

1 & 2 Chronicles

A Suggested Outline of 1 and 2 Chronicles

- I. Genealogies from Adam to King Saul (1 Chron. 1–9)
- II. The reign of King David (1 Chron. 10–29)
 - A. The death of King Saul (10)
 - B. David solidifies his kingdom (11–16)
 - C. God's covenant with David (17)
 - D. David expands the kingdom (18–20)
 - E. David numbers the people (21)
 - F. David prepares for the building of the temple (22–29)
The death of David).
- III. The reign of King Solomon (2 Chron. 1–9)
 - A. Solomon receives God's blessing (1)
 - B. Solomon builds and dedicates the temple (2–7)
 - C. Solomon's fame and splendor (8–9)
- IV. The divided kingdom (The kings of Judah) (10–36)
 - A. The reign of Rehoboam (10–12)
 - B. From Abijah to Asa (13–16)
 - C. The reign of Jehoshaphat (17–20)
 - D. From Jehoram to Amaziah (21–25)
 - E. The reign of Uzziah (26)
 - F. The reigns of Jotham and Ahaz (27–28)
 - G. The reign of Hezekiah (29–32)
 - H. The reigns of Manasseh and Amon (33)
 - I. The reign of Josiah (34–35)
 - J. The last kings and the downfall of Judah (36)

Introductory Notes to 1 and 2 Chronicles

The books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles record the history of the Jews from the last judge (Samuel) and the establishment of the first king (Saul), to the exile of the nation to Babylon. The books of 1 and 2 Kings were written from the viewpoint of the prophets, while 1 and 2 Chronicles present the priestly viewpoint of Jewish history. There is an emphasis in Chronicles on the Levites, the building of the temple, God's covenant as recorded in Deuteronomy, and the holy city of Jerusalem. You might say that 1 and 2 Kings give us the political record and 1 and 2 Chronicles the religious record. Second Chronicles records at least five "revivals" in the history of Judah (chaps. 15, 20, 23, 24, 25, and 29, 31).

The chronologies in 1 Chron. 20:1–3 belong before 1 Sam. 1 and are the "living links" with the past. It was important to the Jews that they know their family history and be able to claim their place in the nation. This was especially true of the priests and Levites who served in the tabernacle and then the temple.

The writer of 1 Chronicles picks up the royal record at the death of Saul (1 Chron. 10). It is interesting to note what he omits from the record: David's long conflict with Saul; the rivalry with Ish-bosheth (2 Sam. 2–4); David's sin with Bathsheba; David's family problems with Amnon and Absalom; Adonijah's attempt to get the throne from Solomon; the sins of Solomon; and much of the history of the kings of Israel (the Northern Kingdom). The record focuses on the kings of Judah and emphasizes God's choice of David and his descendants to reign from Jerusalem. If you studied only the record in 1 and 2 Chronicles, you would never know that David and Solomon had ever sinned! According to the writer of 2 Chronicles, it was not Solomon's sin that caused the division of the kingdom, but Jeroboam's political scheming. Both are true, but it is interesting to see the priestly viewpoint that almost idealized both David and Solomon. After all, David provided the wealth for the building of the temple, as well as the songs, musical instruments, and organization for the Levites; and Solomon built the temple.

The book shows that God blesses His people when they obey His will and disciplines them when they disobey. God is true to His covenant even if His people prove false to Him. When God's longsuffering ended, He turned the people of Judah over to the Babylonians and permitted the enemy to destroy the temple and the city of Jerusalem. Second Chronicles ends with a copy of the decree of Cyrus allowing the Jews to return to their land, and thus parallels the beginning of Ezra. The writer sees continuity in the history of the people, because God is guiding them and accomplishing His purposes through them, in spite of their sins.

A helpful volume to use in studying 1 and 2 Chronicles is *A Harmony of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles* by William D. Crockett (Baker Book House).

1 Chronicles 1–9

Genealogies make boring reading for most people today, but they were essential to the Jews who had to keep accurate records of their family ties for many reasons. You

had to know your tribe, clan, and family relationships because property ownership was supposed to stay within the tribe. In situations where a kinsman redeemer would rescue a poor person, he had to prove that he was indeed a near relative. (See the Book of Ruth.) The firstborn son received twice as much inheritance as did the other sons. Of course, the priests and Levites had to prove that they were from the tribe of Levi or they were not permitted to serve.

These hundreds of names, some of them difficult to pronounce, represent people whom God used to maintain the “living link” with the promises and covenants of the past. The Jews were chosen by God and given promises that would ultimately affect all the world. Had there been a break in this chain of “living links,” the Savior could not have been born into this world.

Most of these people are unknown while a few of them are very famous, but God used all of them to accomplish His purposes. When you read your Bible, you remember people like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, and David, but were it not for a great many lesser-known people, these men would not have been on the scene. Let's thank God for the “forgotten people” who helped the “famous people” get there!

Scattered throughout these genealogies are the names of people who are given special identification, and reflecting on them can teach us some important spiritual lessons.

I. Nimrod, the Mighty Hunter (1:10)

The reference is to Gen. 10:8–10. The word “hunter” carries the connotation of hunting people, not hunting animals. He was a rebel who defied God and set up the infamous kingdom of Babylon. After the sons of Noah began to replenish the earth, it didn't take long for their descendants to turn against the Lord. The lesson of the flood didn't penetrate very deep.

II. Er, the Wicked Son (2:3)

See Genesis 38. We don't know the nature of Er's sin, but it was something serious enough for God to slay him. His brother Onan refused to marry the widow and carry on the brother's name and family, so he was also killed. See Deut. 25:5–10. It was important to God that the Jewish people continue to multiply, for He had some special tasks for them to fulfill. It's unfortunate that Onan's name has gotten into the English dictionary (“onanism”) as a synonym for masturbation, for that was not his offense. The whole story about Judah and Tamar seems repulsive to us, yet Tamar is listed in the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:3).

III. Achan, the Troubler of Israel (2:7)

Read Joshua 6–7. His sin was in violating a ban that Joshua had put on all the spoil of Jericho because it was dedicated to the Lord. Achan thought he had gotten away with stealing the loot, but the defeat of Israel's army at Ai led to his discovery and execution. Had Achan waited a few days, he could have had all the loot he wanted at Ai! One sinner can bring trouble to a whole nation.

IV. Amnon, the Unclean (3:1)

He violated his half-sister Tamar and was eventually slain by Absalom (2 Sam. 13–14). Some of the firstborn sons listed in these chapters are not models of virtue. Er was killed by the Lord (2:3); Amnon was killed by his brother (3:1); and Reuben lost the birthright because he violated his father's concubine (5:1–2). In Israel, the firstborn had special privileges, but these three men threw away their privileges for the "pleasures of sin for a season."

V. Jabez, the Undaunted (4:9–10)

In Hebrew, the name "Jabez" means "to grieve." It certainly wasn't the fault of Jabez that his mother had such a difficult delivery, but she gave him a name that would remind him and others of her pain. See Gen. 35:18–19. It would seem from the text that his brethren rejected him and were not "noble" men of character. Jabez overcame his name and his family problems by turning to God in prayer and asking for His blessing.

VI. Reuben, the Uncontrollable (5:1–2)

How strange that a man's sins should get into an official genealogy! The deed is recorded in Gen. 35:22; and in Gen. 49:3–4, Jacob brought it up publicly at his deathbed and judged him for his lack of self-control. Reuben lost the birthright, which was given to Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48:15–22). One act of sin can be costly for the sinner and for his or her family!

VII. Beriah, the Unfortunate (7:20–23)

When Ephraim's two sons, Ezer and Elead, tried to seize some cattle, they were killed, and their father was plunged into grief. He found solace in loving his wife, and she gave birth to a son whom Ephraim named Beriah, which means "misfortune." He and Jabez and Benjamin (Benoni) could have formed a fellowship of men with miserable names.

1 Chronicles 22–29

Since the record in Chronicles was written from the priestly viewpoint, we would expect the strong emphasis here on the building of the temple. It's remarkable that the temple was built on the property David purchased from Ornan, a reminder of David's great sin in numbering the people (1 Chron. 21). The temple was built by Solomon, a son of Bathsheba, the woman with whom David had committed adultery. Only God can take a man's two greatest sins and build a temple out of them. "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20).

I. The Builder of the Temple (22:1–19)

David's heart had always been set on building a temple for the Lord (see 2 Sam. 7), but since he had been fully occupied fighting wars, he was not able to do the work. The fact that he was a warrior and had shed blood was another reason. Throughout his life, David had gathered treasures to be used for the temple, and these he now turned over to his son Solomon. God gave David the plans for the temple (1 Chron. 28:11–12, 19) just as He had given Moses the plans for the tabernacle (Ex. 25:40). When you are going to do something for the Lord on earth, be sure you get the plans from heaven. And if the Lord won't let you do something that is really on your heart, try to help the other person do it.

Solomon was anointed king privately, in the presence of the leaders, so that the throne would be secure (vv. 17–19); and then the new king was publicly presented to the people (chap. 28). Our Lord Jesus has been anointed King, but His public presentation has yet to be made. Meanwhile, we who trust Him should assist Him in the building of His temple, the church (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:19–22). David drafted the “aliens and strangers” in the land (non-Israelites) and forced them to work on the temple (v. 2). But the Lord has taken sinners who were “outsiders” and made them fellow citizens and living stones in His temple (Eph. 2:19–22; 1 Peter 2:5). What a grace!

David admonished Solomon to trust the Lord and obey Him; otherwise, he could never build the temple to the glory of God. God gave Solomon and the nation rest from war (the name Solomon is related to the Hebrew word “shalom” which means “peace”), and He would give him wisdom in doing the work. We can't begin to calculate the purchasing power of the wealth that David gathered (v. 14).

So, David gave Solomon the wealth to build the temple, the plans, the workers, and the cooperation of the princes of the land (vv. 17–19). But the “heart” of the matter was the heart of Solomon (v. 19). If Solomon's heart was right with God, then God would bless his endeavors. There is nothing “automatic” about the service of the Lord. If we are right with Him, He will prosper our efforts (Josh. 1:8; Matt. 6:33).

II. The Ministers in the Temple (23:1–26:32)

Second Chronicles 29:25 informs us that David's plan for organizing the priests and Levites was given to him by the Lord through his two prophets, Gad and Nathan. Not only the plan for the temple itself, but also what went on in the temple and how it was organized, were commanded by the Lord. The local church today needs to heed the directions given in the NT for its organization and ministry. Too often, we import the ideas of the world and reject the ideals of the Word.

There were 38,000 Levites available and David divided them into four units: 24,000 to supervise the work in the temple; 4,000 as musicians; 4,000 as doorkeepers, which involved the temple treasuries and storerooms; and 6,000 to be scattered throughout the nation to minister as judges and teachers of the law. It is not enough for the people to come to God's house; the servants of God must also go to the people. Note that David provided the instruments for the musicians to use (23:5), and he wrote many of the songs that they used to worship the Lord.

During the years of Israel's wandering, the descendants of Levi were assigned to take down the tabernacle and carry its various parts, reassembling the tabernacle at the place God told the people to camp (see Num. 3–4). Now that they would be serving in a permanent sanctuary, the three clans of the sons of Levi were assigned to other duties.

The priests were divided into twenty-four courses (chap. 24; see Luke 1:5), which means they served in "shifts," possibly two weeks each month. David did things "decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40). The specific assignments were given by lot (Luke 1:8–9).

The gatekeepers (chap. 26) guarded the temple and the storerooms in it. You will recall that Obed-edom (26:4) was the man who guarded the ark of the covenant before it was finally placed in the tent (1 Chron. 13:13–14). The gatekeepers cast lots to see where they would be assigned (26:13). Keep in mind that the Jewish people brought tithes and offerings to the temple as a part of their worship, and all these commodities had to be stored, inventoried, and protected. Most of all, the temple treasury contained valuables dedicated to the Lord, as well as material needed for the service of the Lord (see 1 Chron. 9:27–34). It was important that the spices, flour, and other items be kept from contamination. How unfortunate it is when that which defiles gets into the house of the Lord.

As we review these chapters and their many names, we are struck with the fact that God uses people to accomplish His work, people with different talents and different ministries. Some of the temple servants led in singing praises to God; others played the instruments; some guarded the treasures; some kept the inventory of the gifts brought to the temple. The priests offered the sacrifices to the Lord and cared for the daily service of worship. Everything was organized for efficiency, and the total temple ministry brought glory to the Lord. Even those who had to work "the night shift" praised the Lord for the privilege of worshiping and serving Him. (Ps. 134)

III. The Protectors of the Temple and the Land (27:1–34)

A. The army (vv. 1–15).

We move now from the temple organization to the civil government, for in the nation of Israel, both were ordered by God and governed by His divine law. There were twelve army units and each one served for one month of the year. Of course, when needed, the units could be called together quickly.

If you compare 1 Chron. 11:10ff with the list of leaders in vv. 2–15, you will see that David's "mighty men" were in charge of the army. He had proved these men in many places of testing, and he knew he could trust them.

B. The civil servants (vv. 16–24).

Not only were there capable soldiers to lead each of the twelve units of the army, but there were capable officers assigned to the tribes of Israel (vv. 16–22). David had a "chain of command" in the nation so that each tribe had a representative before the king. We have no record of David's brother Elihu anywhere else in Scripture (v. 18). It's possible that this is a variation of the name "Eliab" (1 Chron. 2:13). The Hebrew word

“brother” was often applied to any relative, but it would seem that an official listing such as this would aim for accuracy.

How interesting that a son of Abner was one of David's trusted officers (v. 21). Abner had tried to maintain Saul's dynasty after Saul was slain and had created problems for David (2 Sam. 1–4). David obeyed Deut. 24:16.

C. David's overseers (vv. 25–34).

In modern society, government leaders must divest themselves of anything that would lead to conflict of interest, but not so in ancient monarchies. The king was a very wealthy man, thanks to the spoils of war, the tribute brought by conquered rulers, and the profit made from his lands. In fairness to David, we should recognize that, since there were no taxes on the citizens, he had to use much of this income for the administration of his own government. All of these holdings had to be supervised, the laborers paid, and the profits guarded.

IV. The Encouragement to Build the Temple (28:1–29:30)

The writer is giving us “the last words of David” (1 Chron. 23:27) as well as the last works of David as he prepared Solomon and the people for the building of the temple. What a wonderful thing that David sought to build a temple to the glory of God and not a monument to his own glory. He could die knowing that future generations would have a beautiful house of prayer and praise where they could honor the Lord. David not only “served his own generation” (Acts 13:36), which every child of God should do, but he also served generations to come. He provided the materials to build the temple; he organized the temple ministry; he wrote songs for the temple singers; and he even designed musical instruments for the Levites to play.

David gathered all the leaders of Israel and exhorted and encouraged them to support Solomon in his administration, especially in the building of the temple.

A. God's choices (28:1–7).

David emphasized the fact that it was God who chose the tribe of Judah to be the royal tribe (v. 4; Gen. 49:8–10); and from Judah, God chose David's family to be the royal family (1 Sam. 16:6–13; 2 Sam. 7). Then God chose Solomon to be David's successor and the one to build the temple. It was a solemn obligation on Solomon's part, for these were God's chosen people; and the temple was for the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

B. David's charges (28:8–10, 20–21).

First, David charged all the officers and people to obey all of God's commands (v. 8). What good was a beautiful temple if the people were disobedient to their God? They owed it to the Lord and to one another, as fellow citizens in God's assembly, to live according to the Law that God had graciously given to them. The Jews owned the land by virtue of God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3; 13:14–18), but they possessed

and enjoyed the land only so long as they obeyed God's Word. See Deut. 27–30. If they wanted to maintain possession of the land and leave it to the next generation, then they had to be an obedient people. It's a solemn thought that we are stewards of all that God gives us, and, if we aren't faithful to the Lord, there will be nothing to leave our children and grandchildren.

Then David charged Solomon (28:9–10, 20–21) to be faithful to discharge his responsibility as king and builder of the temple. "Be strong and of good courage" (vv. 10, 20) reminds us of God's admonitions to Joshua (Josh. 1:6–7, 9, 18). The tragedy is that Solomon did not maintain a perfect heart before the Lord, but loved foreign women and worshiped their false gods (1 Kings 11). A perfect heart is not a sinless heart, for nobody can live without sinning in some way. It means a heart totally devoted to the Lord, a sincere heart. When Solomon began to worship other gods along with Jehovah, he had a divided heart and was not true to the Lord. It was when Solomon forsook the Word of God that he began to worship idols (see Deut. 17:14–20; Josh. 1:8).

C. David's contributions (28:11–19).

Everything Solomon needed for the great building project was provided by the Lord through David: the plans for the building, the organization of the priests and Levites, the material wealth, and the people to do the job. Since we don't know the buying power of gold and silver in that day, we can't accurately calculate the worth of all this material; but certainly it was in the tens of millions of dollars.

D. David's challenge (29:1–9).

David knew that his people must have a share in the cost of the temple, so he asked the leaders of the nation to contribute, and they did so willingly. David had first set the example in giving, and he reminded the people that they were giving to the Lord (29:1). Their giving was an act of worship (29:5b), and they gave generously. The mentioning of "gold, silver, and precious stones" reminds us of 1 Cor. 3:10–23 and the language used to describe the building of the local church.

E. David's consecration (29:10–19).

David prayed and dedicated the offering, the new king, and the people to the Lord. He blessed the Lord and extolled Him for His wonderful attributes. He expressed his humility before God (29:14) and acknowledged that even the wealth that he and his people had brought originally came from the Lord! "Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand" (NIV). The fact that we are "strangers and sojourners" in this world (v. 15) ought to encourage us to give generously to the Lord, for only what we give to Him will last (Matt. 6:19–21). Life is brief and we can't keep anything for ourselves or take it with us when we go (1 Tim. 6:7; see Ps. 90:1–11).

Read chapter 29 carefully and note how the people gave and why they gave; then read 2 Cor. 8–9 and note how Paul taught many of these same truths about giving.

F. Solomon's coronation (29:20–30).

In a great worship service where the Lord was glorified, David passed the scepter to his son Solomon, and the people rejoiced at God's goodness. God was able to magnify Solomon because Solomon magnified the Lord (see Phil. 1:20; Josh. 3:7). David died but the throne of Israel continued. God buries His workmen but continues His work.

2 Chronicles

I. The Kingdom Declines (1–9)

Most of the information in these chapters is also found in 1 Kings 1–11. Solomon began his reign in fellowship with the Lord, but gradually his heart turned away, and he began to worship the gods of his many foreign wives. Deuteronomy 17:14–20 warned the Hebrew kings not to multiply horses and chariots, wives, or gold, but Solomon did all three (1 Kings 10:14, 26, 28; 11:1–8).

While the years of Solomon's reign were undoubtedly Israel's greatest in terms of wealth, fame, and political power, they were also the worst in terms of spiritual devotion to the Lord. Yes, Solomon began his reign at the altar, sacrificing to the Lord and asking Him for wisdom, but that didn't continue. Furthermore, the king lived in luxury because he collected food and taxes from the people. Solomon reorganized the twelve tribes into twelve tax districts, with each district responsible to provide his food one month (1 Kings 4:7–19). When you read the menu for each day, you can well understand why the people felt burdened by his yoke (1 Kings 4:22–25; 12:1–5). Yes, the kingdom was indeed glorious, but it was declining in every way.

II. The Kingdom Divides (10–12)

Solomon's son Rehoboam inherited the throne and was given a golden opportunity to bring the nation back to the Lord. Had he listened to the older advisors, he would have saved the nation from division. Instead, he heeded the unwise counsel of the young men who knew little about life or service. This doesn't mean that the aged are always wise or that the young are always foolish, for such is not the case. Like his father Solomon, Rehoboam had been reared in luxury and was out of touch with the burdens of the common people. He lacked the perception to recognize good counsel when it was given to him.

When Rehoboam tried to go to war with Jeroboam and unite the tribes, God stopped the endeavor because the division was from Him. But both Rehoboam and Jeroboam sinned against the Lord. Rehoboam "forsook the law of the Lord" (12:1) because "he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord" (12:14). When God sent the Egyptian army to chasten the nation, it is to Rehoboam's credit that he repented and sought the Lord's help. But he didn't lead the people back to the Lord.

Jeroboam, king of Israel (the Northern Kingdom), was afraid that the people would go back to Jerusalem to worship God, so he set up his own system of worship which

was idolatrous. Israel never did come back to the Lord, and the kingdom was eventually swallowed up by Assyria.

The only reason God preserved the Southern Kingdom of Judah as long as He did was for the sake of His beloved David (1 Kings 11:34–39; 15:4). How much the people owed to David and to the longsuffering of the Lord!

From this point on (about 930 B.C.), the kingdom is divided: Judah and Benjamin form the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and the other ten tribes form the Northern Kingdom of Israel or Samaria. The record in Kings goes back and forth from Israel to Judah, but the record in 2 Chronicles focuses primarily on the kings of Judah.

III. The Kingdom Decays (13–36)

While the kings of Israel were for the most part apostates, several kings in Judah were men of God who sought to bring the people back to the Lord. However, the infection of sin had already gotten into both kingdoms and it was only a matter of time before they would collapse.

A. Asa (chaps. 14–16).

Asa led the nation in two reforms as he removed the altars to the foreign gods and commanded the people to return to the Lord. God honored his efforts by giving the nation ten years of peace, during which the king fortified the cities. His victory over the Ethiopians and the message from the prophet Azariah motivated the king to gather all the people together to reaffirm their covenant with Him

(15:12). Asa even deposed the Queen Mother and destroyed her idols! How sad it is that in his latter years, Asa stopped trusting the Lord and robbed God's temple to buy protection from a heathen king. When rebuked by the prophet Hanani, the king didn't repent; then, when afflicted with an illness, he didn't turn to the Lord. Good beginnings are no guarantee of good endings.

B. Jehoshaphat (chaps. 17–20).

In spite of the fact that he made some unwise decisions, he was one of Judah's greatest kings. He not only sought God himself, but he sent the priests among the people to teach them the way of the Lord. His first mistake was to marry into the godless family of Israel's King Ahab, a worshiper of Baal and the husband of wicked Queen Jezebel. It was a marriage of political convenience so that Ahab would be allied with Jehoshaphat. Solomon used this approach to secure treaty rights with other nations (1 Kings 3:1). By making peace with the king of Israel, Jehoshaphat compromised his position politically and religiously.

Jehoshaphat's second mistake was to unite with Ahab in fighting Israel's enemies. Ahab talked Jehoshaphat into wearing royal robes into battle, which made him a ready target, but God protected Jehoshaphat and saw to it that Ahab was slain. This event ought not to encourage us to sin, because God isn't obligated to protect us when we are out of His will (Ps. 91:9–16).

His third mistake was to ally himself with wicked King Ahaziah in an attempt to gain wealth (20:35–37). God wrecked the ships and put the whole enterprise to an end. It's unfortunate when godly people sometimes lack discernment and get themselves involved in alliances that can only help the enemy and bring disgrace to the name of the Lord.

When faced by a combined army of the Moabites and the Ammonites, two ancient enemies of Israel (Gen. 19:30–38; Deut. 23:3; Neh. 13:1ff), Jehoshaphat put his faith in the Lord, and God gave him a great victory. The combination of prayer (20:3–13), prophecy (20:14–17), and praise (20:18–22) brought him the victory. (We wonder how the choir of Levites felt about going out before the army. But worship is a great weapon against the enemy.)

C. Joash (chaps. 23–24).

Joash was a miracle boy because his evil grandmother Athaliah had killed all of his siblings, and he alone had survived. The future of David's line and the messianic promise rested on that little boy! How often in Jewish history Satan tried to kill those who were a part of God's plan (Gen. 3:15). The godly high priest, Jehoiada, protected Joash and then installed him as king. At the same time, Jehoiada saw to it that Athaliah and her followers were put out of the way. Through the continued spiritual influence of Jehoiada, the king brought about many reforms, especially the restoring of the temple. When the high priest died, however, the king made the same mistake that Rehoboam made in listening to worldly counsel. Joash ended up killing Zechariah, son of Jehoiada, instead of heeding his message from the Lord, and repenting.

Joash is a warning to all who profess to do God's will but really don't have the love of God in their hearts. If your faith is "propped up" by someone else, what will you do when the "prop" is gone?

D. Uzziah (chap. 26).

He is also called Azariah. After a long and prosperous reign, he ended up trying to become a priest, and God struck him with leprosy. "God helped him" (v. 7) and he went from victory to victory. "He was marvelously helped, till he was strong" (v. 15). Overcome by pride, he intruded into the ministry of the priests in the temple, something forbidden by God. Jesus Christ is the only King-Priest that God will accept. Uzziah is a warning to all of us not to become proud and seek to get involved in things that are outside the will of God.

E. Hezekiah (chaps. 29–32).

He was one of Judah's greatest kings and most devoted spiritual leaders. He repaired the temple and restored the true worship of Jehovah on a scale not seen before. He called the whole nation—Israel and Judah—to observe the Passover together, and he cleansed the land of idols. You would think that such devotion to the Lord would have kept him from problems, but not so. Second Chronicles 32:1 reads, "After all that Hezekiah had so faithfully done, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah"

(NIV). Obedience sometimes leads to greater testing, for our good and the glory of God. See the notes on 2 Kings 18–20, and read Isa. 37–39.

F. Josiah (chaps. 34–35).

Manasseh followed the great King Hezekiah and led the nation into abominable sin. He rebuilt everything evil that his father had destroyed, and destroyed the good things his father had restored. However, in his latter years, Manasseh did repent, and God forgave him. He was followed by Amon, who reigned only two years. Then Josiah came to the throne. If Hezekiah is faulted for his son Manasseh, he certainly must be praised for his grandson Josiah. At the age of sixteen (34:3), Josiah sought the Lord and began to reform the nation and wipe out idolatry. He repaired the temple and restored the Book of the Law. He too celebrated a great Passover and sought to lead the people back to the Lord their God. Unfortunately, King Josiah meddled with a war that was not his concern, and he was wounded in battle and went home to Jerusalem to die. His pride got the best of him, and he thought he could defeat the king of Egypt.

After Josiah's death, the kings of Judah were weaklings, mere puppets in the hands of the politicians in Jerusalem or the nations around Judah. The last king was Zedekiah, and then the nation fell to Babylon in 586 B.C.

Why did Judah decay? Because the people turned from the Lord and worshiped false gods. At first, their godless worship was in secret: they worshiped the Lord in the temple, but also worshiped Baal and other gods in secret. Then they openly turned from the Lord to worship the gods of their enemies. When the Lord sent chastening to them, they repented for a time, but soon they went back to their evil ways. Whenever the Lord would raise up a godly king, his influence didn't last, because the people "reformed" but didn't repent and turn to God with all their hearts. Whatever the king did was the popular thing to do, so they did it.

The church today must beware of the same kind of spiritual decay. Are we worshiping the gods of the enemy? Are we proud of our buildings and budgets and statistics? Is there evidence of true holiness and a fear of God in our worship? Are we dependent on the spiritual leaders God gives us? Are we experiencing success because the Lord is with us or because we cooperate with the world? Do we think that because we have the Bible and church buildings and "successful ministries" that God will overlook our sins and stay His hand of discipline? "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17).

At any time during those centuries of spiritual decay, the people of Judah could have met the conditions of 2 Chron. 7:14, and God would have healed their land. But they would not turn back to God, so God had to turn against them.

What a lesson for God's people today!