said unto all his servants that *were* with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not *else* escape from Absalom: make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword.

**1 Kings 1:1** Now king David was old *and* stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat.

**5** Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him.

**6** And his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so? and he also *was* a very goodly *man*; and *his mother* bare him

after Absalom.

**7** And he conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah, and with Abiathar the priest: and they following Adonijah helped *him*.

**8** But Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and Nathan the prophet, and Shimei, and Rei, and the mighty men which *belonged* to David, were not with Adonijah.

**9** And Adonijah slew sheep and oxen and fat cattle by the stone of Zohelath, which *is* by Enrogel, and called all his brethren the king's sons, and all the men of Judah the king's servants:

**10** But Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, and the mighty men, and Solomon his brother, he called not.

**32** And king David said, Call me Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada. And they came before the king.

**33** The king also said unto them, Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon my son to ride upon mine own mule, and bring him down to Gihon:

**34** And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there king over Israel: and blow ye with the trumpet, and say, God save king Solomon.

**35** Then ye shall come up after him, that he may come and sit upon my throne; for he shall be king in my stead: and I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah.

**MEMORY VERSE:** Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he *is* just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. —**Zechariah 9:9**

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** Two of David's sons, Absalom and Adonijah, took it upon themselves to usurp their father's throne on two different occasions about eight years apart. Both young men used fifty horses and chariots, with runners going before them. Absalom used the horses and chariots a while before his bid for his father's throne while Adonijah used them during his attempt. During Adonijah's uprising, David realized it was time to appoint Solomon king. He commanded that Solomon be put on the royal mule and brought down to Gihon to be crowned there.

## WORD DEFINITIONS

**2 Samuel 15:6** “Stole the hearts”: carried away by stealth the will, intellect, consent, and understanding.

**1 Kings 1:5** “Son of Haggith”: Absalom and Adonijah’s mother, Haggith, was a daughter of King Talmi, king of Geshur.

**1 Kings 1:8** “Benaiah”: one of the mighty men of David. He had formally killed two lion-like men of Moab, killed a lion in a snowy pit, and killed a 7’ 6” tall Egyptian with the giants’ own spear while only having a staff for his own protection. “Shimei, and Rei”: It is thought these two were David’s brothers. “Mighty men which *belonged* to David”: Most likely the company of 600, originally formed during David’s early wanderings.

**1 Kings 1:9** “Slew sheep and oxen and fat cattle”: part of a royal feast, in reference to an inauguration. Abiathar the priest was with Adonijah, giving the feast the effect of being sanctioned by God.

**1 Kings 1:33** “Mule”: a cross between a male donkey and a female horse. Since donkeys have 62 chromosomes and horses have 64 chromosomes, the mule hybrid has 63 chromosomes. Having only 63 chromosomes renders a mule sterile. Mules are valued for their hardiness, strength, and intelligence.

## LESSON BACKGROUND

Since both Absalom and Adonijah’s maternal grandfather was the foreign King Talmi of Geshur, they naturally enlarged upon and took advantage of the horses and chariots David had at their disposal. After all, most other kings utilized horses and chariots, so why couldn’t they – even if their father obeyed the LORD in not doing so? While David rode only a mule, these two dashing young men exploited the glamor and prestige of horses, chariots, and fifty runners. Solomon, however, was given David’s mule to ride when it came time to put him on the throne.

–Clifford Cole

### DISCUSSION:

1. We only know of Absalom and Adonijah using horses, chariots, and runners. None of their brothers are recorded as doing so. Why is this?

2. Absalom and Adonijah’s grandfather, King Talmai, most likely would have used horses and chariots since it was common in all the neighboring nations. What thoughts would you guess these young men had of their father’s refusal to use horses and chariots, especially since he chose to own them?
3. Could it be argued that David did no wrong by having horses and chariots as long as he did not “use” them?
4. How could things progress from David’s mere ownership of horses and chariots to his son’s using them against him?
5. What differences are there between horses and chariots and one lone royal mule?
6. Why did David put Solomon on the royal mule when it came time for him to ascend to the throne?
7. We know nothing of the LORD commanding against the use of mules, a cross between a horse and a donkey. Could mules possibly be “pushing” the line a little regarding God’s commandment?
8. Who do we read of riding into town on the back of colt, the foal of an ass?
9. What did God want to get across with the prophecy of Jesus riding a colt, the foal of an ass?

### **COMMENTS AND APPLICATION**

Mules and donkeys are interesting animals. They’re not as flashy or beautiful as horses, but many folks love mules and donkeys for what they are – hard to spook, hardy, and tough.

Bible historians point out that kings rode horses into town in time of war and rode donkeys or mules as a sign of peace. The meaning was not lost on those who saw Absalom and Adonijah with their horses and chariots. It signified a direct challenge to the current king, David. When David put Solomon on the royal mule for his coronation ride folks understood that Solomon was acting as a king should, not as a usurper of the throne.

Let’s revisit briefly the LORD’S instructions in Deuteronomy 17:16, “But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way.” There are reasons for this commandment. First, horses came chiefly from Egypt at the time Deuteronomy was written. The LORD did not want His people returning to the land of their captivity to obtain horses, a military asset,

under any circumstances. Returning to Egypt would only hinder their separation from the place God had delivered them from. Buying horses from Egypt would also require Israel to form some sort of alliance with the Egyptians. Secondly, horses and chariots were considered a strong military asset. The LORD knew that if Israel used them in warfare and won, it would be all too easy to give the credit of their victory to their horses and chariots, thus giving themselves the credit. The LORD wanted Israel to recognize that He alone had given them the victory.

David did not violate the first point about obtaining horses from Egypt since the horses and chariots he obtained were spoils of war. As to the second point of not having horses so that they would not be used in war, David kept that also. He never used them in military conflict. Does this excuse David for having horses and chariots? In a legal sense, it could be argued that he kept the law since he did not go to Egypt for horses and did not use them in war.

This leads us again to the idea of “precedent” discussed in an earlier lesson. Did David set a precedent for those coming after him? It’s pretty clear that Absalom and Adonijah were affected by David’s ownership of horses and chariots, but what about Solomon? What about the kings that came after Solomon? We will leave these two questions regarding Solomon and future kings on the table for now, but it’s interesting to think about it for a moment and consider.

The manner in which one handles God’s dealings is passed on to the next generation far more often and more effectively than through mere words of the precept alone.

*“Lord, help me to understand how important your dealings with me are, whether through your word, through messages, private conversations, or through the dealings of your Holy Spirit. Help me to remember that while it is important for me to follow the “letter of the law” in what you express to me, it is also important that I follow the “principle” of these communications as well. Many folks will be affected by the way I handle your revelations to me!”*

## REFLECTIONS

Some choices that we make seem unimportant at the time that we are making them. Sometimes the warnings seem irrelevant and a bit over the top. However, we should understand that our choices are connected, and our actions affect others. If we make a wrong turn, it will impact every person in the car as well as the caravan that’s following. It impacts the cars



surrounding us and the people waiting at our intended destination.

Our decisions are not independent, though we often think that they are. Our choices are interdependent. What we do affects others and vice versa. If we fail to do what is required of us, can it be left undone or must someone else rise to the occasion and do it in our stead?

As adults we feel as though we have the right and freedom to do as we please, but we must realize that our actions effect the actions of others, and the consequences of those actions can reverberate for generations. We are a composite of our collective and corrective choices, our nation, our congregations, and families as well.

The power of our wills both individually and collectively is tremendous. How God responds to us is based on the choices that we make. It is based on how we chose to respond to him and his dealings with us.

We can reject him and refuse to obey him; but let us always remember, God chooses his response based on ours.

The small seemingly “insignificant” choices that we make are intertwined with and impact the choices that are made by those within your sphere. Most importantly, our choices ultimately influence the choices that God makes regarding us.

Let us be very careful what we do and how we do it, for our actions are directing the hand of God for good or for evil.

—Darrell Johnson

**JULY 10 AND 17, 2022**

### **THE TURNING OF SOLOMON’S HEART**

**1 Kings 3:1** And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh’s daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the LORD, and the wall of Jerusalem round about.

**3** And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places.

**4** And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt offerings did Solomon offer upon that altar.

**5** In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.

**6** And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as *it is* this day.

**7** And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I *am but* a little child: I know not *how* to go out or come in.

**8** And thy servant *is* in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude.

**9** Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?

**10** And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.

**11** And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment;

**12** Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.

**13** And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.

**14** And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days.

**1 Kings 10:21** And all king Solomon's drinking vessels *were of* gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon *were of* pure gold; none *were of* silver: it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon.

**22** For the king had at sea a navy of Tharshish with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tharshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks.

**23** So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom.

**24** And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart.

**25** And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments, and armour, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year.

**26** And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he bestowed in the cities for chariots, and with the king at Jerusalem.

**27** And the king made silver *to be* in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he *to be* as the sycamore trees that *are* in the vale, for abundance.

**28** And Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt, and linen yarn: the king's merchants received the linen yarn at a price.

**29** And a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six hundred *shekels* of silver, and an horse for an hundred and fifty: and so for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, did they bring *them* out by their means.

**2 Chronicles 9:25** And Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen; whom he bestowed in the chariot cities, and with the king at Jerusalem.

**1 Kings 11:1** But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, *and* Hittites;

**2** Of the nations *concerning* which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: *for* surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love.

**3** And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart.

**4** For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, *that* his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as *was* the heart of David his father.

**5** For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.

**6** And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as *did* David his father.

**7** Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination

of Moab, in the hill that *is* before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon.

**8** And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods.

**9** And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice,

**10** And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the LORD commanded.

**11** Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant.

**12** Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: *but* I will rend it out of the hand of thy son.

**13** Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; *but* will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen.

**MEMORY VERSE:** Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin.

—**Nehemiah 13:26**

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** King Solomon started out so well. He loved the LORD with all his heart and soon became the wisest man that ever lived, all because he asked for wisdom above everything else when the LORD appeared to him in a dream. Over the process of time, however, Solomon went directly against the LORD'S commandment and "loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh." Solomon's many wives and concubines, along with his riches, did not help him maintain his integrity with God, but "turned away his heart after other gods."

## WORD DEFINITIONS

**1 Kings 3:1** "Affinity": a feeling of closeness and understanding that

someone has for another person because of their similar qualities, ideas, or interests. To form an alliance through marriage.

**1 Kings 11:2** “Go in to them”: to marry.

**1 Kings 11:5** “Ashtoreth”: the Phoenician goddess of love (and increase); “abomination”: disgusting, filthy, detestable thing.

**1 Kings 11:8** “Strange”: foreign, outlandish.

**1 Kings 11:11** “Rend”: cut out, tear.

## LESSON BACKGROUND

The LORD established Solomon on the throne of Israel and promised peace and prosperity for generations to come – as long as Solomon and his successors served Him faithfully. Solomon’s two brothers, Absalom and Adonijah, both tried to steal the throne before Solomon was anointed king, but the LORD did not permit this to happen. The story we look at today is how Solomon started the downfall of the kingdom through his love for “strange women.” These women caused his heart to turn towards false gods and stray from the LORD. All of Solomon’s wealth could not reverse this process, but, rather, hastened its progress.

–Clifford Cole

## DISCUSSION:

1. King David had eight wives. What influence could this have had on Solomon?
2. How many wives does the Bible say Solomon chose out of the kingdom of Israel?
3. Why would Solomon want or need so many wives and concubines? Was the sole reason for political alliances?
4. What good does the Bible mention of Solomon’s wives and concubines?
5. How did things turn out in the end regarding Solomon’s wives and concubines?
6. Do you think Solomon regarded his large harem as “not multiplying wives” since he had such great wealth otherwise? In other words, since he was perhaps several thousand times richer than the average man, why couldn’t he have a thousand times as many wives also?

7. God expressly commanded the kings of Israel to not chose wives from other countries. How is it that Solomon disobeyed this not just one time, but possibly as many as one thousand times?
8. If Solomon had chosen a wife from among Israel could the LORD have helped him to be happy and content with his one wife?
9. Solomon had more wealth than any other king at that time and was one of the richest men of all time. How did this wealth help him in the end?
10. Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen. History does not tell of Solomon ever using the horses and chariots in battle. Did this somehow exclude Solomon from the LORD'S commandment to not multiply horses to himself?
11. Some think Solomon was simply a "horse trader" and used horses and chariots as a trading commodity. Others believe Solomon used the horses and chariots throughout the empire to expedite his various capital ventures and trade networks. If either or both of these suppositions are true, would this have exempted him from the commandment to not multiply horses?
12. What influence could Solomon's "keeping of horses" possibly have on future generations?
13. The LORD blessed Solomon with more wisdom than any other man. Did this great wisdom protect Solomon from the effects of one thousand foreign wives and concubines?

### COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Solomon wrote around one thousand songs and three thousand proverbs. The story of Solomon's wisdom regarding the two women both claiming the same infant is a wonderful example of how wise he really was. Who would have thought that commanding the child to be cut in two could prove so quickly and decisively who the real mother was? I'm so thankful the edict did not have to be carried out!

There is a saying, "A good man doing wrong things can do more harm than a bad man doing wrong things." This is similar to the proverb Solomon wrote, "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: *so doth* a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom *and* honour" (Ecclesiastes 10:1). Both the saying and the proverb point out what a disappointment a good or righteous man can be when he does something outside of the character of Christ. Disenchantment with religious matters, in

general, is often brought about by this very thing. A man or woman who is supposed to be a righteous example and who harms or takes advantage of someone, can do irreparable harm to not only the offended but also to others who observe the injustice. The “ointment of the apothecary” was the holy anointing oil God commanded Moses to make and use in the service of the tabernacle (Exodus 30:22-33). Dead flies floating around in the holy anointing oil can spoil the whole batch. So, it is when a righteous man turns, in disobedience, from his righteousness, not only does his turning harm himself, but it also can harm and disillusion many others.

The impression left on the Queen of Sheba when she came to ply Solomon with many “hard questions” was, “Behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard (1Kings 10:7).” It is generally thought that the Queen of Sheba came during the middle part of Solomon’s reign, during the apex or height of its glory, and before the full weight of Solomon’s many wives and concubines had taken its sad toll. The LORD blessed Solomon with so much because of his desire to serve Him with all his heart. By allowing his heart to be turned away from the LORD, could Solomon still have the same wisdom as before? Perhaps, but he failed to apply it to himself. What impression might King Solomon have made on the Queen of Sheba if she had come fifteen years later?

“Better *is* the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: *and* the patient in spirit *is* better than the proud in spirit” (Ecclesiastes 7:8). I do not know when Solomon wrote this, but I agree with it completely. If only Solomon had not started down the path that led him away from God! Solomon not only hurt himself, but the impact on his posterity and on the kingdom of Israel was also far reaching. I hope Solomon was able to repent in the end, but much of the damage could not be undone!

*“Lord, help me to remember my long end. Help me to **practice** what I understand and not just enjoy the sound or thought of wise words. Help me to see how my decisions affect so many around me and all who follow me!”*

–Clifford Cole

## REFLECTIONS

The beginning of Solomon was successful and his relationship with the Lord was so very precious. His wisdom was astounding and the thoughtful care he put into the house of God was notable by the world over. However, there was a flaw in Solomon. He chose for himself many wives and concubines. The purpose behind these multiple relationships was probably

for political gain as well as fleshly appetite. Whatever the intent, these strange and outlandish women became his undoing. Each non-Israelite woman brought with her a different culture, thought pattern and idol to worship. "For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods."

The digression lasted over a course of about forty years. Forty years of minute increments intent on drawing the heart of Solomon away from the true God. Did it start out with just a suggestion? Perhaps an invitation? Maybe a tease? Or was it an incessant nag? The downward spiral was not abrupt or sudden; but the end result was very real and tragic. The last record of Solomon was that his heart "was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father."

Even today we can see that satan is not too worried about a timeframe. He will take a soul in a minute or wait for a lifetime. Thus, we must take aggressive action against him daily. We must be aware of his subtle tactics and be willing to make positive spiritual adjustments. May we be unmoved in our devotion to the Lord. If we take this lesson seriously, then this piece of history will not have to be repeated.

—LaDawna Adams

## **JULY 24 AND JULY 31, 2022**

### **THE THIRD AND FINAL KING OF THE TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL**

**1 Kings 12:1** And Rehoboam went to Shechem: for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king.

**2** And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was yet in Egypt, heard of it, (for he was fled from the presence of king Solomon, and Jeroboam dwelt in Egypt;)

**3** That they sent and called him. And Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came, and spake unto Rehoboam, saying,

**4** Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee.

**5** And he said unto them, Depart yet *for* three days, then come again to me. And the people departed.



**6** And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men, that stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and said, How do ye advise that I may answer this people?

**7** And they spake unto him, saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever.

**8** But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, *and* which stood before him:

**9** And he said unto them, What counsel give ye that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying, Make the yoke which thy father did put upon us lighter?

**10** And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou *it* lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little *finger* shall be thicker than my father's loins.

**11** And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.

**12** So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had appointed, saying, Come to me again the third day.

**13** And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him;

**14** And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father *also* chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.

**15** Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the LORD, that he might perform his saying, which the LORD spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

**16** So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither *have we* inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents.

**17** But *as for* the children of Israel which dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them.

**MEMORY VERSE:** A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. —**Proverbs 15:1**

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** Rehoboam, King Solomon's only son, went to Shechem to be anointed king after his father's death. The people gathered at Shechem begged Rehoboam to ease the burden his father had put on them. After rejecting the wise counsel of older advisers to be reasonable with the people, Rehoboam did as his younger friends suggested and spoke roughly to the people, "My little *finger* shall be thicker than my father's loins. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." Ten tribes immediately revolted. Rehoboam, the fourth king of Israel, lost the vast majority of the kingdom within a few days of coming to the throne.

### WORD DEFINITIONS

**1 Kings 12:1** "Shechem": a chief city of Ephraim centrally located and convenient for a general assembly for all the tribes of Israel.

**1 Kings 12:2** "Jeroboam": a mighty man of valor from Ephraim. King Solomon put him over all the house of Joseph. Because of King Solomon's wives' influence toward idolatry, the prophet Ahijah prophesied that Jeroboam would one day be king over ten tribes of Israel. Jeroboam had to flee to Egypt until King Solomon died.

**1 Kings 12:4** "Yoke": the hard labor and heavy taxation Solomon imposed on all Israel after he forsook God.

**1 Kings 12:14** "Scorpions": some understand these to be whips with lead balls at the ends of their lashes with hooks projecting from them.

### LESSON BACKGROUND

How quickly a good thing can end when it is unappreciated, neglected, and then abused! So runs the story of the rise and fall of the kingdom of Israel. King Saul soon veered from the good path he started out on. King David, after much tribulation, came to the throne and became one of the greatest kings in history. His son, Solomon, after requesting wisdom in a dream, became the wisest and richest king around. Alas! After Solomon's heart was led astray by his many wives, ten tribes were destined to be removed from the kingdom. Solomon's son, Rehoboam, fulfilled this

prophecy through his rough treatment of the people during the first few days of his reign.

—Clifford Cole

### **DISCUSSION:**

1. Although it was prophesied that ten tribes would be given to Jeroboam, do you believe Jeroboam and the people gave King Rehoboam a chance to turn things around by reasoning with him?
2. What did they ask of King Rehoboam?
3. Why didn't the people address the idolatry King Solomon's wives had started?
4. What do you think of the advice the older counselors gave King Rehoboam?
5. What is your opinion of the younger men's advice to King Rehoboam?
6. Why do you suppose King Rehoboam decided to listen to the younger men's advice? Did he have a choice / chance to decide between the right and wrong response?
7. What causes a person, regardless of their rank or status, to resist listening to someone else's pleas?
8. The LORD promised punishment for other folks in the Bible that ended up not happening. What examples can you think of? Why did the anger of the LORD turn in those instances?
9. What events took place before King Rehoboam's reign that set things up for Israel's revolt?
10. What could have been done before King Rehoboam's time that would have prevented the break-up of the kingdom of Israel?
11. How could King Rehoboam's upbringing have impacted his first week as king? How did it affect the rest of his reign?

### **COMMENTS AND APPLICATION**

It is difficult to find anything good in the story of King Rehoboam. We are blessed with the psalms King David wrote and are also greatly encouraged by his steadfastness and heart toward God. He had failures, but

he got back up and kept going. I deeply appreciate that more than I can express. King Solomon wrote many proverbs from which we learn so much. Brother Ed Wilson made the comment one time, “We read the proverbs of Solomon to be wise and the psalms of David to be spiritual.” This is so true! But what do we gain from reading about King Rehoboam?

It only took three generations for King Rehoboam to end up a failure. He had a lot in his background that could have encouraged him in the right direction, but instead he chose the trajectory set by the later part of his father’s life – away from God. It appears that King Rehoboam took up where his father left off and kept going in the same direction.

I am keenly aware that my forefathers’ decisions made it easier for me to choose the right path. While I am not obligated to follow their example, I have a distinct advantage of being introduced to the salvation they enjoyed and am well aware of how wonderfully it worked for them. My decision to get saved and live for God was made all the easier because of them. Godly parents and grandparents are, thankfully, part of my heritage. I can only wonder what it would have been like had there been snares laid for my feet by those I looked up to rather than having godly examples in my formative years!

Brother Willie Murphey Sr. told his two sons years ago, “Sons, if you see me doing it, it’s safe for you to do it too.” Brother Willie did not lift himself up, but, rather, made himself vulnerable to his children. He lived an “open book” life and made no effort to hide anything. He trusted the Lord to reveal any misstep or error in his life, even to the extent he was willing for others to follow his example. The Apostle Paul told the Corinthian church, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also *am* of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

*“Lord, help me to live in such a way that others can follow my path and not be led astray!”*

–Clifford Cole

## REFLECTIONS

What is it about human nature that often makes it difficult for us to listen to reason and experience? I recently had a conversation with one of my uncles about the various types of calamities that affect different parts of the United States. In Southern California, we experience earthquakes, fires, floods, and mudslides; several of these have caused a great deal of destruction down through the years. However, after two or three generations, the alarming stories of caution passed down from those that

have experienced the devastation seem almost like fables to those of the following generations, and so, for example, where the Los Angeles River overflowed its banks in the lowlands of the San Fernando Valley in 1938, less than 85 years later sit thousands of homes filled with families unaware that a 100-year storm would likely overwhelm their city's flood control systems and leave them underwater!

A more recent event paints a similar picture. When the oft-quoted Sir Winston Churchill, paraphrasing the Spanish philosopher George Santayana, stated, "Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it," he could have easily been referring to the bright minds of my generation that came up with the risky financial products leading to the Great Recession of 2008. A financial bubble where fear of missing out and, let's face it, greed, contributed to a global economic crisis. Yet, a few voices here and there who had either lived through or studied the Great Depression warned about the risks being taken by financial institutions, homeowners, even governments, but they were dismissed and ridiculed. In the end, high IQs and computer-generated models were no match for the advice borne of experience that went unheeded!

There are two ways to learn from those who have gone before us: to either follow in their footsteps or to walk in the opposite direction when we see the consequences of their actions. The inability to heed or learn from those that know a thing or two is—sadly—very prevalent in the world today, and many are heading to ruin even if they think they are "forging their own path in life." However, those who are wise usually are willing to listen to sound advice, are thoughtful in their decision making, and are willing to acknowledge warnings when they are presented. Let us not be like Rehoboam, who squandered the valuable asset he inherited, but be sure to mark the godly examples that have walked ahead and leave a sure path for those behind us to follow.

—Fari Matthews

**AUGUST 7 AND 14, 2022**

## **THE FALL OF THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL**

### **JEROBOAM**

**1 Kings 12:26** And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David:

**27** If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, *even* unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.

**28** Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves *of gold*, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

**29** And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan.

**30** And this thing became a sin: for the people went *to worship* before the one, *even* unto Dan.

**31** And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi.

**32** And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that *is* in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made.

**33** So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel the fifteenth day of the eighth month, *even* in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense.

## **JEHU**

**2 Kings 10:26** And they [*Jehu*] brought forth the images out of the house of Baal, and burned them.

**27** And they brake down the image of Baal, and brake down the house of Baal, and made it a draught house unto this day.

**28** Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel.

**29** Howbeit *from* the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, *to wit*, the golden calves that *were* in Bethel, and that *were* in Dan.

**30** And the LORD said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing *that which is* right in mine eyes, *and* hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that *was* in mine heart, thy children of the fourth *generation* shall sit on the throne of Israel.

**31** But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which

made Israel to sin.

**32** In those days the LORD began to cut Israel short: and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel;

**33** From Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer, which *is* by the river Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan.

## **HOSEA**

**Hosea 1:1** The word of the LORD that came unto Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, *and* Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.

**2** The beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea. And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, *departing* from the LORD.

**3** So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son.

**4** And the LORD said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little *while*, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel.

**5** And it shall come to pass at that day, that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.

**6** And she conceived again, and bare a daughter. And *God* said unto him, Call her name Loruhamah: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away.

**7** But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the LORD their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.

**MEMORY VERSE:** For the eyes of the Lord *are* over the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord *is* against them that do evil. —**1 Peter 3:12**

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** Jeroboam, the first king of Israel, caused the people to sin with the golden calves he set up in Bethel and Dan. Jehu, the tenth king of Israel, destroyed the images of Baal but left the golden calves of Jeroboam. A few years later, the prophet Hosea warned of the coming

fall of the kingdom of Israel. The LORD promised to save the house of Judah, however, but it would not be “by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.” (Hosea 1:7).

–Clifford Cole

## WORD DEFINITIONS

**1 Kings 12:28** “Two calves of gold”: possibly imitations of the two cherubims which guarded the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies. They were, however, unauthorized copies, set up in places which God had not chosen, and without any divine sanction. They had the head of a calf or ox, most likely from Assyrian and Phoenician influence.

**1 Kings 12:32** “Feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month”: Jeroboam set up a competing feast day that was exactly one month after the Feast of Tabernacles in Judah, which was held in the seventh month, on the fifteenth day of the month.

**2 Kings 10:27** “Draught house”: a place for human excrement; so all the versions understand it. Nothing could be more degrading than this; he made it a public necessary [*public restroom*] (*Adam Clarke*).

**Hosea 1:2** “The beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea”: the first of several prophecies by several prophets that foretold of the fall of Israel.

**Hosea 1:2** “Wife of whoredoms”: Hosea was instructed by the LORD to marry a woman of Israel that was known to be a woman of “ill fame,” not someone normally suited for a young priest or prophet. The symbology reminds us of how Jesus came to this earth to win a bride for Himself that was marred by sin.

## LESSON BACKGROUND

The kingdom of Israel had a total of nineteen kings, as compared to Judah’s twenty kings from the time of Solomon’s reign to the end of the kingdom of Israel (B.C. 925-721) and the end of the kingdom of Judah (B.C. 925-586). Of Israel’s nineteen kings, all were entirely evil, with the exception of Jehu, the tenth king. Jehu, a former captain of Israel’s army, started off well in carrying out the LORD’S judgments against the house of King Ahab. He caused Ahab’s seventy sons to be killed by their own guardians (1 Kings 10:1-7). He tore down the idols of Baal, “but he departed not from the sins



of Jeroboam, [*did not destroy the two golden calves Jeroboam set up*] which made Israel to sin (2 Kings 10:31b).” For the good that Jehu did, the LORD told him he would have four generations after him sit on the throne of Israel.

–Clifford Cole

## **DISCUSSION:**

1. How long did it take for the newly formed kingdom of Israel to get into trouble with the LORD?
2. Who caused the trouble?
3. What did the trouble-maker of Israel do to cause the LORD to be angry with Israel?
4. What excuse did this man use to justify his actions? Did his excuse lessen the sin he caused or lessen the penalty for this sin?
5. If God brought him to the throne of Israel, what would prevent God from protecting him?
6. Then why did this man do the very thing that would hinder God’s blessing and protection and ultimately destroy him and the people?
7. Do leaders really have enough influence over the general populace to cause them to lean any particular direction?
8. If so, why and how? If not, why not?
9. How do you think Jeroboam could get by with his claim that the two golden calves brought them up out of Egypt?
10. Do you think it was any coincidence that Jeroboam set up a feast day *exactly* one month after the Feast of Tabernacles in Judah?
11. How could Jehu be so zealous to execute the LORD’S wrath upon the house of King Ahab of Israel and destroy Baal worship and yet not take away the two golden calves set up years before by King Jeroboam?
12. Why did the LORD choose to start revealing His upcoming punishment for Israel in the form of a living parable where a young prophet is told to marry a woman of “ill fame”?

## COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

The kingdom of Judah lasted 339 years from Rehoboam to their captivity, while the kingdom of Israel lasted 204 years from Jeroboam to their captivity. Israel went into captivity 135 years before Judah did. Both kingdoms suffered the same sad end for the same reason – sin. The LORD warned both many times of their destruction if they did not turn back to Him in repentance; but, alas, they did not heed. This is a grim reminder for all today, as individuals, as nations, and the world as a whole. Destruction ultimately comes to any and all who reject God.

Jeroboam was the chief spokesman for the ten tribes that ultimately split from Judah. How different things could have been for the new kingdom of Israel if he had been as righteous as he was indignant! Supposing there were legitimate, justifiable reasons to revolt, did that give those ten tribes the right to worship golden calves that Jeroboam set up in Bethel and Dan—because Jeroboam was afraid Israel would return to the kingdom of Judah? Did it give Jeroboam the privilege of instating a new feast day in Bethel that competed with the Feast of Tabernacles in Judah?

How easy it is to condemn the sinful actions of someone else while condoning our own wrongdoing, even if we believe our actions “protect” us from the evil of others! This principle of viewing our wrongs as safeguards may explain why Israel got off to such a bad start immediately. The two calves Jeroboam set up in Bethel and Dan, as well as the new feast day established in Bethel, were intended to keep the people from returning to Judah. Jeroboam simply wanted to protect himself and control the people.

Israel’s wrong-begetting-wrong perpetuated for almost the entire stretch of their nineteen kings. The one exception of their middle king, Jehu, doing a little bit of good at the start of his reign was not enough to slow their progression into captivity. Such is the state of anyone or any group of people. Doing wrong in response to another wrong will never end up right.

–Clifford Cole

## REFLECTIONS

The Lord gave the kingdom of Israel to Jehu and commanded him to execute judgment on the house of Ahab. Jehu did not falter or delay but fully and speedily carried it out. His zeal drove him to destroy all the worshippers of Baal. God was pleased with Jehu and He promised that his

children to the fourth generation would sit on the throne of Israel. For over one hundred years there reigned a king of the House of Jehu, which was longer than any other king's house. Yet Jehu, with all his zeal and obedience in the beginning, did not prove to be faithful. II Kings 10:31 says, "But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin." How disappointing and tragic! Ecclesiastes 7:8 instructs thus: "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof." Jehu's beginning was better than his end. Let us take heed that our end is better than our beginning.

—Sarah Herron

## AUGUST 21 AND AUGUST 28, 2022

### THE DECLINE OF THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH

#### REHOBAM

**1 Kings 14:21** And Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam *was* forty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD did choose out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. And his mother's name *was* Naamah an Ammonitess.

**22** And Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done.

**23** For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree.

**24** And there were also sodomites in the land: *and* they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD cast out before the children of Israel.

**25** And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, *that* Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem:

**26** And he took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he even took away all: and he took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made.

**27** And king Rehoboam made in their stead brasen shields, and committed *them* unto the hands of the chief of the guard, which kept the door of the king's house.

## JEHOASH

**2 Kings 14:13** And Jehoash king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash the son of Ahaziah, at Bethshemesh, and came to Jerusalem, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem from the gate of Ephraim unto the corner gate, four hundred cubits.

**14** And he took all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house, and hostages, and returned to Samaria.

## AHAZ

**2 Kings 16:2** Twenty years old *was* Ahaz when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem, and did not *that which was* right in the sight of the LORD his God, like David his father.

**3** But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel.

**4** And he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.

**5** Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to war: and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome *him*.

**7** So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglathpileser king of Assyria, saying, I *am* thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me.

**8** And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent *it for* a present to the king of Assyria.

## HEZEKIAH

**2 Kings 18:13** Now in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah did Sennacherib king of Assyria come up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them.

**14** And Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, I have offended; return from me: that which thou puttest on me will I bear. And the king of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.

**15** And Hezekiah gave *him* all the silver that was found in the house of

the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house.

**16** At that time did Hezekiah cut off *the gold from* the doors of the temple of the LORD, and *from* the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.

**2 Kings 20:12** At that time Berodachbaladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick.

**13** And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and shewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and *all* the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not.

**14** Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, *even* from Babylon.

**15** And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All *the things* that *are* in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them.

**16** And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD.

**17** Behold, the days come, that all that *is* in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD.

**18** And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

**MEMORY VERSE:** Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better *it is to be* of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud. —**Proverbs 16:18, 19**

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** Along with the good kings of Judah, there were several wicked ones that lost not only moral and spiritual ground, but much of the wealth of the kingdom. Hezekiah, one of the God-fearing kings, lost a considerable amount of riches in both present tense and future tense. He bribed the king of Assyria with silver and gold (2 Kings 18:14-16). Immediately after that he saved future generations the trouble of giving away the rest when he proudly showed the Babylonian ambassadors everything both he and the kingdom had. The prophet Isaiah told Hezekiah

that the days would come when absolutely everything and everyone would be given to the king of Babylon.

## WORD DEFINITIONS

**1 Kings 14:24** “Sodomites”: a male prostitute consecrated in the service of idols. The Apostle Paul refers to this kind of behavior in Romans 1:27, “men working with men that which is unseemly.” The root word is taken from that evil of all evil places, Sodom.

**2 Kings 14:14** “Hostages”: possibly some of King Amaziah’s sons or grandsons taken as surety for future payments to the king of Israel. Not much is mentioned throughout the scriptures of hostages in this regard.

**2 Kings 16:3** “Made his son to pass through the fire”: there is some debate about whether King Ahaz actually sacrificed one of his sons by fire to an idol, or if he passed his son between two fires as a form of consecration to the idol. In either case, it was a great evil that the LORD condemned.

## LESSON BACKGROUND

King Rehoboam’s mother, Naamah (*literally meaning beauty*), was an Ammonitess. It is likely King David gave Solomon to marry the daughter of Prince Shobi, the son of the Ammonite king, in return for his kindness to him when he fled during Absalom’s revolt. While Naamah may have been beautiful on the outside, it is doubtful she had much good influence on her son, Rehoboam. The verses covered in the first part of the lesson give a brief outline of the evil, “above all that their fathers had done.” No wonder the LORD was grieved! No wonder He was provoked to jealousy!

–Clifford Cole

## DISCUSSION

1. The verse 1Kings 14:24 tells of the sodomites. From what we know of this evil practice, what excuse or reason could King Rehoboam possibly have had to allow this abomination?
2. 1 Kings 14:25-26 says that, “Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem ... and took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he even took away all: and he took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made.” Why didn’t the

LORD prevent this from happening?

3. What spiritual parallels can we make between Shishak taking away treasures from the house of the LORD and treasures from the king's house? Are there spiritual principles we hold dear today, parts of our spiritual heritage passed down to us, that could possibly be stolen from us?
4. If there are principles that could be lost to us, what would have to happen on our part for the LORD to remove His protecting hedge from around us?
5. What can we do individually and collectively to allow the LORD to keep His protection for us active and effective?
6. King Ahaz made one of his sons "pass through the fire." What does this remind you of in today's world?
7. We read in today's lesson of different times that the kings of Judah lost tremendous wealth to enemy kings. It speaks of the enormity of what King David and King Solomon had amassed. It reminds us of the spiritual wealth we possess through the power of the gospel and the grace given by God Himself. What are some of the principles and truths we hold so dear to our hearts?
8. What one of these truths could we afford to lose?
9. How could any of these precious things be lost to us today?
10. How many years did it take for the kingdom of Judah to lose everything?
11. There are generational declines in many areas in today's world. What does it take to reverse generational declines?

### **COMMENTS AND APPLICATION**

How could a kingdom that had so much lose so much and still keep going? Part of the answer is that the decline happened over a long period of time. The devil didn't care that it took generations to affect his plan. The devil knew then, and he knows now, that to attempt an immediate and complete takeover would have aroused instant resistance. However, a war of attrition, where both sides try to wear out the other side, can be very effective in the long run— one side gives in a little, the other side takes that ground, and then patiently waits for the next chance to take a little more. There is constant pressure, constant vigilance, and constant scheming in this

type of warfare. An enemy of this mold can never be taken for granted or underestimated.

King Rehoboam “had it all” regarding material wealth when he first became king. Since he inherited his father’s estate, there was absolutely no one around to rival his riches. Unfortunately, Rehoboam was of a different mold than his grandfather, King David. Rehoboam was vain, willful, and foolish in his conduct. He assumed he could act any way he chose and not suffer the consequences.

It’s the same today. Humanity generally has the belief that, “it happened to others, but it won’t happen to me”! Historians warn, however, that to be ignorant of history is to be destined to repeat it. It gives me pause to contemplate what I hold dear in the way of principles and spiritual values. How can these treasures be lost? What would be my part in their loss?

The complicated, yet simple, aspect of losing spiritual treasures is that it usually doesn’t happen in one generation. There is a process where one individual, or one generation, somehow slips up a little in a certain area over a process of time. This change can be ever so gradual, but if the change is there it is still very real. This slipping can then be more easily transferred to the next person, or the next generation. The next generation can then more easily lose this certain aspect completely. This process can be repeated a few more generations with a few more things. Gradually, a comprehensive change is affected that cannot be denied, even if it is defended or excused.

I’m reminded of the story of the man that questioned his wife as to why she cut off the end of the roast before putting it in the oven. She replied that her mother always did so. The man then asked his mother-in-law why she cut off the end of the roast. Her answer was similar, “Because my mother did.” The man finally asked his wife’s grandmother the question and got this reply, “Because my pan was too small!”

Saints, it is imperative that we know exactly why we believe and practice what we believe. To merely repeat what others before us have done will not suffice in the long run. We can, and we must, understand the principles involved in what we believe in order for it to be valued and kept long-term.

*“Lord, help me to truly understand what you require of me, why it is valuable, how it can be lost, and how to refract your pure and undiluted truth to the next generation!”*

–Clifford Cole



## REFLECTIONS

“And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel. And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.” Judges 2:7, 10, 12.

In the texts above we see that the third generation completely lost sight of the principles of truth that were cherished by their forefathers and ceased to understand the value of exclusively worshiping and following the one true God. In losing sight of these things, their hearts went out after other gods.

Sadly, this story has been repeated many times down through the centuries. It happened to the early morning church. Even before the death of all the apostles, there was a great falling away from the faith once delivered to the saints. By the third generation, apostasy was rampant. Likewise, this has happened to groups that sprang from great spiritual revivals and reformations. In three generations the majority lost sight of what the message was all about with only a remnant remaining to uphold the truth that was taught. What kind of challenge does this present to the present generation?

“Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons” (Deuteronomy 4:9).

– Harlan Sorrell

### SEPTEMBER 4 AND SEPTEMBER 11, 2022

#### THE FALL OF THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH

**2 Kings 25:1** And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth *day* of the month, *that* Nebuchadnezzar king of

Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against it round about.

**2** And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah.

**3** And on the ninth *day* of the *fourth* month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land.

**4** And the city was broken up, and all the men of war *fled* by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which *is* by the king's garden: (now the Chaldees *were* against the city round about:) and *the king* went the way toward the plain.

**5** And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him.

**6** So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him.

**7** And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.

**8** And in the fifth month, on the seventh *day* of the month, which *is* the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem:

**9** And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great *man's* house burnt he with fire.

**10** And all the army of the Chaldees, that *were with* the captain of the guard, brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about.

**11** Now the rest of the people *that were* left in the city, and the fugitives that fell away to the king of Babylon, with the remnant of the multitude, did Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carry away.

**12** But the captain of the guard left of the poor of the land *to be* vinedressers and husbandmen.

**13** And the pillars of brass that *were* in the house of the LORD, and the bases, and the brasen sea that *was* in the house of the LORD, did the Chaldees break in pieces, and carried the brass of them to Babylon.

**14** And the pots, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the spoons, and all the vessels of brass wherewith they ministered, took they away.

**15** And the firepans, and the bowls, *and* such things as *were* of gold, *in*

gold, and of silver, *in silver*, the captain of the guard took away.

**16** The two pillars, one sea, and the bases which Solomon had made for the house of the LORD; the brass of all these vessels was without weight.

**17** The height of the one pillar *was* eighteen cubits, and the chapter upon it *was* brass: and the height of the chapter three cubits; and the wreathen work, and pomegranates upon the chapter round about, all of brass: and like unto these had the second pillar with wreathen work.

**18** And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, and Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the door:

**19** And out of the city he took an officer that was set over the men of war, and five men of them that were in the king's presence, which were found in the city, and the principal scribe of the host, which mustered the people of the land, and threescore men of the people of the land *that were* found in the city:

**20** And Nebuzaradan captain of the guard took these, and brought them to the king of Babylon to Riblah:

**21** And the king of Babylon smote them, and slew them at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was carried away out of their land.

**MEMORY VERSE:** He that sacrificeth unto *any* god, save unto the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed. —**Exodus 22:20**

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** The fall of Jerusalem brought an end to the kingdom of Judah. The LORD allowed the city walls to be breached around the same time the famine reached its peak. There was no remaining will or strength to resist. The king and all his army fled. The children's poem, *Humpty Dumpty*, reminds us that, "All the king's horses, and all the king's men, couldn't put Humpty together again!" How true this is. When the LORD removes his great hand of blessing and protection from an individual, a collective body, or a nation, the fall is violent.

## WORD DEFINITIONS

**2 Kings 25:2** "Besieged": hemmed in, preventing anyone from going out or coming in.

**2 Kings 25:4** "Broken up": broken into by means of a breach in the wall.

**2 Kings 25:7** "Fetters of brass": understood to be two chains of brass. The Assyrian's captives are usually represented as bound hand and foot;

two hands secured by one chain and the two feet by another. According to Jewish tradition Zedekiah was, like other slaves, forced to work in a mill at Babylon. Jeremiah tells us that he was kept in prison until he died (Jeremiah 52:11). (*Albert Barnes Commentary*)

–Clifford Cole

## LESSON BACKGROUND

Josiah was the last righteous king of Judah. He made great efforts to eradicate idolatry in the land, so much so that the scriptures say, “And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there *any* like him” (2 Kings 23:25). “Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. And the LORD said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there” (2 Kings 23:26-27).

King Josiah died in battle. His son, Jehoahaz, reigned in his stead three months. When Jehoahaz did evil, the LORD caused the Pharaoh of Egypt to “put him in bands at Riblah ... and put the land in tribute of an hundred talents of silver, and a talent of gold” (2 Kings 23:33-34). Pharaoh also made Jehoiakim, Josiah’s brother, king in Jehoahaz’s stead. After reigning three years, Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. “And the LORD sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servants the prophets” (2 Kings 24:2). After Jehoiakim died, Jehoiachin, his son, came to the throne. His reign lasted only three months. When Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem, Jehoiachin surrendered himself, his wives, his mother, his officers, and the mighty in the land to captivity in Babylon. None remained but the poorest of the land. Nebuchadnezzar carried away treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king’s house. (*2 Kings 24:12-16 condensed and paraphrased.*) Nebuchadnezzar then made Zedekiah, Jehoiachin’s uncle, king.

When Zedekiah, the fourth king after Josiah, revolted, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, with his army, came against Jerusalem, as well as against Lachish and Azekah, two cities used to keep communication with

Egypt. When the forces of Egypt started for Jerusalem to give aid, Nebuchadnezzar temporarily halted his assault against Jerusalem to face the Egyptians. The forces of Egypt returned home, and Nebuchadnezzar went back to Jerusalem and surrounded it with his troops and movable towers with battering rams. The siege lasted almost exactly a year and a half. Its calamities—famine, pestilence, and intense suffering—are best understood from the Lamentations of Jeremiah, written probably almost immediately after the capture. (*Condensed from Albert Barnes Commentary and Adam Clarke Commentaries.*)

## **DISCUSSION:**

1. Going back to the first part of the Lesson Background, King Josiah was the last good king of Judah. Why did the LORD say He would still punish Judah despite Josiah's great effort to right all of the wrongs in the land?
2. The last part of the Lesson Background tells of the Egyptian forces failing to render any help to Judah when Nebuchadnezzar laid siege on Jerusalem. What is this a type and shadow of?
3. After a year and a half of enduring the siege, there was no food. The city wall was then breached. The people had no strength to resist at this point. Is it any coincidence that the walls were breached after the food ran out?
4. When the walls were breached, the men of war all fled by night, along with King Zedekiah. Why didn't the soldiers and king stay and fight for the people? Do the "comforts" of sin stay with those who become ravaged by their sinful ways and defend them?
5. Who did the captain of the guard leave behind to take care of the land?
6. What happened to all of the rich and mighty in the land?
7. What punishment did Nebuchadnezzar decree for Zedekiah?
8. How does this punishment resemble the wages of sin today?
9. Was there much of anything of value left in the land by the time Nebuchadnezzar was finished destroying Jerusalem?
10. Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, burned the house of the LORD. It's hard to imagine the great temple built by King Solomon could come to this end. Why did the LORD allow this to happen?
11. What significance is there in the walls of Jerusalem being destroyed?

## COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

The destruction of Jerusalem has some similarities to the great flood that destroyed the face of the earth in Noah's day. "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart (Genesis 6:5-6)." By the time God decided to destroy the earth with a flood, the great evil that prevailed had reached a point of no return. So, it was at the time of Judah's destruction and captivity; sins almost beyond imagination had gripped the land for so long that the LORD allowed it to be destroyed, even after King Josiah did so much to eradicate evil in the land. This is an important point—in the time of the great flood, and at the time of Judah's destruction, a point of no return was reached. There will come a time of "no return" when God decides to bring this earth to its final end. It will not matter that there are still righteous people endeavoring to serve the Lord. When the cup of the Lord's wrath is full, it will be "poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation" (Revelation 14:10). The righteous will be taken up to be with the Lord and the unrighteous separated to outer darkness and gnashing of teeth forever.

It's interesting to note that the Egyptians, a type and shadow of sin, could not help Judah in its darkest hour. They went home and left Judah to its fate. The devil never gives aid to anyone headed to calamity. King Zedekiah and his soldiers abandoned the people in their attempt to escape with their own lives after the walls were breached. The very ones that should have stuck around to defend the city of Jerusalem defected instead. The pleasures, entertainments, habits, and vices that people depend on today to help them in their darkest times let them down instead, leaving them with no hope and no aid.

Sin never helps, never defends, never gives hope, and never delivers. Instead, it leads those depending on it to destruction step by step, then leaves them feeling totally helpless and alone, and, finally, laughs at their destruction. Addictions, when failing to satisfy, merely entrench deeper and deeper in a futile effort to bring temporary relief. At the end of the addiction, however, is death. "For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

As the Queen of Sheba attested, Jerusalem, along with the rest of the kingdom of Judah, was a beacon to the rest of the world, telling all who cared to listen that this was the right way to live. It was the LORD'S design that His people continue on and be a glorious example for the whole earth. Praise God, it IS still His design that His church triumph over sin. Jesus said,

“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid” (Matthew 5:13-14).

*“Lord, help me be in that city set on a hill that cannot be hid!”*

—Clifford Cole

## REFLECTIONS

We’ve all heard the saying, “That was the last straw.” It refers to something so small and seemingly insignificant that it shouldn’t have had much of an impact one way or another—yet it does. That one comment or gesture or action becomes the tipping point. It triggers the avalanche that brings everything crashing down!

Everyone has their breaking point, and no one knows precisely where that point is. Sometimes it even comes as a surprise to the person themselves. God also has a point at which judgment is the only alternative. He has exhausted the parameters of His mercy. He has done all that He could to adjust the course of human behavior but to no avail. At that point mercy steps aside and judgment steps in.

It may seem like such a small offense, and we may be baffled by the release of such great fury on such a small thing. But what we fail to comprehend is that the small thing was the “last straw” in a series of other small things. Each rejection of the Word, each act of disobedience, each refusal of His mercy creates a massive pile of discarded opportunities. At that point, all it may take is one small spark to ignite the wrath of God.

Simply put, mercy is the withholding of well-deserved judgment. We cannot be so presumptuous as to think that there will be no consequences to our disobedience today simply because we experienced no consequences yesterday. The only thing that is powerful enough to hold back the wrath of God is the mercy of God. May God help us to recognize that *it is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed.*

—Darrell Johnson

**SEPTEMBER 18 AND SEPTEMBER 28, 2022**

## GOD’S PLAN OF RESTORATION

**Ezra 1:1** Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout

all his kingdom, and *put it* also in writing, saying,

**2** Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah.

**3** Who *is there* among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he *is* the God,) which *is* in Jerusalem.

**5** Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all *them* whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which *is* in Jerusalem.

**6** And all they that *were* about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all *that* was willingly offered.

**Ezra 4:1** Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel;

**2** Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye *do*; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither.

**3** But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us.

**4** Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building,

**5** And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

**6** And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote they *unto him* an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

**17** Then sent the king an answer unto Rehum the chancellor, and *to* Shimshai the scribe, and *to* the rest of their companions that dwell in Samaria, and *unto* the rest beyond the river, Peace, and at such a time.

**18** The letter which ye sent unto us hath been plainly read before me.

**19** And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and *that* rebellion and sedition have been made therein.



**20** There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all *countries* beyond the river; and toll, tribute, and custom, was paid unto them.

**21** Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until *another* commandment shall be given from me.

**Ezra 5:17** Now therefore, if *it seem* good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure house, which *is* there at Babylon, whether it be *so*, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter.

**Ezra 6:1** Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon.

**2** And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that *is* in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein *was* a record thus written:

**3** In the first year of Cyrus the king *the same* Cyrus the king made a decree *concerning* the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, *and* the breadth thereof threescore cubits;

**6** Now *therefore*, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shetharboznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which *are* beyond the river, be ye far from thence:

**7** Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place.

**Ezra 9:1** Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, *doing* according to their abominations, *even* of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

**2** For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of *those* lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.

**3** And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished.

**10** And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have

forsaken thy commandments,

**11** Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness.

**12** Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave *it* for an inheritance to your children for ever.

**Ezra 10:3** Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.

**4** Arise; for *this* matter *belongeth* unto thee: we also *will be* with thee: be of good courage, and do *it*.

**5** Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware.

**MEMORY VERSE:** Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell *it* to the generation following. For this God *is* our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide *even* unto death.

—Psalms 48:12-14

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** God is always interested and eager to “restore what the cankerworm hath eaten.” It’s interesting that the LORD put it in the heart of a foreign king to facilitate the restoration of the temple at Jerusalem. God has His ways, even if our imagination can’t take it in sometimes! The rebuilding effort met opposition. This is a reminder that the rebuilding process in our lives will always be accompanied by opposition on many fronts. Just as the rebuilders of the temple prevailed, so can we! “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death” (Revelation 12:11).

## WORD DEFINITIONS

Ezr 4:5 “Hired counsellors”: rather, “bribed” officials at the Persian

court to interpose delays and create difficulties, in order to hinder the work (*Albert Barnes Commentary*).

Ezr 9:3 “Astonied”: stunned, devastated, amazed.

### **LESSON BACKCKGROUND**

Approximately fifty-two years after the kingdom of Judah went into captivity, King Cyrus of Persia decreed that some of the Jews should be allowed to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Time does not permit us to look into the rebuilding of the walls, which happened approximately ninety years later.

The book of Ezra starts out in the first year of the Cyrus, king of Persia, and tells of his decision to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. The tenth chapter of Daniel took place during the third year of King Cyrus. Daniel had been fasting for twenty-one days. We read in this chapter of a spiritual battle regarding the Jews in captivity and of the LORD having to contend with the Prince of Persia, possibly King Cyrus. The book of Ezra tells of the back-and-forth letter writing to different kings by the Jews’ enemies, and the stopping and starting up again of the rebuilding project. It’s amazing that the LORD worked on two fronts by burdening Daniel to pray for the success of the temple rebuilding, while at the same time helping Ezra remain faithful in doing all he could on his end.

–Clifford Cole

### **DISCUSSION:**

1. What did God cause Cyrus, the king of Persia, to proclaim during his first year on the throne?
2. Who was commanded to go back to rebuild the temple?
3. Who opposed the temple rebuilding project?
4. What did this opposition first look like? In what manner was the opposition disguised?
5. What was the rebuilders response to the “help” offered them?
6. How was the work hindered after the first plans of the opposition failed?
7. How effective was this second hinderance?

8. What was done to get past the second hinderance?
9. A third hinderance came along after the work on the temple started up again. In what form was this hinderance?
10. How grieved was Ezra over the third hinderance?
11. What had to be done to stop the third hinderance?
12. How difficult do you suppose it was to carry out the LORD'S will regarding the third hinderance?
13. What would have happened if God's people had not done what needed to be done with the third hinderance?

### **COMMENTS AND APPLICATION**

We have focused primarily on the rebuilding of the temple, but the rebuilding of the walls has some interesting parallels. The main parallels are that God wanted both to take place, both were started with enthusiasm, both faced intense opposition, and both were completed in a remarkably short time.

Regarding the rebuilding of the walls, a step-by-step review yields deep spiritual truths to us today. The LORD was not content to leave His people in captivity. It is just the same today. God is not satisfied with anyone living in sin. He wants to deliver them from their sin and help them "rebuild their temple"! He also wants them to "rebuild their walls," but that is a subject for another time.

As the people began their rebuilding project, some of those who opposed the idea came around and offered to "help" them rebuild. Imagine the irony of this, but it happened just that way. It is just the same today when a soul seeks salvation. There are many ways the devil will try to "help" rebuild, but we know full well that he only wants to hinder the rebuilding project.

Next, when their "help" was refused, the enemies of the temple rebuilding accused them to the king that originally granted them opportunity to rebuild. The devil does the very same thing with souls today by accusing them to the Lord and bringing up all of their sins in the past. Yes, these things are all true, but, just as it happened in our story in Ezra, the rebuilders pled for the king to look again at what had been written that granted them the privilege to rebuild. Their plea worked! When an accused soul today faces accusations of all the wrongs they did in the past, all they have to do is plead the blood of Jesus and remind the Lord and satan that it's God's will for them to be saved. It's God's will for their temple to be rebuilt, and the devil has to flee!

Finally, after the temple had been rebuilt, it was brought to Ezra's attention that some of the people, even some of the religious leaders, had intermarried with some of the enemy. This was strictly forbidden by the LORD years ago for obvious reasons. To allow this kind of thing again would mean certain disaster to God's people. It would bring His wrath on them all over again. It is the same today. When a person gets saved, there are so many ways available for us to "intermarry" with the world and its attractions. This subject alone could take hours to discuss, but suffice it to say there are definite ways satan tempts each one of us in this manner, with our eventual and ultimate destruction in mind. When the entanglement is brought to our individual or collective attention, we can, once again, be overcomers in this area too. Thank the Lord! May each one of us be overcomers!

—Clifford Cole

## REFLECTIONS

*"Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof."*

Psalms 48:12-14

Several years ago, I helped chaperone a group of fifth graders on a field trip to the state capitol. As we approached the steps of the edifice, we were greeted by an elderly gentleman who was to be our tour guide for the duration of the field trip. The children grew restless as they thought of the old man and another boring field trip. But it was not long till this fellow had his audience completely captivated. His knowledge of the building and its surroundings was astonishing. His perspectives were so insightful and his enthusiasm was truly contagious. By the end of the field trip, we were all glad to have had the privilege of this tour and the tour guide.

"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God" (Hebrews 12:22) where Jesus Christ is the cornerstone. (I Peter 2:7). So, what does this mean? Where am I to find this city? Is this a literal structure? Or a future dwelling? Zion is the church of the living God. It is made up of every soul (past and present) that has been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. This is the temple in which the Lord dwells.

It is as though the psalmist David is inviting us at the footsteps of Zion to take a tour. "Walk about Zion." Observe the beauty and holiness of God. "Go round about her." Look at Zion from all angles; front to back, high to low. "Tell the towers thereof." Climb the stairs of God's truth and observe the lookouts of his righteousness. "Mark ye well her bulwarks." These are bulwarks of victory, courage and faithfulness. "Consider her palaces." Take

time to visit each and every room. There you will find chambers of grace, love and peace. Travel down the hall of faith and observe the portraits of patriarchs and martyrs.

How wonderful it is to watch a life well-lived for the Lord. It is simply breathtaking to observe the righteousness and grace of God unfold in every aspect. May we each have a vision of Zion (the kingdom of God) so that we can tell the generations following: with true insight, wisdom, and enthusiasm.

—LaDawna Adams



