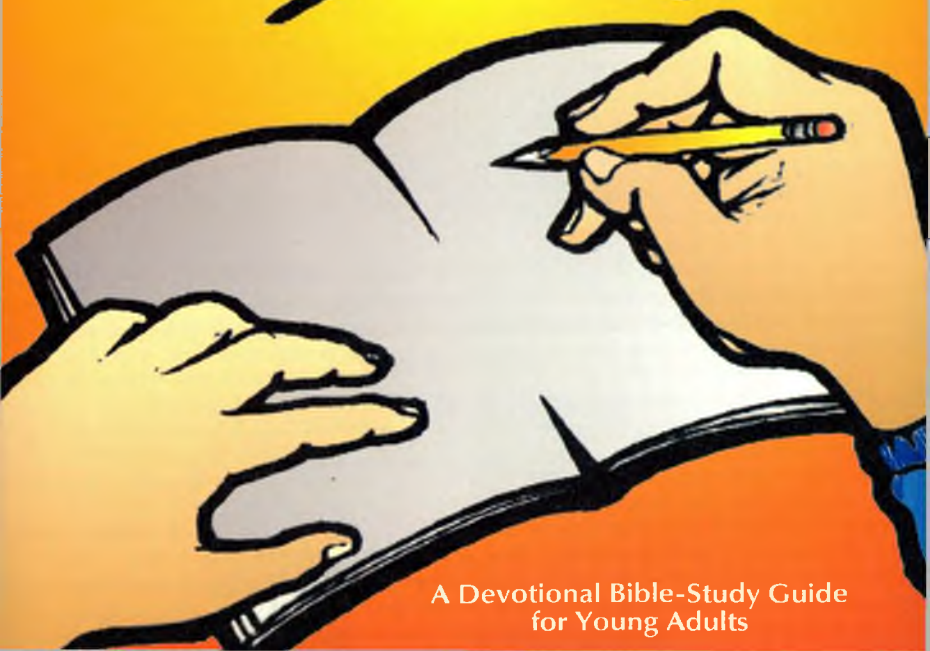


JULY-SEPTEMBER

**Q**  
**2002**

# Kings and Chronicles:

## Too Much Idol Curiosity



A Devotional Bible-Study Guide  
for Young Adults



[www.cq.youthpages.org](http://www.cq.youthpages.org)

# Kings and Chronicles: Too Much Idol Curiosity



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## Welcome to CQ's World



The following pages represent the creative energy of a truly international group of Adventist young adults. The map above indicates the locations of the writers who have participated in *CQ's* writing program for this quarter.

In producing this unique Sabbath School Bible study guide, four hundred individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond individually to the subject under study.

Worldwide circulation of *CQ* is about 65,000. It is published in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Indonesian, and Finnish.

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## Get Interactive

# Ever think about writing for *CQ*?

Why not! Each year 400 young adults from around the world participate in the *CQ* writing program. It gives Seventh-day Adventist young people ages 18 to 35 a unique opportunity to grow spiritually, to share the benefits of their Bible study, to exchange ideas, and to contribute to the mission of the Church.

You are the most important ingredient in our *CQ* formula because you can be the answer to our greatest need—the need for caring, committed, contributing authors. If you think you'd like to participate in the writing of a lesson, write us today:

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## This Quarter's Illustrator

Kelvin T. de la Paz was born December 9, 1978, second among six siblings. He finished his Bachelor's Degree with a mathematics major, at the University of the Philippines, Diliman campus.

An artist at heart, he plays guitar and keyboards at his home church in Pasong Tamo, Quezon City. He also loves drawing and writing.

He pioneered the local chapter of the Adventist Ministry to College and University Students (AMiCUS) in the University of the Philippines, Diliman Campus, and later became instrumental in widening the promotion of AMiCUS in Central Luzon Conference as its president.

# Getting the Most Out of CQ

## **FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW**

*CQ* is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. *CQ*'s purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the Adult Bible Study Guide find that because *CQ* deals with the same topics, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Four hundred Adventist young adults contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Circulation of *CQ* is about 65,000.

## **POINTERS FOR STUDY**

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The Bible passages on which each week's lesson are based appear in bold type in the "Logos" portion of the lesson. Read these entire passages.
3. The Bible passages for the week are usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying these sections, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.
4. Read the other sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passages.
5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the Bible study guide:
  - "**Introduction**" is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.
  - "**Logos**" is a guide for direct study of the Bible passages for the week.
  - "**Testimony**" presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.
  - "**Evidence**" approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.
  - "**How-To**" discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.
  - "**Opinion**" is a personal viewpoint on the lesson meant to encourage further thought and discussion.
  - "**Exploration**" provides the reader with a variety of open-ended, creative ways to explore the topic of the week's lesson.

## **CQ AND THE CHURCH**

*CQ* is the General Conference–approved Bible study guide for the young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the Church.*

# Rough start



---

“Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation,  
and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him”  
(Gen. 18:18).

# Perversion in Presumption

## INTRODUCTION

Prov. 14:12

*Presumption* is defined as acting on “evidence that is probable but not conclusive,” leading to venturing beyond due bounds, overstepping bounds of reverence or respect.\*

Presumption is doing what we know is inappropriate, yet we rationalize that we will get away with it. Just do it, consequences later! With blind ferocity we do in a moment that which is deplorable and impossible.

In fact, evil can be justified as necessary to balance good. Presumption! Children show presumptuous behaviour toward parents even on simple “don’t’s.” People show indifference toward all manner of authority. This is exactly what Adonijah, the second eldest son of David, did.

Adonijah had long known Solomon to be the apparent heir despite his being the oldest son of David after the death of Absalom. But God had long before changed the natural order and appointed Solomon to be David’s successor. Adonijah went against the revealed will of God and pronounced himself king. The act of running to the temple and holding the horns of the altar when in danger (1 Kings 1:51), if his heart was true, would have saved his life.

Half-hearted measures yield half-hearted results. It is the same with spiritual things. It is an all-or-nothing phenomenon. Either Christ or not. Either Christian or not. Either for or against Solomon. Jesus said that “he who is not with Me is against Me.” We can be children of light or of darkness. Adonijah soon began to trace the treacherous path of opposition. The half-hearted remorse was shown when he asked to take one of his father’s wives. This was equivalent to fitting the mantle left by his father David and therefore the throne. This presumption cost him his life.

How deadly is this sort of behavior? At the very core of that which is rationalized, however pompous, intelligent, and reasonable the argument is, there lies *sin*. Sin, whether big or small, leads to eternal death but may begin with physical death. There is something in God’s ability to deal with sin completely. It is His grace that enables us to be acceptable to Him. He does not leave us as we are, but His grace transforms us to be just like Him. He will forgive, cleanse, and restore. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, NIV). Thank God, it is possible!

**Presumption is doing what  
we know is inappropriate.**

\* <[www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)>.



Sunday  
June 30

## Consequences— Do We Need Them?

### LOGOS

1 Kings 1:11-53; Gal. 6:7

Isaac Newton, the British physicist, listed his three laws of motion in his famous scientific work *Principia*. These laws, which describe the effects of forces acting on objects, are *causal* in that they have a cause that produces a certain effect. For example, if you apply a force to an object, it accelerates.

In the spiritual sense, there are laws that God has given to guide our lives. These laws tell us that if we sin (the cause), we will suffer the consequence (the effect) of the sin. The history of the Israelites in the books of Kings shows their struggle to follow His laws and the consequences they suffered when they rejected God.

The nation of Israel was promised by God to Abraham (Gen. 17:1-8). God provided the Israelites with laws that gave them guidelines on how they should live. God told them that if they followed His laws, they would live a long and successful life (Deut. 5:32, 33; 6:1-4). As the king of Israel, David was the spiritual leader and role model and

**No one likes  
to be disciplined.**

was to lead the nation in following these laws. So throughout his life, David tried to follow God's laws with all of his heart and was considered by God to be a man after His own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). In fact, Jesus Himself was often called the "Son of David" (Matt. 9:27; 12:23; Mark 10:47).

We also see David failing terribly by committing adultery and murder (2 Samuel 11; 12). However, when confronted by the prophet Nathan, David immediately admitted his sin and asked God for forgiveness. He had to suffer the consequences of his sin with the death of the child conceived in the affair. Over the next few years, the effect of David's actions is evident in the actions of his sons Amnon and Absalom: murder, betrayal, rebellion, adultery, and rape. Neither of them was remorseful for his sins. While David forgave them, they were never punished and did not understand the consequences of their actions. As a result of this, both Absalom and Amnon died violent deaths at a young age.

With David now as an aging king (1 Kings 1:1), his oldest son Adonijah had ambitions for the throne. Adonijah was not disciplined by his father (verses 5, 6). Adonijah was popular with many people and supported by some of David's closest friends (verse 7). Fortunately David still had people—including the prophet Nathan—who followed the principles of God. God used the prophet Nathan to tell David of Adonijah's actions and remind David of his promise to Bathsheba (verses 11-27). God knew that the best king for Israel was Solomon, who was also called Jedidiah, which means "loved by the Lord" (2 Sam. 12:24, 25). David kept his promise to

---

Bathsheba and pronounced that Solomon would succeed him as king of Israel. When Adonijah heard of Solomon's crowning, he was fearful and ran to the Lord's tent (1 Kings 1:50). Solomon showed an incredible kindness to his brother, in spite of the opportunity to kill any possible contenders to the throne, and sent Adonijah home (verses 51, 52).

No one likes to be disciplined; in fact, most people will put in a lot of effort to avoid any form of discipline. So why do we need it? Simply, to understand that our actions have consequences. We all understand the consequence of touching a hot saucepan in the kitchen: we can feel the pain in our hands for some time. Similarly, God wants us to understand the consequences of sin. The book of Proverbs contains a lot of good advice about discipline. Many of the Proverbs provide advice about discipline and following God's way (Prov. 1:1-7; 5:7-13; 13:24; 23:12-14). Solomon, being a wise man, knew the importance of appropriate discipline in his life and learned from the experiences of his family. God gives His promise that He will forgive us if we come to Him and repent (1 John 1:8, 9). David talks about this forgiveness after repentance in Psalm 32. However with forgiveness, there is the need to change the attitude in our hearts (John 8:7-11). But after the forgiveness of our sins, we are left with the consequences of our sins (Gal. 6:7, 8). The lives of Absalom, Amnon, and Adonijah show the final and tragic consequences of not following God's way. Let us learn from these experiences and not follow in the same path. Romans 6:23 states that the ultimate consequence of sin is death. But do not forget the next part: "But the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (NLT). Let us take this free gift today and make it the center of our lives.

## **REACT**

1. If God has forgiven sins, why does He not remove the consequences?
2. If we have asked God for forgiveness, yet we still feel guilty, what should we do?
3. How should we react when we suffer the consequences for the sins committed by someone else? Does this indicate a fair or unfair God?
4. If someone were to commit a crime that seriously hurt someone we love and that person genuinely repents to both you and God, should we push for them to be punished?
5. To what extent, if any, do we grade sins according to their consequences?
6. Part of accepting God's free gift requires us to let go of some power and surrender our lives to Him. In a world that stresses the opposite—power to the individual—how does letting go of power for God feel?
7. When thinking through a decision, what part directs your final actions most: the reason (cause) or the effects your choice will have? Why?
8. How do you personally make God's assurance of salvation real to you? Be specific.
9. What do you think God feels when His children ask forgiveness?

Monday  
July 1

## To Purify, Not to Consume

### TESTIMONY

1 Kings 1

"The history of David affords one of the most impressive testimonies ever given to the dangers that threaten the soul from power and riches and worldly honor."<sup>1</sup>

He had neglected the duty to discipline his sons. The fruit of his parental indulgence resulted in Adonijah's rebellion. Having received little restraint in his youth, Adonijah "rebelled against the authority of God, who had appointed Solomon to the throne."<sup>2</sup>

"When parents or rulers neglect the duty of punishing iniquity, . . . [God's] restraining power will be in a measure removed from the agencies of evil, so that a train of circumstances will arise which will punish sin with sin."<sup>3</sup>

"Righteousness was to be the foundation for national prosperity. Sin could end only in ruin. . . . The nation could not exist without righteousness and without God."<sup>4</sup>

**"David's history enables us . . .  
to trace, . . . the working out  
of His purposes of mercy  
and beneficence."**

"David's history enables us to see also the great ends which God has in view in His dealings with sin; it enables us to trace, . . . the working out of His purposes of mercy and beneficence. He caused

David to pass under the rod, but He did not destroy him; the furnace is to purify, but not to consume."<sup>5</sup>

David's sincere prayer of repentance illustrates the nature of true sorrow for sin. "There was no effort to palliate his crime. No desire to escape the judgments threatened, inspired his prayer. . . . It was not for pardon only that he prayed, but for purity of heart."<sup>6</sup>

"Confession of sin, whether public or private, . . . will not be acceptable to God without sincere repentance and reformation. There must be decided changes in the life; everything offensive to God must be put away. This will be the result of genuine sorrow for sin."<sup>7</sup>

3. Why are the promises of God's love hard for some to grasp?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 746.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 749.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 728.

4. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 717.

5. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 738.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 725.

7. *Steps to Christ*, pp. 38, 39.

# The Scars of Sin

## EVIDENCE

Gal. 6:7

The books of Kings are more in the nature of a compilation of selected materials brought together by an editor than an original production from a single hand (much like *CQ*). The present two books of Kings were originally one, known in Hebrew as *Melakim*, “Kings.” It is the history of a family in which “the hard facts of life are recorded exactly as they took place—exactly as they do take place in a world where proud and victorious monarchs and even earnest men of God are not free from reaping the harvests of the seeds that have been sown.”\*

Our present first book gives the history of the Hebrew monarchs beginning with the death of David and the reign of Solomon. David is known as a passionate man and is often referred to as the man after God’s “own heart” (Acts 13:22, KJV). This passion, however, led him to become an overindulgent father, one who didn’t question the acts of his children. He had already had to deal with the rebellion of another child, which had ended bitterly (2 Sam. 18:33), and now Adonijah’s claim to the throne posed another conflict.

This passion led him  
to become an  
overindulgent father.

Adonijah was the fourth son of David (2 Sam. 3:4; 1 Chron. 3:2) and was probably a spoiled and stubborn child accustomed to having his own way. He was fully aware of his actions and knew that they were selfish; otherwise he would not have carried out his actions in secret. His immediate rebellion did not end in bloodshed, but he eventually met a tragic end (1 Kings 2:24, 25). This serves to remind us that the results are always tragic when reason and discretion are thrown to the wind in the service of self—Adonijah reaped what he sowed.

Rebellion is seen as open resistance to authority. When we sin, we are openly rebelling against God, our Father and Redeemer. Sin always has repercussions, and it is selfish to think that our actions affect only us. They invariably hurt the ones we love, like our families and friends. God forgives us again and again for our transgressions, but the scars of sin are left behind as a reminder of our sinful nature. “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Gal. 6:10, NIV).

## REACT

What does the Bible say in relation to raising children?

\*The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 2, pp. 715–729.



Wednesday  
July 3

## How Do We Forgive?

### HOW-TO

1 Kings 1:52

**Forgiveness is surrendering  
the right to hurt back.**

In the story of David's declaring Solomon king, we see Solomon forgiving Adonijah for attempting to take the throne. It was common in the ancient Near East for an invading king to kill all potential claimants to the throne. The prophet Nathan

tells Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, that she and her son will be killed if Adonijah is made king (1 Kings 1:12). When Solomon is made king, Adonijah is then afraid that

Solomon will kill him for opposing his succession to the throne. By fleeing to the altar and taking hold of the horns of the altar, Adonijah shows that he is a condemned man but seeks to place his destiny under the protection of God (verse 50). Solomon shows amazing forgiveness of Adonijah's threat to his life and sends him home (verse 53).

In learning to forgive someone, it may be important to answer some questions:

**What is forgiveness?** Forgiveness is surrendering the right to hurt back. Ceasing resentment. Releasing emotional binds. Breaking the cycle of hurt. A conscious decision of the will. Fixing something someone else has broken.

**What myths are there about forgiveness?** It is a myth that if I forgive, I am condoning the behavior of others. Forgiveness means reconciliation. Forgiveness is forgetting. (It can be foolish or unwise to do so in some situations.) When Adonijah tries to manipulate his way to the throne, Solomon has not forgotten that Adonijah has sought to take his throne (2:22).

It is also a myth that forgiveness is about pretending that we are OK on the surface and burying our resentments. Forgiving one another is not about saying sorry with our words but not saying sorry inside.

**What happens when I don't forgive?** If we don't forgive, then our unforgiveness still owns us. We end up ridiculing the people who hurt us behind their backs. We continue to be controlled by our pain.

We are part of the rebellion of crowning ourselves king (Eph. 2:1-3). Even while doing this, God has forgiven us and spared us our life (verses 4-10). Eugene Peterson puts part of David's psalm of praise to God's sovereignty this way: "Your kingdom is a kingdom eternal; you never get voted out of office" (Ps. 145:13, *The Message*).

### REACT

What is it that most people seem to want from others: Respect? Trust? Something else? Support your answer with examples.



# Disciplined Adults

## OPINION

Col. 3:21

Throughout the Bible, a number of verses refer to how parents should discipline their children. But often what is forgotten is that parents must themselves be disciplined in their own lives. Paul urges that parents should not do anything to make their children discouraged (Col. 3:21).

The stages of life in going from a child to an adult are both exciting and challenging. There are many changes—emotional, physical, hormonal, social, spiritual, and mental—that bring about anxiety, questions, and doubts. It is a time when young people make mistakes and are susceptible to outside influences. The most powerful influence on a young child's life as they grow up is the love and care received from parents. This influence along with a consistent attitude will be one

**What is forgotten is that parents must themselves be disciplined in their own lives.**

of the major factors in whether children decide to follow or reject God in their lives. Children will associate the characteristics of their parents with the heavenly Father.

It is important that children receive discipline and understand the consequences of their actions. Being a parent does not give them the right to treat their children however they like. All children are born in the image of God, and all adults have a responsibility to treat children as gifts from God. Nothing is more contradictory than parents who profess to follow God yet show little respect to their children.

Some points to consider:

- Remember that children are growing up, learning new experiences, and will make mistakes.
- Inappropriate and forceful discipline will not teach children the consequences of their actions.
- Parents continue to make mistakes but are often not disciplined for their actions.
- We are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God. But by the grace of Jesus, He forgives our sins.

Jesus made time to be with children during His ministry. He gave special advice to the disciples on how they should act and how they should treat children (Mark 9:33-37, 42). As young people and adults, we also have a duty to treat children with respect, love, and dignity.

Friday  
July 5

## Too Much of a Good Thing?

### EXPLORATION

2 Chron. 7:14; Col. 3:12, 13

### CONCLUDE

Amid all the treachery, revenge, cowardice, and selfishness found in the book of 1 Kings, there is a lot of forgiveness going on. David repeatedly forgives his sons for some major sins. It is this willingness to forgive that probably saves David from falling into the same predicaments that trapped and destroyed Saul. And because Solomon showed mercy and forgiveness to his sneaky brother Adonijah, his reign was even more prosperous than his father's (1:27).

Forgiveness has more to do with its effect on *us* than the person who wronged us. Forgiveness is a powerful tool.

### CONSIDER

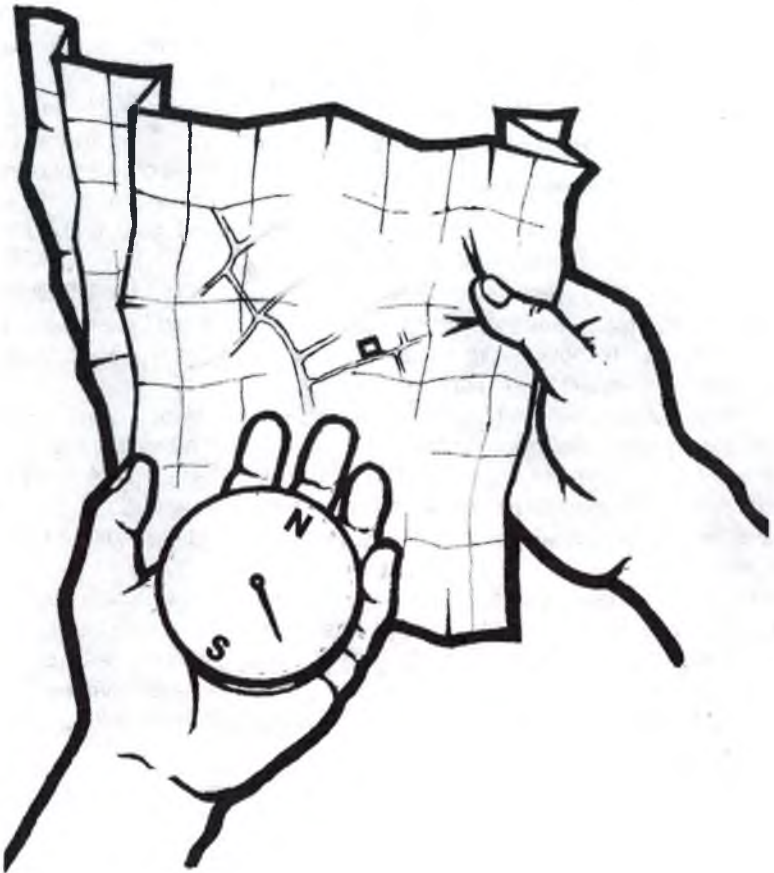
- Praying in a different position or location. Try standing with your hands upraised, lifting your burdens to God. Prostrate yourself, offering yourself to God. How does your position affect the content of your prayers?
- Running the "de-frag" program on your computer. As the system works, moving chunks of information, clearing, optimizing, consider how forgiveness works (God's to us and ours to others) to de-frag our lives.
- Writing a note asking forgiveness from someone you have hurt, or forgiving someone who has wronged you. Write a letter to God, asking forgiveness for hurting Him.
- Secretly doing a good deed for someone without expecting any return. What does God get in return for His free gift of forgiveness and eternal life to us?
- Arranging a symbolic washing ceremony. Find a lake or stream, or use a large bowl of water and fragrant herbs. Read Psalm 51:1-7. After washing claim the promise in verse 10.
- Viewing the *Veggie Tales* video "King George and the Ducky" about selfishness and forgiveness.

### CONNECT

*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 717–726; 753–755.

Joe Engelkemier, *Great Prayers and Pray-ers*, pp. 43-50; John Duckworth, *Joan 'n the Whale*, "Hailing the Chief."

# The **Man** who would be **King**



---

“If you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days” (1 Kings 3:14, NKJV).

Sabbath  
July 6

## Keep Looking Up

### INTRODUCTION

1 Kings 3:5-15; James 1:5

We were lost, not desperately lost, but we knew we were no longer on the trail and could go no farther. We had been hiking only a short while—just the beginning of a three-day backpacking trip covering 26 miles of hilly, wooded Ozark wilderness. Now we found ourselves waist-high in thorny briars with no trail in sight.

We had been planning this backpacking trip for several weeks. There is always a lot of planning that goes into a trip like this. You study the map, plan where to put in, where to camp each night, and where to take out. You plan your food and how to get water. You find out about the right kind of boots and socks to wear, and how to use layers of

**You've done your homework and now you are ready to go.**

clothes. You pack your backpack with the right amount of food, gear, and clothing. You've done your homework and now you are ready to go.

As we hiked along, we were confident that we were ready, busily talking to each other, having fun, and looking down at our feet to avoid hazards such as rocks, holes, and tree roots. But we were so busy looking down that we missed the trail markers. We weren't looking up.

Solomon was preparing to be king. He had access to the king's court. He knew what to wear, what to say, whom to talk to. He had the best education that money could buy. But when it came time for Solomon to become king, he knew that education was not enough. He knew he would need to look up to find the trail markers. He needed the wisdom that only God could provide in order to rule the kingdom.

In our spiritual life we are very busy doing the right things: watching out for the rocks, holes, and tree roots in life that make us stumble. But it is in looking up to God for direction and strength, looking for the trail markers, that will keep us on the right trail and keep us from becoming lost. "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5, NIV).

# Contemporary Solomon

## EVIDENCE

1 Kings 9:4

What would Solomon have been like as a man and a leader in the twenty-first century? It is improbable that Solomon would have 700 wives and 300 concubines as they would be more of a liability than an asset. What modern person could or would endure a royal wedding every two or three weeks?

Assuming God would still bestow the gift of wisdom on him, Solomon would be recognized for his intuitive knowledge of people. His wisdom when ascertaining the true mother in the dispute over the surviving infant brought him worldwide fame.<sup>1</sup> As rulers of the world came to Jerusalem to verify the rumors, they found him personable and even wiser than had been reported. These traits would most assuredly still be there in a contemporary Solomon.

Solomon, like many of us today, quickly forgot that his talents and skills were a gift from God. His greatest failures emanated from his decision to solve the nation's problems without waiting for God's guidance. Two of Solomon's decisions to proceed without waiting on the Lord undermined the theocracy. Even though Solomon repented, the loss was never repaired.

1. He hired builders and bought supplies from Hiram of Tyre instead of waiting for God to provide as He had when constructing the wilderness tabernacle.<sup>2</sup>

2. He made diplomatic alliances in marriage with neighboring rulers rather than seeking God's solution to the diplomatic problems.

Consequently Solomon built extensive palaces and cities to house his growing family. The vast building projects increased his debts to Hiram of Tyre and led to his ceding 20 coastal cities to the Phoenician ruler (1 Kings 9:11). Solomon's foreign wives introduced pagan gods into the palace. Solomon, the man who built a temple to the true God on Mount Moriah, eventually built a temple to the pagan god Molech where children were offered as human sacrifices. The temple to Molech was built on Jerusalem's eastern hill, quite possibly the site of Jesus' crucifixion (1 Kings 11:7).

**Solomon quickly forgot  
that his talents and skills  
were a gift from God.**

## REACT

1. What does it mean to "wait on the Lord"? Be specific.
2. What's the difference between waiting on the Lord and procrastination?

1. *SDA Bible Dictionary*, "Solomon."

2. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 35, 36.



Monday  
July 8

## How Important Are Our Motives?

### LOGOS

1 Kings 2:13-25; 3:5-16; 2 Kings 2:1-3

### The Results of Impure Motives (1 Kings 2:13-25)

Adonijah, the fourth son of David, sought the highest office in the kingdom. Whether it was due to his ambition, lack of parental direction, or perhaps pursuing the root meaning of his name *adown* (#113 Strong's Hebrew), which meant to rule as sovereign, i.e., controller, etc., he desired to be king after his father, David, who was soon to die. This led him to exalt himself above the known heir to the throne—his younger brother, Solomon.

Perhaps he was influenced by the actions of his next older brother, Absalom, who had tried to take the throne from their father. Eventually Bathsheba and Nathan the prophet conferred with King David and together they installed

**Any time we seek to deceive,  
we are on Satan's ground.**

Solomon as king, sending Adonijah in fear to cling to the horns of the altar in the sanctuary (1 Kings 1:50).

Bathsheba's question to her stepson, Adonijah, betrays her fears, which his prior conduct—just reviewed—might well warrant. Even though he insisted that the Lord had given the kingdom to Solomon, his was an evil request with intentions to deceive. Any time we seek to deceive, we are on Satan's ground and the Lord will not bless our devices. Notice an example of true intent of peace found in 1 Samuel 16:4, 5.

In 1 Kings 2:19-21, we find his mother making the request of Adonijah unto the king. In her state as "king's mother," (sitting on the right hand of the king), Bathsheba held tremendous sway with her son, yet the wise King Solomon saw through the activities of his older brother and ordered the death of the would-be usurper. Using the common form of introducing a solemn oath as seen in verse 23, Solomon brings an end to the impure motives of Adonijah. Truly the requests we make today must be tempered with the prayerful memory of the example of Christ Jesus our Lord.

### The Example of Pure Motives (1 Kings 3:5-16)

The example of Solomon asking of God wisdom, rather than wealth and honor, is certainly opposite of the request of his older brother, Adonijah. In verse 5, Solomon is given a dream on the same night that he had just offered a thousand burnt offerings before the Lord. He evidently had prayed much for the Lord to help him to understand how to lead His people.

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His humble acknowledgement of his inability to rightly lead Israel (1 Kings 3:7) further illustrates to us what is needed to receive blessings from God. As we seek to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, we would do well to remember that as Christ, our example, was humble, so must we be.

Notice that Solomon asked for specific administrative judgment for assistance to Israel (verse 9). The motive of his request was not for his own benefit but for the benefit of his people and to the honor of God. This is a good model to follow for success in reaching souls for the King.

Unfortunately, Solomon did not adhere to the conditional blessings stated by God in verse 14. He did not walk in God's ways or keep His statutes or commandments. Eventually he had many wives, which led him into idolatry and rebellion from God, worshiping the gods of the Moabites and Zidonians.

### **Pure Motive Mixed With Direct Focus (2 Kings 2:1-3)**

Our final view of motives and their results in life comes from the story of the separation of Elijah from Elisha and his entrance into the heavens via a whirlwind, riding in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11). Elisha follows Elijah without view of other matters and is not distracted by the crowd (verse 3).

We would do well to seek this kind of focus in our lives as well. Did not Jesus live His life in such a manner? Not seeking His own will but the will of His Father, this was the focus of every day.

Just as Enoch was taken up into heaven by God (Gen. 5:24), so also was Elisha's friend and teacher to be soon parted from him. As one of Elijah's students, Elisha sought for every minute of instruction that he could glean from Elijah. "Just before Elijah was taken to heaven, he visited the schools of the prophets, . . . The lessons he had given them on former visits, he now repeated, impressing upon the minds of the youth the importance of letting simplicity mark every feature of their education."<sup>1</sup>

Notice also that the story proceeds from Gilgal to Bethel to Jericho to the Jordan River. Gilgal was the location "where the children of Israel were circumcised after they came over Jordan and had been forty years in the wilderness."<sup>2</sup> This may be seen as the reversal of the process of God's leading the children of Israel into the land of Canaan. For over the Jordan into the wilderness is where Elijah is captured by God and taken up into heaven. We likewise can be assured that in whatever location God finds us, He can take us into a land with a heavenly view.

### **REACT**

Think of when someone seemed to be a hypocrite and how you felt when you couldn't see past the person to see the message they were supposedly delivering. Why is Jesus' stress on the need for humility and simplicity so important?

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1. *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Oct. 24, 1907.

2. (Josh. 5:9) 1599 Geneva Bible Notes.

Tuesday  
July 9

## "I Am But a Little Child"

### TESTIMONY

1 Kings 2:1-3; 3:5-16

Children demonstrate a faith in those they trust that we as adults seem to forget. My five-year-old daughter was leading her horse when he spooked. He jumped and tried to run away.

**"It is only the meek that He will guide in judgment."**

Taken by surprise she held onto his lead rope and was being pulled along right underneath his dancing hooves. My wife yelled for her

to let go of the rope, which she promptly did. The horse quickly moved away from her, leaving her scared but uninjured. The Bible says that to be saved we should become like little children (Matt. 18:3; 19:14). "Early in his reign Solomon was impressed by the Holy Spirit with the solemnity of his responsibilities, and, though rich in talents and ability, he realized that without divine aid he was helpless as a little child to perform them. Solomon was never so rich or so wise or so truly great as when he confessed to the Lord: 'I am but a little child; I know not how to go out or come in.'"<sup>1</sup>

"In his youth Solomon made David's choice his own, and for many years he walked uprightly, his life marked with strict obedience to God's commands. . . . Above every earthly good, the king desired wisdom and understanding for the accomplishment of the work God had given him to do. He longed for quickness of mind, for largeness of heart, for tenderness of spirit."<sup>2</sup>

"Christ will not undertake to teach the self-righteous, self-conceited, and self-willed. If such come to Him with the inquiry, What is truth? He gives them no answer. It is only the meek that He will guide in judgment; the meek will He teach His way. Solomon was naturally endowed with good judgment and large reasoning powers, but he acknowledged himself before God as a little child."<sup>3</sup>

### REACT

1. In Solomon's early reign, Israel was poised to be the light of the world, to give God's true message to all the surrounding nations. What things made him such a prosperous ruler?
2. How does 1 Kings 3:7 relate to your daily Christian experience?
3. Explain the analogy of becoming like a child.

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 281.

2. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 27, 28.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 449.

# How to Tell Right From Wrong

## HOW-TO 1 King 3:5-16

It is so easy for us to think that we are smarter than God. We tend as humans to think that we can handle everything on our own. Satan uses these thoughts to turn us away from God. Sometimes we are in pretty deep before we even realize it. We think that since we are Christians we know what is right and what is wrong. We don't need help all the time. We can handle it. It is very easy for people in leadership positions to think that they know it all and can do everything just fine on their own. But Satan will try to influence them more than others. If he can get them to follow him, then everyone under them will follow also. That is what happened to Solomon.

You would think that with all the blessings God had given Solomon and his people there would be no way for them to stray. The lesson we can learn from this

is that even though the Lord is right beside you every day, you still must remain humble and rely on Him daily. Satan can cloud our judgment and cause us to fall. If we don't constantly ask God if this is the right thing to do, then we just let Satan influence our decisions. It is very

**Even though the Lord is  
right beside you every  
day, you still must  
remain humble.**

easy to think that we don't need to ask God about everything. Solomon thought he could handle the temptations that were beginning to surround him. He thought he was strong enough and didn't need God. Those thoughts led him to disregard God's law (which he had memorized) and do things on his own. One little sin led to years of complete disregard for God's law.

We must be very careful what we ask from God. Solomon asked for wisdom, and God gave it to him. It might be a gift from God, but Satan can still use it against us if we let him.

## **REACT**

1. Why does Satan want us to think we can do things on our own?
2. How do you sort through the narrow distinction between the church as a human institution that makes mistakes and its mission to uphold God's character, which is pure and holy?
3. Our world is in a fad of stressing the strength of our inner selves and the need to tap into that strength in order to be truly fulfilled. With this sort of conditioning, what challenges do you, like Solomon, face in turning to God for some of that strength to deflect Satan's attack?



## Listen to Our Fathers of Old

### OPINION

1 Kings 2:1-10

In the early history of Israel, we see many examples of God's judgment and mercy on His people. This was judgment according to the people's faithfulness toward God. Those who trespassed God's commands were shown mercy only if they repented. In the book of Kings, faithful rulers were praised while unfaithful kings were condemned. The kings of Israel were condemned for idol worship; but in contrast, the descendants of David and kings of Judah, for the most part, followed the ways of God. The stories of how God had blessed the nation of Israel were told and retold from generation to generation. It was how well the children listened to their fathers and how obedient they were that made the difference between life and death.

As David lay on his deathbed, his main concern was for his son, Solomon, to follow the ways of God. The main message to his son was to "observe what the

**God meant for the family  
to be a model of our  
relationship with Him.**

Lord your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements'" (1 Kings 2:3, NIV). The results of following God was prosperity. Solomon was the richest man in the world.

He obeyed his father and honored God by building a magnificent temple in Jerusalem. Later on, after the death of his earthly father, Solomon's failures came by walking away from God's voice and counsel.

God meant for the family to be a model of our relationship with Him. The fifth commandment calls for us to honor our parents so that we may prosper in this life and prepare us for the life to come. We continually see the breakdown of society as a result of the breakdown of the family unit. It is by respecting our parents or those who fill our parents' role that we learn about respecting God.

God communicates to us through the wisdom of our parents just as Solomon learned from God. Isaiah 48:17 says that it is the Lord who teaches us what is best. It is only as we spend time with Him that we will become aware of His voice. It is only by honoring our parents that we learn how to honor God.

### REACT

1. Is it harder to listen or to develop a relationship with God than it is with our parents? Explain your answer.
2. How is the conflict between the fifth commandment and having non-Christian parents resolved?



# The Conditional Gift

## EXPLORATION

Prov. 3:5, 6

## CONCLUDE

God's storehouse is filled with countless blessings for those who humbly ask, believing they will receive. Why then do we live on the fringes of God's generosity? Solomon found the key to the riches of heaven when he acknowledged that he needed God's guiding hand more than anything else in the world. But after inviting God to lead his life, he didn't allow Him to stay. Although he wasted precious time and resources, he finally learned that being the recipient of God's goodness brings with it an awesome responsibility, a charge to live for His glory.

## CONSIDER

- Beginning a prayer journal. Chronicle your petitions showing when and how God answers them.
- Role-playing as a king for a day. What things would you consider essential to carrying out your responsibilities effectively?
- Going to a mall or other public place and asking people, "Why do you need God?" Share your findings with your Sabbath School group.
- Reading James 4:1-10 and paraphrasing the main ideas.
- Tying your arm to the arm of a friend and following him or her around for an hour. You can do only what he or she does. Share at the end of the hour how it felt to be completely dependent.
- Writing down an outrageous dream, something you would like to do but yet is out of your reach. Pray about it during this week.
- Writing a scripture song with words and music for one of the following references: (a) 1 Chronicles 18:31, 32; (2) 1 Chronicles 20:20; (3) 1 Chronicles 10:27, 28.

## CONNECT

Proverbs 3:5, 6; James 4:1-10.

Bruce Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez*.

# Many strange Women



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“Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!” (1 Kings 8:27, NKJV).

# A Root of Evil

## INTRODUCTION

1 Kings 11:1

“How beautiful your sandaled feet, O prince’s daughter!  
Your graceful legs are like jewels, the work of a craftsman’s hands.  
Your navel is a rounded goblet that never lacks blended wine.  
Your waist is a mound of wheat encircled by lilies.  
Your breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle.  
Your neck is like an ivory tower.  
Your eyes are the pools of Heshbon by the gate of Bath Rabbim.  
Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon looking toward Damascus.  
Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel.  
Your hair is like royal tapestry; the king is held captive by its tresses.  
How beautiful you are and how pleasing, O love, with your delights!  
Your stature is like that of the palm, and your breasts like clusters of fruit.  
I said, ‘I will climb the palm tree; I will take hold of its fruit.’  
May your breasts be like the clusters of the vine,  
the fragrance of your breath like apples,  
*and your mouth like the best wine*” (*Song of Sol. 7:1-9, NIV; italics supplied*).

The love of women made King Solomon write the above verses. He liked to express everything based on his experience with women. This love of women, however, brought him down to the lowest possible faith. Instead of becoming a good example to the Israelites, Solomon becomes the worst example who makes the people of Israel follow him to the worst possible thing people could imagine, from worshiping idols to human sacrifice.

Since the beginning, men have had a tendency to kneel to beautiful women. From Adam, Samson, Solomon, Ahab, and many others, men fall to the lowest level of faith because of passion for women.

Since the beginning God created only one woman for Adam, not two, three, or more. One is enough as an advisor and companion for man. Men always try to please the woman to bring her to love him. Even though in the beginning of his reign King Solomon had asked God to provide him with wisdom, in his fame he forgot God’s wisdom and promises. From making God number one, he stooped to making evil number one. “Do not intermarry with [unbelievers]. . . . For they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods” (Deut. 7:3, 4, NIV). It is indeed love of strange women (those who are not of our faith) that is the beginning of an evil thing.

## LOGOS

1 Kings 4; 5; 6; 8:22-66; 2 Chron. 1:6-12

God promised in 1 Kings 3:12, 13 that He would be with Solomon, his throne would be established, and his reign would be the means of exalting Israel as a wise and understanding people, the light of the surrounding nations. The writer of 1 Kings points out two main areas in the biography of Solomon:

### The Strength of Solomon

The early part of Solomon's reign was characterized by his wisdom and his wealth. He was anointed as a king (1 Kings 1), after the death of David (2), and acknowledged to be God's chosen (3). It was wisdom, not wealth, that Solomon prayed for, and God granted his request. Thus, God-fearing wisdom became the foundation of his kingdom.

Yet his wealth became as great as his wisdom. This was reflected in three aspects of his kingdom:

1. Domestic prosperity (4). Solomon reigned over a region stretching from Babylon on the North to Egypt on the South, and from the Mediterranean Sea to

**Position does not bestow  
holiness of character.**

the River Euphrates. Throughout this territory ran many natural highways of the world's commerce. "Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking

and rejoicing" (verse 20, NKJV). Not only was there prosperity and plenty but there was also domestic tranquility, for "he had peace on every side all around him" (verse 24, NKJV). There was also a great increase in knowledge and music, for Solomon "spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five" (verse 32, NKJV).

2. Religious achievements (5-8). The temple Solomon built in Jerusalem was a magnificent religious achievement. David desired to build the temple, but God would not allow him to build it because he was a man of bloodshed. In his dedication of it, he prayed and bound his people with an oath to remain faithful to God (8).

3. Political stability (9-10). By a series of treaties, marriages, and international diplomacy, Solomon built an unsurpassed network of relationships with surrounding countries. When the Queen of Sheba saw all that Solomon had, she declared, "the half was not told me" (10:7, NKJV).

### The Weakness of Solomon

The fame of Solomon reached great heights but in the end was outweighed by

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his shame. At first, as wealth and worldly honor came to him, he remained humble, and great was the extent of his influence. But after a morning of great promise, his life was darkened by apostasy.

In fame and wisdom, riches and honor, position and popularity, Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth. These things enslaved his heart; and he forgot the Lord, who was really the One that had given him every good thing he had. Position does not bestow holiness of character. Oh that in later years Solomon had heeded these wonderful words of wisdom: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Psalm 111:10. . . . Had never . . . in 'pride and arrogancy,' taken to himself the glory due to God alone!"<sup>1</sup>

As might be expected, moral wickedness is what spelled the final doom of Solomon's kingdom. Enormous revenues acquired through commerce with many lands were supplemented by heavy taxes. Thus pride, ambition, prodigality, and indulgence bore fruit in cruelty and exaction. Solomon degenerated into a tyrant and he became oppressive and despotic.

He also disregarded the instruction that God had given to serve as a barrier against apostasy, and now he gave in to the worship of false gods: Ashtoreth, Molech, and Chemosh (1 Kings 11: 5, 7), and practiced the most degrading rites of heathenism.

The last part of Solomon's life was a tragedy, "His gradual apostasy had more disastrous results than the infamous scandal of his father, who sincerely repented."<sup>2</sup> "But King Solomon loved many strange women" (verse 1). Solomon proved the validity of God's warning that foreign women would turn the hearts of His people after foreign gods (verse 2). Solomon had one thousand wives and concubines (verse 3). The subsequent political disunity was really a result of spiritual shortcomings.

We could draw many morals from Solomon's biography. It is important for us to recognize that we do have the capacity to build each other up. It is not the empty cup that we have difficulty carrying; it is the cup full to the brim that must be carefully balanced. Affliction and adversity may cause sorrow, but it is prosperity that is most dangerous to spiritual life.

## **REACT**

1. What are your first impressions after studying the character and career of Solomon?
2. What is true worship?
3. What part, if any, should Christians play in government today?
4. Solomon: An ordinary guy blessed extraordinarily by God. With all he had going for him, what steps might he have taken to remain carefully balanced and thus remain blessed?

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1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 34.

2. Carl DeVries, "Solomon" in *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, p. 802.



## Forbidden Road— Do Not Enter

### TESTIMONY

2 Cor. 6:14-18

“The Lord commanded ancient Israel not to intermarry with the idolatrous nations around them: ‘Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.’ The reason is given. Infinite Wisdom, foreseeing the result of such unions, declares: ‘For they will turn away thy son from following Me, that they may serve other gods.’”<sup>1</sup>

“Satan well knew the results that would attend obedience; and during the earlier years of Solomon’s reign—years glorious because of the wisdom, the beneficence

**“Human love should draw  
its closest bonds from  
divine love.”**

and the uprightness of the king—he sought to bring in influences that would insidiously undermine Solomon’s loyalty to principle and cause him to separate from God. And that the enemy was successful in this

effort, we know from the record: ‘Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh’s daughter, and brought her into the city of David.’”<sup>2</sup>

“The life of Solomon might have been remarkable until its close if virtue had been preserved. But he surrendered this special grace to lustful passion. . . . His wives led him into idolatry, and when he began to descend the declivity of life, the wisdom that God had given him was removed; he lost his firmness of character and became more like the giddy youth, wavering between right and wrong. Yielding his principles, he placed himself in the current of evil, and thus separated himself from God, the foundation and source of his strength. He had moved from principle. . . . He was deceived and ruined by women.”<sup>3</sup>

The Lord desires us to prove our holy and peculiar character. This applies especially to marriage, because one false step leads to another. Solomon’s life was a good example of the questions, “What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14, NKJV).

So, what can professed Christians do to have a safe marriage? “It is only in Christ that a marriage alliance can be safely formed. Human love should draw its closest bonds from divine love. Only where Christ reigns can there be deep, true, unselfish affection.”<sup>4</sup>

1. *The Adventist Home*, pp. 61, 62.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 305, 306.

4. *The Adventist Home*, p. 68.

# Chasing the Wind

## EVIDENCE

1 Kings 11:1-4; Eccles. 2:8, 11

“Solomon (971-931 B.C.).—Solomon, the third ruler of the united kingdom of Israel, whose name was also Jedidiah, ‘beloved of Jehovah’ (2 Sam. 12:24, 25), seems to have followed the Oriental custom of taking a throne name, Solomon, ‘peaceable.’ His reign made this title not only appropriate but popular.”<sup>1</sup>

“His early life was bright with promise, and it was God’s purpose that he should go on from strength to strength, from glory to glory, ever approaching nearer the similitude of the character of God, and thus inspiring His people to fulfill their sacred trust as the depositaries of divine truth.”<sup>2</sup>

Realizing that as a king he bore heavy burdens, Solomon asked God for wisdom. This was the secret of his power. We can find his wisdom in songs of praise and in many proverbs (1 Kings 4:32). Because of his wisdom, all the people of Israel “feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice” (3:28, NKJV).

“For many years Solomon’s life was marked with devotion to God, with uprightness and firm principle, and with strict obedience to God’s commands.”<sup>3</sup> As the years went by and his fame increased, he was in danger. In attempting to develop good relationships with surrounding countries, Solomon married many strange women from heathen nations (11:1). And he had seven hundred wives,

*The Guinness Book  
of Records would call him  
“The World’s Greatest  
Lover.”*

princesses, and three hundred concubines (verse 3). If Solomon were living in our age, *The Guinness Book of Records* would call him “The World’s Greatest Lover.”

History records the sad story. Because of the heathen wives, the “Beloved of Jehovah,” Solomon, turned from the worship of God to bow before the idols of the heathen nations. “When Solomon was old, . . . his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God” (verse 4, NKJV).

After all the pleasures that Solomon enjoyed, in the end he realized that it didn’t mean anything, that all was vanity, chasing the wind.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 74.

2. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 25.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

## Don't Play With Fire

### HOW-TO

Prov. 5:5,18; Song of Sol. 8:6

Robert J. Wieland suggests five human approaches to natural human love:

1. It depends on the beauty or goodness of its object. Naturally we choose for friends those who are nice to us, those who please us. We fall in love with our sexual opposite who is beautiful, happy, intelligent, and attractive.

2. It rests on a sense of need. Two friends love each other because of their need for each other. One feels empty and alone without one's counterpart.

**King Solomon pursued all five of Wieland's approaches at the same time.**

3. It is based on a sense of value. Many Indonesians, for example, still follow the ancient bride-price system.

4. It searches for God. Millions go on long journeys to Mecca, Rome, Jerusalem, or other shrines searching for God.

5. It is always seeking to climb higher. No employee wants demotion instead of promotion. The state politician longs to get into national prominence.<sup>1</sup>

King Solomon pursued all five of Wieland's approaches at the same time. But he repented at the end of his life. Take the lesson of the repentant king home to your heart, and be wise. Make God your trust. "One false step leads to another, till at last they place themselves where they cannot hope to break the chains that bind them."<sup>2</sup> "If men and women are in the habit of praying twice a day before they contemplate marriage, they should pray four times a day when such a step is anticipated. Marriage is something that will influence and affect your life, both in this world and in the world to come."<sup>3</sup>

### REACT

1. Solomon's taking of many wives diverted him from his pledges to God. But what part of his taking wives led him astray? Love? Politics? Greed? Explain your answer.

2. A goal may be clear-cut, but what sort of distractions that perhaps seem unimportant in the beginning might hinder successfully reaching and maintaining that goal? Think of a career goal, fitness goal, a goal you have for today, a goal you have for five years from now.

1. *Signs of the Times*, June 1985, pp. 16-19, 30.

2. *The Adventist Home*, p. 65.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

# True Happiness Is Walking With God

## OPINION

1 Kings 3:3-14; 9:3-7

You might have heard various reasons people give for being unfaithful in their marriage: pleasure, vigor of life, freedom, happiness. Even a happy married life that has begun well can be destroyed and many hearts hurt. Only later those in a failed marriage think of repentance and coming back to God. "He will forgive me," they argue.

In his youth, King Solomon walked closely with God, and God granted him wisdom, riches, and honor (1 Kings 3:3-14). God promised to keep his kingdom forever and lengthen his life if he followed His commandments and depended solely on Him; if he and the people of Israel turned away from Him, God would cut off Israel out of the Promised Land (9:3-7).

**Some might think of  
marrying unbelievers to  
win their souls to God.**

Solomon fell. His trust in God was divided and he made a compromise with the world. From a human viewpoint, his marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, seemed at first to be a blessing: Solomon's heathen wife was converted and worshiped the true God. But, conversely, Solomon began to worship idols. Taking many heathen wives from the neighboring countries led to his downfall.<sup>1</sup> But Solomon's story ended with his repentance and with his decision to walk with God again.

"A prudent wife is from the Lord. . . . She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life."<sup>2</sup> Some might think of marrying unbelievers to win their souls to God. But how many of them were instead carried away and left the church? They love their partners more than God. "Never should God's people venture upon forbidden ground. Marriage between believers and unbelievers is forbidden by God."<sup>3</sup>

The story of King Solomon, from the wisest king to a slave of unbelieving wives, should always remind us of the danger of trading our love and obedience to God with the things the world offers in marriage, job, career, or education. We have to be careful not to compromise with the world. Negligence of God's rules and commandments can lead us only to the same trap as that of Solomon.

God's promise to make Israel the greatest nation would have been a reality if King Solomon and Israel always walked with God and kept His commandments. God's children will always be the first and best in all things. This promise will also be ours if we will walk with God and keep His commandments.

1. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 53-58.

2. *The Adventist Home*, p. 46.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Friday  
July 19

# Seeking God's Wisdom for Yourself

## EXPLORATION

James 1:5

## CONCLUDE

Solomon asked God for discernment to govern Israel and to distinguish between right and wrong. Pleased with Solomon's request, God granted Solomon great wisdom as well as wealth and long life (two things Solomon didn't request). Solomon's wisdom was well known throughout his kingdom and the neighboring countries. Even the Queen of Sheba acknowledged the Lord God as the Giver of Solomon's wisdom. But Solomon's wisdom of governing Israel was not reflected in his personal life. He loved many women, which became his downfall as he began to worship his wives' gods. He made a choice of convenience rather than standing firm in God's way. What choices of convenience have you made?

## CONSIDER

- Charting your spiritual journey on a piece of paper. Note the highs and lows. Reflect on the choices you made that resulted in the spiritual highs and lows. Write a letter to God expressing your new choices.
- Reading the book of James. In your own words rewrite James 3:13-17; 4:7-10. Post your paraphrase on a mirror or the refrigerator as a daily reminder.
- Searching all the references to wisdom in the Bible with the aid of a Bible commentary. What does this teach you about wisdom?
- Making a list of the qualities you desire in a spouse. Do you exhibit in your life those same qualities? How can you obtain the same qualities you desire?
- Listening to some of the love songs in your CD collection—secular and Christian. Note the different types of love mentioned in each song.
- Logging onto <<http://www.bigquestions.com/>> and enter a discussion on love or wisdom or post your own question. Check out Lesson 2: Does love really work?
- Drawing, writing, sculpting, painting, composing, etc., your concept of love or wisdom.

## CONNECT

*Prophets and Kings*, chaps. 1–5.

Kay Kuzma, *When You're Serious About Love: Straight Talk to Single Adults*.



# The Split



“When all Israel saw that the king refused to listen to them, they answered the king: ‘What share do we have in David, what part in Jesse’s son? To your tents, O Israel! Look after your own house, O David!’ So the Israelites went home”  
(1 Kings 12:16, NIV).

## **INTRODUCTION**

John 8:32; 14:6

What is freedom? Can we be free and still follow God? Perceptions of freedom do not always equal reality. We see things based on who we are and not necessarily the true situation. Only God, who is above such constraints, can see the big picture as well as the end from the beginning and the best route to take. This also applies

**Jesus (a.k.a. God) is love.**

to our freedom and perceptions, especially when considered from God's perspective. God's definition of freedom is inextricably entwined with obedience. For example, freedom from pain is like the mother who has warned her small child not to touch the hot stove. This apparent paradox applies to individuals as well as to groups. What constitutes freedom for a group may not necessarily feel like freedom to the individual.

Jesus Himself stated, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32, NIV). So what is the liberating truth that He was referring to? For many people, truth equals the Ten Commandments, God's laws. However, Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (NIV). Jesus (a.k.a. God) is love. Consequently, God's laws are expressions of His love.

Now about the Israelites. They constitute a vivid illustration of what happens when a child keeps up a running battle against his loving parent: rending of the kingdom, drought, famine, oppression, affliction—and ultimately captivity in a foreign land resulted.

When and how we choose to respond to God and His laws will be a direct result of how well we know Him. Our willingness to get to know Him and the choices we make will decide our level of freedom. That, in turn, will decide how many times we will get scorched before we learn not to touch the hot stove.

# A Great Divide

## EVIDENCE

1 Kings 11:26-40

Ever since Joshua and the Hebrews had conquered Canaan, the 12 tribes of Israel had been living in relative independence from each other. Each tribe was led by an elder or two. The two southern tribes of Judah and Simeon were separated from the northern tribes by geography. The 12 tribes would band together for war and for religious functions, but besides these gatherings they were autonomous.

The kingship of Saul was able to unite all of the tribes only during times of war. When Saul fell and the kingdom was torn from his hands, however, David united the kingdom. David's son, Solomon, strengthened the kingdom, built a temple—and then he sinned big! You name it, and Solomon did it. As a result, Israel would be torn from his son's hands.

The division of Israel was not a glamorous thing (1 Kings 11:26-40). There are a couple of interesting points in this text. First, there are striking similarities between Saul's rejection and Solomon's rejection. When Saul was rejected, he tore his garments. For a sign of Solomon's fall, the prophet Ahijah tore his new cloak into 12 pieces in the presence of Jeroboam. A prophet was involved in each fall. Each fall was the result of sin. And the successor to the throne was commissioned to follow all the commands of God if they were to have a successful rule.

But there is a striking *difference*. When Saul was rejected, the kingdom was completely torn from his hands as punishment for sin. But the sins of Solomon produced a division. Why? When David ascended the throne, God made a covenant that David would always rule the throne, that his family would rule forever (2 Sam.

7:14-17). Because of God's promise, David's line would always rule in Jerusalem and Judah, if not in the entire kingdom. The division of Israel was how God showed His faithfulness to His promises and His unacceptance of Solomon's many sins.

Success in life, whether it is conquering the MCAT or leading a church, is always conditional upon obedience to God. Failure, especially in the cases of the kings of Israel, resulted from sin. Solomon's sins led to the division of the kingdom, the disunity of God's people, and the fracturing of the community of Israel. Sin causes a divide between nations, churches, friends—and between humanity and God.

Success in life is always  
conditional upon  
obedience to God.

## REACT

1. Is there such a thing as autonomy in the kingdom of God? Explain your answer.
2. Explain why you agree or disagree with the following: "Success in life . . . is always conditional upon obedience to God."

Monday  
July 22

## How Not to Tarnish

### LOGOS

1 Kings 11:26-39; 12:1-33; 14; 2 Chronicles 10

First Kings 14 tells us the story of Rehoboam and his reign. At the beginning of Rehoboam's reign, 2 Chronicles 10–12 tells us that he did well. There was a prophet of God in the palace, whose counsel he listened to. He had a group of priests and Levites who were his supporters, and he lined up cities along the northern border to protect the nation. With godly counsel, the nation was healing and word of God's leadership was being spread abroad. In the fifth year of his reign, however, Rehoboam forsook the ways of God.

Verse 21 of 1 Kings 14 begins by telling us about Rehoboam and his mother Naamah. Verse 22 says that Rehoboam and his mother provoked God to anger with the sins they were committing. They built pillars to false gods and had cult prostitutes in the land (verses 23, 24). Rehoboam began to intermarry with other nations, just as his father Solomon had done. "Although Solomon had longed to

**We cannot change the  
messages we were  
taught as children.**

prepare the mind of Rehoboam, his chosen successor, to meet with wisdom the crisis foretold by the prophet of God [the invasion by Shishak], he had never been able to exert a strong molding influence for good over the mind of his son,

whose early training had been so grossly neglected. Rehoboam had received from his mother, an Ammonitess, the stamp of a vacillating character. At times he endeavored to serve God and was granted a measure of prosperity; but he was not steadfast, and at last he yielded to the influences for evil that had surrounded him from infancy. In the mistakes of Rehoboam's life and in his final apostasy is revealed the fearful result of Solomon's union with idolatrous women."<sup>1</sup>

So, one might ask, How are we supposed to overcome the faulty messages that we get from our family? It seems at first to be somewhat hopeless. One answer to that question is also found in Rehoboam's story. What were the things that he did in the beginning (2 Chronicles 10–12)? He had godly counsel, a support system, and he took care of protecting his nation's boundaries. What a concept!

We cannot change the messages we were taught as children. Children who are not protected and taught about a relationship with God are truly victims, but that argument does not hold water when we are adults. We are held accountable for our actions and behaviors by God, but we are not asked to overcome childhood messages on our own. We are to overcome by using the godly support of others and by protecting our boundaries, whether they be physical or emotional.

Rehoboam did not take all this into consideration and because he continually turned away, God allowed Shishak to invade the land. It makes sense that Israel



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was vulnerable to attack. It sounds as if Rehoboam was busy pursuing other interests, following in his father's and mother's footsteps. When Shishak invaded Israel, Rehoboam was able to avoid bloodshed only by paying heavy tolls. Basically, the treasury was wiped out. Part of the toll included 500 gold shields that Solomon had made and displayed in the temple and in his home. In the Old Testament, gold stands for the character of God.<sup>2</sup>

Those shields were symbols in a sense of the purity and multifaceted character of God. When Rehoboam had to turn them over, he had 500 brass shields made. He did this so that on special occasions he could bring them out and nobody would know that the shields that were a symbol of God's glory were gone out of Israel. The interesting thing about brass, though, is that it tarnishes. It is possible to fake a right relationship with God for a time. Just as the guards would polish those shields on special occasions, we can polish ourselves and put on a good front for limited amounts of time, but just like the brass, after a time we will begin to tarnish.

Without a relationship with God, we will be unable to overcome the faulty messages of our youth. (And yes, everyone has some.) The story of Rehoboam teaches us the importance of a vital, living connection with God and of seeking support and counsel from others who also have a relationship with Him.

## **REACT**

1. What faulty messages did you receive about God when you were a child and how do they affect you today?
2. What would you say to someone who says that idols are basically harmless, simple objects, nothing to be concerned about?
3. Why do you think it is that our partnerships (marriage, business, friendships) are so important to our sense of direction and spiritual survival?
4. Where in your life are there "brass shields"—things that may look genuine, but you know under the surface that they are not genuine gold?
5. What kind of boundaries do you think are important in your relationships? In the way you relate to a culture that is hostile to the true God?
6. Rehoboam's idolatry was directly linked to his close associates (women). How do your closest friends influence you?
7. What are the limits of preserving unity at the expense of personal ideas/convictions?
8. How does one maintain the spirit of self-surrender, but at the same time avoid being taken advantage of?
9. As it grows, what are some challenges the Church faces, locally and globally, in staying united?

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1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 88.

2. David Roper, *Rehoboam* (Westboro, Wis.: Discovery Publishing, 1995).



Tuesday  
July 23

## The Hard Taskmaster/King

### TESTIMONY

2 Chronicles 10; 12; Eccles. 8:11-13

Just before his coronation day, Rehoboam faced a fork in the road. “What advice do you give? How should we answer this people who have spoken to me, saying, ‘Lighten the yoke which your father put on us?’” (1 Kings 12:9, NKJV). His older advisers said, “If you are kind to these people, and please them, and speak good words to them, they will be your servants forever” (2 Chron. 10:7, NKJV).

The younger men with whom Rehoboam had grown up said, “Tell them, ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s waist.’ . . . Tell them, ‘My father scourged you with whips, I will scourge you with scorpions’” (verses 10, 11, NIV). Liking the idea of authority,<sup>1</sup> Rehoboam chose the latter and that choice snowballed disastrously on himself and his country.

“Naturally headstrong, confident, self-willed, and inclined to idolatry, nevertheless, had he placed his trust wholly in God, he would have developed strength of character, steadfast faith, and submission to the divine requirements. But as time passed, the king put his trust in the power of position.”<sup>2</sup>

“After Rehoboam’s position as king was established and he had become strong, he and all Israel with him abandoned the law of the Lord” (12:1, NIV).

“How sad, how filled with significance, the words, ‘And all Israel with him!’ The people whom God had chosen to stand as a light to the surrounding nations were turning from their Source of strength and seeking to become like the nations about them. As with Solomon, so with Rehoboam—the influence of wrong example led many astray. And as with them, . . . today with everyone who gives himself up to work evil—the influence of wrongdoing is not confined to the doer. No man liveth unto himself. None perish alone in their iniquity. Every life is a light that brightens and cheers the pathway of others, or a dark and desolating

influence that tends toward despair and ruin. We lead others either upward to happiness and immortal life, or downward to sorrow and eternal death.

Rehoboam faced a  
fork in the road.

### REACT

If influence is so powerful, why would talk of doctrine be necessary with unchurched people?

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 93.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

# Just One of the Guys

## HOW-TO

Mark 10:42-44

I am not a king with subjects, but I do deal daily with decisions, position, and grace. I can relate with Rehoboam because I am a young leader who listens to his friends. It is uncommon in our generation *not* to do what our friends want us to do. For a moment, Rehoboam decided not as a king, but as just one of the friends. God has chosen us to hold a position for Him (1 Pet. 2:9). Are we willing to make unpopular decisions for God?

**1. Decisions.** Remember that you belong to God even when it means making a different decision from your friends. Oftentimes as a young leader I forget why I have position. Rehoboam seemed to believe he was a leader to maintain wealth by administering work and making powerful life-changing decisions. As Christians, and particularly as leaders, we are supposed to be centered on service and not power (Mark 10:42-44).

**2. Position.** Remember that the Christian's purpose for position is service. In our lesson the nation promised to serve a young leader on the condition that he lighten their load. The young leader had the decision to exercise grace or to force labor. Living grace is the point of the gospel that challenges me most. I struggle when I have the decision and position to condemn a person. As a response to God's grace, I can make the grace-filled decision (Matt. 18:26-29).

**3. Grace.** Remember to make the decision to *live* grace.

I am a young leader who  
listens to his friends.

## REACT

1. How can you live grace concretely this week? Be specific.
2. In what ways do peer influences direct your life?
3. How can one be less susceptible to pressure from friends to do things we know are not right and not ultimately in our best interest?
4. Can some peer influences be positive? If so, how do they work, and why? What can you do to cultivate them?
5. What role can the church play in developing positive peer/mentor relationships? How can you and your church go about making this happen?
6. Think of the person who influenced you the most in a positive direction in your life. Why do you think he was so important to you? What are you doing to pass on the legacy to someone else?
7. Think about decisions you made today, yesterday, last week. Whom did you please? Yourself? God? Your friends?

Thursday  
July 25

## Me, You, or We?

### OPINION

John 17:23

"She was gone a long time. He grew wild with hunger and began to rage within himself. . . . Does she still not know after all these years who comes first?"<sup>1</sup>

In his book *I Am the Clay*, Chaim Potok describes the plight of an elderly couple fleeing the Chinese during the Korean War. They find a young boy wounded in a ditch. Against the man's wishes and to his frustration, the wife begins to spend valuable time and sparse resources caring for the boy. On one occasion, she disappears with the little boy to find medical attention. "After many hours the anger yielded to anxiety and fear. He could not imagine a life without her. Who would prepare food and wash clothes and work with him in the fields?"<sup>2</sup>

The husband waits in a turmoil of conflicting emotions until she returns. "Finally he saw her emerge from the shadows with the boy in her arms. His heart leaped and trembled with joy, but he said nothing."<sup>3</sup>

Anger, frustration, anxiety, joy: these feelings and the experience of this couple surviving the harsh realities of war is, to a certain extent, ours as well. Humans are

Independence or unity?  
Me or we?

communal creatures by nature. We find comfort and strength in numbers. Paradoxical to all this is our craving for autonomy. The rugged individualism that is often romanticized in the movies and the ideal of

community are contrasting desires in all our lives. Independence or unity? Me or we? The two exist in a state of tension and when one is sacrificed at the cost of the other, the result is totalitarianism or fragmentation.

The breakup of Solomon's kingdom was the result of decades of moral decay, bad advice, and overinflated egos. Conflicting agendas were also a factor. The king wanted one thing, the people another. Me or we? The king decided "me" and so did the people. The result was a divided empire.

Fragmentation surrounds us today. The breakup of international corporations, wars in distant parts of the world, or the split of a celebrity couple is something most of us have little control over. In smaller, but no less important ways, however, we face fragmentation in friendships, dating, marriage, and the workplace. We face it in the church. Conflicts arise; many times the issue is the same. What I want or think differs from that of someone else: "Me or we?" Unity often requires us to answer "We," and this means that individually we must be willing to lay down our desires and agendas for someone else's.

1. Chaim Potok, *I Am the Clay* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1992), p. 13.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

# What Is Freedom?

## EXPLORATION

1 Cor.10:33

### CONCLUDE

The apostle Paul's overriding philosophy of life was, "I don't just do what I like or what is best for me, but what is best for them so they may be saved" (1 Cor. 10:33, NLT). Rehoboam did not use his great leadership position as king to do what was best for the nation of Israel. He selfishly practiced his own freedom, resulting in his own destruction and that of his kingdom.

There are only two choices—two masters to choose between. One master's goal is our complete enslavement. The other Master wants us to be "free indeed" (John 8:36, KJV).

### CONSIDER

- Explaining how you would explain to a small child the old saying, "Your freedom ends where my nose begins."
- Volunteering for a leadership position in your church or community. How could you incorporate Paul's philosophy regarding freedom as you fulfill your duties in this position?
- Writing a letter to one of your parents describing how his or her example has affected the way you have chosen to follow (or not to follow) God.
- Listening to Frank Sinatra's song "My Way." Consider how the ideas expressed in this song agree, or disagree, with Scripture.
- Interviewing the most godly person of your acquaintance. What is his or her attitude toward freedom?
- Pondering the fact that we are free *not* to share our faith or the good news with others. How might *not* sharing impact our eternal life in heaven?

### CONNECT

1 Corinthians 10:23-33.

*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 257, 258.

Max Lucado, *In the Grip of Grace*, chap. 14.

Lesson 5  
July 27–August 3

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# Cleaning up Town



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“He went out to meet Asa and said to him, ‘Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you’ ” (2 Chron. 15:2, NIV).



# New Sheriff on the Block

## INTRODUCTION

2 Chronicles 15

In the 1997 movie *Cop Land*, Sylvester Stallone depicts a good-natured sheriff who is assigned to a small suburban town in New Jersey. He discovers that the majority of the residents in this town are the families of corrupt police officers who will stop at nothing to cover up their criminal activities. The corruption—racketeering, embezzlement, murder, and lies—were in place long before the sheriff assumed his duties, but he determines to find the root of the problem, cut it out, and restore peace and justice. He finds that his very life is on the line, but he succeeds in cleaning up the town.

King Asa's experience after assuming the throne of Israel must have mirrored that of Stallone in *Cop Land*. In 2 Chronicles 15, we are told that he was descended from a long line of relatives who had strayed so far from the Lord that they were conditioned to a godless lifestyle. After hearing the prophecy of Azaria, King Asa "took courage. He removed the detestable idols from the whole land of Judah and Benjamin and from the towns he had captured in the hills of Ephraim. He repaired the altar of the Lord that was in front of the portico of the Lord's temple" (2 Chron. 15:8, NIV). Asa decided that he and his people would serve the Lord!

**He finds that his very life  
is on the line.**

King Asa's transformation included four components: reformation, sacrifice, covenant, and dedication.

- **Reformation:** His transformation began with hearing the Word of the Lord (verse 8).
- **Sacrifice:** Recognizing the nation's sorry spiritual state, he was moved to offer sacrifices to the Lord (verses 9-11).
- **Covenant:** Remembering that the God of Israel is a covenant-keeping God, he renewed the nation's covenant with the God of heaven (verse 12).
- **Dedication:** Israel's example during the reign of King Asa was a model of dedication to the Lord: "There was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign" (verse 19, NIV).

When we dedicate our lives to the Lord, His peace attends our way.

"Lord Jesus, I long to be perfectly whole;  
I want Thee forever to live in my soul;  
Break down every idol, cast out every foe;  
Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow!"\*

\*James Nicholson, *The SDA Hymnal*, No. 318.

Sunday  
July 28

## Asa: The Lamp of Jerusalem

### LOGOS

1 Kings 15:1-15; 2 Chronicles 13-16

Asa's father couldn't decide whose side he was on spiritually. He used two names, Abijah (meaning "My Father is Yahweh" the true God) and Abijam ("My Father is Yam" the pagan fish-god). History mentions this king who reigned briefly without notable achievements and died, leaving the teenage Asa to inherit the throne. Yet God had promised Asa's great-grandfather, David, that his descendants would succeed him on the throne. David had been called the lamp of Israel (2 Sam. 21:17). God promised to keep his lamp

**God's people were  
stumbling in the moral  
midnight of the paganism.**

burning in his descendants (2 Kings 8:19), and now young Asa would inherit the fire and the light of truth that would make him "a lamp in Jerusalem" (15:4, KJV). (Some 24 generations down from Asa, Jesus the Son of David would be the Light of the world.)

A lamp was needed. God's people were stumbling in the moral midnight of the paganism of Canaan, which taught about a father-god, Ei, who was quite uncaring, and Baal, the king of the gods. Baal's female consorts included Asherah and Astarte, who were pictured as temple prostitutes, pregnant mothers, or bloodthirsty war goddesses. Baal died in winter and was resurrected in spring every year, and fertility worship claimed "sacred sex" could re-awaken the forces of nature and guarantee fertile crops. Thus prostitution and orgies, both heterosexual and homosexual, often occurred in Baal's temples. Imagine how popular that kind of religion would be and how much money its priests would make! Yet imagine the effect it would have on the family life and love and spirituality of a nation.

Canaanite religion seemed very internationalist and open-minded. It tolerated a belief in Yahweh as one of the gods. But Yahweh's first commandment demanded "no other gods" (Exod. 20:3, KJV). Imagine how intolerant, narrow-minded, and nationalistic that sounded. (Some postmodern people see our Christianity this way, with its claims of "I am the Truth.")

Asa grew up in this situation. Maacah, a worshiper of Asherah with a pagan name, had the powerful position of queen-mother, even though she was technically the grandmother of the young king. Yet somehow Asa discovered the true faith in Yahweh. Who taught him? Israel was without teaching priests, so perhaps some cook or librarian or horse handler had quiet conversations with the young king, influencing his thinking. Only heaven will reveal the risks this person took in lighting

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Asa's lamp. As soon as Asa had become an adult, he acted to reform Israel's religion. He smashed pagan temples, altars, and stone phallic symbols, and led his people toward Yahweh. He even smashed the shrines that King Solomon had built for his foreign wives, thus overcoming a massive family blind spot by obedience to the commands of God. When his grandmother refused to drop her pagan beliefs, he removed her from her powerful position and even cut down her wooden idol of Asherah and burned it just outside Jerusalem! If only every leader put principle before nepotism.

Asa did not live for his own luxury but worked at building up military defenses in cities that formed strategic defense zones against enemies. He trained soldiers and built morale. When a huge North African army attacked with the latest military hardware, Asa got the balance right between doing his human part and relying on God's help. His superb prayer is in 2 Chronicles 14:11. Note that "the Lord struck" the enemy (verse 12, NKJV), and "the fear of the Lord" was on the surrounding nations (verse 14, NKJV). God was honored in front of the world.

As Asa returned from battle, he must have been in danger of becoming proud or spiritually slack, because God sent a prophet to challenge him to increase his commitment. Asa focused harder on God and called everyone together for a heartfelt re-dedication to God and a national revival. "They sought God eagerly, and He was found by them" (15:15, NIV). Do you wish that could be said of your nation, or your church, your family—or you?

I wish the story ended there, but Satan's attack never stops. Next we see Asa not asking God for help in war, but bribing a pagan king to be on his side—and even taking gold from God's temple to do it. (Where are you investing time and money? Do you take Jesus seriously about laying up treasure in heaven rather than on earth?) How could Asa be the partner of king Ben-Hadad ("son of Baal")? Why was he thinking in merely human terms when God had done so much for him in the past? The result is nagging wars for the rest of his life.

A prophet rebukes Asa and he throws the prophet in prison! (If a prophet points out your need to repent, do you imprison him or her on a dusty bookshelf?)

Asa's son, Jehoshaphat, was also a good king, thankfully influenced more by Asa's early life. He co-reigned with Asa when Asa had health problems. Yet Asa must have repented before dying, because the Bible graciously says that he "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did his father David" (1 Kings 15:11, NKJV). Thank God for His divine bad memory about confessed human sin.

## **REACT**

1. How do you know you're not blind to traditions in your family/church/country that need reform? Is it your responsibility to confront them tactfully, or just to change your own example and lead your children? Explain your answer.

2. Is there a prophetic message for you in the story of Asa's life? If God sent a prophet to you this coming week, what do you think she or he might say to you? How would you wish to respond?

Monday  
July 29

## When Near Enough Isn't Good Enough

### TESTIMONY

2 Chron. 15:17

A heart, but not a lifetime, committed to God meant that Asa was unable to deliver all the reforms vitally needed in Judah. The remaining “high places” (2 Chron. 15:17, KJV) are symbols of the treasured sins that one thinks won't matter to God. In a time of peace, Asa prepares; in a time of threat, he prays; and when it's all over, he crumbles—calling on the physicians rather than his God for help.

When Zera and a million Ethiopian soldiers attack, “Asa did not put his trust in the ‘fenced cities in Judah’ that he had built, with ‘walls, and towers, gates, and bars,’ nor in the strength of his carefully trained army.”<sup>1</sup>

“When he went out to meet the Ethiopian, and set his forces in battle array, he ‘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.’”<sup>2</sup>

Yet later Asa forgot the prophecy of Azariah that “‘the Lord is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you’” (2 Chron. 15:2, NKJV).

“‘In the thirty and ninth year of his reign,’ Asa was ‘diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great: yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians.’ [Chap. 16 Verse 12. The king died in the forty-first year of his reign.]”<sup>3</sup>

Sadly, “Asa was incomplete in his external obedience, he was right in the main

but not entirely right. Beware of the thing of which you say—‘Oh, that does not matter much.’ The fact that it does not matter much to you may mean that it matters

**“Nothing is a mere detail.”**

a very great deal to God. . . . [Are you saying] ‘I know I am right with God’; but still the ‘high places’ remain, . . . Are you protesting that your heart is right with God, and yet is there something in your life about which He has caused you to doubt? Whenever there is doubt, quit immediately, no matter what it is. Nothing is a mere detail.”<sup>4</sup>

God wants you to be entirely His; He wants more than your heart to be fully committed, all your life. He wants *your whole being* to be fully committed to Him *always!*

1. *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, “A Great Deliverance,” July 31, 1913.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 113.

4. Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, <<http://myutmost.org/04/0415.html>>.



# There's Something About This Valley

## EVIDENCE

1 Kings 15:12-14; 2 Kings 23:4-6, 12; 2 Chron.15:8, 16, 17; 30:14

One of the high points in the story of King Asa is recorded in 2 Chronicles 15:16. "King Asa also deposed his grandmother Maacah from her position as queen mother, because she had made a repulsive Asherah pole. Asa cut the pole down, broke it up and burned it in the Kidron Valley" (NIV). Clearly Grandma Maacah had been much loved, like so many grandmas even today. Love

The Kidron Valley is a geographical symbol in the controversy.

of family, though, is one thing. Faithfulness to God is another. When Grandma Maacah started playing around with an idol, King Asa chose the right side of the great controversy—the controversy between good and evil, between God and Satan.

There is something about the Kidron Valley, where Grandma Maacah's idol is burnt up, that makes that valley a geographical symbol of sorts in the controversy. Almost all the 12 biblical references to Kidron relate to this battle between good and evil. More than half deal with the destruction of idols. In 2 Kings 23, Kidron is named four times in the story of how the boy-king Josiah destroys the idols of his day. King Hezekiah does much the same in 2 Chronicles 30:14.

The most touching link between this valley and the great controversy is in the one New Testament reference. In John 18:1, Jesus and His disciples cross the valley en route to Gethsemane. "Quietly they hurry out the eastern gate, descending into a carved, notched valley called the Kidron, carefully picking their way across a stream that tonight flows crimson. Bloody waters tonight, for it is the Passover weekend, and the blood of a million slaughtered lambs has been spilled into the scarlet Kidron today!"

Idols had been constructed, crushed, and burnt in this valley. The blood of millions of lambs had been slain there. Now, in one of the most telling events of earth's history, the Lamb of God makes His way across the Kidron. He goes to Golgotha, via Gethsemane, to gain for you and me the definitive victory in the great controversy. I just knew there was something about this valley.

## REACT

At what points in your life do you feel most inclined to try to do good things in your own strength, ingenuity, or power? How do such approaches turn out for you?

\*Dwight Nelson, *The Godforsaken God: The Crucible of Gethsemane* (Fallbrook, Calif.: Hart Research Center, 1993), p. 14.



Wednesday  
July 31

## Perfect Hypocrites — Mere Mortals

### HOW-TO

1 Kings 15:3, 5, 11, 14; 2 Chron. 13:10-18; 14; 15:2; 16:1-9, 12

Abijah and Asa had a lot to live up to. As kings of Judah, the decisions of this father and son would determine the destiny of their nation.

In 1 Kings we read a summary of how Abijah committed all the sins of his father before him, because unlike his ancestor King David, his "heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God" (1 Kings 15:3, NIV).

When we read more about the lives of Abijah and Asa in the book of 2 Chronicles, the impression given in 1 Kings seems hard to reconcile. We read how Abijah called on God to save Judah from Israel and was victorious because he relied on God.

Asa, on the other hand, having relied on God in defeating the Cushites, sought human support from the king of Aram when under threat by Israel. At times, Asa's failure to rely on God led to personal suffering, ongoing wars, and his brutal oppression of people.

David's actions many years earlier were not always perfect. Because of his lust, he sent a woman's husband to his death. But despite this, David's devotion to God is used as a benchmark for those who followed.

Like the people of Israel and Judah, the rulers of our lives influence us all. But while Abijah's life followed the course of his father's, Asa overcame his father's shortcomings as a role model and, by relying on God, achieved great things for both God and his country.

The actions of these rulers were neither always good nor always bad. They had their ups and downs. Through the comparison of these men's lives in the books of 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, we see that our final destiny is determined by more than our actions on any given day. Our destiny

**The rulers of our lives  
influence us all.**

depends on the commitment of our hearts to Christ.

Knowing this, we can look beyond human hypocrisy and ask God's help in building a better life now.

### REACT

1. How does your background affect your relationship with Christ?
2. What does this week's study tell you about dealing with your own hypocrisy?
3. If God is looking more for people who will trust Him than for people who are already perfect (or think that they are), what can you do to increase your level of trust in God? What results do you think such an increase might yield?

# Thankful For-Getting

## OPINION

Ps. 50:14-23; 103:2; Luke 17:11-17

I have often wondered how it was that Asa lost sight of God. He began very enthusiastically with many ideals and full of fire for God. How often had he experienced God's presence and guidance—just at the right place, at the right moment. It seemed almost as though God and he had become one team.

Like Asa, many great men and women in the Bible experienced God's intervention in their lives. Think of Moses, Jacob, David, Jonah, etc. God spoke to each of them. He promised to be with them as long as they sought Him. I am happy that time has changed. "That never could happen to me,"

What would I give for a personal appointment with God?

I hear myself saying. What would I give for a personal appointment with God? What life-changing influence would that have?

I've never met God eye-to-eye nor spoken to Him personally. But there were lots of moments in my life when I experienced His presence or guidance—the accident which I narrowly avoided, the protection from robbery. Many of these moments were both uplifting and encouraging at the same time and I wished they would never end. In those moments I was willing to do almost any and everything for God. What haven't I promised Him? At times it was just hours and not days before I was back to my old habits.

Isn't it human nature that we forget so fast? We are living in a fast age filled with information and full of events. How easy is it to forget? Too often we forget the good we experience and concentrate on the negative events. Why? In *forgetting* lies the problem. Can missing out on thankfulness be the key to our forgetfulness? Thankfulness is an attitude that needs to be renewed daily. Self-focused we forget God; but God always is focused on us!

"We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history."\*

## REACT

1. Asa's life and ours prove that encounters with God don't necessarily end in victory. How is it possible to experience God and still lose sight of Him?
2. Our lives today often border on the edge of chaos. Why is it so easy to be sidetracked by what has been called the "tyranny of the urgent" and lose sight of the "important"?

\*Selected Messages, book 3, p. 162.

## EXPLORATION

2 Chron. 15:2

### CONCLUDE

“Once saved always saved” isn’t part of our theology, but how often do we rely on the concept without actually admitting it? If I gradually drift away from God, at what point exactly am I not saved? Can I recognize that point? Obviously Asa couldn’t or he would never have allowed it to happen. Society demands our attention. Every day is a struggle to set our priorities straight and follow God first. If we neglect that, our hearts become as divided as Asa’s and we will end up as he did.

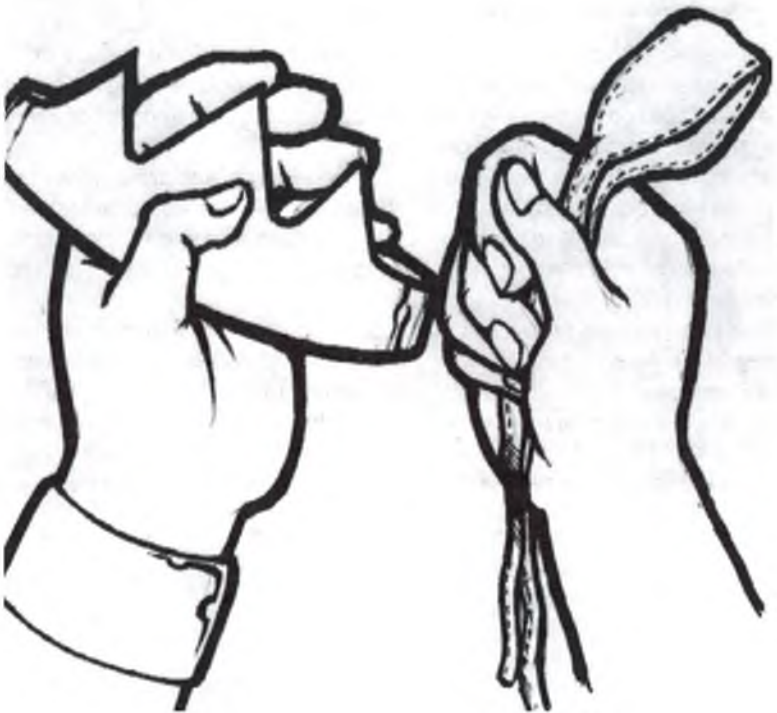
### CONSIDER

- Reflecting on your life up to this point. Write down any recurring stumbling blocks you experience in your Christian walk. Resolve to keep a journal to track your actions. Use the journal to record where and what you’re falling for and how God helps you. Analyze your weaknesses so you can ask God for specific help.
- Resolving to take advantage of the support of other believers. Contract with at least one other person for purposes of accountability. Call or meet once a week to monitor your progress. Give your accountability partner permission to ask questions about what you’d like to be held accountable for.
- Listening to and/or singing “Hold Me Jesus” by Rich Mullins. Reflect on your usual response to doubt and adversity. Pray that God will help you to submit to His will and make you willing to take what He gives that you need.
- Writing a letter to God that claims His majesty over your life and records praises for His work in you.
- Choosing at least one personal key text that you feel is meaningful to help you rely solely on God and not yourself. Prayer-walk around your home, reciting the text in the areas you spend the most time.
- Testing your typical response to situations you have deemed difficult. Resolve to pray before each and note how the outcome differs from what you are accustomed to.

### CONNECT

Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*; Steven Mosley, *There I Go Again: How to Keep From Falling for the Same Old Sin*.

# Apostasy in the North



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“Elijah came to all the people, and said, ‘How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him’ ” (1 Kings 18:21, NKJV).

## He Is My Royal Treatment

### INTRODUCTION

Prov. 24:16

History has provided heroes for us. And we, as everyday people, want to emulate these big personalities. For example, Martin Luther King, Jr., had a dream of togetherness and heavenly peace. What made him a legend? He obeyed God's command to take charge.

David, best known for slaying the giant Goliath, was remembered as a person who failed and then confessed his failure. "A righteous man may fall seven times and rise again" (Prov. 24:16, NKJV). He experienced spiritual warfare over adultery, murder, and conceit. This in our

**Now we see why we  
don't have God's job.**

eyes (if we were God) would be more than enough to terminate David's life.

Now we see why we don't have God's job: people would be dead left and right. In the end, David came back over and over again to his Lord and Savior. He never gave up on God, and God never gave up on him.

Heroes also come in "she" packages. When Esther was crowned as queen, she could have easily said, "It's all about me." But she didn't do this! Instead she was willing to risk her life to save her community. Ruth also was willing to undergo a transformation. She changed from serving graven images to accepting a role in the family of God.

Elijah was so bold as to insist that he wanted to die when things wouldn't go his way. But instead he became willing to fulfill the role of God's prophet. He went to the home of a widow and asked for something to eat. The woman had only a little food, and this was for her and her son. By faith Elijah told her to go fix something for him to eat. She did just that. From simple obedience she had food to last a lifetime. Later her son became sick and died. Elijah brought him back to life. God wants us all to fulfill our potential in His service.



# Victory Consists of Hard Times

## EVIDENCE

Ezek. 11:5

Life is full of promise, and everyone wishes to be happy. Yet too many of us come to the conclusion that obedience to God will get in the way of our happiness. We're afraid that obedience to God's commands will not fulfill our ideas of life's promises.

During Old Testament times there were people who were doing what was right in their own eyes. The Lord was looking for someone to stand up for Him and be a witness for Him. Witchcraft, homosexuality, and adultery were prevalent in those days, and all these things are still going on today.

God had a prophet whose name was Elijah, and he obeyed God by issuing this challenge: "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people answered him not a word" (1 Kings 18:21, NKJV).

The Lord always gives us a choice. Even though Elijah was a prophet of God, he felt that he was God's only follower in the entire nation. Sometimes the Lord has to allow us to be exposed to our solitude so we may know that He is in control. So when hard times come upon us, let us stand still and wait on the Lord. If we remain faithful and obedient, the victory will be ours.

The Lord was looking  
for someone to stand up  
for Him.

## REACT

1. How do people know that you are a child of God? Be specific.
2. If other people believe differently from us, should we really challenge them, and if so, why?
3. Do you agree with the writer, or do you think we should respect others' beliefs and practices, as long as they don't hurt anyone else? Support your answer with reasons for your position.
4. Have you ever been mistaken about the Word of God? Whose fault was it and how did you deal with it?
5. How would you confront people from another religion as in the situation with Elijah and Baal's priests? Do you think it is right to make fun of someone else's faith, or what would you do instead to direct people in the right direction?
6. Have you ever heard God speak to you, and what did it sound or feel like?
7. Have you ever prayed for a group of people (as Elijah prayed for Israel)? If so, what happened to them and to you?

## LOGOS

1 Kings 16–19

Elijah's life was teetering on the edge of exhaustion. From his little drying brook, Elijah waits for the ravens to bring his ration of bread and meat. He can't help seeing the devastation that is worsening before him.

First Kings 16 tells us the history leading up to the drought. Ruthless, power-hungry leaders sacrificed all that was holy for their own gain. But life isn't just about leaders; it is also about the people who sat idly and allowed bad leadership to become worse.

The chapter ends with Ahab becoming king and marrying a Sidonian royal named Jezebel. The Bible is clear to point out that the sinfulness of Israel's king was worse than all the bad kings put together (1 Kings 16:30-33).

**To God, personal history  
is not as important as  
personal response.**

At that time most of Israel's spiritual leadership were career

priests: their best efforts were motivated by their emphasis on career. They chose not to see that the kingdom had been taken by an insidious lack of response to sin. Israel had become a room full of spiritual mirrors; every direction reflected a different god.

Into this chaotic kingdom God sends one of the fiercest prophets—Elijah: a Tishbite from Gilead. To God, personal history is not as important as personal response.

Elijah responded to God's call. He was chosen to be the prophet, and his first recorded words declare the consequence of Israel's actions (1 Kings 17:1). This was not a punishment from God; this was the result of Israel's inaction in the face of spiritual siege.

After his pronouncement on Israel, Elijah is sent to Cherith. This was Elijah's quiet time with God. Without knowing God on a conversational level, the prophet could not proceed. He was shown that absolute trust in God can sustain an individual in the driest of times. The righteous are never forsaken (Ps. 37:25); it may not be comfortable, but we are never forsaken if we trust our God.

Zarephath was the second part of God's lesson. It is important to relate to God on a personal level, as well as respect the people around you.

Elijah was sent to a specific widow. The Bible points out that this widow was a Sidonian (1 Kings 17:9; Luke 4:26). Another Sidonian woman, Jezebel, was seeking to wipe out God's people. God allowed Elijah to grow out of any ethnic prejudice by placing him in the care of a Sidonian. His sustenance came from this woman and her family. Her reliance on food came from the blessing God had provided through Elijah. Human goodness comes from a symbiotic relationship based on a respect

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of God. The first words spoken by the widow (1 Kings 17:12) demonstrate her respect for the *living* God.

The miracle of a dead boy coming back to life was not just for the sake of the woman. This was a precursor to Mt. Carmel. Both Elijah and the Sidonians witnessed life as only God can make it happen.

Chapter 18 points out that God's people are everywhere. Obadiah provided shelter and care for a hundred prophets. Though a minority, God's people don't just pray . . . they move forward from faith into action.

On Mt. Carmel Elijah had a blast. All the queen's priests and all the king's horses couldn't put the sacrifice to any use. It just sat there like a broken egg—useless. When the priests were too tired to utter a word, Elijah builds an altar with 12 stones: each stone representing a tribe of Israel. The people had somehow forgotten they were a family chosen by God; the altar was a reminder. Mt. Carmel was a demonstration of who God is. And the people cried, "The Lord, He is God!" (verse 39, NKJV).

After the event, Elijah is careful to return to Mt. Carmel to thank God.

When Jezebel seeks revenge, Elijah heads for the wilderness, where God again provides for his needs (19:5, 6). Elijah then heads to Mt. Horeb, crawls into a cave, and feels sorry for himself. Self-pity clouds his mind so much that he forgets the glory of Mt. Carmel, the miracle in Zarephath, and the providence of Cherith. He concludes that all is pretty much lost (verse 10). His very being cries out, "It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" (verse 4). He just wants it to end.

God comes down to Horeb. The wind, earthquake, and fire were not to impress the prophet. They were the effects of the presence of the Lord. When a still, small voice calls out, Elijah hides his face because he knows God is there. It isn't wonders that impress the people of God; it is God Himself.

In despair Elijah repeats his woe, but God points out there are seven thousand others who have been faithful—not just Elijah.

However, our God understands the toll the past several months have been on the prophet and respects his faithfulness through it all. In soothing tones, He tells His prophet, "It's OK. It's time to come home."

Elijah moves forward. Knowing he has never been forsaken, the prophet feels the dryness of despair quenched.

## **REACT**

1. What is quiet time with God? Why do we need it?
2. Is it Christlike to pronounce judgment on others even if they are wrong? If not, what made Elijah different?
3. How has popular culture influenced your response to sin? Be specific.
4. How would you deal with someone who was judging a whole race or culture based on one person's actions?

Tuesday  
August 6

## Knowing the Importance of Prayer

### TESTIMONY

Matt. 17:20

As Christians, we have to put our lives in Jesus' hands daily. Salvation is an everyday journey. Without prayer, life is unbearable. But with God all things are possible. "Our heavenly Father waits to bestow upon us the fullness of His blessing. It is our privilege to drink largely at the fountain of boundless love. What a wonder

**"What a wonder it is  
that we pray so little!"**

it is that we pray so little! God is ready and willing to hear the sincere prayer of the humblest of His children, and yet there is much manifest reluctance on our part to make known our wants to God. What can the angels of heaven think of poor helpless human beings, who are subject to temptation, when God's heart of infinite love yearns toward them, ready to give them more than they can ask or think, and yet they pray so little and have so little faith? The angels love to bow before God; they love to be near Him. They regard communion with God as their highest joy; and yet the children of earth, who need so much the help that God only can give, seem satisfied to walk without the light of His Spirit, the companionship of His presence."<sup>1</sup>

Elijah prayed because he was concerned. He saw Israel going deeper and deeper into idolatry. His soul was distressed and his indignation aroused. "Through the long years of drought and famine, Elijah prayed earnestly that the hearts of Israel might be turned from idolatry to allegiance to God. . . . God Himself was working out His plan, and all that His servant could do was to pray on in faith and await the time for decided action."<sup>2</sup> Elijah's prayer was answered. Prayer, faith, belief. With prayer all things are possible if you only believe.

### REACT

1. With God all things are possible. Explain.
2. How can we relate to God as our Creator and Redeemer?
3. Why was Elijah taken to heaven when so many other servants of God did the same, and possibly more, for God than he?
4. How do you like to pray? Do you have a favorite physical position you like to pray in? What do you focus on to close everything else out and let God speak to you?
5. Have you ever prayed to die like Elijah did? Did you feel guilty? What happened?

1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 94.

2. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 133.



# Man of God

## HOW-TO

1 Kings 19:9-18

Elijah was a prophet to whom God showed Israel's future. But the question is, What got Elijah to heaven? Was it his obedience to God? The Bible doesn't report all the tasks that Elijah did for God; when he first appears in the Bible only his name and origin are mentioned. But there is one thing the Bible does report: every time Elijah was in trouble God protected him. Like Enoch, Elijah communicated more closely with God than some of the other followers. Faith translated them to heaven, so they did not see death. So their testimony is what pleased God.

If we want to be as close to God as Elijah was, these steps could be a way:

**1. Pray for unsolved answers.** If there are things you are not sure of, pray to God and the answers may come.

**2. Believe in the power of God.** An answer might be given that will tell you what you may do to keep your faith in God.

**3. Pray all the time.** People tend to give Jehovah the praise when all is well. But we forget that Satan is hiding never too far from our souls. Prayer is what Bruce Lee is to martial arts—unstoppable. Keep your focus on the task at hand. God never said that living in this world would be easy. Therefore we must arm

**Prayer is what Bruce Lee is to martial arts—unstoppable.**

ourselves with all the grenades, daggers, machine guns, rounds, and God's favorite basic training. Target practice comes in handy with Philippians 4:13. Basic training is intense. No, I am not talking about the navy or marines. I'm talking about the Bible with God leading the charge.

When troubled, think of Job. Here's a man who lost everything, but his faith stayed firm. At times it weakened, but through Christ his spirituality gained strength. "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you" (Matt. 17:20, NKJV).

## REACT

1. God trained Elijah as His servant. What tools or situations do you think God is using to train you as a committed Christian? Be specific.

2. Have you ever searched for God to guide you and nothing happened? How did you feel? What did you find that helped you feel God's guidance again?

3. If you were faced with an apparent contradiction between Seventh-day Adventist teaching and the Bible, what would you do?

4. How can we, accurately and in a relevant manner, present God to an unbelieving world?



Thursday  
August 8

## Who Is God?

### OPINION

1 Kings 18:21, 39; Luke 1:13-17; Rev. 2:4, 5

First Kings 17; 18 recounts how the Jews, led by King Ahab, rejected God's way and chose instead the hedonistic worship of Baal and Asherah. Elijah the prophet was sent to these people and, on Mt. Carmel, the climax of his ministry was reached in answering the question, "Who is God?"

You'd think that this question would have been answered adequately by New Testament times. The Jews at that time were very different from Ahab's contemporaries. The religious leaders made a point of appearing pious and were painstaking

in ensuring that no idols were found in their holy places.

**Do our denominational stances accurately echo the Bible?**

But God sent to the (apparently) obedient New Testament Jews another prophet who came "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17,

NKJV). Similarly to Elijah, John the Baptist's theme was repentance, as well as an emphasis on simple, honest living. But, most importantly, John the Baptist's task was to answer the question, "Who is God?" John's answer was Jesus (1 John 1:29, 33).

In postmodern times, we are again entrusted with the prophets' messages of repentance. Like Elijah, we are surrounded by hedonism and false spirituality, as well as the worship of secular gods—money, science, sports, and the media. Our message needs to be one that answers lucidly the world's question, "Who is God?"

As John challenged the believers of his day, however, we may also need to look at ourselves to ensure that we do not repeat their mistakes: focusing on rules, honoring tradition over Scripture, holding judgmental attitudes, and ultimately rejecting the Messiah.

We need to look carefully at the culture we have developed in our church. Do our denominational stances on vegetarianism, alcohol, jewelry, and dancing accurately echo the Bible? Do we faithfully follow the New Testament example when only pastors are permitted to baptize or administer Communion?

The most vital question we need to answer, personally and corporately, is this: "Who is God?" If we attempt to tone down the earth-shattering impact of our Messiah's life and end up with "gentle Jesus, meek and mild," our church will never be the revolutionary movement for God that it was supposed to be.

### REACT

If a new believer walked into your church this week, having come to Jesus through Bible reading only, what surprises might be in store for him/her?

*Kent Kingston, Hillbank, Australia*

# Hold on Fast

## EXPLORATION

1 John 5:4

## CONCLUDE

Victory in any situation comes from hanging on to God no matter what happens. It means cultivating a relationship with Him through prayer and devotions so that He will give us strength to overcome. Sometimes it also means obedience to His commands, even when things don't make sense. Our ability to overcome is directly proportional to our relationship with God. This is the ultimate priority in the Christian's life.

## CONSIDER

- Chinning yourself. How long can you hold your chin above the bar and what does that teach you about holding fast?
- Drawing Elijah's experience with the earthquake, wind, and fire before finally hearing God's still, small voice.
- Memorizing Mark 10:27 in order to remind yourself to hold tightly to God.
- Discussing with a friend three accountability strategies to help your relationship with God.
- View two or three sporting events and consider the way in which victory is celebrated by the winning teams/individuals. What are the positive and negative applications from these observations that a Christian can make when he or she considers the idea of victory over sin?
- Spending an hour in nature looking for ways that plants and animals overcome in difficult situations.
- Composing new words to the classic song "Stand by Me" that show Jesus is always standing with us.

## CONNECT

*Prophets and Kings*, chaps. 9–13.

Henry T. Blackaby, *Created to Be God's Friend: How God Shapes Those He Loves*; Miroslav M. Kis, *Follow Me: How to Walk With Jesus Every Day*.

# Good Days and bad



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“Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper”  
(2 Chron. 20:20, NKJV).

# Good Life, Bad Choices

## INTRODUCTION

1 Kings 22

"I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn, I can't make myself do right. I want to, but I can't. When I want to do good, I don't. And when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway. But if I am doing what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing it; the sin within me is doing it. It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong" (Rom. 7:18-21, NLT).

Dear Diary—

Why do I always do this? Why do I give in and let other people tell me what I should do when my heart knows very well that what they're telling me is wrong? I know what the right thing to do is, yet when I'm presented with the choice, I listen to people and not to God. This is so frustrating to me, mostly because it keeps happening. This isn't how I want my life to be. I want to be a woman of integrity, but here I am, a woman of uncertainty instead.

I really think I'm generally a decent person. I know and love God, and I do try to do His will. About 99 percent of the time I think I do follow His will. I know God loves me and I know that I am saved. But why is there this remaining part of me that just doesn't learn? Does this happen to anyone else?

Why do I always  
do this?

# You Finally Got It— Maybe!

## LOGOS

2 Chron. 17:1-10; 18; 19:1-11; 20

For many of us, King Jehoshaphat is someone we can relate to, someone with whom we can sympathize. His triumphs and defeats often seem to mirror our own. He experiences the thrill of God's power and revels in His might, only to find himself succumbing to temptation, the victim of bad judgment. What is there in his story that offers Christians comfort today?

### Jehoshaphat to the Throne (2 Chron. 17: 1-10)

In introducing the reader to Jehoshaphat's reign, the author of Chronicles clearly wants to emphasize the new king's dependence upon God and his efforts to establish Judah on a solid spiritual foundation (verses 5, 6). He is not, however,

**He decided he needed  
to take matters into  
his own hands.**

satisfied with simply a personal, private relationship with God. Instead, he seeks to instill the glorious truths of God in the hearts of all his people. Jehoshaphat sends priests, armed with the "Book of the Law of the Lord," to teach the citizens of Judah in their

own towns. Clearly, he is on a spiritual high. He recognizes the need to make God first in his reign and desires to know His will. The king is rewarded and Judah prospers.

### The Alliance With Ahab (2 Chronicles 18)

With such a powerful and spiritual beginning, one expects Jehoshaphat only to build on his success. In chapter 18, however, the writer of Chronicles describes not the spiritual giant of chapter 17, but Jehoshaphat's wavering, faltering, doubting side. He made an alliance, confirmed by marriage, with Ahab, king of Israel. It appears that the king of Judah decided he needed to take matters of defense into his own hands, and thus sought outside help. Moreover, when asked whether Judah would go to war on the side of Israel, Jehoshaphat makes a rash decision, failing to consult the God whom he had come to depend on.

Jehoshaphat does, nevertheless, recognize his mistake right away and requests that Ahab ask for the Lord's will to be revealed.<sup>1</sup> What's even more amazing, however, is that after a rather ominous warning from the one true prophet in Israel,

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p.257.



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Micaiah, Jehoshaphat still goes through with his wartime alliance with Ahab. Nevertheless, the Chronicles' author reminds us all that God does not give up on those who falter and fall. For it is during the heat of battle that the Lord Himself comes to the king's aid.

## **The Judges Appointed (2 Chron. 19:1-11)**

Once again the mighty King of Judah finds himself confronted with the results of his misdeeds. "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord?" (verse 2, NKJV). Jehoshaphat seems to answer this question by learning from his mistakes and seeking to do right in the eyes of the Lord again. He appoints judges throughout the kingdom to settle disputes and warn the people of sin. In fact, he demonstrates a measure of spiritual maturity and growth when he declares, "with the Lord our God, [there is] no partiality, nor taking of bribes" (verse 7, NKJV).

## **War With Moab and Ammon (2 Chronicles 20)**

Chronicles concludes its discussion of King Jehoshaphat with a kind of second chance. The king is again faced with a military decision (the imminent attack of the Moabites and Ammonites). Will he rely on human strength and judgment, or will he this time rely on God? The king of Judah demonstrates again that he has learned from his mistakes. This time he turns to God first, and even more forcefully than ever before.

Ellen White adds this insight: Jehoshaphat "was well prepared to meet almost any foe; yet in this crisis he put not his trust in the arm of flesh. Not by disciplined armies and fenced cities, but by a living faith in the God of Israel, could he hope to gain the victory over these heathen who boasted of their power to humble Judah in the eyes of the nations." However, just when the reader is ready to shout, "You finally got it!" the chapter ends with another example of the king's straying from God's plan. Clearly, Jehoshaphat was a man of flesh and blood, one who struggled to follow his God and who offers us an example of God's unconditional love for fallen humanity.

## **REACT**

1. How could God continue to use—and even bless—Jehoshaphat?
2. In what ways is the story of Jehoshaphat a metaphor for our own spiritual journeys?
3. Do you think Judah would have been delivered if the entire nation did not pray and fast as one? What if only Jehoshaphat and the prophets entreated God on the nation's behalf?

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\* *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 198, 199.

## Keeping the Airways Clear

### TESTIMONY

2 Chronicles 18; 20

Have you ever noticed how radio signals sometimes get crossed and you find yourself listening to more than one radio station at the same time? Likewise, if we open the avenues of our hearts to conflicting signals, the results can be detrimental to our spiritual well-being.

One of Judah's best kings, Jehoshaphat sought to walk in all the ways of Asa, his father, who had done "what was right in the eyes of the Lord" (1 Kings 15:11, NIV). Yet still, in moments of weakness, he forsook the God of his fathers. "Some years after coming to the throne, [he] . . . consented to the marriage of his son, Jehoram, to . . . [the] daughter of Ahab and Jezebel."<sup>1</sup> This was a union that God disapproved of and that brought disaster to Jehoshaphat and many of his subjects. In another instance of disobedience, he rashly promised to join Ahab, King of Israel, in his war against the Syrians. Neither he nor Ahab felt inclined to heed the warning of the prophet Micaiah. The result? Ahab was killed and Jehoshaphat returned home to face an upbraiding from the seer Jehu.

In times of severe crisis, however, Jehoshaphat earnestly sought the Lord. Toward the end of his reign, Judah was invaded by a mighty army before whose approach the people of the land had reason to tremble. Even though Judah was prepared to meet almost any foe, in "this crisis [Jehoshaphat] put not his trust in

the arm of flesh."<sup>2</sup> Instead he proclaimed a nationwide season of prayer and fasting. In a rather unique manner of going to battle, Jehoshaphat appointed singers who went before the army, lifting

**Radio signals sometimes get crossed.**

their voices in praises to God for the promise of victory. "The Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir . . . and they were smitten. For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, everyone helped to destroy another."<sup>3</sup> The children of God did not have to lift a finger because the battle was God's.

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 192.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 198.  
3. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

# Just a Phone Call Away

## EVIDENCE

2 Chron. 17:3-6; 20:13-22

Have you ever felt that everything you've tried has failed and nothing seemed to help you out? You turn to friends, employees, colleagues, teachers, church, family but none of them gives you the help you need.

Of course, everyone goes through the same situation but when everything fails whom do we turn to at the last minute? God. The only Person whom we should turn to in the first place is always left to the end of the help queue. The One who has the greatest, highest, fastest help is waiting for us 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with His help.

Have you ever heard the saying "God is just a phone call away"? He is closer than a phone call away. He is watching us each day and He knows what problems we are going to encounter. He knows what is the best way to get through our hurts, our fears, our sorrows, and our problems. You hear of people going to fortunetellers or palm readers because they want to know what the future holds for them. All they are doing is wasting time and money because only God knows what the future holds for each of us.

**God is closer than  
a phone call away.**

A man in the Bible who turned to God when he faced trouble was King Jehoshaphat of Judah. And that's why his kingdom was blessed—because the Lord was with him. "The Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the former ways of his father David" (2 Chron. 17:3, NKJV).

King Jehoshaphat was 35 years old when he became the king of Judah. During his 25-year rule, he was faced with a lot of armies wanting to go to war with him. But the first thing Jehoshaphat always did was turn to God and ask for His help and assurance. He never gathered up his armies and asked God for His blessings. He waited for God to direct him to the right path.

If we are faced with problems, the first thing we should do is seek God and ask for His guidance because only He can deliver us from our worries. If we ever want to succeed, we should not only seek His help but also have faith in Him. Jehoshaphat said, "Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper" (verse 20, NKJV).

## REACT

In what way has God answered your questions when you have turned to Him for help? Through friends, information, Bible texts?

Wednesday  
August 14

## Honesty + Truth – Partiality = True Justice

### HOW-TO

2 Chron. 19:7

Living in the twenty-first century—the age of high tech, the Internet, and life-in-the-fast lane—the average worldly person would comment, “Who has time to worry about being sincere and honest anymore?”

Here we see King Jehoshaphat reforming Judah’s judicial system (2 Chron. 19:4-11). He had seen firsthand its partiality (verses 26-28) when the prophet Micaiah was thrown into prison for speaking against their plans to go into battle.

However, the king saw in his own experience during battle, that when he cried out to the Lord he was saved (verse 31). He saw that God’s judgment was sure

**He went into action to reform the judicial system.**

and correct to the letter. King Jehoshaphat experienced a personal reformation because of God’s mercy and goodness. He no longer wanted to be part of those who favored human judgment above the loving Lord who had saved his life. Thus, he immediately went into action to reform the judicial system of its corrupted judges and practices.

How can we apply Jehoshaphat’s reformation process as a guide for allowing God’s true justice system to bring us prosperity?

**1. Prayer.** Always spending quiet time, communicating with God, asking Him to purify our hearts, making us honest and sincere Christians. Thus, when faced with our own personal battles at crossroads in deciding right from wrong, we will be able to discern the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to us.

**2. Removing idols.** We should earnestly seek to remove those destructive things that we hold on to, things that we cherish but that cause the courts of heaven to render a guilty verdict.

**3. Be a witness.** Tell our friends, family—even strangers that we meet—that God’s law and His judgment are true justice. He isn’t partial in His warnings, but success and prosperity are available to all.

**4. Let God rule our lives.** “We are to remember that human beings are fallible.”\* In every situation ““stand still and see the salvation of the Lord”! . . . Do not fear or be dismayed” (2 Chron. 20:17, NKJV).

This week let these four steps reform our hearts.

\* *Prophets and Kings*, p. 202.

# Whose Acceptance Do You Want?

## OPINION

2 Chron. 18:1

We have a tendency to search for God only when we are in need. As soon as the trouble is over, we turn our attention from Him to other people and/or things. We want them to know how successful we are, and we crave their acceptance.

This reminds me of a friend. When her boyfriend was so irresponsible and she failed to understand his attitude toward her, she was very close to me, asking for

advice, ready to allow me to offer prayers for her (even though she was of another faith), and enjoying my presence in her room. When her boyfriend decided to change as he realized he was going to lose her, her attitude toward me changed. Sometimes I knocked on her door and she didn't respond—though I knew she was in.

The Bible says, "Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance; and by marriage he allied himself with Ahab" (2 Chron. 18:1, NKJV). Jehu (the seer) asked him after all God had done for him, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord?" (19:2, NKJV). It was clear to everyone in Israel how Ahab had done evil before the Lord because of the influence of his wife, Jezebel. Should a king like Jehoshaphat, who had turned the hearts of many to God, be pleased to associate with a person like Ahab? This is exactly what most of us do, disappointing God many times with our choices.

How does He respond? "Therefore the wrath of the Lord is upon you" (verse 2, NKJV). God can forgive us (verse 4), but He cannot remove the consequences/results of our choices. Jehoshaphat almost died because of this association (18:31), but the Lord helped him. Is it pleasing to hurt those who love us? Is it fair to do evil before God, after all He has done for us?

## REACT

1. What do you do to counter feelings of being far from God? Be specific.
2. How do you decide what is the truth when Christians around you are in opposite camps?
3. In what cases might it be better or necessary to lie a little, if any?
4. Why do you think Jehoshaphat's life was spared in battle against the Syrians whereas Ahab's was not?
5. Did Jehoshaphat commit the unpardonable sin when he disobeyed the explicit advice of the prophet Micaiah? Explain your answer.

Her attitude toward  
me changed.



# The Power of Grace in Crisis

## EXPLORATION

1 Thess. 5:16-22

## CONCLUDE

Jehoshaphat was a good man who had weaknesses. In his first crisis, which was his alliance with Israel in war against Syria, he received good and bad advice and because of peer pressure followed the latter. He escaped the battle with his life only by God's grace. However, when he faced another crisis, the attacking armies of Moab, he sought and followed God's advice even though the advice was not conventional. Jehoshaphat had an outstanding victory. He grew in character and learned whose advice to follow. God's grace was the power that saved, led, and brought victory. When crises come to us, what character defect will be revealed? Whom will we listen to?

## CONSIDER

- Drawing an abstract picture that portrays a recent struggle in decision making. Show that you had conflicting advice.
- Writing out a step-by-step plan to deal with one of your insecurities.
- Memorizing 2 Chronicles 20:20 by: (a) writing it over and over; (b) sending an email to your friends and writing the text in it and explaining why you are sending it; (c) reciting it aloud as soon as you wake up and just before you go to bed.
- Describing the music you think would be needed for the following scenes of a movie about Jehoshaphat's life: (a) when the prophets of Israel are prophesying (2 Chron. 18:5-11); (b) when Micaiah came and prophesied (verses 12-27); (c) when all Judah came to pray because of the threat of annihilation (20:1-13); (d) when the prophet speaks and the people worship (verses 14-19); (e) when they go into the "praise" battle (verses 20-23).
- Exploring through mime and body movement the changes of feeling and attitude in God's people in 2 Chronicles 20:1-28 (e.g., threat, prayer, worship, answer to prayer, faith response, battle, and victory).
- Thinking about the following questions: (a) Why is praise such a powerful spiritual habit? (b) How do you develop an attitude of praise?
- Going to the zoo, taking a dog for a walk, or spending time with a pet animal and considering the extent to which animals can make decisions.

## CONNECT

Gary Friesen with J. Robin Maxson, *Decision Making and the Will of God*; Vaughan Allen, *The War Is Real and So Is the Victory*; Merlin R. Carothers, *Power in Praise*.

# Not always a Pretty Picture



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“Jehoiada made a covenant between himself, the people,  
and the king, that they should be the Lord’s people”  
(2 Chron. 23:16, NKJV).

# The Power of Influence

## INTRODUCTION

2 Chron. 23:16

The Bible discusses in blatant detail the heinous deeds as well as the saintly acts of kings, government leaders, and people of social influence. The history-keeping aspect of the Holy Bible gives its readers not only an objective perspective of biblical events but also a way to present clearly the underlying moral message.

This week's lesson discusses the royal reign of King Jehoram and King Joash. Through the unbiased eyes of the Bible and the Holy Spirit, we will see the kinds of influences that significantly affect the characters and decisions of both kings and will realize that God holds both the person being influenced and the person who influences responsible for their own actions.

God wants us to make our own decisions and to take responsibility for them, despite whatever influences surround us. We must take it upon ourselves to submit the advice of others to God first, and also to recognize that our influence on others is noted by God.

The Bible's realistic portrayal of truth is necessary to help us recognize and realize the ugliness and destructiveness of sin and why God does what He does. Even though King Jehoram was firstborn and thus the unquestioned heir to the throne, he kills his own brothers as well as the leaders

**God wants us to make  
our own decisions.**

of the land in order to secure more control and power of his kingdom. Furthermore, he not only sinned against God by acting immorally but caused others to sin as well. Since he was the crowned ruler of the land, whatever laws he laid down must be followed. His influence among his own people and subjects was great; thus when he set up temples to other gods, the people began to worship those gods as well.

King Joash got off to a good start, but when his advisor, Jehoiada died, the priest's moral advice died with him—and Joash, too, influenced his people to turn away from God just like Jehoram did.

The influences of Athaliah, Jehoiada, the royal advisers, and the king's own wives cannot even begin to compare to the advice of God. Only God, and God alone, knows the best way for us to live our lives.

God is all-encompassing, omnipresent, omnipotent, and holy, but even His advice is but a simple influence to the choices you must make.

No matter what the influences are, choose wisely because your decision is a life-and-death matter.

# Baby-Faced Assassin

## EVIDENCE

Isa. 1:19, 20

Throughout the history of Israel, and afterward Judah, this was the one permeating theme: Walk with God and life will be good; do evil, and it will catch up with you. As far back as their long walk through the desert, Israel had to be constantly reined in, because they wandered away from God. Even when they finally possessed the land promised them, as soon as those died who had crossed the Jordan and had seen God's hand deliver the land to them, they turned away from God.

So what seems to be the problem? Bad company! The new generation of Israelites looked to the nations around them for spiritual inspiration and served their gods (Judg. 2:10-15). Nothing seems to have changed centuries later in Judah, as we are studying it this week. The biggest problem here is the influence exerted by Ahab, the king of Israel (2 Chron. 21:6). He, too, was rather keen on gods of the nations around them.

**What seems to be the problem? Bad company!**

One has to wonder what made the other gods more palatable to Judah and Israel than their one real God? This section of history sees a high-tension drama of murders and coups, and through all this God is still keeping His promise that David's lineage would be unbroken.

Jehoiada, the priest, pulls the strings and brings the one remaining heir, Joash, to the throne. He takes him under his wing from an early age, and Judah is led back to God and enjoys a time of prosperity. But as soon as Jehoiada dies, Joash finds himself surrounded by the wrong crowd and promptly abandons God, not sparing one thought as he kills Jehoiada's son, Zechariah, in the process.

We gasp at the unfaithfulness of these people, but are we that different? How often do we find it easier to follow the lifestyle of the people around us than to serve the one real God? This section of history shows us that God is not always as tolerant as we like to sometimes portray Him, and is more than capable of delivering swift justice. But we also see a God who is working hard to deliver His promises. Just as through all this drama in Judah He kept His promise to David, He will keep the promise He gave to those who walk in His ways.

## REACT

1. To what extent, if any, do Jehu's actions in 2 Chronicles 22:7-9 relate to the sixth commandment?

2. The Lord made a covenant with Judah that He would bless them if they obeyed Him, but that their enemies would destroy Judah if they continued to refuse to listen. In what ways is this promise true today?

Monday  
August 19

## Crime, Grime, and Grace

### LOGOS

2 Chronicles 21–24; 2 Kings 11; 12

It's rated "X" for violence and language.

The entire navy sinks. King Jehoshaphat names his firstborn, Jehoram, as the next king of Judah, rewards his other sons with wealth, honor, and power, then dies. Jehoram slaughters the competition (his brothers) and marries the daughter of Ahab (the wicked king across the border, Israel). The romance doesn't cement diplomatic relations.

This is just the first six minutes (uh, sorry, verses of 2 Chronicles 21).

Things don't improve. The Edomites rebel, secede, establish their own government. Jehoram goes for revenge. Libnah revolts. Jehoram is rebuked by Elijah with a message from God that because of his evil deeds, he will suffer a "disease of the bowels, until the disease causes your bowels to come out" (2 Chron. 21:15, NIV). (Special effects staff worked overtime here.)

Fast forward. Jehoram dies. His youngest son, Ahaziah, rules the throne since all the older sons are dead. Ahaziah's mother, Athaliah, is the wicked witch and drags her son along in her footsteps. Another war. Another death scene. No survivors.

Queen Mother Athaliah knocks off the competition in the family and crowns herself. Jehosheba, daughter of King Jehoram (let's see, that would make her the

**It's rated "X" for violence  
and language.**

sister of the deceased king Ahaziah), kidnaps baby Joash (Ahaziah's infant son) before Grandma Athaliah can murder him and everyone else. Jehosheba hides baby Joash in

the storage room at the church (no one ever bothers to go in there anyway) for six years while Grandma rules.

Fast forward. Enter the old pastor, Jehoiada, who turns out to be Jehosheba's husband, son-in-law of Queen Athaliah and uncle of baby Joash. This guy decides enough is enough, so he engineers the coronation of King Joash, age seven. Grandma Athaliah goes ballistic, rips off her clothes (no stunt person here), screams treason. Secret Service (who get their paychecks from her) escort her outside and execute her. (Anyone keeping score on the body count?)

With the help of good Uncle Jehoiada, Joash gets off to a good start, rebuilds the church, reinstitutes worship, cleans up the country. Happy days are here again.

Jehoiada dies of old age. Long-lost relatives from the other country (Israel) come to visit Joash and influence him to party with Asherah poles and idols.

Good Uncle Jehoiada's son, Zechariah (The king's own cousin!), shows up: "Because



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you have forsaken the Lord, He also has forsaken you” (2 Chron. 24:20, NKJV).

“Off with his head,” screeches the king, forgetting (read: ignoring) all of Uncle Jehoiada’s favors. King Joash goes to war and gets wounded; cabinet members plot revenge for Zechariah’s murder. Joash is gunned down in his bed. The credits roll. The lights come up. The audience walks out puzzled. What’s the point?

“All these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor. 10:11, NKJV).

What examples? A warning? Don’t do evil? Don’t worship idols?

Certainly. Learn from their mistakes. Don’t make the same ones.

However, there’s an intriguing part in this tale: Jehoram was not particularly a fine, upstanding member of society. “The Lord would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that He had made with David, and since He had promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever” (2 Chron. 21:7, NKJV). And in 2 Chronicles 23:3 Jehoiada said to them, “‘The king’s son shall reign, as the Lord has said of the sons of David’” (NKJV).

*The New Layman’s Bible Commentary in One Volume* comments that in spite of the wickedness of Jehoram, “the Lord would not destroy the house of David on the ground of the covenant which is viewed by the Chronicler as unconditional.”<sup>1</sup>

In spite of their evil, God in His mercy still fulfilled His part of the covenant. Why?

“God will not break His covenant, nor alter the thing that has gone out of His lips. His word will stand fast forever as unalterable as His throne.”<sup>2</sup>

For us living in the 21st century, God’s law—His covenant with us—is still law. “The law of God is the standard by which character is to be tested; if we erect a standard to suit ourselves, and attempt to follow a criterion of our own devising, we shall utterly fail to secure heaven at last.”<sup>3</sup>

Enter God’s grace. Christ has already paid the price to pardon us. “The law and the gospel go hand in hand. The one is the complement of the other. The law without faith in the gospel of Christ cannot save the transgressor of law. The gospel without the law is inefficient and powerless. The law and the gospel are a perfect whole.”<sup>4</sup>

Unbelievable? Not at all. Because of the grace of God, He wants to make us new. It’s a choice: one that Jehoram, Ahaziah, Athaliah, Joash, and their friends and family didn’t make.

Popular Christian author Max Lucado has a gift of expressing truth with few words: “God loves you just the way you are, but he refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to be just like Jesus.”<sup>5</sup>

It’s your choice.

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1. Editors, G. C. D. Howley, F. F. Bruce, H. L. Ellison, *The New Layman’s Bible Commentary in One Volume* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), p. 508.

2. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 187.

3. *Our High Calling*, p. 138.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

5. Max Lucado, *Just Like Jesus* (Nashville: Tenn.: Word Publishing, 1998), p. 3.

## Mighty Strong Influences

### TESTIMONY

2 Chron. 21:5, 6; 22:2-4, 11, 12; 24:14-22

What weight does someone's influence have on the outcome of another's life? Let's look at two examples; one for evil, one for good.

Ahaziah becomes king and follows in the footsteps of his father, Jehoram. Both kings are led astray by evil advisors. Ahaziah is further influenced by his own mother, Athaliah. "There are few who realize how far-reaching is the influence of their words and acts. How often the errors of parents produce the most disastrous effects upon their children and children's children, long after the actors themselves have been laid in the grave. Everyone is exerting an influence upon others, and will be held accountable for the result of that influence."<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, godly influences are taking place that have great consequences. Jehosheba and Jehoiada save Joash and raise him to follow God. "The well-being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation, depend upon home influences."<sup>2</sup>

For years Joash leads his country in worshiping God. But after Jehoiada dies,

**"There are few who realize how far-reaching is the influence of their words and acts."**

officials of Judah come, flatter and praise Joash, and lead him into idol worship. Did Jehoiada realize what impact his life had on Joash? "The words and actions

looked upon as so small and unimportant are links in the long chain of human events."<sup>3</sup>

Why does Joash fail to continue to be a godly king? "They are affected by circumstances, and seem to think that their lives are their own, and that they may pursue whatever course seems most agreeable to themselves, irrespective of others. . . . They do not prayerfully consider their position and their responsibilities, and fail to realize that only by a faithful discharge of the duties of the present life can they hope to win the future, immortal life."<sup>4</sup>

Do you know how much good you can accomplish by being surrounded by godly influences and being one yourself for others' benefit? "Satan is a vigilant foe, intent upon his purpose of leading the youth to a course of action entirely contrary to that which God would approve. He well knows that there is no other class that can do as much good as young men and young women who are consecrated to God."<sup>5</sup>

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 556.

2. *The Adventist Home*, p. 15.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 542.

4. *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 562.

5. *Messages to Young People*, p. 204.

# Empowering God

## HOW-TO 2 Chron. 21:7

It's amazing that no matter what subject, what book, or what chapter you read in the Bible, there is always a lesson to be learned—something to apply to daily life. Kings and Chronicles are no exception. You may not know what to expect when reading about wars, rebellion, and apostasy, but the underlying theme throughout the books remains: The kings of Judah who put their trust in God had His protection—they empowered God to work through them and through their lives; the kings who made the decision to obey other gods, however, only found themselves in turmoil.

How did Athaliah get on the throne of Judah? She put herself there (2 Kings 11). She wanted to exert *her* influences on everyone else in the land, but God had a different agenda. Athaliah, as with many others, was *not* nonchalant in her evil and devious ways—she lived and breathed it. For many, it was a way of life. People attempted to spread it to everyone around, and there was no accepting God. If God allowed this to continue, more and more of His beloved would fall.

There is always a lesson  
to be learned.

Notice, however, what happens when people commit themselves to the Lord: “Because of the covenant the Lord had made with David, the Lord was not willing to destroy the house of David. He had promised to maintain a lamp for him and his descendants forever” (2 Chron. 21: 7, NIV).

What can we do when we are tempted to stray from God's loving arms? Let's ask three questions:

**1. How does it make God feel?** When you are tempted to do what you want, rather than what God wants, remember how it makes *Him* feel. When you were young and disobeyed your parents, do you remember how it made them feel? You could tell by the disappointed look on their faces when they realized you had lied, cheated, or disobeyed. Imagine that same look on God's face, because it's real.

**2. Where does it get us in the end?** Doing something that I know is wrong has only made me feel worse. But temptation is a powerful thing. We all fall into it numerous times. But if we can keep this point in mind each time we are tempted to do wrong, perhaps we can do more of what God wants us to do, rather than what our own selfish desires tell us we want.

**3. How difficult is it, really?** Obviously, we can't help being tempted. But this doesn't give us an excuse to go out and sin. The closer we follow God, the longer we listen to Him, and the more we ask Him to show us His will, the more we will be like Him and the easier it will be to say No to temptation. Empower God to work through you.

Thursday  
August 22

## Getting Serious About Giving Cheerfully

### OPINION

2 Kings 12:4-15; 2 Chron. 24:4-14

"All the officials and all the people brought their contributions gladly, dropping them into the chest until it was full" (2 Chron. 24:10, NIV).

Talk about a fund-raising effort! Have you ever tried to save your money for something you thought was really important? Did you ever get distracted? Maybe you forgot what you were saving for because you saw something else you wanted and spent your saved money?

The same went for the efforts of young King Joash. It wasn't until he was 23 years

**Setting aside a modest  
amount each month  
would make a difference.**

old that he realized that the money was not being saved for the repair of the temple as he had instructed (2 Kings 12:6). So he got serious about it. And when he got serious about it, the people rejoiced and gave their money cheerfully. Just

think what we could do if all gave what they could to improve our churches. I'm not talking about people giving 80 percent of their salaries; I'm talking about giving what they can, faithfully and consistently, and rejoicing about the impact of giving to your church.

You could build a new youth center to attract the youth in your neighborhood; you could raise money for a new van for your youth or young adult group, which could take you to all kinds of leadership and Christ-centered conferences; you could raise money for a mission trip; your church could sponsor a worthy youth through one of our Christian colleges. There are no limits to what you could do for Christ and His church.

You may not be a King Joash in your church, but you may be one of the king's officers, or you may be a family in the church who wants to see the gospel spread throughout your city. Even something as simple as setting aside a modest amount each month would make a difference.

Though he strayed from the Lord's direction later in life, Joash was right-on when he saw the benefits of an up-front, in-your-face campaign to restore the church and to remind people of the importance that their church makes in their community.

### REACT

1. What could your group do to remind the church of the importance of giving an offering toward the church budget?

2. King Joash strayed from the Lord later in life: why do you think he forgot about how God had blessed his country?



# This Little Light

## EXPLORATION

2 Sam. 22:29; 2 Pet. 1:19

## CONCLUDE

Sometimes you can't help wondering what all these bloody Old Testament stories have to do with our New Testament Christian experience. Yet 2 Peter 1:19 reminds us that throughout the moral darkness found in Chronicles there has always been a pinpoint of light—a light that God never allowed to go out.

During the power struggles found in this week's lesson, the monarchy seemed to go from bad to worse. Many people must have hoped Joash would become another king like David. But in those black days following Joash's downfall, God kept His promise (2 Chron. 21:7). God would not extinguish the lamp of His promise. In the darkest days, God's light shines brightest.

## CONSIDER

- Making a list of people who have been a positive influence in your life. Have there been Jehoiasas in your life? Have you ever told them so?
- Spending the evening outdoors to watch the sunset. (If possible, get away from any artificial light.) As the sky darkens, notice how the stars grow brighter as the world grows darker.
- Designing a bookmark illustrating God's light in your life. Consider all forms of light-giving elements. What form best represents God's effect in your life? Put the bookmark in a place you'll see it often.
- Seeing God in everyday objects. Choose an item at random from wherever you're sitting right now. Think of what that item can teach you about this week's lesson.
- Calculating the far-reaching influence of light. Conduct a simple experiment to measure the distance a single candlepower light can be seen. Look up as many Bible texts as you can think of that refer to lights or lamps.
- Creating a soundtrack for this week's lesson (2 Chronicles 21–24). Use recorded music or write your own. What style of music would you use? What instrumentation best represents the main characters in this week's lesson?
- Sculpting a small oil lamp similar to those used in biblical times. Add floating wick and oil. Burn the lamp as you study this week's lesson. Consider the importance of such a lamp in days before gas or electric lights.

## CONNECT

*Prophets and Kings*, chap. 16.



# It's our Life!



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“This is what Hezekiah did throughout Judah, doing what was good and right and faithful before the Lord his God. In everything that he undertook in the service of God’s temple and in obedience to the law and the commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so he prospered” (2 Chron. 31:20, 21, NIV).

# But It's How I Was Raised

## INTRODUCTION

Ps. 140:4

The yelling was almost unbearable. They always got this way after they drank. Devin sat on the edge of his bed and tried to concentrate on something else. He hated it when they drank. It wasn't just sometimes either; it was every night. It seemed to him that his parents loved their alcohol more than they loved him.

When he went to school, he saw other kids' parents driving them. Devin always had to walk to school because his mom and dad were in bed sleeping off their hangover. Sometimes he wouldn't get his homework done because his parents sent him to bed early so they could have their drink. The teacher would ask him about it, but he would lie because he was ashamed that his parents were alcoholics.

Devin couldn't go on field trips or play in sports because his parents were too drunk to sign the release forms. He was embarrassed to have friends come over to his house. He didn't want to chance that they might have to be there in the middle of one of his parents' fights.

Sometimes he couldn't help thinking that maybe he was the one to blame for the way his parents acted. Maybe he was just too much for them to handle. Had the way he behaved pushed them over the edge and into the open arms of alcohol?

One time he hadn't come home right after school. He had just wandered around town thinking. When he got home, he had hoped that they might be angry that he hadn't shown up on time, but they were passed out on the floor.

Devin felt so alone and ashamed that he finally decided to talk to his Aunt Josi. She felt awful that she hadn't realized that he was being mistreated. She vowed to let him come live with her. She decided she would try to find his mom and dad the help that they needed to sober up and become good parents again.

He moved in with his aunt, but his parents weren't ready to admit that they had a problem. He decided then and there that he would never taste alcohol. He couldn't imagine causing the same grief to his children if he became an alcoholic.

Hezekiah didn't have the best home life, either. It must have been a challenge to grow up God-fearing when your father, the king, burns his children as sacrifices to Baal and remodels the country's religious services to suit a heathen king.

But the bottom line comes down to this, for Hezekiah, and for you, and for me. It's our life. We may have things rough to start out with, but what we do with what we have is our choice. With God, nothing is impossible!

**What we do with what we  
have is our choice.**

Sunday  
August 25

## Letting God Solve His Own Problems

### LOGOS

2 Kings 16; 18; 19; 2 Chronicles 29; 30

*"Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God" (2 Kings 16:2, NIV).*

What could be more blunt than the summary in 2 Kings 16:2? In two sentences Jeremiah, the likely author of Kings, sums up Ahaz's life. The rest of the chapter adds a few choice details, but there it is: Ahaz, king of Judah, weighs in as a negative force in the great controversy between good and evil.

The few choice details outline a strange picture. Ahaz is threatened by two kings—the king of Aran, and the king of Israel, of all people. So where does Ahaz go for help? To the king of Assyria.

Judah has sunk so low that to defend herself against her estranged sister nation, Israel, and the heathen nation of Aran, her king sends a gift to one of the most cruel and heartless of all nations, Assyria, to ask for aid.

*"Then King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria. He saw an altar in Damascus and sent to Uriah the priest a sketch of the altar, with detailed plans for its construction" (verse 10, NIV).*

This is the very nation that Jonah had warned of divine judgment years before.

**This is the very nation that  
Jonah had warned of divine  
judgment years before.**

The Assyrian king and his people had listened to God's messenger then. They had repented and served Israel's God for a time. But even Judah is not listening to God now. Ahaz has an Assyrian

altar built in the temple courtyard and rearranges the rest of the sacred structures to suit the foreign monarch.

Ahaz asks for help, and the Assyrian king, Tiglath-pileser, takes care of things all too well. He kills the king of Aran and deports his people. Assyria takes care of Israel the same way, as we see in 2 Kings 17.

But who is next in line for takeover by the Assyrian war machine? Judah is a sitting duck. By now, Hezekiah, Ahaz's son, is on Judah's throne.

*"He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father David had done. He*

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removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.)

*“Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him” (18:2-5, NIV).*

Hezekiah does his best to avert war with Assyria; he apologizes for failing to pay the tribute called for by the precedent set by his father, and sends a handsome present—gold from the temple doors that he himself had plated. But Assyria can't be bought off for long. Soon the Assyrian troops are camped outside Jerusalem, arrogantly boasting that the Lord can't save Judah from their power.

*“When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the Lord” (19:1, NIV).*

What a difference between Hezekiah's reaction to foreign invasion, and his father's reaction! Hezekiah goes straight to God. He also lets Isaiah, a prophet of God, know what's going on, and seeks his advice. Isaiah sends back a message that the Assyrians will retreat. They do. But later they return with more threats.

*“Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord. And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord: ‘O Lord, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God’ ” (verses 14-16, NIV).*

There is real danger threatening, but Hezekiah turns to God. This is really God's problem, after all; there is nothing Hezekiah can do to protect God's honor. God responds with more than mere reassurance. His words given to Isaiah are a poem, a song full of metaphor. You can read it in 2 Kings 19:21-28, 32-34. That night the angel of the Lord strikes down 85,000 of Assyria's troops in their beds. How easily God manages to take care of His problems when we let Him!

Do you have problems that you should let God own? Hezekiah's father was no great influence, but Hezekiah didn't make excuses. Whatever our background, we still have the final responsibility for the choices we make. What kind of choices are you making?

## **REACT**

1. What in your life is your “Letter from Sennacherib” that you need to take before the Lord? Why is it easy or difficult for you?

2. Second Kings 18:4 applauds Hezekiah for his swift action in destroying the visual reminders of Judah's lack of faith in God, even breaking the bronze serpent because what was once an *aid to* worship had become an *object of* worship. Are there objects or activities that have become idols in your life or church?

Monday  
August 26

## King Hezekiah Leads a Spiritual Revival

### TESTIMONY

2 Chron. 30:21-27

"In sharp contrast with the reckless rule of Ahaz was the reformation wrought during the prosperous reign of his son. Hezekiah came to the throne determined to do all in his power to save Judah from the fate that was overtaking the northern kingdom. The messages of the prophets offered no encouragement to halfway measures. Only by most decided reformation could the threatened judgments be averted.

"In the crisis, Hezekiah proved to be a man of opportunity. No sooner had he ascended the throne than he began to plan and to execute. He first turned his attention to the restoration of the temple services, so long neglected; and in this work he earnestly solicited the co-operation of a band of priests and Levites who had remained true to their sacred calling."

After the temple was restored, Hezekiah invited the people to join in celebrating Passover: "The occasion was one of the greatest profit to the multitudes assembled. The desecrated streets of the city were cleared of the idolatrous shrines placed there

**"Hezekiah proved to be a  
man of opportunity."**

during the reign of Ahaz. On the appointed day the Passover was observed, and the week was spent by the people in offering peace offerings and in learning what God would have them do.

Daily the Levites 'taught the good knowledge of the Lord;' and those who had prepared their hearts to seek God, found pardon. A great gladness took possession of the worshipping multitude; 'the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing with loud instruments'; all were united in their desire to praise Him who had proved so gracious and merciful. [2 Chron. 30:12.]

"The seven days usually allotted to the Passover feast passed all too quickly, and the worshipers determined to spend another seven days in learning more fully the way of the Lord.

"The teaching priests continued their work of instruction from the book of the law; daily the people assembled at the temple to offer their tribute of praise and thanksgiving; and as the great meeting drew to a close, it was evident that God had wrought marvelously in the conversion of backsliding Judah and in stemming the tide of idolatry which threatened to sweep all before it. The solemn warnings of the prophets had not been uttered in vain. 'There was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem.'"<sup>1,2</sup>

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 331.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 337, 338.



# One God, or Many?

## EVIDENCE

2 Kings 19:11-19

Since the beginning of his influence on earth, Satan has used, as one of his ways to divert people's attention from the true God, the concept that there is not just one God but many. He told Eve that everybody could become a god (Gen. 3:5). Even today, many religions of the world have innumerable gods. Some Christians, especially those who have grown up among these other religions, see their Christian God as the chief or superior God over all these others.

The chief identifying mark of the children of Israel as a nation, in contrast to the nations around them, was that they worshiped only one God. As Moses reminded them, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!" (Deut. 6:4, NKJV). Indeed, God had made that the first of His Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:3). It is not a matter of the Creator-God being the chief among many; inasmuch as He claims to be the only God, we cannot worship Him and at the same time consider that there are any other gods at all (Isa. 48:11).

King Hezekiah had plenty to worry about as the Assyrians approached. They had already taken Israel into captivity and had laid waste most of the fortified towns of Judah. Now they threatened Jerusalem itself. Sennacherib, the Assyrian king, sent a letter referring to the nations already conquered: "Have the gods of the nations delivered those whom my fathers have destroyed?" (2 Kings 19:12, NKJV), he asked. The implication was that the God of Judah would be no more successful.

Well! The threat of physical harm was great enough, but now the Assyrians were impugning and maligning God Himself. Hezekiah took the general's letter to the temple and "spread it before the Lord" (verse 14, NKJV). "Save us," he pleaded, "that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that *You* are the Lord God, *You alone*" (verse 19, NKJV, emphasis supplied).

Many religions of  
the world have  
innumerable gods.

And the Lord responded with a message to be transmitted to Sennacherib. "Who do you think you are?" He asked in essence. He went on to say that He would lead the Assyrians back home with a hook in their nose (that's the way they treated their prisoners). Sure enough, 185,000 Assyrian soldiers mysteriously died in their sleep. The rest of the army hightailed it for home.

An interesting footnote: Sennacherib himself was assassinated while worshipping in his temple (verse 37). So much for how helpful his god was to him!

## REACT

How many metaphors can you find in the song God gave Hezekiah in 2 Kings 19:21-28? Which verse to you find the most meaningful? Why?

## Learning From the Ugly

### HOW-TO

2 Chron. 28:5-15

Ahaz was a man who would have fit in well in our day. He sold out to anybody he thought would give him the most power in the shortest time.

One of the uglier sins he committed was burning some of his children as sacrifices. This is not a pretty sight. It is likely that Hezekiah had a brother or a half-brother that he watched be the guest at one of these Babe-o-ques.

Imagine yourself playing with one of your brothers. Suddenly he is grabbed and hauled off. The next time you see him, he could really use some fire-proof long johns. Talk about child abuse! Have you ever heard one of your friends say, "My dad really burns me up!"

Abijah, Hezekiah's mother, was a God-fearing woman. She was in control of his training until he was at least 12 years old. I can easily see Abijah explaining the love of God to Hezekiah while some of the ugly was happening, and the power of God when Hezekiah was watching some of Judah's captives being hauled off to Israel.

The Bible does not say whether Hezekiah was captured by the Israelites. One of

**"My dad really  
burns me up!"**

his brothers lost his life in this battle, so Hezekiah could have been in the battle as well, and one of the captives (2 Chron. 28:5-15). An old tactic to break down slaves psychologically after a battle was to force them to march through the carnage of the battlefield and tell them how

inferior their people were. Hezekiah may have been traumatized in this way.

Ahaz changed gods like he changed socks. Hezekiah, on the other hand, looked at his grandfather and great-grandfather, listened to the teachings of his mother, and then thought about his father's lack of real power. Hezekiah had a choice to make. He weighed the evidence and chose to do what was right in the sight of the Lord his God, according to all that David his father had done (2 Chron. 29:2).

You have all of the same evidence that Hezekiah did and more. All of the evidence before and after Hezekiah's witness is consistent; now you have the choice before you. Joshua summed it up very well when he demanded Israel to "choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Josh. 24:15, NKJV).

### REACT

Similar to Abijah's experience of having to teach about a godly life in the face of ungodly living, what is the most difficult discrepancy between your picture of God and the circumstances of this world?

# Wake Up!

## OPINION

1 Kings 18:1-20:21; 2 Chron. 32:9-31

Hezekiah had it made. Because he did what the Lord God wanted him to do, the Lord blessed him and he became very wealthy. He had victory over the Philistines and even an Assyrian army was wiped out in one night by the angel of the Lord in answer to his prayer.

Then when Hezekiah was miraculously cured of a fatal illness, God even reversed the natural order of the entire solar system as a sign of his healing and an extra 15 years added onto his life.

The entire world knew about this universal upheaval—just as at the time of Christ's birth, men

were watching the heavens. And like the wise men of Christ's day, they packed their bags and journeyed to find out what had happened.

What an opportunity! Did Hezekiah tell the story? Did he take his visitors to the temple and pray with them? Did he use this God-given golden opportunity?

Such a tragedy. But now stop a minute: let's look at today. We are in the end times. Do we tell others when something wonderful happens in our lives? Or has nothing wonderful happened in our lives in a long time? Maybe we should look a little closer at what's happening in our lives, and ask ourselves why we don't have the kind of experiences that beg to be shared.

Like Hezekiah, we have a message for the world. Are we telling it? Are we living it? What can we do about this?

"The world sleeps in darkness, the church sleeps in the light." Wake up!

**Do we tell others when something wonderful happens in our lives?**

## REACT

1. God pulled back from Hezekiah in 2 Chronicles 32:31 to test his character and to strengthen him for trials ahead. How do you respond when everything is going wrong? What was your reaction to the most recent stress or crisis in your life?

2. In your opinion, what is the power of testimonies?

3. What showed that the people of Judah enjoyed their spiritual renewal?

4. It wasn't difficult for the Israelites to add God to their list of gods; the difficult part was making Him the one and only God. What aspects of your own life often compete with God?

## EXPLORATION

Josh. 1:8, 9

## CONCLUDE

No one said that being a Christian would be easy. In fact today, more than ever, it is difficult to stand against the influences of popular society. Many times the challenge is posed by those closest to us—family, friends, professors, coworkers. But God expects us to rise above our surroundings and do the right thing, and when we do, He rewards us.

## CONSIDER

- Writing on a piece of paper each thing, person, or activity that influences your life in a positive or negative way. Tear out each item, fold that piece of paper and put it in a basket. Toss or mix the folded pieces and pull out five. Did you pull more negative or more positive items? If you pulled more negative, what can you do to increase your positive influences? When you figure it out, try the exercise again.
- Singing a song in church in a different key from the one the congregation is singing.
- Reading Matthew 7:24-27 and discussing what elements make up a weak or strong foundation.
- Journaling for a week as you learn more about the story of Hezekiah. At times he was afraid and poured out his heart before God. Share times that you've been afraid and fears you would like to overcome.
- Making a collage of pictures and headlines from magazines and newspapers showcasing people who have stood up against a majority or against great odds and made a difference.
- Envisioning what changes you would bring about in your church and community if you were Hezekiah and his story repeated itself today.

## CONNECT

2 Chronicles 28–32.

*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 331-354.

Max Lucado, *In the Eye of the Storm*, chap. 9.

# Meanwhile, **Back** in the **North**



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“The angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, ‘Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them, “Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?” ’ ”

(2 Kings 1:3, NKJV).



## INTRODUCTION

1 Kings 21:18, 19

### My first semester was a nightmare.

Have you ever cried out “Lord, where are You? Can’t You see what’s going on here?” I have. It was my freshmen year in college, first time to be in the dorm. We were six in the room. Two weeks after I moved in, my roommate lost 5,000 *pesos*.

She cried a lot. Cried out of fear that her parents would be angry with her, for that money was intended as her school expenses for that semester. Feeling sorry for her, others began to lend her money till she lacked only 2,000 *pesos*. Being new and coming all the way from Sri Lanka to study in the Philippines, I had a little more than what I needed. I had 2,000 *pesos* to spare, so I gave it to her—never expecting what came next. She accused me of stealing the money and returning it to her.

Two thousand *pesos* out of guilt? Lord, I did not need this! I was far from home, and the last thing I really wanted was to be looked down upon as a thief by those who were supposed to be my new family. My first semester was a nightmare.

In our study today, we see how Ahab abused his powers as well as disrespected God’s covenant. He and his wife actually plotted the death of Naboth just to get a piece of land. Every Israelite had the right to possess a piece of the Promised Land. Not even the king could legally take away that right. In fact, selling the land would actually break a law God gave Moses (Lev. 25:23-31).

Such stories bring us to the old question, “Does God really care?” Naboth’s tale is not just another story to prove how unjust King Ahab was, but rather to let us know that God hears specially when you think there is no one else left to hear you out. The Bible assures us that even while the enemy rejoices in his gain, God has already taken action in your behalf (1 Kings 21:18).

It’s been four years since the day I was accused of taking my roommate’s money. Looking back, I used to wonder why God was silent when I needed Him so much. But Naboth’s story has changed that for me. For God, who was quick to stand up on behalf of Naboth, is the same God yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13: 8). Now, with assurance, I can join David in singing, “Why are you cast down, O my soul? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God” (Ps. 43:5, NKJV).

# A Common Mistake

## EVIDENCE

2 Cor. 6:16-18

Ahab ruled Israel until his death. His son, Ahaziah, then inherited the throne. After him, his brother, Joram, reigned until Jehu (anointed by God) succeeded in a revolt, killing all Ahab's descendants.

One nation. Three kings. Each king succeeding the other. Each had the chance to undo what was committed before him but instead fell into the same mistake. They rejected God's warnings sent through the prophets. They continued to sin against God and refused to remove idol worship. They failed to bring Israel out of its apostate condition (1 Kings 22:8, 26, 27, 52, 53; 2 Kings 3:2, 3). As a result, each fell into the same fate.

As Seventh-day Adventists today, we are not exempted from committing the same mistakes. Heathen practices are creeping ever more stealthily into our lives. We may not be erecting idols and bowing before them inside our churches and homes, but we may be unconsciously setting up idols inside our hearts. Human role models are slowly taking the place of God. Uninspired human literature is given more weight than the Bible.

We may not be participating in witchcraft, fortunetelling, or astrology, but our indiscriminate study of human psychology is slowly removing God's role and influence in human behavior and development. God is being taken away and focus is given to human effort toward excellence.

Our condition as a fallen race, continually falling into corruption, has been forgotten. The theory of evolution has taken its place, making us believe that we are slowly evolving into perfect beings. This takes away dependence on a divine Savior to redeem us from eternal destruction.

Ancient Israel's history is in danger of being repeated by its spiritual counterpart today. A modern and discreet form of idolatry is taking its place. It is wise to listen to Paul's counsel, "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Cor. 10:11,12, NIV).

"For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate,' says the Lord. 'Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters,' says the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:16-18, NIV).

**Uninspired human literature is given more weight than the Bible.**

## LOGOS

1 Kings 21; 2 Kings 1; 2:1-18; 9

When crossing a railroad, one can see a sign that reads "Stop, Look, and Listen." In an individual's journey in life, there are roads that are worth stopping at, looking into, and listening to. In this article, we are going to stop, look, and listen to the life roads of the kings of Israel and a messenger of God.

**Ahab.** Ahab coveted the vineyard of Naboth and refused to eat until the vineyard was secured (1 Kings 21:2-7). But Ahab realized that he was wrong. When he received the message through Elijah, he fasted and repented (verse 27). The judgment of Ahab's doom was temporarily postponed (verse 29; Jer. 18:7, 8; Jonah. 3:5-10). God is merciful. The opportunity for repentance is never withdrawn.

**Ahaziah.** Ahaziah sent messengers to inquire from the god of Ekron about his future after he fell from an upper room window (2 Kings 1:2, 3). He knew the power

The Lord through chosen instruments or channels continually gives messages.

of God and knew the right thing to do. "Ahaziah had, during the reign of his father Ahab, witnessed many of the wonderful works of God. He well knew the ability of God to help."<sup>1</sup> Still he followed the

practices of the heathen (verse 6). He did not recover from the accident (verse 17). Ahaziah could have led his people away from evil, but he died with a divine rebuke ringing in his ears. God alone has the power to heal and restore. Those who turn from the true God find not life but death.

**Jehoram.** Jehoram put away the image of Baal but clung to the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat (1 Kings 12:28-33; 2 Kings 3:1). He knew what was right but was too weak to pursue it. He had been influenced by the idolatrous customs of Jezebel and clung to indecency, immorality, and faithlessness to God (verse 1). When Jehoram tried to escape during a military coup, Jehu drew his bow and shot him between the shoulders. The arrow pierced his heart and he slumped down in his chariot (9:24, 25). To tolerate evil is to be an ally of evil. "He who is not with me is against me" (Matt. 12:30, NIV).

**Jehu.** Jehu vindicated the prophets and God's servants. "Destroy the house of Ahab your master, and I will avenge the blood of my servants the prophets and the blood of all the Lord's servants shed by Jezebel" (2 Kings 9:7, NIV). Jehu was anointed as king. "I anoint you king over the Lord's people Israel" (verse 6, NIV). "When God's purpose was accomplished, He turned the tide in favor of those who had learned to inquire after Him."<sup>2</sup>

**Elijah.** Elijah brought the message of God to the king (1 Kings 21:17,18; 2 Kings 1:3) At the end of his life, he was taken up to heaven. "Suddenly a chariot

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of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind" (2:11, NIV). "God calls for men who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord."<sup>3</sup>

In whatever situation we are in life, the Lord through chosen instruments or channels continually gives messages, admonitions, and warnings that would serve as a guide in our daily lives. When we come to a crossroads to stop, look, and listen to Israel's history will aid us in making decisions that are wise and in accordance with God's will. May we learn to follow the decision of Joshua: "'Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, . . . As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord'" (Josh. 24:15, NIV).

### **REACT**

1. What have religious principles to do with ethical ideas and civil actions?
2. How does the phrase "men cannot serve two masters" apply to the kings of Israel?
3. How do you reconcile a God of mercy and compassion with the anointing of Jehu to slay Jezebel and all the household of Ahab?
4. Could Jehoram be considered less wicked because he cast out the image of Baal?
5. Compare the idols Ahab's family worshiped with our modern-day idols. How can we avoid, if not abolish idolatry from our lives? Be specific.
6. To follow or not to follow God is a choice. Think about some choices you have made in your life recently. Are these choices that God would approve or disapprove of?
7. This week's lesson illustrates that God speaks to us through chosen instruments. Through whom has God recently tried to send you a message? What was the message? How did you respond?
8. Do you recall a time when you took human advice instead of God's advice because the former was more convenient? What was the result?
9. How can a drive for excellence and success become a form of idolatry?
10. By what means can good works be accounted for as true obedience to God?
11. How can one distinguish whether a guilty conscience is a product of true regret or self-absorption?
12. What are the different ways through which God has guided you in your personal decision making? How can you be sure that such guidance is from God?
13. How can one recognize God's leading in spite of unfavorable outcomes to one's decisions?

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1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p 846.

2. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 255.

3. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1184.



**TESTIMONY**

1 Kings 16:29-33; 22:51-53; 2 Kings 3

“Through faithful messengers the Lord sent repeated warnings to the apostate king [Ahab] and the people, but in vain were these words of reproof. In vain did the inspired messengers assert Jehovah’s right to be the only God in Israel; in vain did they exalt the laws that He had entrusted to them. Captivated by the gorgeous display and the fascinating rites of idol worship, the people followed the example of the king and his court, and gave themselves up to the intoxicating, degrading pleasures of a sensual worship. In their blind folly they chose to reject God and His worship. The light so graciously given them had become darkness. The fine gold had become dim.”<sup>1</sup>

“The history of king Ahaziah’s sin and its punishment has in it a warning which none can disregard with impunity. Men today may not pay homage to heathen gods, yet thousands are worshipping at Satan’s shrine as verily as did the king of Israel. The spirit of idolatry is rife in the world today, although, under the influence of science and education, it has assumed forms

**One rotten mango  
spoil the lot.**

more refined and attractive than in the days when Ahaziah sought to the god of Ekron. Every day adds its sorrowful evidence that faith in the sure word of prophecy is decreasing, and that in its stead superstition and satanic witchery are captivating the minds of many.”<sup>2</sup>

“As Ahaziah had no son, he was succeeded by Jehoram, his brother, who reigned over the ten tribes for twelve years. Throughout these years his mother, Jezebel, was still living, and she continued to exercise her evil influence over the affairs of the nation. Idolatrous customs were still practiced by many of the people. Jehoram himself ‘wrought evil in the sight of the Lord; but not like his father, and like his mother: for he put away the image of Baal that his father had made. Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom.’ 2 Kings 3:2, 3.”<sup>3</sup>

One rotten mango spoils the lot. The same was true with the people of Israel. One family of wicked kings infected a righteous nation with their idolatry and even with Jehoram’s seemingly righteous act of putting away Baal, the seeds of evil had grown its roots. However, God understands the battle within the sinner’s heart. He never left Israel without an opportunity for repentance because He loved them and will do the same for His people through eternity.

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 116.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 212.



# Gods, Keep Out!

## HOW-TO

2 Chron. 7:14

in retrospect, most of the kings of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord by not turning away from the idolatry of their fathers. This provoked God to anger. But instead of taking heed to walk in the law of the Lord, they hardened their hearts and continued in their wickedness. So He sent His messenger, Elijah, to remind them of a living God able to save from sin. His life on earth was an example of perfect obedience and total dependence upon God from which we could draw inspiration.

Today we can expect that history to repeat itself in a different setting with different characters. How then can we refrain from committing the same mistakes?

**1. Cut off self.** At the center of sin is the "I" problem. Dwelling more on self eradicates the existence of others, including that of God. It is selfishness that moves us to utter destruction (Prov. 16: 25). Unmindful of its grave consequences, we carry on our heart's desires (11:19). Learning to trust God alone remedies the "I" ailment, for in Him none can boast. Entrusting our hearts to Him paves the way to a daily walk with God (3:5-7). Also try to redirect thoughts to others and develop an interest in knowing them (Phil. 2:3, 4).

**2. Bury your gods.** We do have modern-day gods: career, wealth, power, education, personalities, and so on. Materialism hovers around. In Romans 12:2, Paul admonishes us not to conform to this world but to renew our minds. If we set our thoughts on high (Col. 3:2), idolatry will be pushed aside. These gods must have no place in our lives for we have a jealous God (Exod. 20:5).

**3. Guard the avenues.** We must always protect our hearts with all diligence for out of the heart springs the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). "Those who would not fall a prey to Satan's devices must guard well the avenues of the soul; they must avoid reading, seeing, or hearing that which will suggest impure thoughts."\* When all the senses are clear, the Holy Spirit can work its way to revive you every day.

If we set our thoughts on high, idolatry will be pushed aside.

**4. Eat the Word.** If you feed on the Word daily, you will never go hungry. A few words, a few lines can complete a verse that might change your life. When the very message has been fully digested, there's an assurance you'll never go astray. As David says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Ps. 119:105, NIV). Then we have the free will to choose between the road to destruction or eternal satisfaction.

\**Messages to Young People*, p. 285.

**OPINION**

2 Kings 1; Prov. 3:5, 6

Making a major decision in life is not an easy task. Even minor choices may leave us perplexed and uncertain about the outcomes of our decision. When confronted with an important crossroad, people tend to turn to others for advice. Some, being more self-reliant, opt to use their own reasoning and logic toward making a good choice. Yet how many of us remember to involve God in our decision making? How often do we seek our heavenly Father's guidance and wisdom in order to make the right choice?

In Israel's history, God's judgments and direct involvement played an important role. However, before pronouncing the fate of the monarchs and of the nation as a whole, He never failed to send them messages of mercy and love. Through the prophets, God manifest His relentless guidance and care for His people.

Ahaziah made a grave error by choosing to consult Baalzebub rather than the true God of Israel. "For him now to turn to a god of Ekron was to deny Jehovah."\* Such was a crucial yet common mistake made by many of the kings of Israel and Judah. Ahab, for one, ignored his own conscience; he instead heeded Jezebel's wicked counsel on acquiring Naboth's vineyard. Saul consulted a medium (1 Sam. 28:3-25).

On the other hand, David had the salutary habit of consulting God in his choices and plans (1 Sam. 23:2, 4; 1 Chron.14:10). Solomon asked God for the wisdom and understanding that he knew he would need as a ruler (1 Kings 3:9).

Friends and trusted persons are important sources of advice. We also value and desire the experience and insight of the elderly. If we indeed look to God as

**God never failed to  
send messages of  
mercy and love.**

our trusted Friend and Father, however, we should then be taking the time to consult His divine wisdom. Allow Him to speak to your heart through the right people, through His Word, and through the still, small voice of His guiding Spirit.

In every decision you make in your life, keep in mind: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (Prov. 3:5, 6, NIV).

God knows what is best for us. He holds the future. So why not trust Him and ask Him to lead you?

\*The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 2, p. 846.

# Whom Do You Choose to Follow?

## EXPLORATION

Josh. 24:15

## CONCLUDE

Throughout the Old Testament, the Israelites constantly cried out to God, "Why have You left us?" Yet, it was the Israelites who turned away from God toward idol worship. Consistently, God sent the Israelites a "Deliverer" and for a while the Israelites were happy, but soon they veered back to their old ways of idol worship and complaining. Even the kings God anointed to lead the Israelites failed to follow God and led the Israelites astray. God has called us to a ministry of fellowship. God's leaders are also His followers. Whom will you choose to follow today?

## CONSIDER

- Reflecting on the song "I Love You, Lord." What does it mean to you? How can you apply the song to your life? Journal your response to these questions.
- Making a list of the idols that affect your life—the things that you place emphasis on, but may not be God's way. Write a psalm or prayer about these idols and enter a contract with God to dispose of these idols in your life.
- Writing a monologue portraying one of the kings you studied this week. Try to write it within a modern context. Perform it for Sabbath School next week.
- Interviewing some of the more life-experienced people in your church about their decision to follow Christ. What spiritual journey did God lead them on? If your church has a newsletter, write a short article describing the person you interviewed.
- Tracing Israel's journey in the Old Testament. Document how many times Israel turned away from God and how many times God sent a deliverer. How does Israel's journey compare to your spiritual journey? What does this say about God?
- Searching the Internet for Ahab, Ahaziah, Jehoram, Jehu, and Elijah. Compare and contrast what the Internet says about these kings to what you read in the lesson this week. What does Ellen White write about these kings?

## CONNECT

Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*; Max Lucado, *Let the Journey Begin: God's Roadmap for New Beginnings*.

# Facing the **Wrong** **Direction**



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“Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets” (2 Kings 17:13, NKJV).

# Leaning Toward the Sun

## INTRODUCTION

2 Kings 17; Gal. 6:14

Growing up in an Adventist secondary school did not provide much entertainment for us, the children of the faculty. Apart from the sporadic Pathfinder Club activities and kick-ball games in the melting sun or under heavy equatorial downpours, our only delight was the library. It was here I discovered *Jeanie* by William Ross Westphal and many words of wisdom contained therein.

One rainy afternoon as I relaxed on our living room couch, I read how Jeanie, before leaving her academy, had come upon these words of wisdom written by her professor on a

**Uniformity was lost as  
every empty head turned.**

classroom blackboard: "A field of golden grains leaned toward the sun; along came a slight breeze and every empty head turned."\*

I like to imagine how fabulous the field of golden grains looked when all in it leaned toward the sun. I guess no beholder would have failed to admire the glamor of the field with its striking uniformity.

But in a twinkle of an eye came a feeble breeze that made a big difference. Uniformity was lost as every empty head turned away from the sun.

During Israel's 200 years as a kingdom, she did not learn to keep her head from turning to evil. On many occasions came a slight breeze that made them forget their magnificence when they solely depended on the Lord. In the long run, the results were inevitable.

Over a long period Israel's loyalty as God's chosen nation kept wavering from full dependence on the Lord to fallenness and allegiance to heathenism. Every fall was a lesson to draw her back to God, yet history repeated itself again and again.

It is true that like Israel of old, we, too, are entangled in this web of choices. Many are the occasions when we have opted for the worse instead of clear statutes. Though many times we have suffered because of our evil deeds, we have not yet learned to live a life fully dependent on Christ.

We are advised to relax our neck and turn to the Lord (2 Kings 17:14; Prov. 29:1). The Israelites have been described as stiff-necked people because of their stubborn self-will. Selfishness will cause us to fall, but being stiff-necked will cause us to be lost.

\*W. R. Westphal, *Jeanie* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association).



Sunday  
September 8

## A Period of Probation

### LOGOS

2 Kings 13:1-25; 15:8-31; 17:1-23

#### Israel's Sin (2 Kings 17:7-12)

We begin the final countdown of Israel as a kingdom. The week's study begins with the reigns of Jehoahaz and Jehoash and continues through the reigns of seven more kings covering the last century of the nation. The change from one dynasty to another brought no improvement in the spiritual condition of the people. No wonder.

**"Sin grows like a cancer."**

Many of the kings of Israel "did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, who had made Israel sin" (2 Kings 10:31, NKJV).

People in those days were eager for power and hesitated at nothing to secure their ends. Israel as a nation had ceased from following the statutes and commandments of the Lord. They refused to heed the warnings brought by the prophets, but "stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers" (17:14, NKJV).

"Sin grows like a cancer. When a person begins to disobey one of the commands of the Lord, he soon will find himself venturing farther into pathways of disobedience. When the Israelites turned from God and began serving idols, they soon found themselves breaking all the commandments of the Lord."

The leaders of the people were responsible for leading the people into sin. Yet this does not excuse the people. Humanity is held responsible for its own actions. Just because the leader does wrong gives no excuse for the followers to take the same sinful course.

#### A Period of Probation (2 Kings 13:23; 2 Chron. 30:1-9)

In spite of the continual refusal of the children of Israel to follow the commandments that had been laid out for them, God did not forget His promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He gave the people numerous occasions to turn away from their idolatry. Through the ministry of prophets like Elijah, Elisha, Hosea, and Amos, God repeatedly warned the people to turn from their sinful ways and observe His commandments and statutes. But it was an age when humanity gave in completely to iniquity. Yet a final warning was given.

"In the third year of Hoshea's reign, . . . a proclamation was sounded 'throughout all Israel, from Beersheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the Passover unto the Lord God of Israel at Jerusalem.'"<sup>2</sup>

"Israel should have recognized in this invitation an appeal to repent and turn to God. But the remnant of the ten tribes still dwelling within the territory of the once-flourishing northern kingdom treated the royal messengers from Judah with

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indifference and even with contempt. 'They laughed them to scorn, and mocked them.' There were a few, however, who gladly responded."<sup>3</sup>

God is patient, merciful, and long-suffering. Humankind is given a time when they can choose to repent of their ways and follow the Lord's commandments. Ample warnings are given to us to turn from our sinful ways. It is for us to heed the admonitions and repent. But when the divine warnings have been repeatedly rejected and sin has reached its limit, judgment will come. We have no excuse. Rather than follow what religious leaders say, we should conduct our own research of the Bible and find the truth for ourselves.

### **God's Judgment (2 Kings 17:20, 22, 23)**

"In the terrible judgments brought upon the ten tribes the Lord had a wise and merciful purpose. That which He could no longer do through them in the land of their fathers He would seek to accomplish by scattering them among the heathen. His plan for the salvation of all who should choose to avail themselves of pardon through the Saviour of the human race must yet be fulfilled; and in the afflictions brought upon Israel, He was preparing the way for His glory to be revealed to the nations of earth. Not all who were carried captive were impenitent. Among them were some who had remained true to God, and others who had humbled themselves before Him. Through these, 'the sons of the living God' (Hosea 1:10), He would bring multitudes in the Assyrian realm to a knowledge of the attributes of His character and the beneficence of His law."<sup>4</sup>

We must all appear before the judgment seat of God (2 Cor. 5:10) when all will be tried according to their deeds. Yet in Christ we have our Mediator and Intercessor (Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1). We should be mindful that we don't base our faith on the belief and practices of religious leaders; rather we are urged to study the truth for ourselves and if we seek diligently we will be answered. Our time of probation draws to a close and we should not be found wanting when the scales are measured.

### **REACT**

1. What are the similarities between the children of Israel in those days and people living now? Be specific.
2. "When a person begins to disobey one of the commands of the Lord, he will soon find himself venturing farther into pathways of disobedience." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
3. Can you think of instances in which you have observed this happening, either in your own life or someone else's? What's the secret to staying on the right path?

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1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 948.

2. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 288.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 291.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 292.

## U-Turn or Lost for Good

### TESTIMONY

2 Kings 17:13

“Before there could be any hope of prosperity for Israel they must be led to repentance before God. In consequence of sin they had lost their faith in God and their discernment of His power and wisdom to rule the nation—lost their confidence in His ability to vindicate His cause. Before they could find true peace they must be led to see and confess the very sin of which they had been guilty.”<sup>1</sup>

“Many look upon the great work to be accomplished for God's people, and their prayers go up to God for help in the great harvest. But like the Jewish nation,

**In Christ every provision  
has been made.**

if help does not come in just the manner they have arranged, they will not receive it, but turn from that help as the Jewish nation turned from Christ, because disappointed in the

manner of his appearing. Too much poverty and humility marked his advent, and in their pride they refused him who came to give them life. In this God would have the church humble their hearts, and see the great need of correcting their ways before him, lest he visit them with judgment.”<sup>2</sup>

To the discouraged and downhearted, the Lord says: “‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die?’” (Ezek. 33:11, NKJV). It is Satan's special device to lead humanity into sin and then leave them there, helpless and hopeless, fearing to seek for pardon. But God invites, “‘Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me’” (Isa. 27:5, NKJV).

In Christ every provision has been made, every encouragement offered. In the days of apostasy in Judah and Israel, many were inquiring: “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?” The answer is plain and positive: “He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” Micah 6:6-8.”<sup>3</sup>

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 614.

2. *Testimony for the Church at Battle Creek*, p. 53.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 326.

# Are We Benumbed by Sins?

## EVIDENCE

2 Kings 17

At times we get so involved in our way of life and habits that when someone points out something wrong, we do not want to listen. We are so familiar with the things we see and do that this familiarity makes us desensitized, and we become stubborn—or to put it in a harsher way, we become deaf to the voice of reason or conscience.

Such was the case of the children of Israel (2 Kings 17). God spoke to the children of Israel through prophets and messengers. He wanted them not to worship idols or continue in their evil ways (verse 13). They “would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their God” (verse 14, NKJV).

As a result of their stubbornness, “The Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel, afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of plunderers” (verse 20, NKJV).

There may or may not be gods or graven images that we as Christians worship. But what about our ways of life, associations, and objects of our affection? Does our conscience bother us about them? If so, why continue as if nothing is wrong? The answer may be that of the Israelites: we don't want to change.

**Why continue as if  
nothing is wrong?**

Although we may not have prophets or special messengers from God, we still have our conscience. It is time we listened to that still, small voice that says, “Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes” (verse 13, NKJV).

How much longer will we refuse to listen to God?

## REACT

1. God takes all or nothing at all. Is there anything in my life that is keeping me from total surrender of body, mind, and soul to God?
2. Why did God consider His people stiff-necked? In what ways do we exhibit stubbornness? What's the remedy?
3. Why did the people of Israel laugh God's messengers to scorn? What is the ultimate result of rejecting God's warnings?
4. God has a “wise and merciful purpose” in bringing judgment on Israel. How can good possibly result from punishment?

## Spiritually Dead? Hope Lingers!

### HOW-TO

2 Kings 17:13

Prior to the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel to the ruthless Assyrians, their spiritual condition had degenerated to an all-time low. False worship was prevalent apart from other social evils of corruption, greed, and injustice among others. Unfortunately, some of the people called by God's name, just like Israel was, have repeated the same sins Israel was guilty of.

However, such a condition of spiritual deterioration and decline can be regenerated and rejuvenated and thus bring one into conformity with God's will. How can this be attained?

**1. Listen to God.** God talks to us through various ways. It can be through nature, revelation, providence, and also the influence of the Holy Spirit.

**A condition of spiritual deterioration and decline can be regenerated and rejuvenated.**

**2. Develop strong faith.** It is necessary to build strong faith in God because God is all-powerful (Hos. 12:5) and He is also able to keep us from falling and to present us faultless before His

throne (Jude 24). Elisha had such faith in God. His faith never wavered; neither did he lose trust in God in the midst of great apostasy.

**3. Cry to the Lord.** Psalm 51:17 tells us that God wants a broken spirit, a contrite heart. When we have realized our sins, crying to the Lord for help is not only desirable but it is necessary, for He delights to answer when He hears a cry for help.

**4. Do not make sin a habit.** Idolatry (of all forms), injustice, greed, and all that is hateful to God must be shunned. God entreats us not to repeat doing evil but instead obey and follow His teachings and commandments (2 Kings 17:13).

### REACT

1. If you were asked to develop a "spiritual rehabilitation center" for helping backsliders, what would you do? Be specific.

2. Though many in Israel were in apostasy, some remained faithful to God. What does it take to stay faithful when everybody around you is indulging in sin?

3. What are some of the specific sins Israel had trouble with? What are some of the sin struggles of God's people today? Compare and contrast God's people then and now.



# In the Undefeated Battle

## OPINION 1 Chron. 21:8

Although King David reigned over all Israel and was doing what was right for his people, his life illustrates two aspects of sin that upset the Lord. First was his lust for Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah (2 Samuel 11; 12); second was his failure to resist Satan's prompt to take a census (1 Chron. 21:1-6).

He might have been a successful leader, but he took much pride on his military strength, thus wavering between trusting God's remarkable mission for him to the people of Israel and his power alone.<sup>1</sup>

Even though it may seem to people around us that we are living a clean, moral life, in our spirit we may be harboring an attitude that displeases the Lord. Because sins of the spirit are unseen, hidden in the heart, we tend to ignore them until they lead to some outward behavior that reveals their presence.

Some Christians may not realize that what they're thinking is what feeds their souls. As a result of this, often we become careless regarding our thoughts. At

such time, we stand at risk because of our marred relationship with our God. It is this that we should strive to keep strong. "We guard our words

**Often we become careless  
regarding our thoughts.**

and actions with utmost care, but our thoughts, which, after all are the very spring and the root of everything in character and life, we neglect entirely."<sup>2</sup>

## REACT

1. What things erode your confidence? How might you be tempted to gain confidence apart from Christ?

2. What does the word *yielding* convey in your life?

3. The lesson lists specific steps to take in order to conform to God's will. What are some activities you can do to implement these steps in your own life?

4. Despite the temptations around us, it is possible to have victory over sin. What are the secrets to overcoming sin? List some Bible texts that give us the assurance that we can overcome.

5. Can you remember an incident in which you blamed God for things you could have avoided?

1. Dennis J. De Haan, *Our Daily Bread*, July 4, 2000, RBC Ministry.

2. Hannah Whitall Smith, *A Gentle Spirit*, January 25, 1985 (Ohio: Barbour Publishing Inc.).

Friday  
September 13

# No Longer Slaves to Sin

## EXPLORATION

Romans 6

### CONCLUDE

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9, KJV). Therefore, it doesn't matter what your heart is telling you; it only matters what God says. And God says that because He "loved you to death" and because of His power as He lives within you, you do not have to give in to sin. God does not want you to flirt with sin. God does not want you to experience the pain and the defeat and the disgrace of sin. God does not want you to play in the sewage.

"God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it" (1 Cor. 10:13, NLT).

### CONSIDER

- Analyzing the similarities between the power-hungry, deceitful mind-set of Israel in the days of the kings and people living today in the year 2002.
- Rewriting 2 Kings 17:7-17 as a contemporary news article. Substitute the name of your home country for "Israel."
- Asking a friend to share a personal experience of when he or she successfully resisted temptation.
- Setting aside one hour to express in a poem your understanding of temptation and God's provision for sin.
- Singing all three verses of the old hymn "Yield Not to Temptation." Can you think of a modern praise or worship song that expresses the same concept?
- Finding three examples in nature of God's forgiving, healing, restorative power.

### CONNECT

Romans 6.

*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 749–757.

Max Lucado, *In the Grip of Grace*, chap. 11.

# Getting a new Picture



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“[Josiah] did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left” (2 Chron. 34:2, NIV).

# Seeing Things Through God's Eyes

## INTRODUCTION

2 Chron. 34:2

*"[Josiah] did what was right in the eyes of the Lord" (2 Chron. 34:2, NIV).*

I lay in bed, fuming with frustration and anger.

It should have been a wonderful Friday evening. The week had been crazy, but somehow, by Friday, all the chores had been done, our two small children were bathed and tucked up in bed, and I had planned a perfect evening.

Candles were on the table, worship music was playing, Bernie's favorite meal was simmering on the stove, I wore my new dress, a special perfume . . . We both needed time to relax, time to connect, to create some special moments.

But Bernie hadn't come home. He hadn't called. The supper began to spoil, the candles burned dangerously low, I grew more and more tired, more and more angry. Finally I put everything away, and stormed upstairs to bed. I was tired of having our daily plans disrupted by church emergencies. It seemed as if my needs were always at the bottom of any "To Do" list. Whenever those needs began to get

**But Bernie hadn't  
come home.**

near the top of the list, another crisis would tumble them down to the bottom again.

And now I lay in bed, thinking of all the angry and hurtful things I would say to Bernie when he came home. Boy, would he get a piece of my mind! A whole spectrum of negative emotions churned through my body, ready to explode the moment he came through the door.

I hated the feelings. I knew that there must be a better way of dealing with the crisis. As I prayed that God would take away my rage, He gave me a new picture of my husband, from His perspective. I saw a man who had also had a very difficult week. Our tiny church was struggling with serious theological conflicts. Our church members had deep personal crises. Right now Bernie was unexpectedly having to counsel a family through a major trauma. He was exhausted, longing to be home where he could relax, feel loved, and find comfort. The last thing he needed was to come home to an angry and frustrated wife.

By the time Bernie came home, there was a hot bath waiting for him, lit with candles and soft music. The dinner was rescued. My heart was softened. Seeing things through God's eyes had transformed the picture.

Manasseh and Josiah learned how to see things through God's eyes. That's what transformed their picture too.



## It's Personal

### EVIDENCE

2 Chronicles 33; 34

South Africa has had a long history of conflict. More recently our relatively smooth transition to our first democratically elected government in 1994 surprised the world (and us).

In 1995, our state president, Nelson Mandela, constituted a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to help the country deal with the impact of the conflict under apartheid rule. Four years of TRC hearings that followed gave more than 20,000 people from different sections of South African society opportunity to share their experiences within this system. This grueling process evoked responses of shock, horror, disbelief, anger, sorrow, numbness, and relief. Someone involved in transcribing hearings described their personal response: "As you type, you don't know you are crying until you feel and see the tears falling on your hands."<sup>1</sup>

The gut-wrenching violence and human rights abuses from all sides have had a profound effect on South African society. I wondered how people could do such evil things to each other. While many of these events were taking place, I had not yet been born or I may have been too young, unaware or ignorant. Despite having been sheltered, I have come to believe this political history is of direct relevance to me. I have inherited this historical context and even though apartheid legislation has ended, the system is still imprinted on many minds.

The stories of Manasseh and Josiah, too, showed that people in positions of political leadership carry a heavy responsibility. They could play such a powerful role in people's spiritual growth—to devastating or restorative effect. These stories also prove that you are never too old or too young to be affected by mistakes of the past and learn from them. It is never too late to ask for forgiveness and make changes for the better. People who are open to the guidance of God can always play a reconstructive role in their society.

In the final TRC report, Archbishop Desmond Tutu says: "Having looked the beast of the past in the eye, having asked and received forgiveness and having made amends, let us shut the door on the past—not in order to forget it but in order not to allow it to imprison us. Let us move into the glorious future of a new kind of society where people count . . . because they are persons of infinite worth created in the image of God."<sup>2</sup>

**It is never too late to ask  
for forgiveness and make  
changes for the better.**

1. *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 1998, vol. 1, chap. 1, para. 88.

<<http://www.truth.org.za>>

2. *Ibid.*, para. 91.



Monday  
September 16

## Good Boys, Bad Boys ... Kings and the King

### LOGOS

2 Kings 21:1-17; 23; 2 Chron. 33:1-17; 34

Almost any rogues gallery of modern rulers would likely include some of the same nasties we all wish we could forget: Osama bin Laden, Idi Amin, Saddam Hussein, and Hitler, for example. Some rulers seem intent on breaking all the rules of decency and honor. Look to the Bible record and you can't help noticing Manasseh, probably the most evil of the kings of Judah. In fact his name has become synonymous with idolatry and rebellion against God (2 Chron. 33:2). Of the long and detailed list of his sinful practices, two alone should define his evil: he "sacrificed his sons in the fire" (verse 6, NIV) and installed "male shrine prostitutes, which were in the temple of the Lord" (2 Kings 23:7, NIV). Bad boy, indeed.

### What Happened, Dad?

Amazingly, we read that good King Hezekiah was the father of this decidedly evil king—yes, the same Hezekiah who "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord" (18:3, NIV). He broke down the heathen altars, restored faith in God, resisted the mocking Rabshakeh sent by the king of Assyria and witnessed the Lord work mightily in destroying an army of 185,000 men. And, when on the point of death he prayed for healing, it was given with the sign of the sundial's shadow moving back.

Maybe that's as good a clue as we'll get as to what went wrong with Manasseh. Perhaps Hezekiah became tentative in his own faith. Certainly he showed presumption in revealing his treasure to the representatives of Babylon. And he developed a selfishness (21:19), which seems to have blossomed in his son.

Of course the sons of godly men had gone wrong before. The sons of both Eli and Samuel were almost as infamously evil as Manasseh. We have to allow that

**His name has become  
synonymous with idolatry  
and rebellion against God.**

evil can take a foothold anywhere, in spite of a parent's training. But just as surely, experience has shown that a fatal spiritual flaw in even good people can magnify and communicate itself to others.

Hezekiah was indeed a king of consistent righteousness, but the followup to his healing showed somewhat of a character flaw. He proudly showed his treasure to the Babylonian envoys who had really come to hear the full story of his healing. "God left him to himself, in order to try him and to know all that was in his heart" (2 Chron. 32:31, TLB). This, coupled with the account of his great wealth during this period, might give a clue as to why Manasseh went bad so easily. Hezekiah

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lived 15 years after his illness, and Manasseh became king at 12—so obviously he grew up in the ambivalent atmosphere of Hezekiah’s wealth and self-consciousness.

## **To the Third and Fourth Generation**

Mannaseh’s own son, Amon, ruled as evilly as his father for two years before he was slain by his own servants. But after him came Josiah, a paragon of godliness. Perhaps he had observed too closely the evil of his father and grandfather—perhaps he yearned for the faith of his still remembered great-grandfather, Hezekiah. Certainly he could find a parallel between Hezekiah’s deliverance from enemies and his own tenuous ascendancy to the throne during a time of popular uprising.

But Josiah lived in the dark ages created by the 57 years of absolute apostasy that followed the death of Hezekiah. Something stirred him to recover the true God. But the way out was hard and progressive, as he “began to seek the God of his father David; and . . . began to purge Judah and Jerusalem” (2 Chron. 34:3, NKJV). It took 18 years to get around to restoring the temple of God. Significantly, at that point, the book of the law of Moses was discovered. God clearly led in the resurgence of spirituality that followed. Josiah then enquires of a prophetess of the Lord—Huldah. She was obviously known to him or at least his court—but not till the discovery of the Word was she credible to them. The word she spoke was of dire consequences for a nation that had forsaken God. Josiah was commended for his faith and an assurance given that he would die in peace.

## **Who Would Have Thought?**

But there’s a twist to the stories of Josiah and Manasseh.

Because of his great wickedness, God delivered Manasseh into the hand of the king of Assyria. As a captive in Babylon, he found God. In distress he humbled himself and called on the Lord to deliver him. Maybe the lessons of Dad and his stories of deliverance rose up in his memory! “Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God” (33:13, NKJV). And for the rest of his reign he worked to undo the evil he had done. But sadly, his earlier influence had been so corrupting that the people did not respond as he had.

And Josiah! It seems the self-confidence of Hezekiah’s latter days was his undoing also. The prophetess had foretold evil for the nation, and eventually Pharaoh Necho came with a sense that God had made him an agent of punishment (2 Kings 23:26, 27; 2 Chron. 35:20, 21). Pharaoh specifically told Josiah that he had no quarrel with him and told him to “Refrain from meddling with God, who is with me, lest He destroy you” (2 Chron. 35:21, NKJV). Josiah died in battle, frustrating the promise of the prophetess that he would die in peace. A curious tone deafness to the purposes of God—just like Hezekiah at the end!

# Leaving Deep Waters Behind

## TESTIMONY

2 Kings 21:8; 2 Chron. 33:10-13

Repentance: hard to come by in our sight but possible through the Holy One. As members of this sinful human race we are compelled to do something other than right; not only that, but have no conscience about it. But that's where our love for God steps in and the controversy in our lives begins.

The enemy knows we've done wrong and, with that idea, tries to push thoughts into our heads, thoughts that make us believe that there is such a thing as no listening or forgetting from God. If we allow the enemy to follow through with his tactics, we'll not want to repent and seek forgiveness—let alone find the blessing in it. In the

**If there is no effort to  
change, all our tears  
are in vain.**

story of Manasseh it was extremity of his actions' consequences that "brought the king to his senses."<sup>1</sup> And as we see in the king's life and we'll see in ours as well, "repentance includes sorrow for sin and a turning away from it. We [will] not renounce sin unless we see its sinfulness; until we turn away from it in heart, there will be no real change in life."<sup>2</sup>

If there is no effort to change, all our tears and sorrows are in vain and mere acts of sentiment. God wants true and humble seeking of forgiveness. He wants us to "'come to [Him], all you who labor and are heavy laden, and [He] will give [us] rest'" (Matt. 11:28, NKJV) and peace of mind. "When we ask God to forgive us, whatever we have done, He responds by telling us, 'I still love you.' He releases us from the prison of our heavy conscience. He brings us back into His world, into His family, into His heart."<sup>3</sup>

Only in focusing on God can we accomplish repentance. "We must cherish and cultivate the faith that lays hold on the promises of God and waits for deliverance in His appointed time and way."<sup>4</sup> Once we feel this faith, then we will seek the Eternal One.

## REACT

1. Is repentance always associated with humility? Explain your answer.
2. Why does it seem that most of the time repentance doesn't take place unless we fall into deep waters in our lives?

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 383.

2. *Steps to Christ*, Youth Edition, p. 23.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 387.

# The See-Saw Effect

## HOW-TO

Deut. 30:19; 2 Chronicles 33; 34

Our lesson this week speaks of Judah's condition during the time of the kings. Judah followed a pitiful trail of backsliding-repentance-backsliding-repentance. Some of our readers may know firsthand exactly what it may be like to be in Judah's position. It seems that Judah's condition grew worse with every backward slide. At the forefront of each of these episodes was a king, whose spiritual condition the Bible writers use as a measure of Judah's faithfulness. Let us briefly examine them:

| King     | Actions   | Downfall/Course  | Consequences                           | Result   |
|----------|---|--|--|--|
| Hezekiah | Did right in God's sight; fought off the Assyrians who defied God | Became puffed up with wealth and fame  | Became sick to death                   | Repented; God restored his health                              |
| Manasseh | Did evil in God's eyes  | Rebuilt the idol altars; practiced witchcraft; led Judah to disregard God      | Taken prisoner by the Assyrians        | Prayed; was released and returned to Jerusalem and his kingdom |
| Amon     | Did evil in God's eyes  | Worshiped idol gods, and disregarded God's way                                 | Conspiracy against him by his servants | Death  |
| Josiah   | Did right in God's sight  | Purged the land and temple of idolatry; ordered restorative work on the temple |  | Was spared from witnessing God's wrath against Judah           |

Of the kings of Judah recorded in the Bible, Josiah was the youngest and most steadfast to God. During the restorative work on the temple, the book of the law of Moses was found. Josiah could have been content with his ongoing work of restoration and Judah's repentant state. But no. In fear of God's judgment on Judah, Josiah sent his officers to inquire of the Lord on their behalf. The words from Huldah the prophetess confirmed the king's fear. Judah had invoked God's wrath, and punishment was sure. In spite of this, God honored the king's wholehearted devotion and spared him from witnessing Judah's end.

We are faced with choices every day, some more difficult than others. How will you choose when faced with matters of eternal import? What influences the kinds of choices you make? (See Deut. 30:19.) The choices you make today determine whose you are.

**OPINION**

2 Chronicles 33

The 33rd chapter of 2 Chronicles is, at first glance, a pretty disgusting read. It's the story of Manasseh, probably the most repulsive king Judah ever had. He followed the detestable practices of the nations that God had driven out before the Israelites. He undid all the positive reforms of his father, Hezekiah. He practiced sorcery and witchcraft, brought false gods into the temple, and even sacrificed his son in the fire. This man was supposed to be the leader of God's chosen people! "The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they would not listen" (verse 10, NKJV).

So God allowed the Assyrians to take Manasseh captive. He was bound with bronze shackles, hand and foot, and a hook was put in his nose! Ouch! Sitting in a dark dungeon, Manasseh took stock of his situation. He realized what a mess he had made of everything, and "humbled himself . . . before . . . God" (verse 12, NIV). I suppose it's easy to be humble when you have a hook

**Do I force God to allow something drastic to get my attention?**

through your nose! Now the amazing part of the story: God listened to his plea—and even restored him to his kingdom!

Manasseh tried to correct the evil he had sown but was not very effective at it. His son, Amon, picked up on his bad example. When he became king, he was just as bad as his father. In fact, he reigned only two years before his own officials assassinated him!

Sometimes, when I take the time to look inward, I recognize the mess I've made of my life. OK, I haven't gotten into witchcraft or sacrificed any children to the flames, but I have fallen into the same "I can do it myself—I don't need God" routine countless times. Do I force God to allow something drastic to get my attention? Wouldn't it be wiser to learn from Manasseh and humble myself before the hook?

I take courage from Manasseh's story. God accepted him back, and he accepts me right where I am now. God knew Manasseh wouldn't be able to undo all the wrong he had done, and God knows I will trip and fall repeatedly in the future. But God loves us both anyway.

**REACT**

1. Why is it so much easier to follow a bad example than a good one?
2. What relationship do you see between behavior and consequences? The story of Manasseh illustrates bad actions resulting in bad results. Is this always true? If not, why not? If so, why aren't there more bad things happening to bad people?



# Slip Sliding Away

## EXPLORATION

2 Chron. 34:2

## CONCLUDE

There are many examples in the Bible of good people going bad, Josiah and Hezekiah being only two. They should make us seriously consider what it takes for faith to grow. There is a misconception today that faith is faith—unchanging and eternal. It gives people a false sense of security. We become like the man whose pocket is picked. When we need our faith we find it has been stolen. Faith must be nurtured each day by Christian self-discipline (Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, witnessing, obedience) or one day we will wake up to find we've had our pockets picked.

## CONSIDER

- Making a graph like the one shown for Wednesday's portion of this week's lesson. On it indicate the high and low points of your life to the present.
- Planning an action plan that will allow you to act rather than react the next time someone treats you less than well, determine to "walk in their shoes," and do what you think they'd like to have done for/to them.
- Researching the definition of cheap grace. Writing its meaning in your own words.
- Choosing someone you don't have an ideal relationship with. Make, bake, or purchase a small token gift or card to give to them in an attempt to strengthen the relationship.
- Realizing that everything you own belongs to God. Record in a journal the "transfer of ownership" for each difficult relationship in your life. Acknowledge His right to do what He knows is best in each case.
- Collecting rocks along the seaside or near any body of water. Name each rock after one struggle. As you name each, give it to God by tossing it into the water. Now that you have let go of it physically, let go of it emotionally.

## CONNECT

*Steps to Christ.*

John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*; C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.

# The **Curtain** falls



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““I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me””  
(Jer. 32:40, NKJV).

# Spiritual Renaissance

## INTRODUCTION

2 Chron. 35:1-19

Leadership is the capacity and will to rally men and women to work toward a common cause. A leader must have the character to inspire confidence and change. Leaders address one of the hardest questions: "Where are we going?" The answers to this question bring about reformation, new ideas, and remarkable changes. Josiah became king at the tender age of eight, "an age of innocence." During his reign as a young king he displayed unusual leadership skills. Josiah was able to inspire change that in the end brought about a spiritual reformation in Judah.

King Josiah acquired a vision for his people from the Creator. Because he believed and held on to this vision, Josiah was able to inspire a new birth of Christianity. As the king of Judah, he re-focused his people to committing their lives to God by modeling this new revival. Josiah himself renewed his vows to God and pledged to obey His Word. Although the king was able to commit the people to follow God's command, the revival still could not take place. There was a need for a change of heart and mind.

**Christ is willing to  
renew you daily.**

"To have a new heart is to have a new mind, new purposes, new motives. What is the sign of a new heart? A changed life. There is a daily, hourly dying to selfishness and pride." The thorough physical and spiritual preparation required for the Passover meant that Judah had to be revolutionized, cleansed, and renewed. It was necessary for Judah to take a pause from their daily routine and prepare for this spiritual celebration. Empowered with a God-given perspective, King Josiah led the people of Judah to experience a spiritual renaissance.

Christ is willing to renew you daily. He can bring forth new birth. However, He needs you to take the first step toward making that commitment for renewal. If you take a pause to hold on to His vision of eternal life for us, you can be empowered to make changes that will lead to renewal. Whether or not you take the job transfer is not as critical as whether you allow Jesus to transfer His character to yours. What college you choose or what career you select is not as important as where you will spend eternity. Our daily spiritual choices can help to form the process of our renewal. This week's lesson will help you to realize that—like Josiah and the people of Judah—you, too, can experience a "spiritual renaissance."

*\*Messages to Young People, p. 72.*

## Great Beginning, Tragic End

### LOGOS

2 Chron. 35:1-27; 36; Jer. 32:38

### Judah's Opportunity for Permanent Spiritual Prosperity (2 Chron. 35:1-18)

Judah's spiritual condition was comparable to a roller coaster ride. For years the nation suffered for lack of spiritual stability. The epicenter of the nation's spiritual crisis was located in their leadership. If the reigning king was God-fearing, spirituality would go up. If the king was worldly minded, then spirituality would go down. For many years Judah and Benjamin's long history of apostasy was a continual threat to their staying in the Promised Land. They were the only two remaining tribes of Israel, for the other ten had already been dispersed among the heathen nations.

The biblical record then presents what appeared to be a promising beginning of spiritual prosperity. The ascension of King Josiah to the throne was earmarked with a search for God and spiritual reformation. "Josiah removed all the abomina-

**If the king was worldly minded, then spirituality would go down.**

tions from all the country that belonged to the children of Israel, and made all who were present in Israel diligently serve the Lord their God. All his days they did not depart from following the Lord God of their fathers" (34:33,

NKJV). Josiah's accomplishments were indeed remarkable. They were even more so, however, because he was only eight years old when he began his reign (verse 1). In addition, he had inherited a kingdom that had been plagued by a long history of corruption. He himself was "born of a wicked king, beset with temptations to follow in his father's steps, and with few counselors to encourage him in the right way, Josiah nevertheless was true to the God of Israel. Warned by the errors of past generations, he chose to do right, instead of descending to the low level of sin and degradation to which his father and his grandfather had fallen."\*

### The Impact of Presumption (2 Chron. 35:20-27)

The devil is clever. He knows that if he cannot get us to become spiritually cold and indifferent, he can sometimes use our religious fervor to push us into fanatic activities. Josiah had been doing a great job; the stage was set for Israel to attain unprecedented spiritual heights. However, Josiah failed where many of us have failed when prosperity is given to us: We forget that it is God who gives us prosperity and begin to trust in our own strength and intelligence. This happened to Josiah

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when he took up arms against the king of Egypt without consulting God first. Although he was warned about his mistake, Josiah went ahead anyhow.

All the good things Josiah had done were not enough to spare him from the consequences of this flagrant act of presumption. We could actually say that Josiah died like a fool, because only fools go against the will of God, believing that they will prevail. However, as tragic as the death of the king was, it was not the worst of the consequences of the sin of presumption. The nation hereafter began a nonstop descending path to disintegration.

### **The Tragic End (2 Chron. 36:1-21)**

The reformation king was dead. To make matters worse, Judah lost political control of their nation because the king of Egypt took away the king appointed by Judah and appointed another king. The reforms begun by Josiah were forgotten, the influence of heathenism grew once more, and the nation abandoned God. Verse 16 explains how the people mocked and despised God's messengers "till there was no remedy" (NKJV). Babylon, through the conquest crusades of Nebuchadnezzar, took all the vessels and the treasures from the house of the Lord. In addition, they stole all the treasures from the palace, burned the house of God, broke down the walls of Jerusalem, burned all the palaces, and killed many by sword. Those whose lives were spared were taken captive to Babylon.

### **Hope for the Hopeless (2 Chron. 36:22, 23; Jer. 32:38)**

Although Judah had to bear the consequences of apostasy, God never abandoned them. God did not despise or reject Judah, but continued to plead with them and kept His promises ever present before them. Today we have the same assurance. Even though we are sinners God gave us His only-begotten Son to die for our sins. Through His death we can be restored to holiness, regardless of our past transgressions.

### **REACT**

1. Why is the beginning of a Christian experience at baptism not enough to prevent someone from spiritual disaster?
2. How can one avoid the sin of presumption?
3. Are good King Josiah's poor choices at the end of his life (i.e., the battle with Egypt) the cause for Israel's decline from that point on? How much weight should we put in the choices of our leaders and their affect on us as followers?

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*\*Prophets and Kings, 384.*



## Spiritual Self-Sufficiency

### TESTIMONY

2 Chron. 35:20-25

"[Josiah] had done a good work. During his reign idolatry was put down, and apparently successfully uprooted. The temple was reopened and the sacrificial offerings re-established. His work was done well."<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly, because of Josiah's desire to live a godly life, he was able to influence a whole nation to put away pagan practices and to dedicate talent, time, and material goods for the restoration of God's temple. Because of his faithful leadership and because they were willing to be led, God blessed both Josiah and the nation of Judah. Josiah's reign could have ended in glorious dignity. Unfortunately, this was not the case.

"But at the last he died in battle. Why? Because he did not heed the warnings given."<sup>2</sup> Pharaoh Necho, the king of Egypt set out to attack one of Judah's neighbors. Upon receiving news of the invasion, Josiah set out to fight the Egyptians. Some Bible historians believe that Josiah acted out of fear that if Egypt conquered,

**Pharaoh Necho himself  
sent messengers to tell  
him not to get involved.**

the Egyptians would later subjugate Judah.<sup>3</sup> Whether his fears were justified or not, Josiah felt that, after all, his astute war tactics would suffice.

Many tried to persuade Josiah that this was not his war. Pharaoh Necho himself sent messengers to tell him not to get involved, for Egypt's war orders were coming from above. Nevertheless, Josiah did not follow counsel and forged ahead. In doing this, he went against wise human counsel and, above all, opposed God's instructions. Instead of relying on God, Josiah relied on himself; he became spiritually self-sufficient. The results of this new trait were devastating for king and nation.

"To turn back with his army would have been humiliating, so he went on. And because of this, he was killed in battle, a battle that he should not have had anything to do with. The man who had been so greatly honored by the Lord, did not honor the word of God. The Lord had spoken in his favor, predicted good things for him; and Josiah became self-confident, and failed to heed the warning. He went against the word of God, choosing to follow his own way, and God could not shield him from the consequences of his act."<sup>4</sup>

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 2, p. 1039.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 94, 95.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 1039.

# His Will Shall Be Done

## EVIDENCE

2 Chron. 36:22, 23

For approximately 50 verses of 2 Chronicles 35; 36 we are spectators of a pathetic drama similar to the image of a ship that is slowly sinking. We experience the moments of glory when King Josiah celebrated the Passover, which is also the greatest one ever held in the kingdom (35:18). Then we are brought down to the hazardous reigns of the last four kings until the moment when Judah is taken into captivity to Babylon.

It would seem as if evil had triumphed. Nevertheless, the writer clearly demonstrates the divine reasons for the nation's calamities: "Israel is treated in Chronicles as an apostate nation, walking in the ways of wickedness and death. Judah is treated as a nation that prospers under reigns of righteousness and suffers the penalties of transgression under kings who forsake the Lord." Consistently the chronicler points to the theme: *Obey God's will and you will prosper; obey your own impulses and you will be unsuccessful.* Judah was destroyed because they persisted in their disobedience. In the midst of this seemingly tragic historical annals, the writer introduces a crucial concept of sacred history at the end of the narration: restoration.

The story does not end hopelessly. Restoration appears as a divine providence from He who is in control of history. There is not only hope but tangible evidence that a superior power is moving to restore His people. "In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, . . . the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, . . . the Lord God of heaven has . . . commanded me to build Him a house at

It would seem as if  
evil had triumphed.

Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May the Lord his God *be* with him, and let him go up!" (2 Chron. 36:22, 23, NKJV; emphasis supplied). As the last book of the Hebrew Bible,<sup>2</sup> what a powerful message can be drawn from the previous verses: The story continues; we are being restored!

Restoration is a concept that has cosmic significance for all believers of the second coming of Christ. Restoration restores the hope of a new beginning in Christ Jesus. Restoration is antagonistic to modern humanistic and evolutionist philosophies, in which renewal is self-reliant or nonexistent. Restoration is the central theme of our hope for eternal salvation.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 119.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

## How to Heed God's Message

### HOW-TO 2 Chronicles 36

The prophet Jeremiah was chosen by God to speak to His people during the reign of King Josiah. "For forty years Jeremiah was to stand before the nation as a witness for truth and righteousness."\* At first, Jeremiah's message was one of encouragement to the people of Judah. He instructed them to honor God and His law. However, when they did not turn from their wicked ways, his message became one of impending doom.

Although Jeremiah warned the people dwelling in the land of Judah that their kingdom would be delivered into the hands of the Babylonians, they continued to mock him while their leaders did evil in the eyes of the Lord. Jeremiah's prophecy soon came to pass and Judah, along with all its inhabitants, was destroyed and handed over to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Those who escaped death were

**God is not the author  
of confusion.**

carried into exile until the Babylonian Empire fulfilled its reign of 70 years.

In this day and age, the message of the prophets remains the same for us. Just as Jerusalem fell, there will be a great falling away of believers from God's church in the last days. Therefore, it is imperative that we study God's Word, ask forgiveness for our sins, and make a daily effort to heed the message that God has for us. The question is, How can we as sinners do this? Here are a few steps:

**1. Rededicate your life to God daily.** Trying to listen to God's Spirit without having your life in order would be impossible. We need to renew our mind, body, and spirit before we can fully understand the message that God is trying to send to us (Ps. 51:10).

**2. Find a quiet place to talk with God.** Remember, God speaks in a still, small voice; He is not the author of confusion. In order for us to hear Him, we must find a place where we can focus solely on His message without any distractions (Mark 14:34, 40).

**3. Allow God to use you.** The Lord has a special purpose for each of His children. Even if you have not yet discovered God's plan for your life, just yield to His message of love and He will use you in mighty ways (1 Sam. 3:1-21).

### REACT

In what ways can you be a Jeremiah in this day and age? Be specific.

\*Prophets and Kings, p. 408.

# From Babel to Babylon to Us

## OPINION

Gen. 11:4-9; Matt. 5:10

From generation to generation, the people of God have maintained the same behavioral patterns. Right before the Flood the earth was filled with wickedness and corruption. As a result of their utter rejection of God, He sent the Flood. Noah and his family remained faithful to God and were spared from destruction, but it did not take long for insurgence to rise again.

Though God promised never to destroy the earth again by a flood, people, motivated by their disbelief, began constructing the infamous Tower of Babel to reach to heaven. Have you ever thought how foolish this project was? Even if they did make it to heaven, what would they say to God when they arrived? "Hello, God. We didn't believe Your promise, so we're going to hang out here." In order to stop this insane undertaking, God confounded their languages so that they could not understand each other.

Throughout history we see examples of God's people who, because of disobedience, suffered some form of self-inflicted punishment. Next we come to Babylon, which is linguistically linked to the word "Babel." From the death of King Josiah onward, all successive kings did evil in the sight of God. As a consequence of Judah's rebellion, Babylon conquered Judah and took them

**"We didn't believe Your  
promise, so we're going to  
hang out here."**

into captivity. Decades later, after their release, they returned home in obedience to God. This occurs even today. Though it might not happen collectively, it most certainly happens on an individual basis. We turn our backs on God, and then some hardship, trial, or tragedy must occur to grab our attention. At this stage we recognize our wrong and once again obey and serve God, seeking relief from our distress.

It is imperative that we remember to serve God faithfully, in the good and bad times. Let us endeavor to break the perilous cycle that has been the plight of God's people through the ages. Of course, those who serve God faithfully will also suffer. We are living in perilous times, which makes the Christian walk no bed of roses. However, those who are faithful and obedient to God will have the comfort of knowing that He will be with them every step of the way to lighten their load.

## **EXPLORATION**

Ps. 37:24; 55:22

### **CONCLUDE**

Even when we desert Him, God never leaves us. We may reject Him over and over but He doesn't give up on us. He may allow some trouble to overtake us in order that we turn our eyes back on Him. But He is infinitely patient with His struggling children, giving them chance after chance. Even when we fail and turn away from Him, He offers hope and restoration to all who are willing.

### **CONSIDER**

- Listening to Bob Carlisle's song "We Fall Down" on the *Stories From the Heart* album.
- Journaling about times when God has picked us up and given us hope.
- Contacting someone who has disappointed you and giving them another chance.
- Carving a heart out of a bar of soap. Leave it in your bathroom as a reminder of how God washes us clean.
- Viewing *The Prince of Egypt*. Consider the theme of restoration depicted in this video.
- Planting an herb garden. Think about how the seeds you plant are harvested from dying plants and, when put in the ground, are restored to their original beauty.
- Making a collage of things you want restored in your life.

### **CONNECT**

*Prophets and Kings*, chaps. 32, 33.

Jon Paulien, *What the Bible Says About the End Time*; Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*.



## Next Quarter's Lessons

# Hope: The Helium of the Soul

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for fourth quarter 2002, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

### Lesson 1: THE NEED FOR HOPE.

Logos: Genesis 1-3

As soon as there was the need for hope, there was hope. The human situation, if left to itself, would mean only pain, despair, and suffering that would end in nothing but a meaningless death from which there was no promise of anything except annihilation. That's why God intervened; only He would rescue humankind from the raw, unyielding hopelessness that immoral beings, in a moral universe, faced.

Hope is as fundamental an aspect of the human condition as is breath. We all hope; maybe not for the same things, maybe not for the same reasons, maybe not with the same fervency, and maybe not even for the right things—but we all, nevertheless, hope. We have to. We couldn't be human without it, not in an existence where pain, suffering, fear, death, and uncertainty seem to be written into matter itself.

### Lesson 2: OLD TESTAMENT HOPE

Logos: Genesis 6; 11; 12; Isa. 7:1-4

Hope isn't just just some abstract thing, some philosophical or theological concept that exists only as grand overarching principles that float around in the sky or only in the mind of God and never touch earth, particularly those of us living on earth. Hope needs to be something tangible, touchable, something that we experience ourselves or see in our lives or in the lives of others. Otherwise, why call it hope?

Old Testament history is so instructive, for in it we can see hope realized, we can see the action of God in giving people reasons to hope, even amid some rather dire situations.

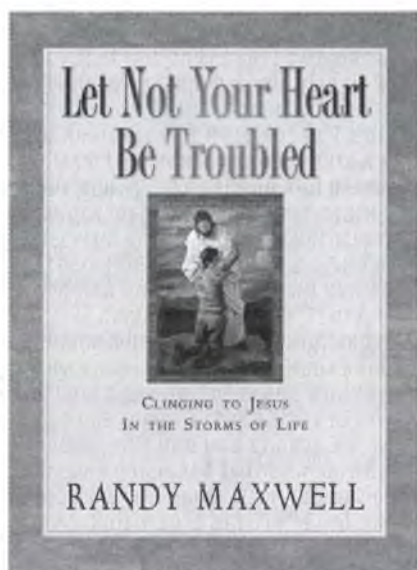
This week's lesson looks at various examples of hope expressed in the lives and the experiences of those who are present in the Old Testament.

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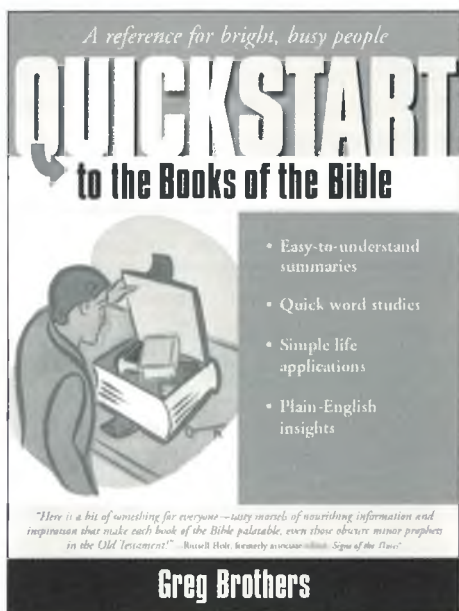


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Lisa, 21, lives in western Kalimantan on the island of Borneo. Because her hometown had no high school, Lisa went to live with her uncle in a larger city so



Southern Asia-Pacific  
Division

she could attend school. An Adventist girl invited her to church, and Lisa went. The church was small and old, but the people were warm and loving. She continued to attend the Adventist church, and a few months later she was baptized.

Her uncle learned of her baptism and forbade her to attend church. Her parents refused to support her in school. Lisa found a job, and the pastor offered her a room in the church. Lisa lives in this room, which is little bigger than the mattress on which she sleeps. She is happy, for she can worship God as she pleases.

The devil has tried to destroy Lisa and her faith, but God has brought her through every trial. Read her story in this quarter's Teen Mission.

Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath offering this quarter will help build chapels and medical clinics in western Kalimantan, Indonesia.



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