

WEEK 16, DAY 1: **TODAY'S READING: 1 KINGS 4-6**

OVERVIEW:

Solomon's key men; the kings of the earth come to hear Solomon; the preparation for building the Temple; the specifics in building the Temple.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we read chapter 4, it's easy to allow the material prosperity and blessing the people of Israel were enjoying under Solomon's leadership to deceive us. Notice that 4:20 says that the multitude of Judah and Israel were "... *eating and drinking, and making merry.*" And as wonderful as it all was, the fact is, the way they were prospering MATERIALLY and FINANCIALLY, was not commensurate with how their souls were prospering SPIRITUALLY! (See 3 John 2) Something that is woefully missing in chapter 4 is any mention of how these abundantly blessed people were pursuing God through His word! This is what I often refer to as "the CURSE of God's BLESSING." Sometimes we spend so much time relishing in God's blessings, that we no longer have time for Him! We begin seeking the BLESSING rather than the BLESSER... the GIFT rather than the GIVER... and the THINGS of GOD rather than GOD HIMSELF!

In this chapter, the kingdom of Israel was at its zenith. (4:21 c.f. Gen. 15:18) The peace and prosperity they were experiencing at this time was unequalled in their history. (4:24-25) Its splendor will only be surpassed when the Son of David, our Lord Jesus Christ, rules and reigns from His throne in Jerusalem in His millennial kingdom!

As 4:22-34 provide us a description of the nature of Solomon's kingdom and his incredible accomplishments, note, first of all, that it is all unbelievably impressive! His unsurpassed wealth (4:22-23), the vastness of his kingdom (4:24-25), the governmental administration he established, the elite staff he had assembled and the manner in which he provided for them (4:26-28), the "*wisdom and understanding*" that God had lavished upon him (4:29-31), his skill and giftedness in composing songs and proverbs (4:32), and the grasp and insight he had concerning nature (4:33-35)– were all humanly beyond compare!

Secondly, note, that all of these impressive characteristics listed in 4:22-34 concerning Solomon and his kingdom, provide us with keen insight as to the "type" of wisdom for which he besought the Lord, and with which he became supernaturally endowed. It wasn't SPIRITUAL wisdom that would give him deep insight into God and His word, but rather a PRACTICAL wisdom that would give him, as J. Sidlow Baxter noted, "...*administrative discernment, sagacious judgment, intellectual grasp, aptitude for the acquisition of knowledge, a practical wisdom in the directing of affairs.*" The intention of making this observation is certainly not to cast disdain upon Solomon's choice of wisdom, because even God commended him for it! But it is possible for us to become so enamored with all of his illustrious achievements, that we become blind to the fact that in all of this extravagant and detailed description concerning Solomon in this passage, it is all void of anything related to the passion of his heart for the word of God, or the God of the word, as was so easily observed in his father, David. Solomon, at least at this point, was certainly a good man who loved the Lord, and as we will see, will become one of the most perfect types of Christ in the entire Bible. It is these kinds of spiritual omissions, however, that will ultimately cause the "wisest man in who ever lived" – to "foolishly" become one of the most perfect types of Antichrist in the entire Bible!

After establishing the organizational structure of the government of the kingdom in chapter 4, Solomon immediately turns his attention to establishing the physical structure of the King's Temple in chapter 5. The

magnitude of the project can begin to be understood by noting that the grand total of men identified in chapter 5 as those who had been contracted to fulfill a role in the undertaking was over 183,000! (c.f. 2 Chron. 2:17-18)

Chapter 6 details the dimensions, materials and actual construction of the Temple. One of the interesting observations concerning Solomon's Temple is the fact that it wasn't actually a large structure. Though its footprint was exactly double that of the Tabernacle, the Temple was only 120 feet by 60 feet, or approximately 36.6 meters by 18.3 meters. As Dr. John Kitto acknowledged, *"The importance of the Temple of Solomon, which we have been led to regard as one of the wonders of the ancient world, consisted not in its size, but in the elaborate, costly, and highly decorative character of its whole interior and furniture, and also in the number, extent, grandeur, and substantial masonry of its surrounding courts, chambers, walls and towers. Indeed, it is not too much to presume that these outer constructions, forming the massive ring in which the costly gem of the Temple was set, cost as much as the sacred building itself, immense as was the quantity of gold bestowed upon it."* Notice that 6:21 says, *"So Solomon overlaid the house within with pure gold!"* Be reminded that in the dispensation of the church age, the Lord no longer dwells in temples made with hands (Acts 7:48; 17:24), but has made our bodies His very temple! (1 Cor. 6:19) May we, likewise, be *"overlaid"* with *"pure gold."* (See 1 Cor. 3:12)

Notice, also, that the chapter ends in 6:37 with the statement, *"So was he (Solomon) seven years in building it."* Keep in mind, the number seven in the Bible is the number of completion and perfection. The Temple was *"completed"* in the seventh year, in accordance with God's *"perfect"* instruction.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

Through SOLOMON, as *"all people"* and *"all kings of the earth"* come to hear the wisdom of Israel's king – 1 Kings 4:34 (Phil, 2:9-11 – Christ will one day rule the world as Israel's king in His millennial kingdom, and every knee will bow before Him.)

WEEK 16, DAY 2: **TODAY'S READING: 1 KINGS 7-8**

OVERVIEW:

Building Solomon's house; the Temple is furnished; the dedication of the Temple.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

When we ended yesterday's reading in chapter 6, the closing sentence of verse 38 was, "So was he (Solomon) seven years in building it (the Temple)." And again, what a glorious thing! God finally had a more permanent dwelling on the earth! The next two words as we come into chapter 7, however, are very telling. Sad to say, at this point in 1 Kings, Solomon joins a long list of good men in the Bible of whom it could be said, "But Adam... But Noah... But Abraham... But Isaac... But Jacob... But Judah... But Moses... But Saul... But David!" The first two words of chapter 7 are "But Solomon!" Oh, may the passionate surrender of our hearts never allow there to ever be a "but" that taints the testimony of our life!

And the contrast indicated by the word "But" in verse 1, is that though Solomon was seven years in building THE LORD'S HOUSE (6:38), "...Solomon was building HIS OWN HOUSE thirteen years, and he finished all his house." (7:1) Obviously, it took almost twice as long to build "his own house" as it did the Lord's! And sure, there may be some variables to consider. We don't know, there may not have been 183,000 workers who were a part of constructing Solomon's house. And it may be that the materials used in Solomon's house had not been prepared before they were shipped as they were with the Lord's house. But for some reason, as the Holy Spirit inspired the writing of 7:1, the first word: "But," forces us to make the contrast between the amount of time it took to complete both "houses."

And as we move into 7:2, once again, we're forced to make another very telling contrast. Back in 6:2 it says: "And the house which king Solomon built for the Lord, the length thereof was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof twenty cubits, and the height thereof thirty cubits." In 7:2, in reference to Solomon's house, it says, "...the length thereof was an hundred cubits, and the breadth thereof fifty cubits, and the height thereof thirty cubits..." Not only did Solomon's own house take almost twice as long to build, it was also almost twice as big!

There is no doubt, Solomon was certainly passionate about the Lord's NAME...and the Lord's HOUSE. There was only one problem. He was twice as interested in his OWN NAME...and his OWN HOUSE. May this reality cause each of us to look at our own life and ask: "Am I any different than Solomon?" In the midst of our passion for the Lord's NAME and the GLORY due it, are we more interested in our OWN NAME... and our OWN FINANCES, our OWN HOUSE...and our OWN POSSESSIONS?

Perhaps the lesson in this for all of us is: It doesn't matter how "blessed" of the Lord we are...or how "wise"... or how "sincere"...or how big of a "priority" we think Jesus has in our life today— as long as we are in this body of flesh, we are never going to be free from the temptation to make our OWN NAME and our OWN HOUSE a bigger priority than the Lord's!

As chapter 7 continues, it details the specific instruction concerning the construction of the Temple. As you read through these details of what would become the dwelling place of God, recognize that we are now the temple of God, and that the New Testament is our specific detailed instruction for building a life that is worthy of the dwelling place of Almighty God. May we be as meticulous in following the instruction concerning our *spiritual* temple, as Solomon was this *physical* temple.

Notice at the end of chapter 7, "...Solomon brought in the things which David his father had dedicated; even the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, did he put among the treasures of the house of the lord." As we consider the unselfish and passionate investment of David's life and resources into a Temple he knew he would never see, may it likewise impassion us to unselfishly invest in the "temples" of both our physical and spiritual children and grandchildren— some that we may never see— a spiritual and moral legacy that can cause the glory of the Lord to fill them! (See 1 Kings 8).

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As the GLORY OF GOD filling His Temple. – 1 Kings 8:10-11 (John 1:14; Isa. 40:5; Matt. 16:27-7:2)

WEEK 16, DAY 3: **TODAY'S READING: 1 KINGS 9-11**

OVERVIEW:

God speaks to Solomon; the Queen of Sheba comes to Solomon; Solomon's kingdom increases in wealth; Solomon's heart is turned away; God's judgment upon Solomon.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Chapter 9 begins with God speaking to Solomon a second time. It has now been 20 years since the Lord spoke to him the first time. He confirms the fact that He wants to bless Solomon the way He had blessed his father David, but also lets him know that His blessing was most certainly conditional. If Solomon walked in "*integrity of heart*" and in "*uprightness*," and simply did the things he knew to do— keeping the Lord's "*statutes and judgments*" — he and the kingdom of Israel would be "*established*" and blessed. But God also warned that if Solomon turned his back on Him, and no longer kept His "*commandments and statutes*," and began serving and worshipping other gods, the kingdom of Israel would be cursed. The choice Solomon was presented seems like the biggest no-brainer in the history of earth — and yet, recognize that God sets before each of us each day a similar choice. Every day we get to choose whether we will sow to our flesh— or sow to the Spirit. (Gal. 5:7-8) If we choose to sow to the flesh, we will of the flesh reap corruption. If we choose to sow to the Spirit, we will of the Spirit reap life everlasting. (i.e. life that keeps giving life— or "abundant life!") That choice also seems that it would be the biggest no-brainer ever — and yet, as most of us have discovered, somehow it isn't. May God help us to make better daily choices than Solomon ultimately made.

But as we come into chapter 10, Solomon is presented as what is perhaps the greatest type of Christ in the entire Bible. Biblically, he is identified as...

- The "*prince of peace*." (The name of King David's son, "*Solomon*," means "*peace*." See Isa. 9:6; 2 Sam. 12:25)
- The "*beloved of the Father*." (Solomon's name was also, "*Jedidiah*," meaning "*beloved of Jehovah*" — or, the beloved of God, the Father. See Matt. 3:17)
- The "*son of David*." (Pro. 1:1; Matt. 1:1)
- The "*son of Jehovah*." (1 Chr. 28:6; Luke 1:32)
- The "*man of rest*." (1 Chr. 22:9; Heb. 4:8-10)
- The one who sat "*upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord*," (1 Chr. 28:5; Rev. 3:21)
- The one whose kingdom was a kingdom of "*peace and rest*." (1 Chr. 22:9; Isa. 9:7)
- The one whose kingdom was a kingdom with "*no adversary*" present. (1 Kings 5:4; Rev. 20:2-3)
- The one whose presence was sought by "*all the earth*," and "*all the kings of the earth*." (1 Kings 10:24; 2 Chr. 9:23; Rev. 21:24)

And this is the glory of chapter 10! However!!! Solomon goes from being perhaps the "greatest type of CHRIST" in chapter 10, to perhaps the "greatest type of ANTICHRIST" in chapter 11! And may we all recognize, the very fact that this COULD happen to Solomon...and DID happen to Solomon, should cause every one of us to sit and take notice! Because there probably aren't any of us who are more "sincere" and "well-meaning" as Solomon. And none of us have had the deck more stacked in our favor than Solomon did. And certainly, none of us have more wisdom than Solomon did— nor to mention knowledge and understanding!

So the question is, just what was it that actually happened to Solomon?

Well, there are several very identifiable "downfalls" in his life. We have already mentioned in yesterday's reading the fact that *"his own house"* was almost twice the size of *"the Lord's house,"* and took almost twice as long to build! Though Solomon was still being obedient to his calling, his first downfall was that he had an obvious **PREOCCUPATION with "SELF!"** But that's certainly not all!

Notice, also, his **ATTRACTION to WOMEN!** The first three verses of chapter 11 say: *"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."*

And then, notice, also, his **ACCUMULATION of WEALTH!** Chapter 10 and verse 14 says: *"Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold."* Be aware, that biblically, the number 6-6-6 is always associated with the "Antichrist" (Rev. 13:18) and/or what 1 John 4:3 calls the "spirit of Antichrist."

And then, notice, also, his **CONNECTION to EGYPT.** And Egypt, as we have previously seen, is always a picture of the world and sin in the Bible. Egypt was the place from which God *"brought out"* His people from bondage, and the place from which God never wanted His people to go back for the purpose of *"bringing out"* anything else! (Isa. 31:1-3; Gen. 5:-24-25) And don't miss the fact that God has specifically forbidden the kings of Israel in Deuteronomy 17:14-17 to conduct any type of business with Egypt, to multiply wives, or to accumulate gold. Solomon would have known that had he followed the instruction of Deuteronomy 17:18, that as a king in Israel, he was to make his own copy of the law! Be it known, when we distance ourselves from the Word of God, the compromises we will begin to make will be astounding – and the consequences far-reaching.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

Through SOLOMON, ruling in Jerusalem as the leaders of the world seek Him and His wisdom – 1 Kings 10:1-6 (Phil. 2:9-11).

WEEK 16, DAY 4: **TODAY'S READING: 1 KINGS 12-15**

OVERVIEW:

Rehoboam becomes king; the kingdom is divided; Jeroboam is made king of Israel and institutes false worship; the prophet of God rebukes Jeroboam; God judges Jeroboam's house; the temple is looted under Rehoboam's reign; the reigns of Abijam and Asa in Judah; the reign of Nadab and Baasha in Israel.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we ended yesterday's reading in 1 Kings 11, we were able to witness a distinct turning point in Solomon's life and reign as king. He was overtaken by the same four things that overtake believers to this day...

- **PREOCCUPATION of SELF.** (2 Tim. 3:2; Phil 2:21)
- **ATTRACTION to WOMEN.** (Matt. 5:27-28; 2 Pet. 2:14)
- **ACCUMULATION of WEALTH.** (Col. 3:1-2; Matt. 6:19-21)
- **CONNECTION to EGYPT (or, the WORLD).** (Jam. 4:4; 2 Cor. 6:14-18)

As we come into chapter 12 today, Rehoboam, Solomon's son, becomes the king after his father's death. If he will exercise wisdom, he sits in a position to win the affection of the people and establish his leadership in the kingdom. Certainly, the Temple building project had given the Nation of Israel great notoriety, but the taxes to fund it had become burdensome to the people. As Rehoboam seeks the counsel of the old men, they tell him that if he will be a servant-leader to the people, the people would follow him to the ends of the earth. The counsel he receives from the young men was the exact opposite. They tell him that the way to establish his leadership was to be a dictator, and to increase the burden of their taxes. Rehoboam foolishly follows the counsel of the young men.

Chapter 12, therefore, marks a key division in the Book of 1 Kings – not to mention a key division in the kingdom. There are 22 chapters in the Book. The first 11 chapters detail the incredible 40 years of Solomon's reign in the UNITED kingdom in Israel. The second 11 chapters detail the first 80 years of the DIVIDED kingdom. From this point in the Old Testament, these two kingdoms will be known as Israel and Judah, respectively. Jeroboam becomes the king of Israel, comprised of 10 of the 12 tribes, while Rehoboam is left to be the king of the two remaining tribes, Judah and Benjamin. The 10 tribes (Israel) become the NORTHERN kingdom with Samaria as its capital, while the two tribes (Judah) become the SOUTHERN kingdom, maintaining Jerusalem as its capital.

As has already been mentioned, Rehoboam foolishly followed the wrong counsel in increasing the severities upon the people. As Jeroboam begins to lead the northern kingdom, he, likewise, exercises of major lack of wisdom that seals its doom. Fearing that if the people were forced to go to Jerusalem to participate in the annual feasts he would begin to lose his jurisdiction over the people, he reaches back into one of the Nation of Israel's "bag of biggest blunders," and follows the sinful example of Aaron in making a golden calf of all things! To make it convenient for the people to "worship," he sets up one golden calf in Dan, and another one in Bethel. The demonic worship of these golden calves in these two places included an entire blasphemous priesthood – with Jeroboam himself burning incense at the altar as if he were a priest!

Rehoboam and Jeroboam paint a very graphic picture of leaders throughout history – right up to this present day – who seek to lead from a position of power and pride, rather than a position of service and humility. Once a

leader feels the need to protect his "position" and/or "power," there seems to be no limit to the carnal absurdities that will issue forth. Pray that your pastor will humbly follow Jesus' leadership style, and that he will be passionate about seeking to protect Christ's glory in the church— rather than his own.

The remainder of the Book of 1 Kings (Chapters 12-22) records the next 86 years of the reign of the kings in the divided kingdom. The king's names, the length of their reign, and the scripture's verdict concerning them is as follows...

In **JUDAH** (4 kings in approximately 86 years)

1. Rehoboam (17 years)... EVIL.
2. Abijam (3 years)... EVIL.
3. Asa (41 years)... GOOD.
4. Jehosaphat (25 years)... GOOD.

In **ISRAEL** (8 kings in approximately 86 years)

1. Jeroboam (22 years)... EVIL.
2. Nadab (2 years)... EVIL.
3. Baasha (24 years)... EVIL.
4. Elah (2 years)... EVIL.
5. Zimri (1 week)... EVIL.
6. Omri (12 years)... EVIL.
7. Ahab (22 years)... EVIL.
8. Ahaziah (2 years)... EVIL.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

In the prophecy concerning JOSIAH. Another child shall come that shall judge the false gods and false worship of this world – 1 Kings 13:2 (2 Thess. 1:7-10; Rev. 18:1-2, 10, 21).

WEEK 16, DAY 5: **TODAY'S READING: 1 KINGS 16-19**

OVERVIEW:

The corruption of the early kings of Israel; Elijah prophesies the drought; Elijah is fed miraculously; the widow obeys God's Word; the widow's son is raised from the dead; Elijah confronts Arab; Elijah takes on the prophets of Baal; the Lord reveals Himself as the Lord; Elijah flees Jezebel; Elijah hears the still small voice of God; Elijah puts his mantle on Elisha.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As was discussed in yesterday's "Highlights and Insights," the pattern of Israel's kings was one of apostasy. Each one turned from God and His Word, and suffered the consequence of God's judgment. The crescendo of evil and carnality, however, was reached in Arab. 1 Kings 16:33 says that, *"Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him."* That, my friend, is quite a statement, because the fact is, the holy Lord God of Israel had been provoked... A LOT! (See 16:7, 13, 25-26.)

In the midst of Ahab's wicked reign, God raises up one of Israel's most powerful and infamous prophets. (In fact, he will be one of the prophets God raises back up to preach during the wicked reign of the Antichrist during the final 3 1/2 years of the Tribulation Period! See Rev. 11:3-6.) When God gave Elijah the words He wanted spoken, Elijah wasn't afraid of putting them out there – regardless of WHO the AUDIENCE was! A great case in point is in 17:1. Elijah gets up in King Ahab's stuff and says, *"As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word"* (or, *"until I say it will!"*) Note that this drought of 3 1/2 years will be repeated when Elijah returns to prophesy during the Tribulation. (Rev. 11:6)

Elijah makes this prophecy to King Ahab in 17:1, and by the time they see each other again, (18:7) it's been 3 1/2 years – and just like Elijah said, there hasn't been a single drop of moisture! The scene in Israel was one of crisis. There are no lakes, streams or pools of water anywhere. Not only has this led to a physical crisis – but an economic, political, moral, and spiritual crisis as well!

When their paths did cross (18:17), Ahab says, *"Well, my, my, my– if it isn't the big trouble-maker in Israel himself!"* Elijah retorts back, saying, *"You took the words right out of my mouth! If it isn't the big trouble-maker in Israel himself!"* Elijah goes on to nail him to the wall, citing that he was the one who was guilty of bringing about the judgment of God on his nation by refusing to follow the Word of God, and leading the people of Israel to follow Baalim. With what is about to happen in the story, it should be noted that Baal was the "sun god," or the "god of fire," and the worship of him included all kinds of sexual perversion and debauchery.

In 18:19, Elijah calls for a showdown! He tells Ahab that he is fully aware that his wicked wife, Jezebel, had been funding the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of the groves, and tells Ahab to gather all 850 of them along with all of the people of Israel to Mount Carmel to bring the reality of who the true God in Israel actually was, once and for all. Verse 20 says that Ahab did just that.

Once everybody had assembled, Elijah walks up to the platform where all of the 850 vile prophets of Jezebel were assembled, and looks out on all of the people of Israel and says, *"Listen, this half-Baal/half Jehovah trash has gotta stop! You're trying to live in two worlds, and pick and choose what you want out of each of them – and God has sent me out here to tell you today that He's had enough!"*

Elijah continued, *"If the Lord be God (in other words, "Jehovah, the God of the Bible!"), then adjust your lifestyle and follow Him! But, if you're so demented that you actually think that Baal is the true God, and not just your excuse for gratifying yourself sexually – then sell yourself out to him, and forget Jehovah God altogether! But it's time to get off of the fence– and go one way or the other!"* Wow! That sounds a whole lot like the message God wants to give to the church in the 21st century! Oh, that God would raise up some "Elijah's" in these days!

Elijah speaks his peace in 18:21, and the people have absolutely no response. They are "Halted," or stuck in the middle between two contrary worlds. So in 18:23-24, Elijah says, *"Okay, boys and girls, let's settle this thing once-and-for-all. So, you 850 guys come over to this altar for Baal, and you prepare the sacrifice of a bullock– and since Baal is the so-called 'god of fire,' don't put any fire under the sacrifice."* Then he says, *"I'll come over to this altar for Jehovah over here... this one that is become broken down from lack of use – and I'll likewise prepare the sacrifice of a bullock, and I won't put any fire under it either. The God who consumes the sacrifice by answering with fire, let Him be the true God in Israel, and let's all wholeheartedly follow Him– and let's put an end to all this dual worship and double-mindedness in Israel."* This time the people do have a response! They tell Elijah in 18:24– *"We like it! Let's go for it!"*

Once the 850 false prophets of Jezebel had prepared the sacrifice, they cried out to their false god for six solid hours, even throwing themselves upon the altar to try to get some response out of him – and even cutting themselves so that blood was gushing out and covering the altar! At noon, Elijah mockingly says to them, *"Hey fellas! Maybe your quote-unquote "god" is busy talking with someone, or chasing after somebody, or on a long trip somewhere – or maybe it could be that he's sleeping!"*

Elijah then repairs the broken down altar to Jehovah, puts the wood underneath the bullock, and yet, before he begins to pray to the one true God to answer with fire, he calls for four barrels of water to be poured out all over the sacrifice. After the sacrifice was absolutely drenched, he calls for a second round of four barrels to be poured over it, and then a third! By this time the water has fully engulfed the sacrifice, and was laying in the trenches surrounding it.

Then, without any fanfare, drama, or "religious shenanigans," Elijah prays a simple prayer. In English, the entire prayer is a grand total of 63 words. It takes only approximately 16.5 seconds to pray the entire prayer! And yet, as soon as his prayer was concluded, the fire of God fell from heaven, consumed the sacrifice, along with all of the water that was in the trenches surrounding the sacrifice.

Often, when we read of a dramatic move of God like this, we tend to think that Elijah could pull off such a tremendous feat because he was some kind of extraordinary guy. God anticipated that we might pass off the power that was manifested through him by skewed thinking like that – so you know what He did? He clears off a little space in the New Testament to let us know that Elijah was a man who was made of the same stuff all the rest of us are made of, and a man who faced all of the same struggles we face– in other words, he was just a very average, ordinary guy – but he was a guy who possessed the fire of God's presence and power on his life! James 5:17-18 says, *"Elias (the Greek rendering of the Hebrew word "Elijah") was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."*

And do you remember how Elijah had challenged the people in 18:21? *"If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him."* Well, they finally got it! No more double-mindedness. In fact, notice the double-declaration in 18:39: *"The Lord, he is the God'; the Lord, he is the God."* Hallelujah!

People in the 21st century ask, "*Where is the Lord God of Elijah?*" God asks the people of the 21st century, "*Where are the Elijah's of the Lord God?*"

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As THE FIRE OF GOD consuming the sacrifice – 1 Kings 18:38 (Heb. 12:29).

WEEK 17, DAY 1: TODAY'S READING: 1 KINGS 20–22

OVERVIEW:

Syria attacks Israel twice; Ahab spares the Syrian king; Ahab's "purchase" of Naboth's vineyard; Israel and Judah unite against Syria; the death of Ahab.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Benhadad, the king of Syria, conspired with 32 other kings to besiege Samaria, the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel, and sent a message to King Ahab telling him that the conditions of his surrender would not only be all of his silver and gold — but the very best of his wives and children. Recognizing his inability against such a formidable alliance of nations, Ahab reluctantly concedes. Shortly thereafter, Benhadad sends more messengers to Ahab demanding that his servants be granted access to the city to plunder Ahab's house, and the houses of all of his servants.

King Ahab calls an emergency meeting to seek the counsel of the elders of Israel. The elders are adamant that Ahab stand his ground against Benhadad's second demand. When Benhadad receives Ahab's reply, he was so infuriated that he sends back the message — that by the time he was finished, there wouldn't be enough of Samaria left for all of his servants to grab a handful of its dust! (20:10) Ahab tauntingly replies back, that a soldier "putting on" his armor — shouldn't boastfully conduct himself like someone who is "taking his armor off" after achieving a victory! When Benhadad receives the message, it was while he and all of his "kingly buddies" were together partying, and Ahab's taunting response worked! Benhadad immediately called his soldiers to action. (20:12)

Just then, a prophet comes to Ahab and tells him that despite the incredible amount of soldiers in Benhadad's combined armies, the Lord would provide the victory using a relatively small Israeli army— leaving no doubt whatsoever that the Lord was the One who granted the victory.

Ahab rallies his troops, and it so happens that Benhadad and his posse of 32 kings were already drunk. When Benhadad's soldiers informed him that the Israeli army had made their way out of the city walls, he foolishly tells them that whether they were approaching in peace or for war, not to kill them, but to take them as hostages. Obviously, that passive battle plan put his soldiers at a major disadvantage that resulted in many casualties. Those who weren't killed were forced to retreat.

After Ahab's victory, the prophet returned informing Ahab to go regroup himself and his troops, because Benhadad and his armies would be returning within the year. (20:22)

Meanwhile, in King Benhadad's camp, his military foot soldiers let their "General-King" know that they could defeat the Israel army by doing three things: 1) Not fight them in the hill country, but in the plain. (They surmised that they had suffered such great defeat at their hands because their "gods," were "the gods of the hills." — 20:23) 2) Replace the 32 kings with "real" military strategists. (20:24) 3) Rebuild the combined armies, horses and chariots to the number they had before the devastating defeat. (20:25) Benhadad complied with all of their counsel and demands.

Several months later, Benhadad had successfully regrouped his military, and leads the attack against Israel. From a distance, Israel looked like two small flocks of goats compared to Benhadad's armies. The prophet returned, however, to let Ahab know that God was, once again, going to show Himself mighty on their behalf — especially since they had said that Israel's God was "God of the hills, but he is not the God of the valleys." (20:28) By the end

of this "seven day war," the Israeli army had miraculously killed 100,000 Syrian soldiers! The Syrians who weren't killed sought refuge within the walled city of Aphek, and when they came into the city, the wall fell killing all 27,000 of the remaining soldiers! (20:26-30) Go God!

Benhadad's remaining servants ask for permission to approach Ahab under the guise of surrender, requesting that he spare the life of Benhadad. During the encounter, Ahab makes the mistake of saying, "Oh, is 'MY BROTHER,' Benhadad, still alive?" His servants pick up on the whole "my brother" thing, and milk it for all it was worth. The result was, Ahab tells them to bring Benhadad to him. When he arrives, Benhadad promises to restore the cities that had been taken from his forefathers, and to institute an urban renewal program, as it were, and rather than kill him as God had said, Ahab foolishly enters into an alliance with him. (20:31-34)

As Ahab makes his way back home, God inserts a prophet into his path with an object lesson of Ahab's disobedience in not destroying Benhadad, and God tells Ahab that his life will be taken for Benhadad's life. (20:35-43)

Chapter 21 is the infamous chapter regarding Naboth's vineyard. It reveals that Ahab was nothing but a selfish, self-serving, self-seeking, spoiled brat — and that those were his "good qualities!" What an incredible epithet is recorded in 21:25: "But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, home Jezebel his wife stirred up."

In response to God's sentence against Ahab and his "lovely wife," Jezebel (21:17-24), Ahab goes through some semblance of actually humbling himself. (21:27) If you ever wanted to know just how gracious, long-suffering, merciful and forgiving our God is, listen to the words God spoke to Elijah concerning Ahab in the last verse of this chapter: "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house." (21:29)

In Chapter 22, Jehoshaphat, who was actually a relatively "good king," makes enters an unholy alliance with Ahab. May it serve as an Old Testament illustration and reminder to us of the New Testament truth of 2 Corinthians 6:14-18: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As Micaiah, the prophet of the Lord, speaking whatever the Lord (Father) wants him to speak — 1 Kings 22:14 (John 3:34; 14:10).

WEEK 17, DAY 2: TODAY'S READING: 2 KINGS 1–4

OVERVIEW:

Ahaziah sends 102 men to their death; Elijah is taken up; Elisha is established as a prophet; Moab revolts; the miracles of Elisha.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

The stubbornness and rebellion of man has no better example than Israel's King Ahaziah. He has seen and heard Elijah and the condemnation of Baal. He knows of the fire falling from heaven in judgment of Baal. And now, when faced with a pressing need in his life, rather than turn to the God who clearly manifested Himself as the One true God on Mount Carmel and countless other ways in Israel, Ahaziah still turns to Baal, the god of Ekron. Even when confronted with the truth from Elijah, he refuses to accept God's word, and becomes guilty of sending two captains and their respective 50 men to their deaths. How could a man be so blind? Could we ever be so blind? Because the reality is, the same thing continues to happen right up to the present day! Many times, when people (even believers!) find themselves at a time of great need in their life, rather than turn to the holy and powerful God of the Bible who has proven Himself consistently and continuously for the past 6000 years, they turn rather to the "god of self" in its many forms (self-reliance, self-preservation, self-confidence, self-control, self-defense, self-determination, self-help, self-motivation, self-propulsion, self-sufficiency, and/or self-will) – or they'll turn to the "god of money" in an attempt to meet their need.

An interesting insight into the frailty of Elijah's humanness is shown in verse 15. Even after being used of God to call down fire from heaven on three separate occasions (1 Kings 18:37-39; 2 Kings 1;10,12), the Lord still has to tell Elijah not to be afraid of the third captain sent by Ahaziah. (1:15) The Lord is here revealing to us the reality explained by James, in James 5:16-18, that even though Elijah, the Prophet of Fire, tenaciously confronted kings and religious leaders with the word of the Lord – rather than being a superhero, he was actually a man who had to deal with the same types of fears and weaknesses of which we all face. God reveals to us through James, that Elijah's greatness wasn't the power of his PERSON, but simply the power of his PRAYERS! And God's point through James, is that if we will be righteous men and women of fervent prayer, God's power will likewise be manifested through us!

In Chapter 2, Elisha follows and serves his leader to the end. Elisha had seen the FIRE, but what he wanted was the SPIRIT! He wasn't interested in demonstrating what Elijah demonstrated on the OUTSIDE, he wanted what Elijah possessed on the INSIDE! He understood the reality of Zechariah 4:6, that the Lord's work is "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts."

As we consider the practical application to us, recognize that the Lord Jesus Christ gave us the promise of the Holy Spirit LIVING and ABIDING in us in John chapters 14, 15 and 16. Paul writes, that we are SEALED with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30), we have the potential to be FILLED with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) and to manifest the FRUIT of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), we are LED by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14), TAUGHT by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10) and STRENGTHENED by the Spirit. (Eph. 3:16) Oh, may we never fail to realize that we have already have in our possession what Elisha was passionately asking to receive! All we need on a daily, and even a moment by moment basis, is to surrender to the powerful Spirit of God that patiently waits to be released and manifested both IN and THROUGH us!

Elijah is taken into heaven. (2:11) Elijah's mantle is left to Elisha – and the Spirit of the Lord now works through him. The miracles and the work of the Lord will continue because Elisha will be doing the work of GOD... not the work of ELIJAH. God's work continues as He brings another man into His place of service. In the last part of chapter 2, Elisha is confirmed by God in the sight of other men. Interestingly, Elisha had asked for a double portion of the spirit of Elijah to be poured out upon him (2:9), and as you might would imagine – the number of his recorded miracles is double that of Elijah!

Chapter 3 details the deliverance of a good king (King Jehoshaphat of Judah) that gets involved with other evil kings. After the death of Ahaziah in chapter 1, his brother Jehoram begins to reign over Israel. He put away the image of Baal, but kept the golden calf of Jeroboam. (1 Kings 12:28) (He is a reminder of how few people there are in any generation who genuinely offer to the Lord the absolute and complete surrender for which He requires!) Moab revolts from the rule of Israel and Jehoram calls on Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom to help. Soon, the three kings are in a desert with no water and no hope. Jehoshaphat finds himself in the wrong place with the wrong people. Only then, does Jehoshaphat ask for counsel from the Lord. Elisha comes in and the Lord brings deliverance with the reflection of the sun upon the water. In a place of no water — the Lord brings victory through water.

Elisha miraculously helps other various individuals in chapter 4. After Elisha gives a widow instruction, the Lord multiplies her only possession (a pot of oil) to pay her debts and meet her future needs. (4:1-7) A woman who takes care of Elisha, is given a son. When the son later dies in the field, the Lord brings him back to life through Elisha. (4:8-37) A poisonous meal is purified and given to hungry men. (4:38-41) Firstfruit offerings are multiplied to meet the needs of many people. (4:42-44)

As is demonstrated through the ministry of Elisha, the Spirit of God abiding in and controlling a person brings blessing, joy and hope to men... and glory to God! For God's glory's sake, like Elisha, may the power of God's Holy Spirit be manifest through us!

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As JUDGE OF THE UNBELIEVERS — 2 Kings 1 (Rev. 19:11–20:15).

As GIVER OF THE SPIRIT — 2 Kings 2:9 (Joh. 14:16–17).

As THE ASCENDED SAVIOR — 2 Kings 2:11 (Luk. 24:51; Act. 1:9).

As THE GIVER OF LIFE — 2 Kings 4:17 (Joh. 6:33, 10:28; 1 Joh. 5:11).

As THE MULTIPLIER OF FOOD — 2 Kings 4:42–44 (Mat. 14:16–21; 15:32–38).

WEEK 17, DAY 3: TODAY'S READING: 2 KINGS 5–8

OVERVIEW:

Healing of Naaman; miracles of Elisha; a great famine and deliverance; further decline of Israel and Judah.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

The healing of the leprous Gentile in 2 Kings 5 is one of the best known stories of the Old Testament. He was a very impressive man, as 5:1 details. He was "captain of the host of the king of Syria," he was a "great" and "honourable" man, had been used as a "deliverer," and was a "mighty man in valour." Wow! Those are some pretty incredible accolades! All of the great statements made about Naaman in verse 1, however, mean absolutely nothing after reading the last phrase of the verse: "but he was a leper." None of his earthly positions and accomplishments could overcome or heal his dreaded and incurable disease. And keep in mind that leprosy in the Bible is consistently a picture of sin. The practical application of verse 1 is, quite simply, that none of our accomplishments or greatness have the ability to overcome the reality of our sin. And as is revealed in this account of Naaman, the cure for sin is always and only a gift from God (Rom. 6:23), revealed by a servant of God. (Rom. 10:14)

After Naaman is told of his potential healing in Israel, he packs up his great possessions, assembles his entourage, and departs for places of power and influence. What he discovers, is that there was no remedy there. Had God's man, Elisha, not called him to his house, Naaman would be left with no hope. Though Naaman's pride initially caused him to reject the remedy offered to him, his ultimate obedience brought healing. It resulted in Naaman going home in peace. (5:19) Hallelujah! Romans 5:1 tells us: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The rest of the story reveals the heart of the servant, Gehazi. As has been discussed on previous occasions, there is a haunting word the often precedes men's names in scripture, that we must avoid at any cost — the word "But." "But Adam.. But Noah... But David," etc., etc., and here we find it again in 5:20; "But Gehazi!" The entire verse says: "But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him." Since Naaman was quite willing to offer great merchandise for his healing (5:5), Gehazi was quite willing to take it! (5:20) After the deception and lies of Gehazi, the judgment of God came upon him. Do recognize, that even in the 21st century, the WORD and WORK of the Lord are still being tarnished by the greed, deception and lies of some so-called "servants" of the Lord. (5:20,25)

In 2 Corinthians 4:18, Paul teaches us that if we can see something with our PHYSICAL eyes... it is TEMPORAL. He goes on to reveal to us, that the things we see through our SPIRITUAL eyes (the eyes of FAITH) are ETERNAL. Paul said that it was that realm into which he was constantly 'looking!' Sadly, the eternal realm is one into which few Christians today have eyes to see — despite the fact that we daily find ourselves in the middle of a real, eternal, spiritual battle. Spiritual beings both dwell and work in the unseen world above our heads — as well as on the earth. (Eph. 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:15; Rom. 8:38) Job 1 tells how they can cause physical effects on the earth and can influence people. Take refuge in the fact, however, that 1 John 4:4 assures us: "greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world!" The Lord Jesus Christ has conquered our enemy in the unseen realm! Colossians 2:15 says, "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he (Christ!) made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." But not only does Satan have powers that do his bidding in the unseen realm, God likewise has ministering spirits

that do His work! In 2 Kings 6, Elisha and a young servant are in a city surrounded by bands of Syrians. Elisha had previously warned King Jehoram of the locations of the Syrians, and on multiple occasions. The Syrians had now compassed the city, terrifying the young man. Without fear, Elisha tells him, "They that be with us are more than they that be with them." (6:16) With his eyes opened to the spiritual realities surrounding him, the young man was then able to see the reality of the battle that Elisha had already seen. The attackers are drawn into the city, blinded, and led to the middle of Samaria. The Syrian bands are surrounded by Israel, given provisions, and sent back to Syria.

A famine then comes to the kingdom of Israel and is blamed on Elisha. In is an interesting case of "like father, like son!" King Jehoram blamed Elisha, just as his father, Ahab, had blamed Elijah for the troubles in Israel. In chapter 7, however, the Lord will cause the Syrians to hear the noise of a great army, causing them to flee, leaving behind a surplus of food and other provisions. God provides plenty for all of the people of the nation, but judges the one man who rejects Elisha's prophecy in unbelief. Note that the Lord can deal with groups and individuals simultaneously!

Chapter 8 continues with the decline of both Israel and Judah. Benhadad, the king of Syria, is murdered by Hazael. Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, begins a short, but very evil reign. The chapter ends with Ahaziah, the son of Jehoram, over Judah; and Joram, the son of Ahab, over Israel. As promised in 1 Kings 19:15-17, judgment is coming! The wicked house of Ahab will soon be destroyed. God's judgment is sure.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As ONE SENT TO THE GENTILES — 2 Kings 5:1–14 (Luk. 4:27).

As HEALER OF LEPROSY — 2 Kings 5:10 (Mat. 8:2-3; Mar. 1:40-41).

As POWERFUL PROTECTOR — 2 Kings 6:16 (Luk. 12:7; 1 Joh. 4:4).

WEEK 17, DAY 4: TODAY'S READING: 2 KINGS 9–12

OVERVIEW:

Jehu executes judgment; Joash is spared and becomes king; Joash repairs the temple.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Two chapters in today's reading deal with Jehu, the king of Israel (Chapters 9 and 10) — and two deal with Joash, the king of Judah. (Chapters 11 and 12) The crazy thing is, both men will actually do God's work — but neither one will do it with a pure heart for God. The results will be short-lived, and obviously, because of their self-promoting motives, the Lord certainly won't receive the glory that is due His name! Once again, recognize that there are many people today who do the Lord's work with the same self-aggrandizing motives, and with the same results. May God spare us from the overarching "last days" characteristic that drives such behavior... "for men shall be lovers of their own selves." (2 Tim. 3:1-2)

Jehu was prophesied by name years earlier by Elijah. (1 Kings 19:16) God intended to use this man to completely remove the lineage of the wicked Ahab. This "promised avenger" could have given great glory to God by fulfilling the purpose for his existence, demonstrating to the world the incredible trustworthiness of God's promises, but he failed to do so because of his extreme cruelty and pride. And do recognize, that just as in the case of Jehu, God has all of us here on a specific mission. Our job is to completely embrace God's purpose for our existence — and to fulfill it! The way Paul said it in Philippians 3:12 is, "But I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." In other words, Paul says, "The Lord Jesus had a specific purpose for my life when He took me into His possession, and I am going to do everything within my power to take that purpose into my possession!" Oh, may that be the passion of every one of us!

In chapter 9, Jehu executes judgment on Joram, the king of Israel, along with Ahaziah, the king of Judah, and Jezebel, the wife of Ahab. In chapter 10, Jehu continues with his judgment upon all of the descendants of Ahab and all of the Baal worshippers in Israel. He accomplishes the tasks with intimidation (10:3-4), ruthlessness (10:14), pride (10:16) and deception. (10:18-19) Jehu is rewarded for removing Baal and the house of Ahab, but because he continued the worship of the golden calf (Are you kidding me?), disregarding the law of the Lord, Israel moves closer to captivity. (10:32)

Chapters 11 and 12 take us to the other kingdom, Judah. When Ahaziah is killed by Jehu — his mother, Athaliah, does one of the most deplorable and despicable acts in all of scripture. She is so incredibly ruthless that she actually kills all of her grandsons so that she can sit her sorry behind on the throne in Judah! I don't know, maybe you have to be grandparent to understand the depth of reprobation that could cause you to do something so inhumane! The Lord hides one baby boy, Joash, from the slaughter. A faithful priest, Jehoiada, raises the boy for six years and then orchestrates his coronation as the king of Judah at the ripe old age of seven! Athaliah is removed from the throne, and Joash (also called Jehoash) becomes king. He is a good king all of the days of Jehoiada, but his demise is explained in 2 Chronicles 24:17: "Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them." We must be very careful and discerning with the counsel we receive and the voices to which we are listening! Joash followed the Lord while Jehoiada lived, but after his death, Joash hearkened to the bad counsel of the princes of Judah. It becomes apparent that the "spiritual discernment" and "commitment to the Lord" that Joash seemed to exercise was never really his own. It wasn't really his own

personal faith, but rather, the faith of Jehoiada. We must be certain that we do what we do because of our own personal faith, and our own surrender to the Lordship of Christ... not that of our pastor, our parents, our discipler, our friends or our fellow-churchmembers. Notice also, that the compromise of Joash led to the severe judgment of God, not only in Joash's life, but in the entire land of Judah. Be reminded, there are far-reaching effects of sin!

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As THE AVENGER — 2 Kings 9:7 (Rev. 6:9).

As THE INTERCESSOR — 2 Kings 11:17 (1 Tim. 2:5; Rom, 8:34).

WEEK 17, DAY 5: TODAY'S READING: 2 KINGS 13–16

OVERVIEW:

Israel is delivered into hand of Syria; the death of Elisha; three good kings in Judah; the final kings of Israel.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

During the period of time covered in today's reading, it gets a little tricky to keep the kings of Judah and Israel straight! For example, both kingdoms have a king named Ahaziah, and both kingdoms have a king named Joash — whose name is sometimes spelled Jehoash. They can be identified, however, by carefully noting over which kingdom they're actually reigning — or by noting the name of their father. For example, King Joash of Judah, the son of Ahaziah, begins his reign in chapter 12 and does that which is right in the sight of the Lord. King Joash of Israel, the son of Jehoahaz, begins his reign in 2 Kings 13:9-11 and does that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.

Something else that becomes somewhat difficult to get our minds wrapped around in today's reading, is that the stories of the two kingdoms are being told in parallel. But the reality is, it would be impossible to record the reigns of the kings and the events of their lives in chronological order, because of how the history of one king sometimes overlaps with one or more of the kings in the other kingdom. Note that the death of Joash, the king of Israel is told in both 2 Kings 13:13 and 2 Kings 14:16, because chapter 13 is telling the story in Israel... and chapter 14 is telling the story in Judah. As was mentioned above, careful reading of the context is definitely required in this section!

The end of chapter 13 records an incredible and beautiful example of the enduring faithfulness of our Lord. Though Israel has repeatedly worshipped Baal and the golden calves, the Lord graciously expresses His compassion on them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The beginning of chapter 14 gives an interesting insight into the effect of a father on his son, and/or the effect of a discipler upon a disciple. Joash started his reign as a good king, through the influence of Jehoiada, the priest. Evidently, the teaching of Jehoiada not only affected Joash, but even reached to his son Amaziah. (2 Tim 2:2) Verse 3 says he did as his father Joash had done — and verse 6 let's us know that he not only knew the commandment of the Lord from the book of Deuteronomy, but he also obeyed it.

Chapter 15 continues with two more good kings of Judah: Azariah (also called Uzziah), and Jotham. Both did that which was right in the sight of the Lord as their father had done. 2 Chronicles 26 reveals that as long as Uzziah sought the Lord, God made him to prosper, but also lets us know that after much success, Uzziah's heart was lifted up to his destruction. May we learn from his example!

Though Judah has a series of good kings, Israel is spiraling downward. Though Jeroboam has outward success, he did that which was evil and never could disconnect himself from idol worship. Zachariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah and Pekah continue in the evil and bring Israel near captivity. Most of these kings are murdered — one even being murdered after only one month on the throne! Menahem is a ruthless and cruel leader. Pekah and his army kill 120,000 men in one day of battle. Yet, in such a dark time, Isaiah prophesies that a virgin will conceive and bear a son, Immanuel. (Isa. 7:14) Isaiah 9 is written at this time to a people in darkness that have seen a great light.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As SAVIOUR – 2 Kings 13:5 (Luk. 2:11; Acts 5:31; 13:23)

As THE RESURRECTION – 2 Kings 13:21 (Joh. 11:25)

As THE BRASEN ALTAR – 2 Kings 16:14 (Heb. 9:14)

WEEK 18, DAY 1: TODAY'S READING: 2 KINGS 17–20

OVERVIEW:

Israel is carried away; the glorious reign of Hezekiah

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Today's reading records for us the judgment of Jeroboam's sin in Israel. God has consistently warned, both through his prophets and through the display of His righteous judgment upon other nations, and yet, the warning has been to no avail. But now, the hammer of God's judgment falls. Twenty kings over a period of 200 years have had countless opportunities to repent and obey the word of the Lord, but it has totally gone unheeded. Psalm 86:5 reminds us: "For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee." The Lord had sent prophets to let them know just how "ready" He was "to forgive," but 2 Kings 17:14 gives the heart of the matter: "They would not hear!" The next verse tells us that "... they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them, that they should not do like them." (17:15) The consistent pattern in scripture teaches us that God's judgment comes upon our lives because of our persistence to continue follow our own stubborn will and way. Proverbs 29:1 says: "He, that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

Chapters 18 through 20 reveal the life of a king that was unlike any others in the land of Judah. Rather than trusting his own will and way, this king actually "trusted in the Lord God." (18:5) Hezekiah accomplished great things in Judah! He destroyed the idolatry; he conquered the Philistines; he resisted the Assyrians; and he fortified his city and he built great water works. But his real legacy is found in the statement of 18:3 and 7: "And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did... And the Lord was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth: and he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not."

Hezekiah's life was not without troubles though! His faith and dependence on the Lord was severely tested. His trust in the Lord was specifically challenged and publicly ridiculed by the messengers from Assyria. The messengers spoke scornfully concerning his religious reforms. Notice, however, that Hezekiah's immediate response to trouble was seeking God through His word... and prayer. Oh, once again, may we learn from his incredible example! The answer returns: "Be not afraid... I will cause him to fall." (19:6-7) When a threatening letter came from the king of Assyria, once again, Hezekiah immediately took it to the Lord in prayer. God lets him know that He had heard his prayer, and answers: "... the king of Assyria, he shall not come into this city!" (19: 32) Because of Hezekiah's faithful walk and relationship with the Lord, He miraculously delivers him and the land of Judah.

In chapter 20, Hezekiah's faith is tested once again, this time through his health. Verse 6 reveals that this time of trial comes during the conflicts with the king of Assyria. His public challenges were compounded by his private health issues. Hezekiah's response was simple... and consistent: "he... prayed!" (20:2)

Through the trials and life of Hezekiah, God is able to teach us what in looks like in "real life" to walk with the Lord, and to trust in Him. Note some of the Psalms that Hezekiah exemplified through his life...

52 WEEKS OF PURSUIT

Psalm 18:3 – As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him.

Psalm 20:7 – Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.

Psalm 25:2 – O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me.

Psalm 32:10 – Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about.

Psalm 33:21 – For our heart shall rejoice in him, because we have trusted in his holy name.

Psalm 44:6 – For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me.

Psalm 56:11 – In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.

Psalm 118:8 – It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man.

Psalm 143:8 – Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee.

Like Hezekiah, may our lives reflect that same kind of bold trust in our trustworthy God!

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As TEACHER – 2 Kings 17:27 (Mar. 4:1; Joh. 3:2)

As the CLEANSER OF THE TEMPLE – 2 Kings 18:4 (Mat. 21:12; Mar. 11:15; Joh. 2:15)

As a MAN OF PRAYER – 2 Kings 19:15 (Joh. 17; Mat. 26:39; Luke 5:16; 22:32)

WEEK 18, DAY 2: TODAY'S READING: 2 KINGS 21–25

OVERVIEW:

Wicked Manasseh and Amon; the last good King, Josiah; four more evil kings; the Babylonian captivity.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

The righteous leadership of Hezekiah for which we were refreshingly able to rejoice in yesterday's reading is quickly replaced by the overwhelming evil of his son, Manasseh. Though we read of his later repentance in 2 Chronicles 33, Jeremiah 15:4 says that the kingdom would be removed because of the deeds of Manasseh in Jerusalem. The deeds of a leader (husband, father, teacher, pastor) have a far-reaching effect for good or for bad.

Josiah, the last good king, did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. He had chosen to do right and restore the temple before the book of the law was found. The knowledge he received from the word of God would not have been revealed to him, however, had Josiah not already chosen to do right! God reveals to us in 2 Peter 1:5-7, that virtue (choosing to do right, and doing it!) is to be added to our faith, before beginning to add knowledge. If we have not already purposed in our hearts to follow the instruction of the Lord, what need is there to accumulate more knowledge?

With the "new knowledge" received from the "newly discovered" books of the Law, Josiah humbles himself before the Lord, makes a covenant to the Lord in the presence of all the people, and begins to cleanse the temple and the land. He is used of God to remove the idols and the high places of worship in Jerusalem. Interestingly, notice that he carries the items of sin across the brook Kidron, destroys them, and then scatters the ashes on old graves. The Lord Jesus Christ crossed the very same brook, Kidron (or, Cedron), on the way to become sin for us on the cross — where they would be buried in His grave! (Joh. 18:1)

Josiah continues his cleansing reforms — and goes to Bethel to destroy the golden calf set up by Jeroboam. The idol worship that plagued the children of Israel throughout their entire history is finally destroyed by the one who was prophesied by name. The Lord tells us concerning Josiah in 2 Kings 23:25: "And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him." It is almost unbelievable, that not until Josiah, did any king ever go up to destroy the golden calf!

After such an incredible example set by Josiah, surprisingly enough, not a single one of the final four kings follow in his footsteps. As seen in today's reading, all four of them are weak, evil kings, who are actually controlled by other foreign kings. Because of the evil of Manasseh, the Lord will not spare Judah. The leaders, the people, and the treasures that should have been dedicated to the Lord, are carried away to serve the Babylonians in captivity.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As the PROCLAIMER OF THE WORD — 2 Kings 23:2 (Luk. 4:16)

As the ONE PROMISED BY NAME — 1 Kings 13:2 & 2 Kings 22:1 (Mat. 1:21-23; Luk. 2:21)

As the PASSOVER — 2 Kings 23:21 (1 Cor. 5:7; Joh. 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:19)

As the INNOCENT BLOOD OF JERUSALEM — 2 Kings 24:4 (Mat. 27:4; Act. 13:28)

WEEK 18, DAY 3: TODAY'S READING: 1 CHRONICLES 1-3

OVERVIEW:

Jesus' lineage through Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel (Jacob), Judah, and David.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

At first glance, it appears that the Book of 1 Chronicles is simply a repeat of 1 and 2 Samuel... and that 2 Chronicles is a repeat of 1 and 2 Kings, but there are some significant differences!

Whereas Samuel and Kings emphasize the HISTORICAL side of things, Chronicles emphasizes the SPIRITUAL.

Whereas Samuel and Kings are seen from the HUMAN standpoint, Chronicles is seen from the DIVINE standpoint.

Whereas Samuel and Kings are presented from the viewpoint of the PROPHETS, Chronicles is presented from the viewpoint of the PRIESTS.

Whereas Samuel and Kings show MAN RULING, Chronicles shows GOD OVERRULING.

Chronicles primarily concentrates on the reign of David and his successors, and on the temple and its worship. It includes information not previously covered concerning the priests, the Levites, the musicians, singers, and doorkeepers. It goes into detail concerning transporting the Ark to Jerusalem, and the preparation for the building of the Temple. The northern kingdom is of little significance in Chronicles. In fact, the northern tribes are only mentioned in connection with their dealings with David's reign.

1 Chronicles opens with the longest genealogical history in the entire Bible. It continues on for nine solid chapters! Needless to say, the next several days' readings will not qualify for the award for "The Most Heart-Warming and Life-Changing Devotional Passage of the 52 Weeks of Pursuit!" However, always remember Proverbs 30:5, "Every word of God is pure," and every word is there for a reason! These chapters are in our Bible to provide us the historical basis of our faith. As Bruce Wilkinson said, "The opening chapters of 1 Chronicles form the skeletal framework of the entire Old Testament. They bind the Old Testament together into a unified whole, showing that it is in fact history and not merely legend or myth. From Adam to Abraham, Boaz to Benjamin, the generations are all there in their proper order to show the outworking of God's plan and purposes through the years and in the lives of men and women of faith." What these chapters teach us, if nothing else, is that God has a plan: A plan for the earth, the universe, Israel, and your life!

A very basic overview of the first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles is as follows:

- The genealogy from Adam to Abraham. (1:1–27)
- The genealogy from Abraham to Israel. (1:28–54)
- The genealogy of the Descendants of Israel. (Chapters 2–8)
 - * Judah (2:1–4:23)
 - * Simeon (4:24–43)

- * Reuben, Gad, half the tribe of Manasseh East of Jordan (Chpt. 5)
- * Levi (Chpt. 6)
- * Issachar (7:1–5)
- * Benjamin (7:6–12)
- * Naphtali (7:13)
- * Half tribe of Manasseh West of Jordan (7:14–19)
- * Ephraim (7:20–29)
- * Asher (7:30–40)
- * Benjamin (Chpt. 8)
- Those Who Returned From Captivity (9:1–34)
- The Genealogy of Saul (9:35–44)

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

In the FIRST ADAM – I Chronicles 1:1 (Christ is the LAST or SECOND ADAM. We have eternal life because the last Adam was a quickening, or “life-giving” spirit – 1 Cor. 15:45,47).

Through the genealogy of DAVID – I Chronicles 3:1–24 (Christ, the Son of God was also called the Son of David – Matt. 1:1; Luke 3:23–38; Rom. 1:3)

WEEK 18, DAY 4: TODAY'S READING: 1 CHRONICLES 4–6

OVERVIEW:

The descendants of Solomon, Judah, Simeon, Reuben, Gad, Manasseh and Levi; Temple singers and keepers appointed; the descendants of Aaron; the cities of the Levites.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we read through what seems to be a never-ending genealogy today, rejoice in the underlying message: God doesn't view mankind as simply a mass of humanity! He is interested in each individual—and knows us all by name! Hallelujah! God takes the time in these chapters to make sure that the name of every single priest and Levite, along with the family and tribe to which he belonged, was specifically registered and mentioned. (Exo. 33:17)

Of particular note in chapter 4 is this man Jabez. God stops when He gets to his name to interject an incredible statement and about him. Verse 9 of chapter 4 says that he "was more honorable than his brethren!" One of the reasons he was "more honorable" is, no doubt, not only the fact THAT he prayed, but HOW he prayed. Our Lord reveals to us in this passage that Jabez had a beautiful fourfold request, and it was of such significance that God chose to record it for us in verse 10:

- 1) "Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed..."
- 2) "and enlarge my coast..."
- 3) "and that thine hand might be with me..."
- 4) "and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!"

Verse 10 concludes with this monumental statement: "And God granted him that which he requested." Verse 10 is not held up as a "model prayer" as such, but its content is well worth incorporating into our prayers! It is obvious that Jabez was a man who lived in pursuit of God, and that God rewarded him for it. May God strengthen us to follow his example as we continue the "52 Weeks of Pursuit!"

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

In the CITIES OF REFUGE – 1 Chronicles 6:57,67,69 (To find protection from the avenger of blood, a person had to flee to a city of refuge. Likewise, God provided His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ as the Refuge to whom we must flee to find protection from His judgment against sin — John 3:14–18;10:24–30; Gal. 2:16; 3:1-14; Heb. 10:1–18; 1 John 2:2; Rev. 1:5; Heb. 6:18)

WEEK 18, DAY 5: TODAY'S READING: 1 CHRONICLES 7-9

OVERVIEW:

A continuation of Israel's descendants: Issachar, Benjamin, Naphtali, half-tribe of Manasseh west of the Jordan, Ephraim, Asher, Benjamin; those who returned from captivity; the genealogy of Saul.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

The genealogy continues today bringing us through the remainder of the descendants of Israel: Issachar (7:1–5), Benjamin (7:6–12), Naphtali (7:13), the half-tribe of Manasseh west of the Jordan (7:14–19), Ephraim (7:20–29), Asher (7:30–40), Benjamin (Chapter 8). Chapter 9, then, gives us the record of those who returned from captivity (9:1–34), and then, the descendants of Saul. (9:35–44)

A particular phrase that is mentioned twice in chapter 7 is well worth noting: Chapter 7 and verse 11 talks about the number of the "... soldiers FIT to go out for war and battle;" and chapter 7 and verse 40 talks about the number of the "mighty men of valour... that were apt to the WAR and to battle." You might want to note that the word "apt" is also translated in the Bible as "prepared;" "ready;" and "willing." You might also want to note that the New Testament is very specific in letting us know that as believers in Jesus Christ, we, too, are SOLDIERS (2 Tim. 2:3) who are engaged in an incredible "WAR" or "BATTLE." (2 Tim. 2:4; 2 Cor. 10:3). With that reality in mind, we would do well to consider: If God were making a list today of the number of New Testament "soldiers" and "mighty men and women of valour" who are "fit" and "apt to the war and to battle" like He did here in 1 Chronicles 7, would our name be included in that number? Ephesians 6:10–17 lets us know that the number includes only those who "STAND" in the victory Christ has already won, having on "THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD." Are you "FIT" and "APT" for the "WAR" we call the Christian life?

Chapter 9 and verse 2 says, "Now the first inhabitants that dwelt in their possessions in their cities were, the Israelites, the priests, Levites, and the Nethinims." The "Nethinims" were very simply the "Temple servants." Their job was simply to do whatever needed to be done. Because of their love for the Lord, they didn't need the limelight—they were willing to work behind the scenes so that the work of the Lord could go forward! Oh, may God use us to be as the Nethinims! Verse 28 says of the Levites, "and certain of them had the charge of the ministering vessels, that they should bring them in and out by tale (or, count)." Again, from an earthly standpoint, the job God entrusted to them doesn't really seem to be all that significant. Others, according to verse 29 and 30 "were appointed to oversee the vessels and all the instruments of the sanctuary, and the fine flour, and the wine, and the oil, and the frankincense, and the spices. And some of the sons of the priests made the ointment of the spices." And again, from the mind of a natural man, these responsibilities are hardly worth mentioning. But to God, each individual fulfilling their role and completing their personal assignment was well worth mentioning, because God knew that every individual was key for what He intended for the service of the Tabernacle!

May we learn from these Old Testament servants that whatever God has called us to do in His service—however insignificant it may appear to others, and however insignificant it may sometimes even feel to us—it is extremely significant to Him! He is simply looking for us to faithfully carry out the assignment to which we have been entrusted. The way Paul said it in Philippians 3:12 is: "... but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." In other words, "I'm going to live my life in constant pursuit of taking into my possession—the purpose God had in taking me into His possession!" The New Testament teaches that God has given all of us a MINISTRY to fulfill in the CHURCH and a MISSION to fulfill in the WORLD. To fulfill these

responsibilities according to God's design, He has entrusted each of us with a composite of key resources to utilize in fulfilling our intended purpose. He has given each of us spiritual gifts, along with our natural, and yet, God-given talents and abilities. He has given to us our individual personality, and within our personality, has made us passionate about certain things. And all along the way through the course of our life, God has allowed us to encounter many different people and experience many different things. All of these various components are not random—these are all the specific things God has orchestrated and is orchestrating in our lives to direct us into an understanding of the specific kingdom assignment He intends us to fulfill.

Regardless of how insignificant we may think our value to His kingdom may be, God views our responsibility as a sacred trust, and vital to His will and work in and through the Body of Christ! We all must play our position! We all must fulfill our role! God has called each of us to embrace the stewardship of these incredible resources, and do one thing with them: be FAITHFUL! (1 Cor. 4:1–2) Always keep in mind that you are as vital to the Body of Christ in your local church, as any member of your physical body is to you! There are no insignificant individuals—and there are no insignificant responsibilities.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

In JERUSALEM (which means, “Foundation of peace”) — 1 Chronicles 9:3. (Christ is the only foundation of peace upon which man can stand before God – 1 Cor. 3:11; John 14:27; 2 Cor. 5:18; Eph. 2:14)

WEEK 19, DAY 1: TODAY'S READING: 1 CHRONICLES 10-13

OVERVIEW:

The death of Saul and his sons; David made king over Judah; Israel anoints David king; David takes Jebus (Jerusalem) as the capital city of the kingdom; David's first attempt to bring the Ark into Jerusalem.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

The seemingly endless genealogy ended in chapter 9, and now God is wanting to bring us into the reign of David as Israel's king. To do so, however, He must make the transition from the reign of Saul. Chapter 10 makes that transition, as it gives us the record of Saul's death. The parallel account of the death of Saul and his sons is found in 1 Samuel 31:1–13. The reason for Saul's death is found in verses 13 and 14 of 1 Chronicles 10:

- 1) He was not obedient to the Word of God. (1 Samuel 13 and 15 provide the details).
- 2) He consulted a medium, or witch. (1 Samuel 28 provides the details).

In chapter 11, David is anointed as Israel's king in Hebron. This is a classic case of "the third time being the charm," as this is now the third time David has been anointed. The first anointing was done privately by Samuel (1 Sam. 16:13), and the second was done publicly as king over Judah (2 Sam. 2:4).

Note the key responsibilities God gave to David as Israel's leader in chapter 11 and verse 2: "Thou shalt FEED my people Israel, and thou shalt be RULER over my people Israel." In simple terms, David's responsibilities are much like those given to those who are called to provide oversight of God's people in the church: FEED... and LEAD! (See Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1–3)

The first item on David's agenda after being anointed king was to secure a capital for the kingdom. Chapter 11 verses 4–9 explain how Jerusalem was taken, and how that in accordance with David's promise for whoever was instrumental in removing the Jebusites out of Jerusalem being promoted to the captain of David's army, Joab was installed as the commander. Verse 10 of chapter 11 begins a long list of the "mighty men" in David's army. It is interesting to note the accomplishments of the various men who comprise this list.

Whereas chapter 11 identifies the INDIVIDUALS who were key in David's army, chapter 12 identifies the number of mighty men from each of the TRIBES. Chapter 12 and verse 38 lets us know why all of these men were so "mighty"—and why they were so mightily used in David's army: "All these men of war, that could keep rank, came with a perfect heart to Hebron, to make David king over all Israel." These four qualities provide a great list for what every church should be looking for when filling positions of leadership within the church:

- 1) Men who understand SPIRITUAL WARFARE
("all these men of war" – 12:38a).
- 2) Men who understand SPIRITUAL TEAMWORK
("that could keep rank" – 12:38b).
- 3) Men who manifest SPIRITUAL MATURITY
("came with a perfect heart" – 12:38c).

- 4) Men who manifest SPIRITUAL SUBMISSION TO LEADERSHIP
("to make David king over all Israel" – 12:38d).

Chapter 13 records David's first attempt to bring the Ark back into his newly acquired capital, Jerusalem. Remember, the Ark had been completely neglected during the reign of Saul—and keep in mind that the Ark represented God's presence. What is sad, is that for 20 years, nobody seemed to miss it! David, however, is zealous to see God's presence, as it was represented in the Ark, restored to its rightful place in Israel's camp. It is, however, a great lesson on how doing the right thing with the right motives, but done in the wrong way will always be disastrous, and in many cases, as in this one, deadly!

Notice that the Ark was placed on a "new cart." (13:7) Apparently, David wanted it to be "special" because of what it represented. But the cart hit an uneven place in the road, the Ark began to fall, and when well-meaning Uzza reached out to steady it to keep it from hitting the ground, he was immediately zapped—just as Numbers 4:15 said he would! You see, God had specifically given Israel instruction concerning transporting the Ark so that this very thing would not happen! (Exo. 25:12–14; Num. 7:9) What began as a glorious celebration at the beginning of this chapter, ends like a funeral procession—with David very discouraged, disappointed, and even somewhat disillusioned. Again, a great reminder that God says what He means, and means what He says, and no amount of good intentions override obedience to what He has specifically spoken in His Word!

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

In DAVID, the ANOINTED KING — I Chronicles 11:3. (Christ is the "Anointed of God" who will sit on the Throne of David as KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS – Rev. 19:16; Luke 1:32)

WEEK 19, DAY 2: TODAY'S READING: 1 CHRONICLES 14-17

OVERVIEW:

King Hiram's blessing upon David; the Philistines defeated; the Ark is brought to Jerusalem; David's psalm of thanksgiving; David's desire to build the Temple; David is forbidden to build the Temple; God makes a covenant with David (the Davidic Covenant).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

At the end of yesterday's reading in I Chronicles 13, David was a discouraged, dejected, defeated, and disillusioned man. The excitement that was in his heart to see God's presence, represented in the Ark, restored to its rightful place in Jerusalem had caused a great positive ground-swell of spiritual excitement amongst the people—yet it had all come to a screeching halt with the tragic death of Uzza. David had even changed his mind about wanting the Ark returned to Jerusalem, and had it stored in the house of Obededom. That's how disillusioned he had actually become. The Ark remained there for three months, but upon seeing the blessing of God that had come upon the house of Obededom and "all that he had" because the Ark was in his home (13:14), it was enough to convince David that regardless of the cost, the Ark in Israel's capital was non-negotiable.

The narrative concerning bringing the Ark into Jerusalem will pick up again in chapter 15, but first, chapter 14 provides some parenthetical information to help us to understand more about David and his reign.

Without providing any commentary, 14:3 very straightforwardly states, "And David took more wives at Jerusalem." This practice was common among ancient kings, and, in fact, had come, not only to be ACCEPTED by the people—but almost EXPECTED as a sign of their ruler's royalty and prestige. Regardless of how the people viewed it or regarded it—it was clearly against the law of God! At times it may seem that God is somewhat lenient in the Old Testament concerning this practice, but a closer look into the harvest of sorrows David and others like him reaped in their families proves different, teaching us the principle once again, that there are always consequences to sin! We must be certain that the world's acceptability of sin in the 21st century does not influence us to violate God's holy Word, or His holy calling upon our lives!

Upon hearing that David was now Israel's king, the Philistines thought they might try their hand against David's army. David spanked them like a two-year old at Walmart, even to the point that the gods they were carrying and trusting to give them the victory were dropped on the ground so they could run away in more haste. (14:12) Call me crazy, but I certainly don't want to put my trust in any "god" that can be dropped like a hot potato on a field of battle—and can be burned!

Note, however, that David "enquired of God" before leading the troops into battle. (14:10) He wanted to make certain that this was completely the will of God. Note also, that when the Philistines returned to do battle (14:13), "David enquired again of God." (14:14) God's previous "go ahead" was no guarantee of a "go ahead" today! We must learn to pray about everything, asking for God's specific guidance in and for every decision. God did give David the "go ahead," but revealed a very particular battle plan to achieve the victory. It is interesting to note that this battle plan would not have been revealed to David had he not "enquired again of God!" What clear direction from the Lord might we be forfeiting, simply because we fail to enquire of Him? (Jam. 4:2b)

As chapter 15 begins, David is once again moving to get the Ark in its proper place. It's the same exact thing he sought to do in chapter 13, but this time it was being done, what we like to call the "BIBLICAL way!" David realized that they had received God's judgment upon them (at Uzza's expense), because they "sought him not after the due order," or in other words, "because we didn't ask God how He wanted us to do it!" This time, David made sure that the right people were carrying the Ark (15:2), that they were properly prepared for the task (15:12), and that it was being carried the right way. (15:15) Once the Ark was in its proper place (16:1), the priority of worship was once again restored to Israel. (16:1-6) David then offered a psalm of thanks to the Lord. It is a composite of Psalms 105:1-15; 96:1-13; 106:1,47-48.

Chapter 17 is divided into three basic sections:

- 1) David's desire to build God a house. (17:1--2)
- 2) God's determination to build David a house. (17:3-15)
- 3) David's humble prayer of response. (17:16-27)

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

Through the EXALTATION AND FAME OF ISRAEL'S KING (DAVID) – I Chronicles 14:17 (Phil. 2:9-11; Rom. 14:11)

Through DAVID, THE SHEPHERD-KING – I Chronicles 17:7 (Matt. 1:1-2; Rom. 1:3; John 10:11; Rev. 19:16)

WEEK 19, DAY 3: TODAY'S READING: 1 CHRONICLES 18-21

OVERVIEW:

The extension of David's kingdom through his victories in battle; David's sin in numbering the people; God's judgment upon Israel for David's sin.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

It will be helpful to understand that the events that God summarizes for us in chapters 18, 19 and 20 took place historically AFTER David was made king (chapter 12), but BEFORE the Ark had been brought to Jerusalem. (chapters 13–17) David's life in these three chapters reads more like the campaigns of a World War II General than "the man after God's own heart." They provide ample understanding of why God refused to allow David to build the Temple, saying, "Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight." (1 Chron. 22:8)

Whereas in yesterday's reading we saw that David had made a horrific blunder in multiplying WIVES for himself (14:3), chapter 18 and verse 4 records yet another failure of David to obey the laws God had laid down for Israel's kings in Deuteronomy 17:15–17. This time he multiplied HORSES. God's prohibition for not multiplying wives is obvious, however, the prohibition for not multiplying horses is somewhat unclear. Apparently, God knows that it is somehow associated with the development of a spirit of pride within human leaders. David's pride will blossom in chapter 21.

Note in chapter 18, that while David's enemies were the recipients of the execution of David's wrath (18:1–15), God's people enjoyed the execution of David's righteousness and justice. (18:14)

The first part of chapter 19 is a great example of the 21st century tongue-in-cheek proverb: "No good deed goes unpunished." What David fully intended to be a blessing to the son of king Nahash at the death of his father, is turned into an incredible fiasco by the newly installed king's "cabinet of advisors" called "princes." (19:3) Through their "profound insight" and ability to "discern the motives of David's heart," they counsel the king concerning David's "ill-intentioned motives," and by the time it's all said and done, what could have been the beginning of a great relationship, ended with the death of 47,000 soldiers! (19:18-19) A great lesson for us about thinking we have the ability to discern people's motives and/or hearts—and a great warning to us about listening to people who think they can!

From a chronological standpoint, 1 Chronicles 20 coincides with 2 Samuel 12, and is that time when David became involved with Bathsheba. Whereas 2 Samuel 12 records David's sin and restoration, in keeping with the rest of 1 and 2 Chronicles, the sin is not recorded here.

In chapter 21, the usually humble David is lifted up with the pride of the Devil. He instructs Joab, the commander of his army to number the people. Joab recognizes that David is battling his pride and that taking this census would bring sin into the kingdom—so he appeals to David, saying (in effect), "Listen, boss, if the motive here is to find out how many subjects are in your kingdom, let it be enough to know that there are a whole lot of 'em, and that they ALL love you and are your servants! You don't need to know how many there are. All finding out is going to do is lead to a bunch of problems!" David, however, had made up his mind. He was going to do what "HE" wanted to do! And he did.

Numbering the people displeased the Lord, and brought His immediate judgment upon Israel. (21:7) Though David had "sinned greatly," the good news is, he was quick to humble himself and take ownership of his sin. (21:8) The bad news is, his sin did not just result in the death of one man, as in Uzza's case, but the death of 70,000 men!!! Imagine the devastation felt by 70,000 families in Israel! Though God graciously forgave David of his sin, imagine how hard it would have been for 70,000 families to forgive their king because of his insistence upon exalting his foolish pride. And it is yet another tragic and graphic reminder that the consequences of sin often have devastating effects on many innocent people.

Through the "seer" (i.e. "prophet"—1 Sam. 9:9), the Lord instructed David to acquire the threshingfloor of Ornan (21:18), upon which to build an altar and to offer sacrifices. Through the sacrifices, the judgment of God upon Israel was stayed. This threshingfloor would later become the site of the Temple. (2 Chron. 3:1)

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

Through the ALTAR David built to sacrifice unto the Lord so that Israel might be restored to a right relationship with God — I Chronicles 21:18,26 (Only through Christ can we be restored to a right relationship with God — Rom. 3:24).

WEEK 19, DAY 4: TODAY'S READING: 1 CHRONICLES 22-25

OVERVIEW:

David's preparation for the construction of the Temple; David's instructions and charge to Solomon; David's enlisting of the leaders of Israel to support Solomon in the project; the duties of the Levites; the duties assigned to the priests, and to the musicians and singers.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As yesterday's reading came to a conclusion in 1 Chronicles 21, David had just acquired the threshingfloor of Ornan and had built an altar to offer sacrifices. As chapter 22 begins, David recognizes that this threshingfloor would be the site for Temple that he had longed to be able to build for the Lord. Though he was not permitted by the Lord to oversee its actual construction, he was given the incredibly wonderful and joyful privilege of planning and preparing for the building of it.

David realized that at Solomon's young age (he was approximately 20 at the time), he would need some help in preparing for something of this magnitude and magnificence. (22:5) David said, "The house that is to be builded for the Lord must (Notice, not "should," but "must!") be exceeding (and you've gotta love this word...) MAGNIFICAL!" And notice again, not just "MAGNIFICAL," but "EXCEEDING MAGNIFICAL(!!!), of fame and of glory throughout all countries." (22:5) In other words, "There must not be any structure... anywhere... in any country... on the entire planet... that has the magnificence of the Lord's house!" And David continues in verse 5, "I will therefore now make preparation for it." And it's as if David is saying, "I may not be able to build it, but I can certainly plan for its magnificence!" And verse 5 concludes with the statement, "So David prepared abundantly before his death." Note that this verse teaches us a great principle of life: There may be dreams we have in our hearts that God never actually allows us to accomplish, and yet, we may be mightily used of the Lord to joyfully make preparations for someone else (maybe as in David's case, one of our children, or perhaps, one of our spiritual children!) to accomplish through their life!

In chapter 22, verses 6–13, David explained to Solomon his vision for building the Temple, and how that God had reshaped and redirected the vision to be fulfilled through his son. He walks Solomon through what we now refer to as, "The Davidic Covenant," and charges Solomon with the vision and responsibility for the project, and pronounces his blessing upon him. In 22:14–16, David informs Solomon of all of the materials he had already accumulated for the project, and then in 22:17–19, David commands all of the leaders of Israel to get behind Solomon in this glorious and monumental task. The chapter ends with David's challenge and charge to his son, Solomon, and all of the leaders of Israel, "Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD your God; arise therefore, and build ye the sanctuary of the LORD God, to bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and the holy vessels of God, into the house that is to be built to the name of the LORD."

It's hard to imagine, but in great "Laodicean" fashion, rather than making the admonition of his father to build the Temple his first priority, Solomon put his personal interests first, and didn't even begin the project until the fourth year of his reign! During those four years, however, he began to accumulate quite a barrage of chariots, horses, not to mention wives! (See 2 Chron. 1:14; 3:1–2; 1 Kings 10:26–11:4) God had clearly prohibited these very things for Israel's kings in Deuteronomy 17:16–18.

52 WEEKS OF PURSUIT

In the list of David's lifetime accomplishments, something that is often overlooked are his efforts to organize the tribe of Levi for effective ministry in the Temple. (Chapters 23–25) Though seldom mentioned, this work was of tremendous spiritual significance!

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

Through SOLOMON, THE SON OF DAVID, ISRAEL'S KING – 1 Chronicles 23:1 (Luke 1:32; Matt. 21:9)

WEEK 19, DAY 5: TODAY'S READING: 1 CHRONICLES 26-29

OVERVIEW:

The divisions of the porters (gate keepers), the treasurers and other officers; the divisions of Israel's military; David's challenge to the leaders of Israel to the work of the Temple; David's charge to Solomon to build the Temple; David's gifts for the Temple; David's offering of praise to the Lord; the people's offering of praise of the Lord; Solomon's official installation as Israel's king; the death of David.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we move into chapters 26 and 27 today, the major portion of these two chapters is consumed with the listing of names. In the midst of a genealogy, or lists of names such as this, when not studying the names to determine biblical time-lines and/or family connections, it's quite interesting to just observe the brief comments God inspired the writers of Scripture to interject. For example, chapter 26 and verse 4 begins, "Moreover the sons of Obededom were..." and the remainder of verse 4 and 5 lists their names. However, at the end of verse 5, God just drops in this little statement, "for God blessed him." And that's that. But do you remember why God blessed Obededom? Remember, he was the one who sheltered the Ark after the death of Uzza back in 1 Chronicles 13. He was blessed because the presence of God (represented in the Ark) was manifest in his life and in his home. (13:14) We, too, will be blessed like Obededom when God's presence is manifest in and through our lives and in our homes.

Notice also God's commentary on Obededom's sons and grandsons. Verse 6 says, "... they were mighty men of valour." Verse 7 says, "... [they] were strong men." And verse 8 adds, "they... [were] able men for strength and for service." Most pastors all over the world would tell you that what is lacking, but so desperately needed in the church in the Laodicean Period, is "strong MEN!" That doesn't mean men who are extroverts, or intimidating men, cocky men, dominating men or men who are "successful" by the world's standards. Remember, we have been called to be strong—BUT(!!!) not in our own strength! Ephesians 6:10 commands us to "be strong IN THE LORD!" And remember, HIS "STRENGTH is made perfect in WEAKNESS!" (2 Cor. 12:9) Real biblical "strength," and biblically "strong" men are paradoxical. Their "strength" is manifested through their "weakness." We must be very discerning!

As the search was being made for "mighty men of valour," compare the statement in 1 Chronicles 26:31, "... they were sought for, and there were found," with the statement made in Ezekiel 22:30, where God says, "And I SOUGHT FOR A MAN among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land that I should not destroy it: BUT I FOUND NONE!" As God is seeking "mighty men (and women) of valour" as He did in 26:31, may He find you and me!

Chapter 27 lays out the military leaders and governmental structure of the nation. Note that the army was comprised of over a quarter of a million soldiers, 288,000 to be exact—with 24,000 on duty each month. As we make our way through chapter 27 and on in to chapter 28 and verse 1, it is more than apparent that this was not a rag-tag band of soldiers, but a highly organized and regimented military operation. In chapter 28, verses 1–8, David addresses all of the leaders about how the whole thing had actually unfolded concerning the building of the Temple, and enlists their support of Solomon and the incredible project at hand. In verses 9 and 10, David addresses Solomon himself. In doing so, David presents four things: a command, a promise, a warning, and an exhortation:

1) The COMMAND:

"Know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart." (28:9a)

Note that Solomon could know ABOUT God from his father David, but to KNOW HIM would require that Solomon be acquainted with God on a personal basis himself! Understanding who Solomon's mother was, you understand why David would tell his son, "serve [the Lord] with a PERFECT heart." (Matt. 1:6) I'm quite certain David wished he had!

2) The PROMISE:

"If thou seek him, he will be found of thee." (28:9b) It's a reminder of the theme verse of our 52 Weeks of Pursuit, "But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul." (Deut. 4:29)

3) The WARNING:

"But if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever." (28:9c)

4) The EXHORTATION:

"Take heed now; for the Lord hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong and do it." (28:10) That was David's admonition to his son concerning his commission. It fits perfectly with the commission we have received from the Lord (Matt. 28:18–20): "Be strong and do it!"

As we come into chapter 29, it is the record of the end of David's life. David's life ends just as it had begun. He is a humble man, with an incredible heart for God. In verses 1–5, he tells the people that he not only had been setting aside money from the national budget for the great work of the Temple, but also from his own personal finances. He challenged all the people to do likewise. Notice their response in verse 6–10: Verse 6 says, they "offered willingly!" (29:6) Verse 9 says, "Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly to the Lord: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy." (29:9) May that willingness to joyfully give to the Lord's work be found in each of us.

In verses 10–19, David blessed the Lord his God, and then in verse 20, challenged the people to do the same. Note their response in verses 20–22: "And all the congregation blessed the Lord God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads, and worshipped the Lord, and the king. And they sacrificed sacrifices unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings unto the Lord, on the morrow after that day, even a thousand bullocks, a thousand rams, and a thousand lambs, with their drink offerings, and sacrifices in abundance for all Israel: And did eat and drink before the Lord on that day with great gladness." Solomon is then formally installed as the new king, and 1 Chronicles ends with a brief summary of David's reign: "And he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour." (29:28)

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

Through the TEMPLE TREASURES – 1 Chronicles 26:20–28 (Colossians 2:2–3 says of Christ: "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.")

WEEK 20, DAY 1: TODAY'S READING: 2 CHRONICLES 1-4

OVERVIEW:

Solomon's sacrifices; God's appearance to Solomon in a dream; Solomon's choice of wisdom and knowledge; Solomon's accumulation of chariots, horses, horsemen, silver and gold; Solomon builds the Temple; the Temple furnishings.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we begin the Book of 2 Chronicles today, keep in mind that this Book spans a whopping 427 years! To help us get that in perspective, it would be the equivalent of chronicling the high points of history since around the beginning of the 17th century! That's quite a long period of time! The period covers 19 kings...10 of which were bad, seven that were good, and two that were good—but became bad (i.e. Solomon and Joash). As is always the case, as go the leaders, so go the people—until finally the nation had so apostatized that they are carried off into captivity. The Book does end, however, with a ray of hope.

As chapter one begins, the reign of Solomon is established as he sets a priority on worship. (1:6) God appears to Solomon in a dream (1:7 c.f. 1 Kings 3:5), and says, "Ask what I shall give thee." In other words, "Ask Me for anything you want, and it's as good as yours!" Solomon humbly asks for something that brought great pleasure to the Lord. Understanding the enormity of the task of leading God's people, he simply asks for the wisdom and knowledge to rule them properly. Because he wasn't selfish in asking for personal gain, God tells him, "I will give thee riches, and wealth and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like." (1:12) We might call this, however, "the curse of God's blessing"—because quite simply, Solomon wasn't prepared spiritually to handle the stewardship of God's incredible material blessing upon his life. God had made abundantly clear in Deuteronomy 17 that the kings of Israel were not to multiply to themselves silver and gold; they were not to do business with Egypt to multiply horses (or for any other reason!), and they were not to multiply wives. (Deut. 17:16–17) Verses 13–17 of 2 Chronicles 1 reveals that he violated all three of those commands, and 1 Kings 3:1 reveals that he violated another of God's commands by going down to make an "affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter," and made her his wife.

Obviously, all of these things were tragic mistakes (as we will soon see), but make sure you don't miss seeing why they all happened! He violated all four of those commands, because he violated another key command concerning Israel's kings in Deuteronomy 17. God had made abundantly clear that as a king in Israel, he was to write his own copy of the law. You see, that was the real issue! He was to make his own handwritten copy of the entire books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy—forcing him to personally interact with every word of God! (Pro. 30:5) Had the Word of God been his first priority, he would have known that God had forbidden him to involve himself in the very things he was doing at the outset of his reign! Oh, may we learn from the life of Solomon to always make the Word of God our first priority—and to always personally interact with "every word of God"—not just in times of trial, but in times of blessing! And perhaps we should add, especially in times of blessing! As the old saying goes, "This Book will keep you from sin; and sin will keep you from this Book!"

As chapter 2 begins, Solomon determines to build the Lord's house. That sounds wonderful until you realize that he included one "minor little priority" as well. He also determines that he is going to have a house built for himself! There's certainly nothing wrong with that, but in light of David's strong words to Solomon about how "MAGNIFICAL" (I'm still totally taken by that word!) the Lord's house was to be in comparison to anything else in existence (1 Chron.

22:5), it seems quite inconceivable that it took almost twice as long to build Solomon's house as it did the Lord's house (7 years compared to 13 years — See 1 Kings 6:38 and 1 Kings 7:1); and if you compare the size of Solomon's house (1 Kings 7:1–12) with the size of the Lord's house (1 Chron. 3), Solomon's house is almost exactly twice as big as God's "MAGNIFICAL" house! What?! And wouldn't you have loved to hear Solomon's rationalization and justification for that?! Never underestimate the tremendous ability we have as humans to justify and rationalize just about anything and everything we want to do. May God help us!

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

By the THOUSAND BURNT OFFERINGS OF SOLOMON — 2 Chronicles 1:6 (Through Christ's one offering of sin, He removed the need for the many and continual individual offerings required in the Law — Heb. 10:10–12,14; Rom. 6:10)

WEEK 20, DAY 2: TODAY'S READING: 2 CHRONICLES 5-8

OVERVIEW:

The Ark is brought into the Temple; the glory of the Lord fills the temple; Solomon's prayer of dedication; Solomon's sacrifices; the glory of the Lord fills the Temple again; God appears to warn Solomon.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

It had taken 153,000 skilled workers seven years to complete it (just imagine!), but the Temple was now ready to receive all of the furnishings David had accumulated and dedicated to be showcased in this magnificent ("magnifical!") structure he so longed to build. Once they were put in their place—along with the hallowed Ark, of course—Solomon led the people in offering sacrifices and heartfelt praise to God. By the description in the passage, the music must have been overwhelmingly incredible! The passage doesn't say how many singers there actually were, but it says there were 120 priests playing the trumpet (5:12), and that when they played with the singers, the "mix" was absolutely perfect ("as one" — 5:13)! For the singers to contend with the likes of 120 trumpeters, there must have been a whole slew of 'em! It certainly must have been an unbelievable worship experience! Even God got a little carried away! The glory of God so filled the Temple that the priests had to run for the exits! (5:14)

As you read about the Temple in the Old Testament, don't ever lose sight of the fact that it is a picture of YOU and ME! God no longer dwells in temples made with hands (Acts 7:48), but says very specifically, "Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God and ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Cor. 6:19–20). And don't miss—the glory we just read about in 2 Chronicles 5:14 is the glory God wants to receive and manifest through each of our lives!

In chapter six, Solomon leads the people in Israel in dedicating the Temple. He addresses the people in 6:1–11, and in verses 12–42, he ascends onto a scaffold made of brass that had been made for this specific purpose, and he addresses the Lord Himself! It is the longest prayer recorded in the Bible, and is perhaps the most majestic and moving! It is so powerful and wonderful, and spoken with such incredible sincerity, that you hate to bring any negative comments into it. But we must "keep it real." Solomon asks God in verses 24 and 25 that if His people sin against Him—but return to Him and confess His name—to please hear them and forgive them. It is such a beautiful and humble request! The unbelievably tragic thing is though—that Solomon himself became an incredible sinner—and yet there is never any biblical record of Solomon ever repenting of any of his own sins! It really makes you wonder how it is that so many who START so STRONG—can END UP so OVERTHROWN! Once again, God help us! (1 Cor. 10:5–6,11!)

When Solomon finishes his prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God for His unequalled attributes and unfailing promises, the glory of the Lord was, once again, so overpowering that the priests couldn't even make their way into the Temple! And when the people saw it, "...they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever." (7:3)

But even in the midst of all of this incredible worship, God comes to Solomon in the night warning him that if the nation didn't remain true to Him, He would uproot them out of their wonderful homeland—and destroy their magnificent Temple. (7:20)

Chapter 8 moves the timeline along 20 years, and records various accomplishments and successes in Solomon's reign. Of particular note is verse 11. It says that Solomon wouldn't allow his wife, the daughter of Pharaoh, to live in the royal palace. The reason he gave (which was a legitimate one!), was that the palace was holy! It is a great illustration of how prone we are to allow ourselves to be deceived into thinking that there are somehow areas of our personal lives that can remain disconnected from our spiritual lives. Call it a "double-life" or a "double-standard"... "hypocrisy" or just plain "stupidity," the fact is—our personal lives can never remain separate from our spiritual lives! Though Solomon restricted the daughter of Pharaoh to a separate residence, it did not restrict her from leading him into idolatry! (See 1 Kings 11:1–8) We all would do well to consider: Is there any area of my personal life that I am trying to convince myself that I am keeping separate from my spiritual life? May our honest introspection prevail over any of our self-deception.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

Through SOLOMON'S PRAYER — 2 Chronicles 6:14 (Jesus is that supreme God to which Solomon was referring! 1 Tim. 2:5 – "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.")

WEEK 20, DAY 3: TODAY'S READING: 2 CHRONICLES 9–12

OVERVIEW:

The Queen of Sheba visits Solomon; the extent of Solomon's riches and fame; Solomon's death; Rehoboam succeeds Solomon as Israel's king; Jeroboam leads a revolt of 10 of the tribes; Rehoboam forsakes the law of God; God brings judgment against Rehoboam through Shishak, king of Egypt.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

In 2 Chronicles 9, there is perhaps no more glorious Old Testament picture of the Lord Jesus Christ ruling and reigning in wisdom in His millennial kingdom from His throne in Jerusalem—when every knee is bowing and every tongue confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father! (Phil 2:9–11) Hallelujah! The parallel passage is found in 1 Kings 10, where it likewise presents this most glorious picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Kings 11, however, continues with details of the remainder of Solomon's life, and strangely enough, there is perhaps no greater Old Testament picture of the Antichrist! In the midst of all of the splendor of the record of Solomon's kingdom in 2 Chronicles 9, it does, however, drop a few subtle hints. Notice in verse 13, the amount of gold that came to Solomon in one year: "Six hundred and threescore and six." I believe you spell that 6–6–6! And notice also, the three-sided configuration upon which his throne was set, with six steps leading up from the front and the two sides. Again, I think you might call that 6–6–6! (Check out Rev. 13:18 if you're unfamiliar with the 6–6–6 connection to the Antichrist: "Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast (Antichrist): for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.")

Chapter 9 ends with the death and burial of Solomon, and chapter 10 begins with the reign of his son, Rehoboam. You can bring Rehoboam's reign to the bottom line by two simple little phrases in chapter 12. Chapter 12 and verse 1 says that when he "had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him." Chapter 12 and verse 14 says, "And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD." May these horrific blunders in Rehoboam's life teach all of us that we get ourselves into spiritual trouble when we begin to think that our strength is in ourselves, rather than in the Lord—and the power of His might and His Word. As soon as we forsake the Word of God, thinking we're strong in and of ourselves—we're on a collision course with disaster! And notice, Rehoboam did all of the evil, idiotic, and sinful things he did because he failed to do one simple, but monumental thing: He "did not prepare his heart to SEEK the Lord." Once again, we're reminded of the purpose of the 52 Weeks of Pursuit: "But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou SEEK HIM with all thy heart and with all thy soul." (Deut. 4:29).

Rehoboam's first decision as king was a major fiasco, as he heeded the wrong counsel. May it be a vivid reminder to us that we must be careful about whose counsel we seek and/or take! (Psa. 1:1) His harshness caused 10 of the tribes to secede from the "union," as it were, to go form what we now refer to as the Northern Kingdom.

Note that this is where the Kingdom of Israel is divided in the Old Testament. The 10 Northern Tribes are hereafter referred to as ISRAEL—and the two Southern Tribes as JUDAH. Jeroboam is installed as the King of Israel (See 1 Kings 11:28–31), while Rehoboam remains King in Judah. When you compare 1 Kings 11:28–31 with 2 Chronicles 10:15, don't miss how God is somehow able to take the poor, idiotic, and even flat-out WRONG decisions of earthly rulers—and use those very decisions to perform His will and fulfill His Word! God is big, y'all! Really big!

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

In the GLORY OF SOLOMON'S KINGDOM – 2 Chronicles 9:1–28 (Phil. 2:9–11; Rev. 20:5)

WEEK 20, DAY 4: TODAY'S READING: 2 CHRONICLES 13–16

OVERVIEW:

Abijah's battle and victory over Jeroboam, King of Israel; King Asa's reforms in Judah; his covenant with God; his pact with Benhadad, King of Syria; Asa's rebuke by Hanani; Asa's diseased feet and death.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As chapter 13 opens, God uses Abijah, the newly appointed King of Judah to discipline Jeroboam, King of Israel. The battle involves 1.2 million soldiers, and by the time it's finished, Israel lost exactly a half million men. (13:17) What an extremely high price to pay for simply refusing to obey God! The defeat was so devastating, Jeroboam never fully recovered. Note Abijah's appeal to Jeroboam in 13:4–12 to consider his ways and walk with God.

Chapter 14 begins with the death of Abijah, and the beginning of his son, Asa's, reign. What Abijah accomplished in Judah MILITARILY, Asa sought to do SPIRITUALLY. He removed all of the foreign influence of worship and "commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to do the law and commandment." (14:4) As a result, God blessed the kingdom with 10 years of "quiet" (14:1,5) and "rest" (14:6–7)—while he fortified an army full of "mighty men of valour." (14:8) Judah's peace ended, however, when an Ethiopian army of one million(!) men came against them. Asa's prayer of faith and dependence upon God in verse 11 is well worth noting, since we all face situations almost weekly where the odds are stacked against us. Notice, "Asa cried unto the LORD his God, and said, LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O LORD, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee." (2 Chron. 14:11) Judah's smaller army was victorious because of their simple dependence and trust in the Lord. (14:12–15)

In chapter 15, Azariah the prophet challenges Asa to keep up the good work of spiritual reformation in the nation, and Asa responds with great enthusiasm, destroying even more idols (15:8), and decreeing that the people either seek the Lord with all of their heart and soul—or die! (15:12-13) His grandmother, who also happened to be the reigning queen at the time, made an obscene idol—and Asa not only crushed and burned the despicable idol, he even removed her from being queen! It's a sad reality, but following the Lord sometimes requires making tough decisions concerning members of our own families!

Chapter 16 is just sad. Like so many Christians through the centuries, even up to the present hour, as Asa's wealth and power increased, his dependence and trust in God decreased. When toward the end of his reign, Baasha, King of Israel, came up to battle against Asa, rather than cry out to God in faith as he had previously done (14:11), he takes God's money to pay Benhadad, the King of Syria, to help him. Baasha was unsuccessful in coming against Asa, but Asa had greatly displeased the Lord in the process. Note the rebuke of God's prophet in 16:7–8, and the great statement of verse 9: "Don't you realize that the Lord is just constantly on the lookout for those He can bless by showing Himself strong on their behalf?!" (obvious paraphrase) Rather than acknowledge his wrongdoing and repent, Asa has the prophet thrown into jail. And isn't it interesting how that even in the 21st century, when people receive God's message, they still have a propensity to get upset with God's messengers?! Sadly, this attitude became a pattern as Asa's life comes to a close. Even when disease had struck his feet, he looks to man for help rather than God. Keep in mind, Psalm 118:8 says: "It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in man."

And note also, that many 21st century believers are much like Asa. They start off so wonderfully, but before it's all said and done, their spiritual feet have become diseased—and they are no longer able to "WALK in the Spirit" (Gal.

5:16)—and no longer able to “WALK worthy of the vocation wherewith [they have been] called!” (Eph. 4:1) We must be very careful as we grow older in the Lord, not to allow our spiritual feet to become diseased!

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

Through the REST God gave JUDAH — 2 Chronicles 14:7 (Matt. 11:29; Heb. 4:1,8–11).

WEEK 20, DAY 5: TODAY'S READING: 2 CHRONICLES 17–21

OVERVIEW:

Jehoshaphat succeeds Asa; Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab, King of Israel; the death of Ahab; Jehoshaphat's rebuke by Jehu the seer (prophet); Jehoshaphat's national reform; Jehoshaphat's victory over the children of Moab, Ammon, and Mount Seir; the death of Jehoshaphat; the reign of Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram; Jehoram's bitter death.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

What a breath of fresh air Jehoshaphat is! As we will see, he's not perfect (oh, surprise, surprise!), but despite some stupid alliances he made with the wrong people, he was a good man and a good king. Verse 3 of chapter 17 says, "And the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David." It's interesting to note that David is constantly used as the standard by which the kings were measured. If they followed David's example, they were blessed. If they didn't, their lives and their kingdoms ran amuck. David had his share of problems, but God was pretty "taken" with his heart! Don't ever forget, "The heart of the matter, is the matter of the heart!" So, "keep (guard) your heart"! (Prov. 4:23)

Verses 4–9 of chapter 17 give at least five reasons the Lord was "WITH"(17:3) Jehoshaphat:

- 1) He sought the Lord (17:4a).
(Don't forget that that's the goal of the 52 Weeks of Pursuit! (Deut. 4:29)
- 2) He walked in the commandments of the Lord. (17:4b)
(Jesus said in John 14:15 that keeping the commandments is how we express our love for the Lord!)
- 3) His HEART(!) was lifted up in the ways of the Lord. (17:6a)
(As opposed to his heart being lifted up, like Lucifer, toward himself!)
- 4) He removed all of the sick ways people were worshipping Baal and Ashteroth (17:6b), along with removing all of the homosexuals. (1 Kings 22:46)
- 5) Recognizing that the key to spiritual renewal and revival in the lives of the people was the power of the Word of God in their lives, he established a nationwide "Bible study program" that was taught by princes, Levites, and priests. Who knows, maybe they even called it "52 Weeks of Pursuit!" (17:7–9)

Because of these incredible reforms in the kingdom, "the fear of the Lord fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, so that they made no war with against Jehoshaphat." (17:10) As Proverbs 16:7 says, because his ways pleased the Lord, "even his enemies [were] at peace with him."

Obviously, having your enemies at peace with you is a good thing. However, making alliances with them because of it—is not! In chapter 18, verse 1, it says that Jehoshaphat "joined affinity with Ahab." Ahab was the wicked, Baal-worshipping king of Israel. This "affinity" with Ahab causes Jehoshaphat to join him in a battle to help him regain the city of Ramothgilead, which was very displeasing to the Lord, and almost cost him his life! Ultimately, this "affinity" will even lead to the marriage of Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram, to Ahab's (and Jezebel's!!!) daughter! (21:1,6) And do note how often the compromises parents make, result in compromises in the lives of their children!

Because of Jehoshaphat's unholy alliance with Ahab, God sent the prophet Jehu to rebuke him, saying: "Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord." (19:2) Jehoshaphat responded well to the Lord's rebuke through Jehu, and moved immediately to restore justice (19:5-7), and priestly order in Jerusalem. (19:8-11) Do note, however, that even though Jehoshaphat responded correctly and was forgiven, there were still consequences to his sin. The marriage of his son to Ahab and Jezebel's daughter will open the door to Baal worship in Judah, and will result in the murder of every single one of Jehoshaphat's sons and grandsons except for one-year-old Joash, who was hidden by Jehoida the high priest. (22:10-12) If it hadn't been said 100 times already in the 52 Weeks of Pursuit (slight exaggeration), this might be a place to say once again, "There is always a price-tag for sin!" Since it has been said so often, I'll refrain from saying it here! :-)

Chapter 20 is one of the most practical and significant chapters we have come to thus far in our reading. There is more to talk about here than we have space in simply trying to "highlight" things in each chapter. Read it slowly and carefully, noting a few key phrases along the way as God describes this very strange battle that takes place in this chapter. As the combined forces of Moab, Ammon and Mount Seir plan to converge upon Jehoshaphat and the armies of Judah, note the key phrases:

- 1) "The battle is not yours, but God's." (20:15)
- 2) "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle." (20:17a)
- 3) "Set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you." (20:17b)
- 4) "Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established." (20:20)
- 5) "When they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against... Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir." (20:22)
- 6) "The LORD... made them to rejoice over their enemies." (20:27)
- 7) "And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries, when they had heard that the LORD fought against [their] enemies." (20:29)

The reason these statements are so significant is that they coincide so perfectly with the New Testament teaching concerning the spiritual warfare you and I face on a daily basis! Because you see, just like with Jehoshaphat's battle, the battle we face is not OURS, but GOD'S! Therefore, we must "be strong in the Lord and the power of 'HIS' might." (Eph. 6:10) The battle plan in our battle, like Jehoshaphat's, is not for us to "FIGHT," but to "STAND" in the victory Christ has already won on our behalf! (Note in Eph. 6:11-14 the repetition of the word "STAND"—not "FIGHT!") And our battle, just like Jehoshaphat's battle in 2 Chronicles 20:20, is a battle whereby the Lord causes us to REJOICE over our enemies by FAITH (Eph. 6:16), as we stand against the enemy—SINGING the praises of our God. (Eph. 5:19)

This passage becomes another great example of how God carefully orchestrates the recording of the history of the Old Testament so that it becomes a graphic picture to illustrate New Testament truth! (1 Cor. 10:6,11; Rom. 15:4) Don't ever forget, we are holding a supernatural Book—given to us by our supernatural God!

After Jehoshaphat's death (20:35-21:1), his son Jehoram takes the throne. In his first public act, he kills all of his brothers and everyone else he thought might have the potential for usurping his authority. (21:4) God judges him in many ways in chapter 21, not the least of which was afflicting him with an excruciating disease where ultimately his intestines exploded out of his body. (21:18-19) Couldn't have happened to a nicer guy!

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

Through MICAIAH, who spoke the words that God told him to speak — 1 Chronicles 18:13 (John 8:26-28; 3:34; 8:40).