

Chapter Ten

The Way to Lose a Kingdom: First Kings, Second Chronicles 1-20

In the Hebrew Bible, our books of I and 2 Kings are combined into one book simply called Kings. The present division was not made until the first century before Christ by the translators of the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. Since I Kings and the first 26 chapters of 2 Chronicles cover the same period of time we will take them together in this study. The unknown writer of the books of Kings has written not only a book of history, but has selectively chosen significant events from this history that would help his readers understand the internal meaning of the outward events, especially as measured against the covenants which God made with Israel centuries before at Mount Sinai.

First Kings begins with the reign of Solomon and carries us through the tragic division of the kingdom under Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. Then we are given summaries of the various dynasties within the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the lives of the kings of the single dynasty of the house of David in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In each case, the spotlight is always on the king, for it was what the king did in relationship to God that determined how the nation went. When the king walked with God in obedience and humility, God's blessing and prosperity and victory rested upon the kingdom. The rains came at the right time, the crops grew and the land flourished. There was victory over their enemies even though the enemies came in allied forces. But when the king disobeyed and allowed the people to fall into the worship of other gods, immediately famines broke out, plagues came, invasions occurred, and the land fell into difficult and serious conditions. The kings that walk in obedience become, as always, types of Christ, such as David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Jehoshaphat, and Josiah. But the kings who walk in disobedience become types or pictures of the anti-Christ, the man of sin who is yet to appear upon the earth.

The factor, of course, that makes even these historic books of perennial fascination to us is that the kingdom of Israel is an accurate picture of our own lives. It was for this purpose that God chose Israel to be a nation and gave it its unique laws and its unique government, in order to provide an example to all the world of what the living God is willing to be in any individual's life. Thus, as we read these books, we find ourselves also in the midst of the problems, the blessings, and the possibilities that are reflected in these books of the kings.

THE REIGN OF SOLOMON

First Kings opens with the last days of David. He appears here as a very old and feeble man, unable to discharge properly the duties of his high office. This feebleness created the opportunity for one of his sons, Adonijah, to foment a rebellion which would make himself the successor to his father. We can place the time of this rebellion as following that of Absalom recounted in 2 Samuel, and occurring just before Solomon was acknowledged openly as joint king along with David, his father. Though Adonijah obtained the support of Joab and Abiathar, the priest, his plans were thwarted by the intervention of Nathan the prophet who, through Bathsheba, David's wife and Solomon's mother, informed King David of the plot. Immediately David arranged for the public anointing of Solomon as king.

Adonijah, fearing Solomon, took shelter at the altar in the court of the Tabernacle and was spared for a season; however, he eventually was slain at Solomon's command. After David's death, Adonijah presumed to threaten the throne by seeking marriage with the girl who had been David's nurse during the closing days of his life.

Before David died, he called Solomon before him and solemnly charged him to walk in the ways of the Lord his God, and to teach his children after him, that the kingdom might endure in safety and prosperity forever (2:1-4). He left to Solomon's wisdom the fate of those men whom David had never fully trusted in his own

time--Joab, his brutal and bloody general, and Shimei, who cursed David so violently on the day he fled from Absalom (vv. 5-9). David had kept his covenant with these men by sparing their lives; but they eventually paid for their treachery by death at the command of Solomon. He also deposed Abiathar, the priest, and substituted Zadok in fulfillment of the prophecy given to Eli many decades before.

The reign of Solomon appeared to hold much promise for it is recorded that he loved the Lord and walked in the statutes of David, his father (see I Kings 3:3). Soon after Solomon ascended the throne, the Lord appeared to him in a dream and offered him his choice of gifts. Aware of his own incapacities for the heavy demands of government, the young king asked for the gift of wisdom--the ability to distinguish between good and evil. God's answer was one of gracious and abundant mercy for He gave Solomon what he asked, but added also the riches and honor he might have chosen but wisely had passed by. It is clearly evident from this that wealth and fame are proper honors when God bestows them, but if sought for selfish purposes they frequently prove to be curses rather than blessings.

Solomon's gift of wisdom is immediately manifested in the famous story of his choice between two mothers who each claimed a certain baby as her own. When Solomon ordered the child divided by a sword and half given to each, the real mother quickly gave up her right in order that the child might live, though the other woman would possess it. Solomon promptly awarded that child to the first and proper mother. With this incident his fame spread throughout the kingdom.

Solomon's reputation for wisdom spread far beyond the borders of his kingdom, which now extended from the Euphrates in the north to the border of Egypt in the south, almost the entire extent which had been promised to Abraham hundreds of years before. A summary of Solomon's wise sayings included 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs (4:32). His fame spread widely, also, as a naturalist and philosopher.

Yet, despite this apparent magnificence a note of weakness is found in his marriage alliance with Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, by bringing Pharaoh's daughter to Jerusalem as his wife. As we have seen, Egypt in the Scripture is always a type of the world's allurements to the human heart. When Solomon brought Pharaoh's daughter into his court the door was open for alliances with other lovely maidens from the tribes around Israel. Soon he had 1,000 wives. And along with them came their idols. Thus, despite outward prosperity and glory, the kingdom began to deteriorate under Solomon because he allowed the world to entice and allure him and draw him away from his heart's interest in the Temple, where his worship should have been centered.

By the fourth year of his reign, Solomon was ready to begin the building of the Temple, 480 years after the Israelites left Egypt. They were now settled in the land of promise, enjoying a season of rest from warfare, and unusual prosperity. In preparing materials for the Temple, Solomon enlisted the aid of his father's friend, Hiram the king of Tyre, from whom he obtained massive quantities of cedar and cypress wood as well as skilled workers in bronze and gold (5: 1-12). The stones for the Temple were quarried out beneath the Temple mount and were finished within the quarry so that "neither hammer nor ax nor any iron tool [was] heard in the house, while it was being built" (6:7). This remarkable sentence finds its parallel in Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:20-22, concerning the building of the church. It is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into it a dwelling of God in the Spirit." Without noise or fanfare the Spirit of God has for 20 centuries been constructing a glorious temple, from living materials, to be a habitation of God through the Spirit.

Solomon built the Temple along the same pattern as the Tabernacle in the wilderness, though it was double the size and was characterized by a greater magnificence and durability. Like the Tabernacle, the Temple was most beautiful from within, for almost everything was covered with pure gold.

In the midst of the account of the building of the Temple, which took a period of seven years altogether, the chronicler interjects a brief account of the building of the palace for Solomon and adds this significant statement: "Solomon was building his own house thirteen years" (7:1). The significance of this is seen in the insightful comment of Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, "If the time and possessions devoted to our own comfort be greater than those devoted to the service of God, it is sure proof that the master passion is self-centered rather than God-centered. "

The furniture of the Temple likewise duplicated that of the Tabernacle except it was of far greater magnificence. When all was finished the solemn moment for the dedication of the Temple arrived. In an impressive ceremony of solemnity and beauty, the Ark of the Covenant was brought from its place in the Tabernacle and installed within the Temple. When the priests came out from the holy place after installing the Ark in the holy of holies, a cloud of glory from the Lord suddenly filled the Temple, and when Solomon saw this evidence of God's immediate presence with His people, he uttered a cry of rejoicing and arose to bless the people (8:15-21).

Then kneeling (v. 54) before the altar of burnt offering and raising his outstretched hands, Solomon uttered a moving prayer of dedication, recognizing the faithfulness of God and the peril of departing from the ways of God (vv. 22-53). His understanding of God's transcendent majesty was manifest in his words, "Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain Thee, how much less this house which I have built!" (8:27). In prophetic vision he outlined the many circumstances that might arise in which the people would turn, temporarily, away from the ways of God, but from which they might recover when they turned again with repentant hearts to the presence of God, as symbolized by the Temple.

Rising from prayer he pronounced another blessing upon the people, and followed this with the offering of thousands of sacrifices (8:54-64). At the close, the joyful people returned to their dwellings, having participated in the greatest moment of glory the nation was ever to know from the days of Moses and until the time of the Messiah.

After the dedication of the Temple, Jehovah appeared again to Solomon in a dream (9:2-9) and assured him that his prayer had been heard. He told Solomon that His divine promises to David his father were renewed, upon the condition that Solomon and his descendants would walk faithfully before the Lord. If they failed to do this, the beautiful Temple would be torn down and the people would be driven from the land and become a byword and a proverb among the nations.

As we read the account, we know the terrible fulfillment of this in history, for the conditions were not kept either by the king or the people, so that the penalty was fulfilled in precise detail. Again, the parallel to the individual life is self-evident.

Solomon's present of 20 cities in Galilee to King Hiram of Tyre is recorded in 9:10-14. His establishment of various storehouse cities and military barracks throughout the land, and his creation of a commercial navy are detailed in verses 15-28.

At this time, the apex of Solomon's prosperity, the famous visit of the queen of Sheba occurred (10:1-13). Sheba was located in what is now southern Arabia, but even at that distance its queen had heard the fame of Solomon and especially of his noted wisdom and blessing from the Most High God. She came to Jerusalem with a great caravan to see for herself whether what she had heard was true. When Solomon showed her the magnificence of his palace and of his kingdom, she reported that even the half had not been told her, but in words of great insight she expressed clearly that the secret of his greatness lay in the centrality of the government of God.

A further description of Solomon's astounding wealth is given in verses 14-29, in which it is noted that he made silver as common in Jerusalem as stone, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore wood. The wealth of all the nations around seemed to pour into Jerusalem as a result of the, blessing of God upon Solomon and his kingdom. Yet the luxury with which the king surrounded himself reveals a love of indulgence which, expressed in many ways, would soon result in widespread dissatisfaction within the nation and ultimate division and decay.

In chapter 11 the writer of Kings unveils in detail the degeneration within Solomon's heart which was soon to result in the division of his kingdom. The point where evil first took hold was in Solomon's love for women. His commercial enterprises brought him into contact with many surrounding nations, and there he let his heart go after women from nations which the Lord had forbidden the Israelites to enter into marriage with. Soon he built temples for these women to practice their own degraded worship within, and eventually he joined them there, actually bowing down himself to the abominable idols of his pagan wives. For this "the Lord was angry

with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel" (11:9). For the third time He appeared to Solomon, perhaps again in a dream, but this time to announce to him that the kingdom would be torn from him and given to another; yet for David's sake it would occur after Solomon died, during the lifetime of Solomon's son. Immediately we read of several adversaries rising up against Solomon, including Hadad the Edomite on the south, Rezon in the land of Syria on the north, and from within the kingdom itself, Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite who lifted up his hand against the king.

The prophet Ahijah was sent by God to meet Jeroboam outside of Jerusalem. Divesting himself of the new garment he wore, Ahijah tore it into 12 pieces. He handed Jeroboam 10 pieces, symbolizing that Jeroboam would be given 10 of the 12 tribes, while only two--Judah and Benjamin--would remain with the house of David. The promise given to David of divine blessing was extended to Jeroboam if he, too, would walk in the ways of God and keep His commandments as David had done. When Solomon heard of this he sought to kill Jeroboam, but he fled into Egypt and remained there until Solomon died.

After 40 years of unprecedented magnificence and prosperity, Solomon died and was buried in the city of David, his father, a sad and tragic close to a life which had begun with great promise and possibility.

The life of this man clearly indicates the importance of the will. In the kingdom of your life the human will is the king, and nothing can take place in that kingdom except as it is allowed by the choice of your will. Therefore, what your will does determines what your life will be like. If, willingly and obediently, you yield yourself to the influences of the Holy Spirit dwelling in your human spirit, you are like the kingdom when David walked with God and the land flourished, and the influence of the kingdom reached to the uttermost parts of the earth. But if, like Solomon, you begin to walk in disobedience, if your will is defiant and set upon the things of the flesh rather than the things of God, then evil invasions will begin in your life. You will no longer have strength to repel inward corruptions that ruin and take their toll upon you; thus the kingdom of your life will fall into ruin as well.

THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM

When Rehoboam, Solomon's son, came to Shechem to be anointed king, the people, led by Jeroboam who had returned from Egypt, asked that the new king would grant them relief from many of the burdens which Solomon had placed upon them. These included forced labor, unnecessary extravagance, and heavy taxation. The king sent them away for three days and consulted with both the old men who had advised his father and the young men with whom he had grown up. His own pride and despotism was revealed when he chose the advice of the young men. He told the people that their burdens would be increased (12:1-15). This announcement became the signal for widespread revolt. The 10 tribes chose Jeroboam to be their king, fulfilling the decree God had made to Solomon.

Jeroboam set up his capital at Shechem and, fearing that if the people continued to worship at Jerusalem they would eventually return to the authority of Rehoboam, he introduced the great sin for which the Northern Kingdom was ever after to be noted. Making two calves of molten gold, he set one up at the city of Dan in the far north, and another at the city of Bethel, at the border with Judah. Summoning Israel he said to them, "Behold your gods, O Israel" (v. 28). This was a harking back to the sin of Aaron at the foot of Mount Sinai, when he made a calf of gold which the people began to worship. They called that calf, Jehovah (Exod. 32:5), not intending to deny that Jehovah was their God, but foolishly misrepresenting Him as no more than the gods of the nations around.

The parallel in our lives is that form of godliness which denies the power of God. It is an outward conformity to Christian faith which lacks the inner response of the Spirit. It means to conform outwardly to everything Christian, but inwardly there is no true worship at all. This is the fatal sin which Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, introduced to the Northern Kingdom.

From this moment on in Israel's history, David and Jeroboam became representative of two spiritual principles that are traced throughout the kingdoms. They became the standards of measurement for the kings that followed. In Judah a good king is said to "walk in the ways of David, his father," and to serve the Lord his God by tearing down the false and abominable worship that Israel had fallen into; but in the Northern

Kingdom, the evil kings are said to "walk in the ways of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who caused Israel to go awhoring after the gods that he had set up." It is significant that in Israel, the Northern Kingdom, there are no godly kings at all. There is but a continual succession of kings who walk in idolatrous ways and who frequently gain the throne by murdering their predecessor. Despite this, God in grace often intervenes by sending prophets to arrest the decay and fall of the Northern Kingdom.

In Judah, the Southern Kingdom, there were a few godly kings among many who were evil, but these godly men stand out like lights in the darkness. The primary ones were Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Hezekiah and Josiah.

In an attempt to give Jeroboam opportunity for repentance, God sent a prophet to him, warning him of his evil by predicting the immediate overthrowing of the altar. When Jeroboam stretched out his hand to order the prophet's arrest his hand was withered and he could not draw it back. When he begged the prophet for healing, the hand was restored, but it represented no real repentance on Jeroboam's part (13:1-6).

A solemn lesson follows when the prophet attempted to return to his home. He disobeyed the expressed word of the Lord and entered into another prophet's house to eat and drink with him after the man lied and told him God had sent him. There it was predicted that the man of God would die as a result of his disobedience. On the way home a lion met him and killed him. Though no excuse can be made for the prophet who lied to him, nevertheless the account indicates that when God gives a direct command, it must not be disregarded, even though an angel from heaven or another prophet suggests a change.

Further judgment fell upon Jeroboam in the sickness of his son. Ahijah, the prophet, sent word to Jeroboam through his wife that the same God who had exalted him to power and made him king over Israel would now, because of his sin, remove him from the throne. The sign of it would be that his son would die. As Jeroboam's wife brought the news to her husband the child died. Nothing further is told us concerning the 22 years of the reign of Jeroboam except to record his death and the fact that his son, Nadab, reigned in his stead.

Meanwhile, things were going no better in the Southern Kingdom under Rehoboam (14:21), whose 17-year reign also was characterized by the introduction of idolatry and the reappearance of homosexual prostitutes within the land. The result was an invasion by the king of Egypt, who carried away the treasures of gold from the Temple and the king's palace. The substitution of bronze shields and vessels for the golden ones was God's reminder to the king of the deterioration of the worship in the land. A border war raged continually between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, and ultimately it is recorded that Rehoboam, too, slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David, and Abijam, his son, reigned in his stead.

Abijam lasted three years as king of Judah before he died and one of the good kings, Asa, began a 41-year reign. Asa's reforms included the elimination of homosexual prostitutes and the removal of idols, even that belonging to his mother, the queen, whom he removed from her office because of her idolatry (15:9-13). This partial reform under Asa undoubtedly preserved Judah, for the time, from the decay and corruption which was evident in the Northern Kingdom.

The Northern Kingdom suffered under the rule of a series of evil kings who all walked "in the way of Jeroboam." All this time, God tried to reach His people in Israel. When the most evil of all the kings of the Northern Kingdom ascended the throne, we meet a man whose name rings through history as a prototype of John the Baptist.

ELIJAH: THE PROPHET OF FIRE

Ahab not only adopted the idolatry of Jeroboam but in addition married Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Sidon, and thus introduced the worship of Baal into Israel. It is recorded that "he did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him." It was during the reign of this evil pair that Elijah, the prophet, made his appearance. This is in line with the declaration of the New Testament, "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom. 5:20). The account of the conflict between Ahab and Jezebel with Elijah occupies the next four chapters, from chapters 17 through 20.

The sudden appearance of Elijah in the account is dramatic and startling. He came from Gilead, east of the Jordan, but not much more is known of his nationality or parentage. He suddenly confronted Ahab with the announcement that the living God was about to bring a drought upon the land, which would not be relieved until Elijah gave the word. The drought began immediately and was very severe. To protect him from the wrath of Ahab and Jezebel, Elijah was sent first to the brook Cherith where he was fed by ravens, and then to the land of Sidon on the coast, where he lived with a widow and her son.

After three years Elijah was sent back to confront Ahab, who greets him with the words "Is this you, you troubler of Israel?" (18:17). Elijah responds that it is the king who, through his vile idolatries, has troubled the land, and challenges him to a contest between the prophets of Baal and the power of God, to be held on Mount Carmel. There follows a familiar story, full of drama and majesty. On one side are 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah. On the other side stands Elijah alone, crying out, "If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him" (v. 21). There is a sardonic humor in the description of the Canaanite prophets calling out in vain for their god Baal to burn up the sacrifice that waited on the altar. Elijah mocks them by suggesting that perhaps the god is asleep, or has gone on a journey, or even has gone to the bathroom to relieve himself.

Finally, it was Elijah's turn, and after drenching his sacrifice with water he prayed a mighty prayer of faith, and God answered by devouring the sacrifice by fire from heaven. When the prophets of Baal had been proved to be false prophets, they were put to death. Then, in answer to the prayer of Elijah, the rain, which had not fallen for three years, now came in great torrents.

The fury of Jezebel was awakened by the destruction of her prophets. She sent a message to Elijah threatening him with immediate death (19:2) and, surprisingly, the prophet who stood with great courage against 850 adversaries on Mount Carmel, now fled for his life from a single woman. But God, with great patience and tender care, met first his physical need and then sent him to Mount Horeb where He gave him a great revelation of Himself through "a still small voice." That quiet voice then rebuked him for his lack of faith and revealed to him that there were yet 7,000 within the nation who had not bowed the knee to Baal. He was then sent back to anoint Hazael to be king of Syria, Jehu to be king of Israel, and Elisha to be prophet in his own place (vv. 9-18). The obedient prophet returned to the land and, finding Elisha plowing with oxen, cast his mantle upon him. After offering a sacrifice, Elisha took up his new role as servant to the old prophet.

Despite the wickedness of Ahab, God's patient mercy was extended to him on the occasion of an attack upon Samaria by the king of Syria, Ben-hadad (chap. 20). With arrogance Ben-hadad demanded the surrender of the city but, through an unnamed prophet, Jehovah announced the defeat of the Syrians at the hands of Israel.

Again the Syrians came against Samaria the following spring. Once again Israel won by the mercies and grace of God. But in the moment of his triumph, Ahab made a covenant with Ben-hadad whom God had clearly devoted -to destruction. For this, God sent a prophet again to the king to announce his doom. Characteristically, Ahab returned to his house, "sullen and vexed" (20:43).

The terrible struggle between good and evil in the heart of King Ahab seems to reach its crisis in the account of his selfish longing to possess the vineyard of his neighbor, Naboth. Thwarted by Naboth's unwillingness to sell, the king behaved with such petulance that his wife, Jezebel, offered to obtain the vineyard for him by an evil ruse. Falsely charging Naboth with having cursed God and the king, Jezebel obtained his death by stoning at the hands of the citizens of the city. But when Ahab went to the vineyard to take possession he is suddenly confronted by the rugged prophet, Elijah. Upon hearing from Elijah that his dynasty would end, Ahab tore his clothes and, with fasting and sackcloth, expressed his repentance before God. It was enough to obtain a temporary reprieve. God announced that "I will bring the evil upon [Ahab] in his son's days" (21:29).

The final chapter in both Ahab's life and the book of I Kings details the story of the visit of Jehoshaphat, who ascended the throne of Judah, to establish an alliance with King Ahab of Israel. Planning war against Syria, Ahab invited Jehoshaphat to accompany him, and the two kings, through 400 false prophets attached to Ahab's court, sought the mind of God as to the outcome of the battle. Their prophecies promised success, but Jehoshaphat insisted upon consulting Micaiah, a true prophet of God in Israel. At first he gave an ironic confirmation of the prediction of victory, but when pressed gave the true word of the Lord, predicting the death of Ahab during the battle.

By a cowardly ruse Ahab placed Jehoshaphat of Judah in a conspicuous place during the battle, hoping that he would be mistaken for himself and be killed. But an arrow shot into the air (by chance) by a warrior on the opposite side, found its way through Ahab's armor and into his heart. God is the God of circumstances, and even the God of accidents! Ahab's body was brought to the capital where his bloodstained chariot was washed, and the dogs licked up his blood according to the prophecy of Elijah. The final account of the book briefly summarizes the reign of Jehoshaphat of Judah, who walked in the godly ways of his father Asa. This story is picked up and continued in the second book of Kings.

The stories covered in this first book of Kings highlight the great truth declared in Proverbs 4:23, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life." The picture drawn for us, in our individual lives, reveals that nothing we face in terms of outward pressure or circumstances can ever succeed in dethroning us. Such dethronement will only come as we permit some rival worship to enter the heart and replace the living God. When we become emotionally attached to some place or someone that is a rival to the worship of God, then our kingdom's days are numbered.

SECOND CHRONICLES 1-20

Since the first 20 chapters of 2 Chronicles cover the same chronological period as I Kings and, for the most part, in somewhat briefer style it will not be necessary to cover it in detail. There are, however, certain omissions and also certain additions which merit comment, and it may be helpful to point out additional factors that would apply in the parallel experiences of our own spiritual Journey.

The first nine chapters recount again the story of the reign of Solomon. His humble request for wisdom from God's hand, his building of the Temple and construction of its furniture, and the solemn and impressive ceremonies of the Temple's dedication, are detailed. The visit of the queen of Sheba is also recorded here.

It is the nature of Chronicles, as different from Kings, to give us more of detail of the worship of Israel and Judah and their kings than it does on historical matters. The transference of the worship of the nation from the Tabernacle at Gibeon to the Temple in Jerusalem symbolizes the growth of a Christian. From his early up and down experience, like Israel in the wilderness of wandering, a Christian grows to a more settled condition where he recognizes the Lord Jesus as King and Ruler and walks consistently in the light of God's settled presence.

In building the Temple, Solomon is the type of Christ as the Prince of Peace, who has the honor of building the true temple of the Holy Spirit, the human body. In Hebrews we are told that Moses had honor in God's house (the Tabernacle) as a servant, but Christ had more honor for the builder of the house has more honor than the house itself (see Heb. 3:5,6). Christ is the One who has made the temple of our body, which contains the sanctuary of the Spirit.

All this is pictured in the physical temple, described in 2 Chronicles. What a beautiful place it must have been! It was small, as temples go, but incomparably beautiful. The entire interior was completely lined with gold. It has been estimated that the value of it was some \$10,537,000. The furniture of the Temple, except for the Ark of the Covenant, was rebuilt completely. The Ark, which symbolized the initial meeting place of God and man, needed no duplication, for the new birth can never be repeated. But in other ways, the Temple represented a new beginning. This parallels the experience of many Christians who, often after years of a vacillating experience, come to a place where, intelligently, conscientiously and with permanent intention, they yield themselves anew to the Lordship of Christ. Emotionally, it is almost like being born again. That is what is depicted in the new beginning of the Temple.

The response of God to Solomon's dedication of the Temple, recorded in chapter 7, is given in somewhat fuller detail than the account in I Kings. Here the well-known promise is found in verse 14: If "My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then

I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14).

The story of the visit from the queen of Sheba to Solomon is a wonderfully illustrative picture of the means by which God intended the whole earth to know the story of His grace. Jews of the Old Testament were never sent into the whole world, as we are commanded to do now in the Great Commission. God's grace was rather displayed by the building of a land and a people so wondrously blessed of God and so obviously different from all other nations around, that word of it would spread to the uttermost parts of the earth. People would then come to Jerusalem from all over the earth to learn the secret of God's blessing.

In the New Testament, God's supreme method of evangelism is that every believer is to be walking in obedience to the Spirit of God who inhabits the temple of his human spirit, and his life is to so manifest the victory, the rejoicing, the blessing, the prosperity, and the joy of the Lord, that people around will ask, "What is the secret of this life?" As I Peter 3:15 puts it, "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." That is God's most effective method of evangelism.

An additional note is given in 2 Chronicles 11 covering the reign of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. Despite the personal weakness of the king there was considerable spiritual vitality within Judah, and the secret of it is given to us in verses 16 and 17: "And those...who set their hearts on seeking the Lord God of Israel, followed them to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Lord God of their fathers. And they strengthened the kingdom of Judah and supported Rehoboam the son of Solomon for three years, for they walked in the way of David and Solomon for three years." Rehoboam misunderstood the secret of his strength and, it is later recorded (12: 1): "He and all Israel with him forsook the law of the Lord." In consequent judgment, the king of Egypt, Shishak, came against him and carried off the treasures of the house of the Lord.

It is noteworthy that in 2 Chronicles, only the kings of Judah are reported in detail. The northern kings are passed over except as they had contact with the kings of Judah.

The obscure prophet Azariah, the son of Oded, is introduced during the days of Asa, the king of Judah (15:1). His ministry is revealed as having a part in the godly reign of Asa. Further detail is also given in Chronicles regarding the reign of Jehoshaphat of Judah. Upon returning from the disastrous battle of Ramoth-gilead, where Ahab of Israel was slain, Jehoshaphat was rebuked by the prophet Jehu for having made an alliance with Ahab. The king's response of turning back to God brought immediate reactions for good among the people. Jehoshaphat set judges over the people and reminded them that God was no respecter of persons, and they, too would be accountable before Him.

Soon after, Judah was threatened by a powerful invasion of the united armies of Moab, Ammon, and certain Edomites. The response of the king was to lead the nation in prayer before the Temple. Confessing their powerlessness and their ignorance of what to do in the situation, but pleading with God for His intervention, the answer was immediate, for the Spirit of the Lord came upon a Levite and he prophesied that Israel need only take their position before the enemy but would not need to fight, for God would fight on their behalf. With music and singing the people went out to meet the foe; and Jehovah sent such confusion and terror among the enemy that they turned upon each other and their vast army was completely destroyed.

Yet, in his closing years, Jehoshaphat made another foolish alliance with Ahaziah, king of Israel, joining him in a naval expedition which met with disaster. Shortly afterward, King Jehoshaphat died, ending a reign of 25 years during which he had, for the most part, walked in godly ways, though it is recorded (20:33): "The high places, however, were not removed; the people had not yet directed their hearts to the God of their fathers." One of the outstanding highlights of his reign had been the sending out of bands of Levites, headed by the princes of Judah, to teach the law of God among the cities of Judah. As a consequence, the fear of the Lord fell upon all the lands around and they made no war against Jehoshaphat until the final invasion of the Edomite host. Thus, God was with the man who was with Him, and honored him with a protracted period of peace.

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