

# The Glory & Decline of the Kingdom



**INTERMEDIATE NOTES – 13 to 14 Years**

**STAGE THREE OF FIVE STAGES**



*“And the hand of Yahweh was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.”*

**1 Kings 18:46**

## **CHRISTADELPHIAN SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION**

### **INTERMEDIATE NOTES — STAGE 3**

#### **FOREWORD**

This year our lessons cover a wide range of history. They commence with the stories of David's military conquests and end with the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus 1,000 years of history shall be considered. They tell the story of the "GLORY AND DECLINE OF THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL", and so we have chosen this as our year's caption.

Israel's golden age did not last very long and spiritual decay soon set in and grew worse despite the valiant efforts of such as Hezekiah and Josiah. We shall look at their lives and endeavour to highlight their faithfulness as an example for us today. We shall also study the periods of exile and of restoration. The reasons why God led both Israel and Judah into captivity present grave warnings for us in these perilous last days. The revival of faith which the years of punishment in exile brought about, will inspire us, and we shall consider the stirring examples of Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah. But we shall find that apathy and worldliness again crept in and spoiled the work of reform. Israel's worship lost its power and fell into a state of empty formalism.

The Messianic scriptures foretold divine intervention and the promises of God reached a wonderful stage of fulfilment when the Son of God was born: the "Word was made Flesh!" Thus far this remains the greatest event of history and so our lessons conclude on an exciting note, which will prepare us for Stage 4—a year's lessons on the ministry of Christ, if Yahweh wills.

It is the sincere hope and prayer of the Committee that the readers will heed the vital, personal lessons which emerge. Wherever possible the lessons have been directed to the greater work and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that a balanced outlook might be maintained.

May these notes assist the preparation of young people for the highest honour possible, the service of a Loving Heavenly Father, and His Glorious Son.

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# 1. YAHWEH ESTABLISHES THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL UNDER DAVID

“And Yahweh preserved David withersoever he went”

## 2 Samuel 5; 6; 8; 10 and 12:26-31

*After reigning for seven years over Judah in Hebron David was finally accepted by all the tribes and “they anointed David king over Israel” (v.3) in Hebron. After this David went with his men to Jerusalem which was held by the Jebusites and “took the stronghold of Zion” (v.7) and there “in Jerusalem, he reigned 33 years over all Israel and Judah” (v.5). We are told that “David went on and grew great, and Yahweh God of Hosts was with him” (v.10). We will see, as we follow David extending the borders of the Kingdom of Israel, that “the hosts (or armies) of Yahweh” were with him in his battles, and David knew that unless Yahweh was with him then he fought in vain.*

## DAVID BRINGS THE ARK TO ZION. 2 Samuel 6; 1 Chron. 13; 15.

David’s first desire, now that he had taken Jerusalem, was to bring the Ark to Zion and to re-organise the worship of Yahweh. The Ark had been in the house of Abinadab in Kirjath-jearim, having been returned by the Philistines who had captured it when the sons of Eli foolishly took it into battle.

David told the people of his intention to bring the Ark back and all the people were greatly excited. It was placed on a new cart drawn by oxen while Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drove the cart. It was a time of great joy, and David and all the house of Israel played before Yahweh on all manner of instruments (v.8). But alas, in the midst of this great rejoicing tragedy struck—the oxen stumbled and Uzzah put forth his hand to steady the Ark, and he was struck dead. Why should such a thing happen? Why was God angry? The Ark was taken aside and left at the house of Obed-edom, and David in great distress stopped to ponder what had gone wrong. It was not long before he found the answer—for the answers to all our problems are found in the Bible. He remembered how that Yahweh had told Moses that “none ought to carry the Ark of God but the Levites” (1 Chronicles 15:2, 13; Duet. 16:8). What an important lesson David and all Israel learned. It does not matter how sincere we are in serving God if we do not serve Him in His way, that is according to the revealed truth. Sincerity alone counts for little. Jesus said that those who worship God must do so in “sincerity **and truth**” (John 4:23; Josh. 24:14).

After three months David once again organised to bring up the Ark to Jerusalem. This time, however, he did it according to the way God had commanded, and so “the children of the Levites bore the Ark of God upon their shoulders” (1 Chronicles 15:15). There was great joy and

gladness as the Ark came to the city, and David himself dressed as a priest “danced before Yahweh”. Sacrifices were offered at the start of the Ark’s journey (after 6 paces, 2 Sam 6:13) and upon its arrival at the Tabernacle that David pitched (2 Sam 6:17). Can we imagine the wholehearted joy and praise of David and his people, especially after the sad delay of the previous few months? The words of Psa. 110, 132, 68 and 1 Chron. 6, 8, 36, written at this time, reveal this joy and praise.

**THE PHILISTINES INVADE ISRAEL. 2 Samuel 5:17-25,  
cp. 1 Chronicles 14:8-17.**

When the Philistines of the south and west heard that David was anointed King over Israel, they challenged him. They spread themselves in the fruitful and strategic valley of Rephaim that lies south west of Jerusalem towards Bethlehem. David fortified himself in the newly taken stronghold of Zion. He enquired of Yahweh whether he should attack them, and if so, would they be delivered into his hand. The reply from God was immediate and the courageous King of Israel was assured of victory. So David smote them and attributed the victory to Yahweh. “God hath broken forth upon mine enemies before me, as the breach of waters” (1 Chron. 14:11). The images of the routed Philistines which were strewn along the way, were collected and burned. But victory was not final and again the Philistines mustered themselves in Rephaim. David again sought Divine counsel and this time was instructed that he should use a different strategy. He was not to go forth as before, as the Philistines no doubt anticipated, but rather to come behind them near some mulberry trees, and await a sign from God before he should attack — “when thou hearest the sound of a wind going in the tops of the mulberry trees”. God did this to remind David that the victory belongs to Him, that His angels are always at work for Israel’s ultimate good. But waiting for the angels to go first, David and his men were taught that faith is more powerful than the strongest army. God can destroy the enemy without our efforts and we must always remember that without Him we can do nothing. Here was an example of faith producing a victory. David followed precisely the plan of his God and the enemy was smitten from Geba to Gazer. David’s fame went abroad and “Yahweh brought his fear upon all nations” (1 Chron. 14:17). There is a lesson here. Do we always follow the course which the Word of God would indicate when problems confront us; or do we do that which is right in our own eyes? let us lean not to our own understanding but rather acknowledge God in all our ways and He will direct our steps (see Prov. 3:5, 6).

**DAVID EXTENDS THE BORDERS OF ISRAEL. 2 Samuel 8.**

With the Ark now in Jerusalem and David established as King over Israel, God gave that wonderful promise to him (recorded in 2 Sam. 7:12-16); the promise of a seed who will reign on his throne forever. And

that seed we have seen from our lessons last year is the Lord Jesus Christ. David now turned his attention to extending the borders of Israel and suppressing the enemies on all sides. This was done in seven particular battles.

- (1) **Against the Philistines** (2 Sam. 8:1). The Philistine menace had not been completely put down and they regathered to challenge David yet again. This time they were dealt with thoroughly. They were subdued and “Gath and her towns” were taken and no longer threatened David’s realm.
- (2) **Against Moab** (2 Sam. 8:2). The Moabites must have given cause for David’s assault upon them, and they were very severely dealt with, two thirds being put to death and the remainder being spared (2 Sam. 8:2, R.S.V.). Thus threats from the south-east were eliminated.
- (3) **Against Zobah** (2 Sam. 8:3-4). Zobah was north of Damascus in the Anti-Lebanese ranges. As David proceeded north to restore his power at the River Euphrates (2 Sam. 8:3, R.S.V.) he was challenged by Hadadezer, King of Zobah, with a formidable array of chariots and horsemen. God answered David’s prayers and they were smitten.

**Against Syria** (2 Sam. 8:5,6). There is a second stage to this northern campaign. David’s victory caused two things to happen. First of all the wary Syrians of Damascus to the south came forward to help Hadadezer. But 22,000 were smitten and Damascus was garrisoned. “Yahweh preserved David whithersoever he went” (v.6).

On the other hand Toi, King of Hamath, north of Zobah, sent and congratulated David. Articles of gold, silver and brass were brought, but David devoted them to Yahweh, the source of his victory (2 Sam. 8:9-12). Thus the northern boundary was restored.

- (4) **Against Edom** (2 Sam. 8:13, 14). In v. 13, “Syrians” should be “Edomites”. David’s renown was spreading far. Abishai and Joab were commissioned to enter the strong city of Edom and put down this traditional foe of Israel (1 Chron. 18:12, 1 Kings 11:15). Joab remained there six months and slew 12,000 including “every male in Edom”. Thus David was saved from these vicious enemies in the south.
- (5) **Against Ammon** (2 Sam. 10:1-14). David proceeded to organise his realm, extending his power “with judgment and justice” (2 Sam. 8:15). Nahash, the King of Ammon, died and his son, Hanun, reigned in his stead. David sent expressions of sympathy to him, but alas the Princes of Ammon doubted his sincerity. They suspected that David’s messengers were come to spy out the city and they were shamefully treated. This was no way to treat sympathy, especially of a powerful neighbour! The Ammonites heard about David’s wrath and fearing reprisal sent for help from the Syrians of Beth-Rehob and Zoba and from the King of Maacah, and the men of Tob. Thus 33,000 in all came to their aid. Joab divided his host and attacked the

Syrians who were behind Israel. They were put to flight; this put fear into the Ammonites, and they fled before Abishai into Rabbah, their capital city.

- (6) **Against Syria** (2 Sam. 10:15-19; 11:1; 12:26-31). The Syrians regrouped along with others beyond Euphrates and challenged Israel. When this news reached David, he crossed Jordan and marched north and smote the confederacy at Helam. Their captain perished and all the kings sought peace and served Israel.
- (7) **Against Ammon** (2 Sam. 11:1; 12:26-31). Though David had fought against Ammon, his attentions had been directed north by the Syrian challenge. This having been overcome, he sent Joab and the army east and destroyed Ammon and besieged the capital city, Rabbah. This city was finally taken by David.

### **DAVID'S CONQUESTS TYPICAL OF CHRIST'S**

As David put down his enemies and extended the borders of Israel, so likewise will Christ when he returns. He will deliver Israel from her enemies, and then extend the borders of the land. In establishing the Kingdom of God, it will be necessary for all nations to be completely subdued. As the nations rose up against David, so will the nations rise up against Christ (Psalm 2:1-3) but they will be subdued (Psalm 2:8-9). Those who are faithful and obedient to Christ will have opportunity to help in establishing the Kingdom of God on earth (Revelation 2:26-27).

#### **LESSON FOR US:**

David was a man after God's own heart. He always desired to put God first and do that which pleased Him. Even in bringing up the Ark to Jerusalem his motives were right, but we see the lesson from Uzzah's death that all that we do in service to God must be in accordance with His ways. After this tragic event David turned to the Word of God to receive instruction in the way he should act and so must we at all times. David continually prayed to God for guidance in decisions he had to make and he praised Him for blessings and victories he received. To David Yahweh was a reality who was ever present to hear and watch over him. Let us make Him a reality in our lives so that we can know His ways and obey Him.

#### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

- “The Story of the Bible” (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 4, No. 1, 2, 3.  
“The Man David” (H. Tennant)—Chapter 6

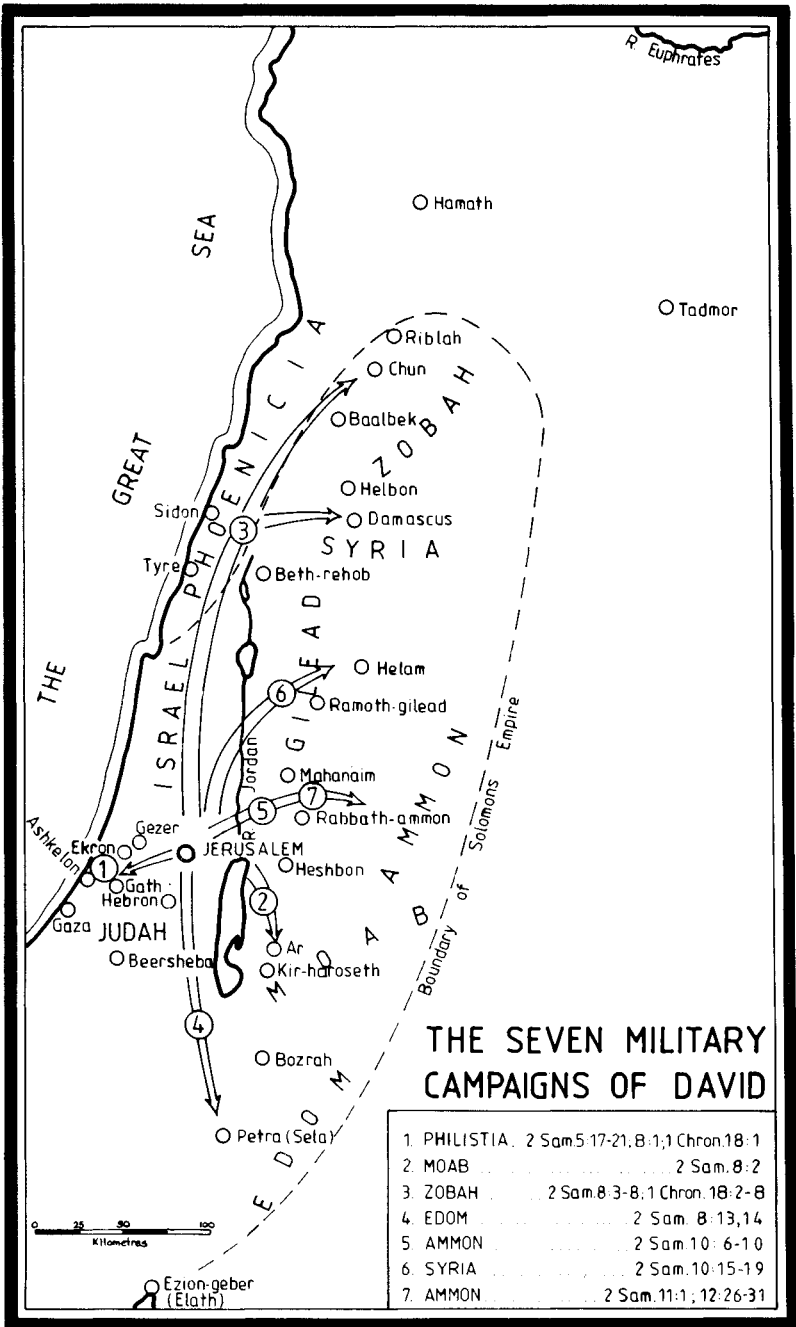


**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *Why was David successful in his campaigns against Israel's enemies?*
2. *When David fought the Philistines the second time what special instructions did God give him? What was the reason for this?*
3. *Show how David's conquests prefigure the conquests of Christ.*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *David wanted to bring the Ark to Zion. Describe what happened and what lesson can we learn from the death of Uzzah?*
2. *Copy the map of "the seven military campaigns of David" onto a page suitable for placing in your Bible.*



## **2. DAVID'S SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

### **“The thing that David had done displeased Yahweh”**

*In our previous lessons we have been following the life of David. We have come to admire his trust in God and we have seen how God blessed him by giving him that wonderful promise of a seed, even the Lord Jesus Christ. We have seen him delivered from all his enemies, and now we come to a section of the Bible that, at first reading, causes us to stop and ask the question, “how could David do such a thing?” But, when we find the right answer to that question, we then have learned a very important lesson, a lesson that each one of us must learn. It is a lesson that will humble us in our own sight and cause us to realise that only through God’s mercy can we have hope of eternal life.*

### **2 Samuel 11 and 12**

#### **DAVID'S GREATEST ENEMY**

Really David’s greatest enemy was not Saul, or the nations around Israel, or any other man or beast, for God was able to deliver David from all of these. David’s greatest enemy was the hidden enemy of inward temptations — sinful lusts or desires, which, if followed, would lead to sin. This desire, which each one of us has, is our greatest enemy which we must overcome; for if we do not, then we will be led to do things which are not pleasing to God, and will bring shame and grief to us and our family.

#### **DAVID'S SIN. 2 Samuel 11.**

The army of Israel was out fighting against Ammon under the leadership of Joab, but David had remained home in Jerusalem. One evening David walked upon his housetop, from which he saw a beautiful woman washing herself. She was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of David’s valiant soldiers who was out fighting with Joab in the army.

David desired to have Bathsheba for his wife and David invited her to his house and committed adultery with her. God had forbidden this when he gave the Ten Commandments. It was evil for a man to take another man’s wife (Exodus 20:14-17). The proverbs clearly express this disastrous course upon which David had started: “He who commits adultery has no sense; He who does it destroys himself, wounds and dishonours will he get; and his disgrace will not be wiped away” (Prov. 6:32-33 R.S.V.).

#### **ONE SIN LEADS TO ANOTHER.**

Although David originally had not set out to disobey God, he now realised that he had sinned. What was he to do? He tried to cover his ways so that no one would ever know. He sent a letter to Joab, asking him to put Uriah in a dangerous position in the battle so he would be slain. He had Uriah killed so he could take Bathsheba to be his wife. Now

David was guilty of breaking three commandments: coveting his neighbour's wife, murder as well as adultery (Exod. 20:13-17). But Yahweh, who sees and knows all things, knew of the evil and terrible thing that David had done (2 Sam. 11:27). Let us never try to cover our sins, but openly confess them to God, for in so doing we will save ourselves much heartache and suffering.

### **CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS. 2 Samuel 12:1-14.**

Months later, Nathan the prophet came to David. He spoke a parable about a certain rich man with "exceeding many flocks" who refused to take a lamb of his own flocks to provide food for a traveller who had come to his house, but instead took the one lamb of a poor man which was cherished by him. David's customary sense of justice was immediately aroused. He pronounced judgment upon the callous act, "the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: And he shall restore fourfold . . ." But in so saying he had condemned himself. Nathan replied, "Thou art the man!" The words were a terrible revelation.

David was shattered. Nathan told him "Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of Yahweh . . . thou hast killed Uriah . . . and taken his wife to be thy wife . . . now, therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house" (v.9, 10). David had done it secretly (v.12) and acted as though God had not existed, and for this reason his punishment would be open.

David did not excuse or justify himself, he confessed and said "I have sinned against Yahweh". Nathan replied "Yahweh also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die" (v.13). Under the law David knew that he was guilty of death. Although Yahweh had forgiven him his sin, his sin brought forth many years of sorrow. David felt from that day on that he could no longer judge others, even though they may deserve it.

Nathan went on to say "Because of this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of Yahweh to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die" (v.14). Because of David's sin people would mock Yahweh. We must be careful not to give people reason to speak evil against the Truth. The baby that was born to Bathsheba would die.

David fasted and wept in the hope that God would save the life of the baby, but the baby died after 7 days. During this time David wrote two psalms — Psalms 32 and 51. In Psalm 32 David speaks of the pain and suffering he felt when he tried to hide his sin and "kept silence" (v.3-4), and the sense of relief he felt when he confessed and God forgave him (v.5).

We should note that in 2 Sam. 12:4 sin is described as a "traveller" and a "wayfaring man". David was not an habitual sinner for he is described by God as "a man after mine own heart" (Acts 13:22). His sin was a temporary departure from his Godly way of life. This did not reduce the wickedness that David committed but it did give Yahweh a basis for forgiveness that was absent with Saul.

God's forgiveness of David contains a great lesson. There was nothing he could do, no sacrifice he could make (Psa. 51:14-17), to avert the penalty of death according to the law. Although David was guilty he was delivered from death. Here lies hope for all who sin — if they repent. God by His grace has offered us a hope of salvation through baptism into Christ (Eph. 2:8-9).

### **THE CONSEQUENCE OF DAVID'S SIN**

Although the actual sin of David was forgiven, its effects were to be far-reaching. The first child that David and Bathsheba had, died in accordance with the words of Nathan, the prophet (2 Sam. 12:15-23). Then they had another son whom they called Solomon, though Yahweh called him Jedidah meaning "Beloved of Yahweh". Nathan told David that Yahweh would cause evil to come upon him out of his own house (v.11) and this took place. Three of David's other sons caused him great heart-ache, Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah, all of whom were slain for their wickedness.

### **LESSON FOR US:**

We have just heard a sad and terrible story, but it is a story that must be told, because of the great warning it gives us if we want to be followers of Christ. David brought upon himself a terrible punishment and unhappiness to others because he was thoughtless for a moment. He allowed his mind to become idle and his thoughts strayed from God's ways. Sinful thoughts deceived him and caused him to sin.

We must realise that sin is caused by doing unlawful desires which come from our own heart (Mark 7:21-23). We must concentrate our minds upon the word of God, and always do that which is pleasing to Him. We should be occupied in doing the work of the Truth. If we do this then we will not be taken off-guard by idle thoughts that can lead to sin. And a moment of sin can bring years of sorrow. It has been said that sin stains, warps, scars, the life of the sinner and clings to his heels as if in hot pursuit. We are told quite clearly, "flee fornication" (1 Cor. 6:18, 9-10). The lesson of David's sin is "He that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). We live in an evil and an adulterous world where the sin of David is part of their wicked, pleasure seeking life-style. Young people, beware! Although teenagers all around us may have little or no morality left, we must "fear God and keep His commandments", mentally and morally resisting such temptations and with purity of mind and heart make a determined effort to flee youthful lusts and rather pursue after godliness".

David was called a "man after God's own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14). Even though David sinned he loved God and devoted much of his time writing psalms and teaching others of God's way.

God was merciful to David because David had repented and had been merciful to others, (remember the lessons on Saul — on two occasions

David spared Saul's life, 1 Samuel 24 and 1 Samuel 26). This is why God forgave David. It is important that we should be merciful to others. We pray "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" — if we forgive others then God will forgive us (Matt. 6:12, 14, 15).

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

"The Man David" (H. Tennant)—Chapter 7.

"The Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 4, No. 3.

"The Ways of Providence" (R. Roberts)—Chapter 17.

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What is sin — and how can we overcome it?*
2. *How had David broken the Ten Commandments in his sin with Bathsheba?*
3. *What was Nathan the prophet's message to David after he sinned?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *How did David suffer because of his sin?*
2. *What lessons do we learn from God's forgiveness of David's sin?*

### 3. THE MESSIAH IN DAVID'S PSALMS

**“All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Psalms concerning me”.**

LUKE 22:44-46

**Psalms 2, 22, 69, 110**

#### **THE PSALMS.**

Did you know that the Book of Psalms is the largest book in the Bible? It is made up of 150 different Psalms. A psalm is a song or prayer, many of which have been set to music. Most of the Psalms were composed by David. Remember when David was anointed how “the Spirit of Yahweh came upon him” (1 Sam. 16:13)? This meant that God would instruct him in His ways so that when David wrote he could say, “The Spirit of Yahweh spoke by me and His word was in my tongue” (2 Sam. 23:2). This is what Paul meant when he said, “All scripture (and the Psalms were part of the scripture) is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16). Not only did David write the Psalms, but he wrote them in a particular way. He was skilled in playing music (1 Sam. 16:16-23), and he used this ability to write the Psalms in such a way that they could be set to music and Israel could sing, and thus praise Yahweh and learn of Him.

#### **SOME PSALMS WRITTEN ON PARTICULAR OCCASIONS.**

As we read through the Psalms we see that some of them have notes at the beginning of them, called superscriptions. In particular you will note that the reason is given why certain Psalms were written. For example, look at Psalm 34, and at the beginning of it we read, “A Psalm of David when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech, who drove him away and he departed.” We can look up 1 Samuel 21:10-15 and find this incident, and so we can see the mind of David at that time recorded in this Psalm. You can look up others, e.g. Psalm 52, and compare 1 Samuel 22:9. See if you can find any more.

#### **THE PSALMS AND MESSIAH.**

In the New Testament we find many quotations from the Psalms relating to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in fact Jesus himself said that the things written “in the Psalms concerning me” (Luke 24:44-46) “must be fulfilled”. We can understand that if God inspired David to write the Psalms then in them he could foretell many things about the Messiah. Let us now look briefly at a few of these Psalms.

#### **THE LIFE AND DEATH OF MESSIAH. Psalms 69, 22.**

**Psalm 69:4**—“They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head”. These words were quoted by Christ when talking to his disciples (John 15:25). He was telling them that, because he had revealed the sinfulness of his enemies, they hated him; yet unjustly so. We may find people will hate us because we speak and do what is right in God's sight.

**Psalm 69:9**—“The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up”. These words were recalled by the disciples when Christ drove out of the Temple those who were changing money and selling doves, sheep and oxen (John 2:14-17).

**Psalm 69:21**—“They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” David’s experiences that caused him to write this are paralleled with what the Jews did to Jesus when he was on the cross (Matthew 27:34).

**Psalm 22**—Takes us to the crucifixion of Messiah.

**Psalm 22:1**—“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me” is spoken by Jesus on the cross (Matthew 27:46).

**Psalm 22:8**—“He trusted in Yahweh that he would deliver him, let Him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him” was spoken by the murderous crowd near the cross (Matthew 27:43).

**Psalm 22:16**—“They pierced my hands and my feet”. This spoke precisely of the way Jesus was crucified (Luke 24:40; John 20:27).

**Psalm 22:18**—“They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture”. These words were remarkably fulfilled by the Roman soldiers at the crucifixion of Christ (Matthew 27:35 cp. John 19:23-24).

#### **THE RESURRECTION OF MESSIAH. Psalm 16.**

The promises made to David demand that his son be a resurrected man. David was specifically told that “of the fruit of his own body” God would raise up one to sit upon his throne. He was also told that his kingdom would be “established *for ever*”. The question then arose in David’s mind — how could one of his mortal descendants live for ever? David solved the problem and realised that his seed would have to be raised from the dead. The Apostle Peter tells us these things in Acts 2:25-31. After quoting Psalm 16, which was written by David, he proceeds to explain its meaning. Significant words were to be found in this Psalm which could not apply to any man who had lived in the past: “thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption”. Though written by David, they could not apply to him seeing that he “saw corruption” (v.29).

Peter says that David was prophesying when he wrote Psalm 16, for he understood the requirements of the promise — that his mortal son should live for ever (v.30). Seeing that the tomb of Christ was empty and they had seen and heard the risen Lord, these recent events and prophecy were in agreement (v.32). God had raised His son from the dead according to the scriptures.

There is no doubt that this Psalm was the leading proof in the preaching of the Apostles, that Messiah had to be a resurrected man. The Lord had “opened their understanding”. Later the Apostle Paul uses it in exactly the same way (Acts 13:34-36).



## **ASCENSION AND SECOND COMING OF MESSIAH. Psalm 110.**

If the Lord had risen, where was he? This question faced the Apostles in their preaching. It was conclusively met by the quotation of Psalm 110:1, "Yahweh said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool". The ascension of the Lord into heaven was here foretold (cp. Acts 2:33-35).

Psalm 110 does not stop at his ascension. A limit is placed on his duration in heaven. He will be there "UNTIL his enemies are made his footstool". The Psalm speaks of his intervention at Armageddon and of his victory (v.2, 5-7).

## **THE UNIVERSAL POWER AND KINGDOM OF MESSIAH. Psalm 2**

In this psalm is seen the opposition that will face the Lord Jesus when he returns and establishes his power in Zion. Nations will rage and gather themselves together to put down Yahweh's anointed (v.1-3). But the wrath of man is a very small thing in the path of God's judgments and He will laugh and vex them (v.4-5). Because he is God's son he has "a more excellent name" and shall inherit "the uttermost parts of the earth". He will use divine power to crush the nations (v.8, 9). Verse 9 is cited in Revelation 2:27. Here the Lord promises the same power to the saints. "He that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron". We, too, can become sons of God by baptism into the name of the Son and, "if sons", then we shall be heirs of God as well (Romans 8:17).

The Psalm concludes with some good advice for rulers when Christ returns. They are called upon to submit to him or perish (v.10-12). From the following quotations we know that some will and some will not submit (Micah 4:2, 3; Psalm 72:9-11).

### **LESSON FOR US:**

When we realise that the things which David wrote in these Psalms which we have considered, were written 1,000 years before Jesus was born, we see clearly that God inspired the writing of the Bible. Man could not predict such things. If the prophecies in these Psalms have been fulfilled so accurately regarding the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, then we can confidently believe that God's prophecy regarding his return to set up the Kingdom will just as surely come to pass.

With evidence such as we have seen in this lesson we are left in no doubt as the inspiration of the Bible, and therefore to the very existence of Yahweh himself.

Let us, therefore, reverence the Bible as His Word and learn the lessons He has recorded therein for us.

### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What are the Psalms and why were they written?*
2. *Using at least two different Psalms describe the nation's reaction to the Lord Jesus Christ when he returns and how he will treat them.*

### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Show from the Psalms how they prophesy aspects of the life and death of the Messiah.*

## THE PARABLE OF SOLOMON'S REIGN

The following chart lists the ways in which Solomon's reign typifies that of the Lord Jesus Christ. As an exercise mark them in your Bible.

PAST	FUTURE
A time of peace preceded by great wars—1 Kings 5:4 .....	Ps. 110:2; Isa. 9:6-7.
Jerusalem, the Throne of Yahweh—1 Chron. 29:23; 28:5 .....	Jer. 3:17.
One king over a united Israel—1 Kings 4:20 .....	Ezek. 37:22.
Israel, a multitudinous and powerful nation— 1 Kings 4:20 .....	Micah 4:7.
Israel, secure and at peace—1 Kings 4:25 .....	Mic. 4:4; Zeph. 3:19-20.
Israel, the chief of the nations—1 Kings 4:21 .....	Micah 4:8.
Israel, the principal third with Egypt and Assyria (kings of the south and north—Dan. 11:40)— 2 Chron. 9:26; 1 Kings 10:29 .....	Isa. 19:25.
Israel, the mart of nations—2 Chron. 1:17 .....	Isa. 23:18.
Wealth of the Gentiles flows to Jerusalem— 1 Kings 4:21, 2 Chron. 9:23-24 .....	Isa. 60:11.
Surrounding nations submit to Israel's power— 1 Kings 4:21 .....	Ps. 72:10.
Fabulous wealth in Jerusalem—2 Chron. 1:15 .....	Isa. 60:17.
A time of great fertility in the land— 1 Kings 4:22-28; 5:11 .....	Isa. 35:1-2.
A period of tremendous building activity— 1 Kings 9:10-20 .....	Isa. 65:21-22.
Gentiles assist in the building of Israel—2 Chron. 2:2, 17 .....	Isa. 60:10, 13.
Glorious Temple built at Jerusalem—1 Kings 6 .....	Isa. 56:7-8.
Temple constructed from God-provided plans— 1 Chron. 28:11-19 .....	Ezek. Chps. 40-48.
Temple built by Prince of Peace—1 Kings 6 .....	Zech. 6:12.
Solomon known as Prince of Peace— 1 Kings 5:12 .....	Isa. 9:6.
The King noted for wisdom, enlightenment— 1 Kings 4:29-34 .....	Isa. 32:4; 33:6.
The King known for piercing, unerring judgment— 1 Kings 4:29-34 .....	Isa. 11:1-3.
Jerusalem the centre of world-wide pilgrimage to hear the wisdom of its king—2 Chron. 9:23; 1 Kings 4:34 .....	Isa. 2:2-4; Zech. 14:16.
Tyre (Tarshish) the great friend of Israel— 1 Kings 5:1 .....	Ps. 45:12, Isa. 60:9.
Zadok, the High Priest—1 Kings 1:24; 2:26 .....	Heb. 7:11-12; Ezek. 40:46.
Priests serve day and night in Temple (Ps. 134) thus figuratively immortal (Isa. 40:28-31) .....	Heb. 7:15-16; Rev. 4:8; Rev. 5:9-10.
Full order of Divine worship established for first time—1 Kings 9:25; 2 Chron. 8:12-16 .....	Deut. 30:6-8; Isa. 42:21.
Satan bound—1 Kings 5:4 .....	Rev. 20:2.
Satan unloosed towards the end of reign— 1 Kings 11:14 .....	Rev. 20:7.

#### **4. SOLOMON SUCCEEDS DAVID**

**“Then Solomon sat on the throne of Yahweh as king instead of David his father, and prospered; and all Israel obeyed him.”**

*David was now old and “stricken in years” (v.1) and it had become obvious that the day of his death drew near. Since his sin with Bathsheba, David’s house had had many troubles — Absalom, his son tried to take the kingdom from him, but he had been killed, and now with David weak in bed, near death, another son, Adonijah, seized the opportunity to revolt against his father.*

#### **1 Kings 1; 2:1-12; 1 Chronicles 28; 29.**

##### **ADONIJAH’S REVOLT. 1 Kings 1:1-31.**

Adonijah prepared chariots and horsemen, and gathered many people on his side, such as Joab, the captain of David’s army and Abiathar the priest to help him take the throne. Adonijah prepared a feast and the people rejoiced and cried out “God save King Adonijah” (v.25).

The news that Adonijah was going to take the throne spread quickly. Nathan the prophet realised that something had to be done to stop Adonijah because God had promised the throne to Solomon (1 Chron. 22:9). He went to Bathsheba, Solomon’s mother and told her of Adonijah’s revolt. Nathan proposed a plan to get David to anoint Solomon as king. Bathsheba went to David, who was confined to his bed, and told him what was happening. She said “My lord, thou swarest by Yahweh thy God unto thine handmaid, saying ‘Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon thy throne’, and now behold Adonijah reigneth” (v.17, 18). Bathsheba knew that her life and Solomon’s life would be in danger if Adonijah became king. While she was speaking Nathan the prophet came and confirmed the words of Bathsheba, and he urged David to act quickly. David told Bathsheba that Solomon should be king.

##### **SOLOMON ANOINTED KING. 1 Kings 1:32-40.**

David called Nathan the prophet, Zadok the priest and Benaiah, one of David’s mighty men and told them what to do.

“Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon to ride upon mine own mule, and bring him down to Gihon: And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there king over Israel: and blow ye with the trumpet, and say, God save King Solomon. Then ye shall come up after him, that he may come up and sit upon my throne; for he shall be king in my stead: and I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah” (v.33-35). David’s will was duly carried out and there was great rejoicing in Jerusalem. Solomon clearly met with the people’s approval, for they all came and “rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth rent with the sound of them” (v.40).

### **ADONIJAH'S FESTIVITY BECOMES FEAR. 1 Kings 1:41-53.**

The cries of joy echoed down the Kidron Valley and came to the attention of Adonijah's guests. Then the news came from Jerusalem "Verily our lord king David hath made Solomon king . . ." (v.43-48). Adonijah and his guests were gripped with fear. Their presence there amounted to treachery and rebellion against David and Yahweh. They wasted no time in abandoning Adonijah and "went every man his way." Adonijah trembled and he realised his life was in danger. He went to the Tabernacle and took hold of the horns of the altar in hope of obtaining mercy. He sought an oath from Solomon that he would not be slain. In wisdom Solomon granted him reprieve provided wickedness be not found with him in the future.

### **SOLOMON FORMALLY MADE KING. 1 Chronicles 28, 29.**

Later all Israel was gathered to see Solomon formally made king. David was old and weak, yet on this occasion he "stood upon his feet" (1 Chron. 28:2) to address the people. He told the people that God had chosen Solomon from all his sons to sit upon the throne. He encouraged Solomon "to know God and to serve him with a perfect heart and willing mind" (1 Chron. 28:9).

Solomon had been chosen by God to build the Temple. David had wanted to build this house for God, but because he was a man of war God had said that his son Solomon was to build it.

David had stored up great wealth and material for the Temple. He said, "Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of God, gold, silver, brass, iron, wood, precious stones and marble in abundance" (1 Chron. 29:2). David had given Solomon the plans for building the Temple. David had received these plans from God (1 Chron. 28:11-19).

David called upon the people to give willingly for the Temple — and they did. "The people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with a perfect heart they offered willingly to Yahweh, and David the king also rejoiced with great joy" (1 Chron. 29:9).

David's heart overflowed with thanks to Yahweh and the people sacrificed and rejoiced as Solomon was anointed the "second time" as king "on the throne of Yahweh instead of David his father" (1 Chron. 29:20-23).

### **GOD'S RESPONSE TO SOLOMON'S UNSELFISH REQUEST.**

#### **1 Kings 3:1-15.**

"Solomon loved Yahweh, walking in the statutes of David his father" (1 Kings 3:3). So, shortly after David's death, Solomon gathered all the leaders of Israel to the Tabernacle at Gibeon to worship and offer sacrifices (2 Chron. 1:2-6). Here we see the faithfulness of Solomon in trying to unite Israel on the basis of service to Yahweh.

While Solomon was at Gibeon, Yahweh appeared to him in a dream and said, "Ask what I shall give thee" (v.5). What a marvellous question for God to ask a man! Yet Yahweh knew the heart of Solomon. He knew Solomon had gathered the leaders to unite them as a nation obedient before God. Solomon's heart was full of the greatness of the task that had now come upon his shoulders, for he was to be the judge of all the nation. He was to rule them with righteousness before Yahweh. The task was clear, but how to perform it to the glory of Yahweh seemed beyond him, so when Yahweh asked what he wanted, he thought not of himself but of the work he was to do before God. He replied, "Give therefore Thy servant an understanding heart to judge *Thy* people that I may discern between good and bad, for who is able to judge this Thy so great a people" (v.9).

When the desires of the heart of Solomon were revealed and it was seen that he thought not of himself, but rather how he might serve Yahweh, God was well pleased. God therefore gave him a "wise and an understanding heart" (v.12) but above this God also gave riches and honour and a promise of long life if he continued to walk in God's ways (v.11-13).

### **SOLOMON THE WISE JUDGE. 1 Kings 3:16-28.**

The wisdom which God had given Solomon was continually put to the test, as it was on the occasion when two women presented themselves before Solomon with one baby. Both these women lived in the one house and to each a baby had been born, but one of the children had died in bed when its mother accidentally laid on it. Now both of the women claimed the living baby. One said the other had got up during the night and changed the babies over and the other denied this. But which one was telling the truth? A very difficult problem to solve — but Solomon with his God-given wisdom knew human nature. The people present would be shocked to hear him say, "Bring me a sword — divide the living child in two and give half to the one and half to the other." But now the true mother was revealed for no mother would wish her child to be killed; she would rather give it away than see it die. So she said, "O, my Lord, give her the living child and in no wise slay it": but the other woman said, "let it be divided" (v.26). So Solomon ordered that the child be given to its mother, and when the news of this judgment spread through Israel the people feared the king for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him (v.28).

### **LESSON FOR US:**

As Solomon asked wisdom of God so we should do likewise. True wisdom is knowing how to apply in our lives the things we learn from the word of God. Solomon wrote, "The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10). He also wrote, "incline thine ear unto wisdom and apply thine heart to understanding" (Proverbs 2:2). "Yahweh giveth wisdom" (Proverbs

2:6), and so James wrote, “If any lack wisdom let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5).

Let us follow the words which David gave to Solomon (1 Chron. 28:9). “*To know*” God — is to read and learn of Him and all His ways of judgment and mercy: “*To serve*” Him is to obey those things which will please God, doing His will at all times “with a perfect heart and willing mind”. Let us do those things that please God with pureness of motive and with willingness, not grudgingly and with discontentment. Let us have zeal to do the things of God and seeking wisdom from God that we may do all to His praise and glory.

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

“Story of the Bible” (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 4, No. 7.  
“The Man David” (H. Tennant)—pp. 207-215.

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *Describe the anointing of Solomon as King.*
2. *What did Solomon request when God said to him, “Ask what I shall give thee”?*
3. *Using the incident of the two women and the baby, show the power of Solomon’s God given wisdom.*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Adonijah set himself up as king, but God had promised the throne to Solomon — describe the events and what David did to establish Solomon on his throne.*
2. *Using Solomon as an example, explain how we can gain true wisdom so that we can “know” and “serve” God.*

# THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON

In the fourth year of his reign, Solomon built the "house of the LORD". Like the tabernacle before it, its structure, furniture and priestly services were a parable of the redemptive work of Christ yet to be revealed — "a shadow of heavenly things" (Ex. 25:40; Heb. 8:5; 9:9, 23, 24). It was an exceedingly beautiful structure and became the soul and seat of the nation's affections (1 Chron. 22:5; 1 Kgs. 10:5; Isa. 64:11). The details of its structure and dedication are twice recorded (1 Kgs. 5-8; 2 Chron. 2-7).

The reign of Solomon foreshadowed Messiah's and the Temple was typical of the "house of prayer for all nations" to be built by David's greatest son and heir (Isa. 56:7; 2 Sam. 7:13; Zech. 6:12, 13).

**SITE:** Mount Moriah, where earlier Abraham had "offered" Isaac, and David had sacrificed that the plague might be stopped (cp. 2 Chron. 3:1; 1 Chron. 21:22-30; 22:1; Gen. 22:2, 14; Deut. 12:11).

**TIME OF BUILDING:** 7½ years. It commenced in the 2nd month of Solomon's 4th year and was completed in the 8th month of his 11th year (1 Kgs. 6:1, 37, 38; 2 Chron. 3:2).

**LABOUR FORCE:** Lumbermen, carpenters, burden-bearers and stone masons were drawn from Israel and Tyre, while the chief officers were Solomon's servants (1 Kgs. 5:6, 13-18; 2 Chron. 2:17; cp. Isa. 60:10-13).

**GENERAL PLAN:** Proportional to the Tabernacle, but basic dimensions doubled and ornamentation richer. Interior measurements: length 60 cubits, breadth 20 cubits, height 30 cubits. It was divided into 3 sections, namely, The Most Holy Place (Oracle), The Holy Place, and The Court.

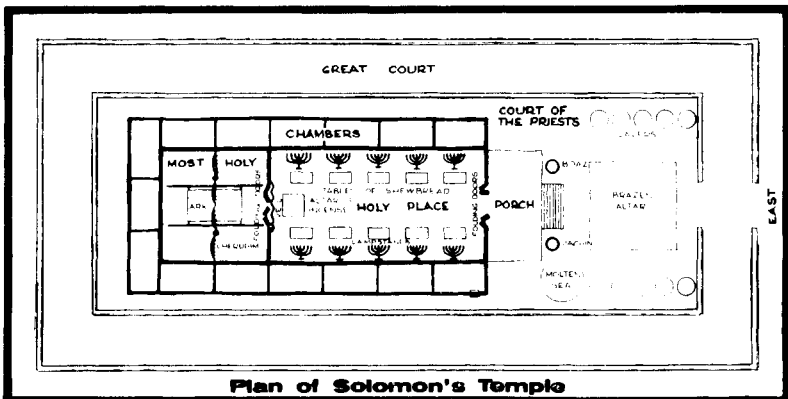
- The walls were made of quarried stone shaped and hewn prior to construction. These were lined with cedar, carved with cherubim,

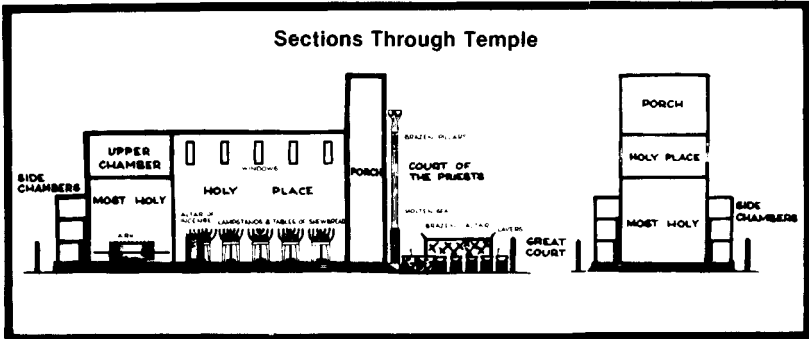
palm trees, open flowers and gourds and overlaid with gold (1 Kgs. 6: 7, 15, 18, 21, 29).

- The Floors were of fir or cypress and lined with gold (1 Kgs. 6:15, 30).
- The Ceiling was of beams and planks of cedar and lined with gold (1 Kgs. 6:9, 22).
- The Doors of the Most Holy Place were of olive carved with cherubim, palm trees, open flowers and overlaid with gold (1 Kgs. 6:31-32).
- The Doors of the Holy Place were 2 in number and each had 2 folding leaves. They were of fir and similarly carved and lined (1 Kgs. 6:33-35).

## MATERIALS — SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

- 1. STONE.** These stones were taken from the earth and shaped beforehand to God's specifications. In a similar way the saints, the "living stones" of God's spiritual house, are being "taken out of" the Gentiles and prepared as God's abiding places (1 Kgs. 6:7; 1 Pet. 2:5; John 14:23).
- 2. TIMBERS.**
  - (1) Cedar—very durable = Incorruption (Ps. 92:12; 1 Cor. 15:53).
  - (2) Fir—very strong = Strength of God (Eph. 6:10; Hab. 3:19).
  - (3) Olive—produced the oil which illuminated the Holy Place = Enlightenment of the Spirit Word (Ex. 27:20; Ps. 119:130; Neh. 9:20, 30; Zech. 4:14; Acts 10:38; Rev. 1:20).
- 3. METALS.** Gold was used exclusively in the Holy and Most Holy Places (see notes on Most Holy for significance), while brass was used for the Court (see notes on Brasen Altar for significance).





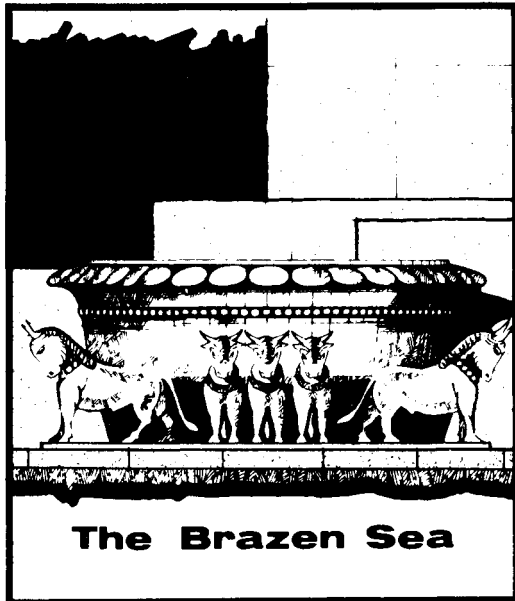
### THE OUTER COURT

Where acceptable worship commenced = MENTAL SANCTIFICATION AND CLEANSING.

Special Features:

1. **BRASEN ALTAR** (2 Chron. 4:1). Was "most holy" (Ex. 29:37) = Christ (Heb. 13:10). It "made holy" that which touched it (Heb. 2:10). It was the first object barring direct access to the Most Holy and speaks of the prerequisite of sacrifice at the Christ-altar (Rom. 12:1, 2). Brass = Sin's flesh (Num. 16:38-39; 31:22-23; 21:8; Ex. 38:8; Heb. 2:14; Rom. 8:3).
2. **MOLTEN SEA** (2 Chron. 4:2-5; 1 Kgs. 7:23-26). Equivalent to the Laver. Hands and feet (= works and walk) to be washed with water (= Word of God Eph. 5:26; Acts 26:16), BEFORE the brasen altar could be approached (Ps. 26:6; Ex. 30:18-21). It stood on 12 oxen (12 = Israel's tribes, and the oxen = service). Before we can offer acceptable worship we must be cleansed and educated by the Word (John 15:3; 17:17).
3. **TEN LAVERS** and their stands (1 Kgs. 7:27-39). There were 5 on each side of the Court, and they were used to wash the burnt offerings (2 Chron. 4:6; Lev. 1:9).

4. **TWO PILLARS** of Brass before the Holy Place (1 Kgs. 7:15-22). Were named Jachin (= He will establish) and Boaz (= Strength). They represent "flesh" purged, strengthened and caused to stand by God's redemption (Rev. 3:12; Dan. 10:18-19; 12:13).
5. **THE ASCENT** (1 Kgs. 10:5). Heb. "Olah", the word generally translated "burnt offering" (cp. Ezek. 40:26) = Dedication to Yahweh's exalted service and hence a sweet savour in His nostrils (Eph. 5:2).





## THE HOLY PLACE

Was midway, the second stage, and stands for the MORAL CLEANSING required as one walks toward the Kingdom of God (1 Jn. 3:3). It is a parable of spiritual Israel in a state of covenant relationship to God. The brasen altar and molten sea (laver) are behind and the Presence of God lies ahead.

Special Features:

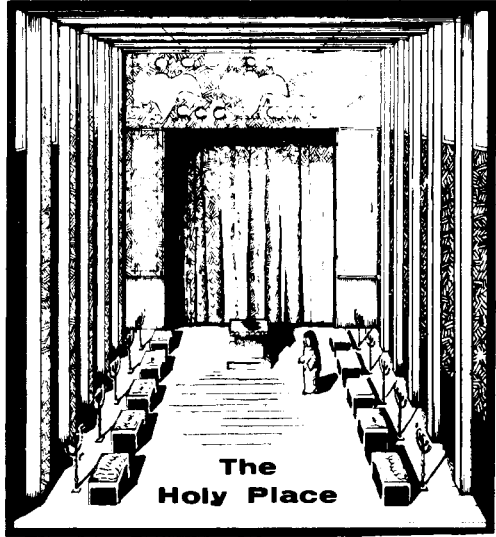
1. **TEN LAMPSTANDS** of gold, 5 on each side of the Holy Place (2 Chron. 4:7; 1 Kgs. 7:49) = Jesus and Ecclesia from whom the light of the knowledge of the Truth radiates in a dark world (2 Cor. 4:6; Jn. 1:9; Phil. 2:15; Rev. 1:20; Matt. 5:14-16; Deut. 4:6; Ps. 119:105; Prov. 6:23).

**OIL** — supplied by all Israel, and thus the Lampstands represent the nation (Ex. 27:20, 21).

**SEVEN BRANCHES** — 7 was the number of the Mosaic Covenant and so they were reminded of their relationship to God (Deut. 5:15; Ex. 31:16-17; Lev. 26:15, 18, 21, 24, 34, 35). Also stands for the perfection of knowledge and wisdom pertaining to God (Rev. 4:5; 5:6; Zech. 4:2; 3:9).

**TEN** — Completeness, finality (Luke 19:13; Gen. 31:7; Num. 14:22; Dan. 1:20; Zech. 8:23; Lev. 26:26; Job 19:3; 1 Sam. 1:8). Hence "ten", associated with the illuminating lampstands, represents Christ, in whom wisdom is final and complete (Col. 2:8-10; 1 Cor. 1:18-24, 30).

2. **TEN TABLES OF SHEWBREAD** (2 Chron. 4:8, 19; 1 Kgs. 7:48), with 12 loaves on each (Lev. 24:5-9). 12 = 12 tribes of Israel; loaves = meal offering, the fruit of their labours; and Aaron and the priests represent God. When the priests ate the "bread of God" (Lev. 21:6), God was symbolically accepting the fruit of their labours. Frankincense on the bread was burned, producing a delightful fragrance, indicating God's pleasure (Lev. 24:7). The bread was replaced "every sabbath" — the day which was the "sign of the covenant", commemorating their redemption from bondage (Deut. 5:15; Ex. 31:16, 17).

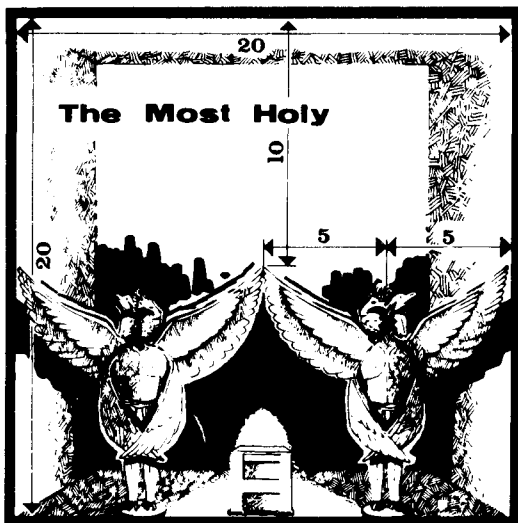


3. **INCENSE ALTAR** of cedar overlaid with gold (1 Kgs. 6:22). Ascending incense = The prayers of saints on the Christ-altar (Psa. 141:2; Luke 1:7-10; Rev. 5:8 marg; 8:34). It belonged to the inner sanctuary or Most Holy (1 Kgs. 6:22 RSV). Hence "prayer" made access into "heaven itself" (Heb. 6:19; 9:24). Only fire from the brasen altar could be used, the lesson being that prayer is only acceptable on the basis of atonement for sin through Christ. No "strange incense" was permitted — only that which was divinely prescribed was to be used (Ex. 30:9, 34; Lev. 16:12; Acts 4:12; John 15:4-5).

4. **THE VEIL** (2 Chron. 3:14) Heb. "paroketh" = "separation". It was a barrier separating Israel from God. As such it was a fitting symbol of the impotence of the Law of Moses to transcend the limits of flesh nature and give life (Gal. 3:21; Rom. 8:3). That is, it represented the "flesh" and the Law which barred from God (Heb. 10:20). It was made of white linen (= the righteousness of saints, Rev. 19:7-8) in which were wrought the colours Blue (= God's law, Num. 15:38). Purple (= redemption, John 19:2), and Scarlet (= man and sin, Isa. 1:18; Matt. 27:28; Lev. 14:4, 6). The principles of the atonement were first wrought in Christ's flesh and by perfect obedience the veil was rent, yielding access to the Most Holy (Heb. 2:10-14, 5:5-8, 10:20; Matt. 27:51)

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"The house that is to be builded for Yahweh must be exceeding magnificent, of fame and of glory throughout all countries" — 1 Chron. 22:5



## THE MOST HOLY PLACE

The final stage, the goal of Israel's spiritual life, and as such it represents —

- (1) God's presence or "heaven itself" (Ex. 25:21-22; Heb. 6:18-20; 9:24).
- (2) PHYSICAL CLEANSING, incorruption, immortality in the kingdom (Heb. 10:34; Col. 3:3-4; 1 Cor. 15:50-54).

### Special Features

1. **SHAPE** — A perfect cube (1 Kgs. 6:20) = the perfected ecclesia, one with God (Rev. 21:16, 3).
2. **GOLD** — Overlaid everything. Is precious and incorruptible and as such stands for the riches of the "inheritance incontestable, and undefiled" — eternal life (1 Pet. 1:4-7; Rev. 21:18; Psa 45:9, 13), and also for proven faith, by which immortality is attained (Rev. 3:18; Job 23:10).
3. **CHERUBIM** (1 Kgs. 6:23-28) = The perfected ecclesia, the multitudinous Christ-body, now having attained the goal (Ezek. 1; 43:1-3; Rev. 4:7; 5:9-14). In the Tabernacle the wings overshadowed the mercy seat, but here they are also outstretched, apparently in conformity with the universal aspect of Solomon's kingdom (1 Kgs. 4:21, 24, 34).
4. **THE ARK** — contained only the enduring tables of the covenant (2 Chron. 5:10) = God's glorious dwelling place (Num. 7:89; Psa. 80:1; 2 Cor. 5:21; John 1:14, "dwelt" = "tabernacled").
5. **THE MERCY SEAT ABOVE** = Christ, where God will meet with us (Ex. 25:22; Rom. 3:25 "propitiation" = "mercy seat"). God is a moral Being and will meet with us only on the basis of His Will for holy living as expressed in the 10 commandments written on the tables of stone beneath the mercy seat.
6. **THE STAVES** were left in the ark and protruded into the Holy Place (1 Kgs. 8:8 RSV). It was

thus ready for transit and the lesson was impressed that Solomon's Temple was not His true and final resting place, but rather the poor and contrite in heart, who tremble at His Word (Acts 7:47-49; Isa. 66:1-2; 2 Cor. 6:16).

The mercy seat was sprinkled once a year with the atoning blood to obtain forgiveness (Lev. 16:14-15). Hence no fellowship was possible except on the basis of the "shedding of blood". Yet once atonement was effected, then "fellowship" with God was attained, as entrance into the Most Holy symbolised.

### OVERALL TEACHING

Is expressed in Ex. 25:8, "Let them make me a sanctuary *That I may dwell among them*". The Temple revealed how man could be reconciled to God. To the outer court, man came; and in the Most Holy, God dwelt. The

stages in between reveal how man, by complying with God's requirements, could obtain redemption and ultimately immortality. Thus the Most Holy beckoned Israel forward and stood as the goal. Here was the heart of the Sanctuary, the presence of Yahweh Himself, that condition of perfect and permanent fellowship with Him who had redeemed Israel specifically to manifest His glory in and through them.

### THE TRUE HOUSE

While Solomon's Temple was awe-inspiring and God did manifest His glory in it, it could not contain Him. Even the builder realised this (1 Kgs. 8:11, 27). No house made by man's hand could adequately provide for Him, but He has Himself declared that He will dwell with him "that is of a contrite and humble spirit" (Isa. 57:15; 66:1-2). By faith He is taken into the hearts of such and their obedience reveals that He is there (Eph. 3:16-19; 2:21-22). "If any man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23).

Wickedness caused the glory of God to depart from Solomon's Temple and the Babylonians desecrated it (Ezek. 10:4, 18, 19; 11:23; 2 Kgs. 25:8-17). In its place God has laid the foundation stone of an entirely different house: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation". Men, as lively stones, are invited to build thereon on the basis of faith: "he that believeth shall not make haste" or be ashamed (Isa. 28:16; Rom. 9:33; 10:11-12; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-7).

"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God . . . He that hath an ear, let him hear".

### References:

- "Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield) Vol. 4, No. 8.
- "Law and Grace" (W.F. Barling) Chapter 5.
- "Law of Moses" (R. Roberts) pp. 95-154.

Available as a Bible insert from the  
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## 5. THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON

**“The house which I build is great: for great is our God above all gods.”**

*David, Israel's greatest king, had desired to build a temple unto the name of Yahweh. This was not allowed by God and it was the privilege of Solomon, whose name means peace and whose kingdom was noted for its peace, to construct the glorious building which stood for over 350 years before being destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.*

*The early part of Solomon's reign was spent in consolidating his kingdom. Once peace had been established he began the preparatory work for constructing the temple.*

### **1 Kings 4-8; 2 Chronicles 2-7.**

#### **GOD BLESSES ISRAEL UNDER SOLOMON. 1 Kings 4.**

Solomon using his God-given wisdom, established a sound government which brought happiness and contentment to the people.

Solomon's kingdom stretched from the River Euphrates to the border of Egypt. Solomon had peace on every side for we read that “Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree” (1 Kings 4:25). Compare the words of Micah (Micah 4:1-5) where he uses these same words to describe the Kingdom that Jesus Christ will establish.

#### **SOLOMON'S WISDOM RECORDED FOR US. 1 Kings 4:29-34.**

Solomon's wisdom not only gave him an understanding of the ways of God, but also of the things God created. He spoke of trees, animals, reptiles, birds and fish. “He spoke 3,000 proverbs and of his songs were 1005” (v.32). Many of these sayings have been recorded for us in the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. These sayings are written so that “we may receive his words and hide his commandments with us so that we may incline our ear unto wisdom and apply our heart to understanding” (Prov. 2:1-2).

#### **SOLOMON PREPARES MATERIALS FOR CONSTRUCTION.**

##### **1 Kings 5; 2 Chronicles 2.**

Solomon was very blessed, for much of the treasure and material to be used in the Temple had already been collected by David years before (c.f. 1 Chronicles 22:14-16). David was also responsible for another blessing which was of immense value to Solomon in the construction. We learn from 1 Kings 5:1 that Hiram, King of Tyre was “ever a lover of David” and so was delighted when Solomon requested cedar trees from Lebanon. A league, or treaty of peace, was made between Hiram and Solomon, and hence a supply of timber was guaranteed. Solomon was to supply

labour, and a workforce of 30,000 men was organised for this purpose. To ensure that the men would be happy in their work Solomon arranged that gangs of 10,000 men at a time would spend one month away in Lebanon and then two months at home before their next turn.

Beside the 30,000 men, a further 70,000 were involved in bearing various burdens and another 80,000 were engaged in hewing stone out of the mountains near Jerusalem. These 150,000 men came from the strangers that dwelt in the nation and so, coupled with the workmen of Tyre, a great many Gentiles were involved in the building of the Temple to Israel's God (c.p. 2 Chronicles 2:17).

The 3,300 overseers were Solomon's own officers (1 Kings 5:16). Thus a staggering total of 183,300 men were employed in the work of building a house to the glory of Yahweh's Name.

### **THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE AND ITS DESCRIPTION 1 Kings 6:7; 2 Chronicles 3; 4.**

The site chosen for the Temple was Mount Moriah where Yahweh had appeared to David. Construction began in the second month of Solomon's fourth year and was completed in the eighth month of his eleventh year. Seven and one-half years were therefore spent in building. The Temple was not large compared with buildings of surrounding nations, but the liberal use of gold, which lined the entire interior and the many treasures which were placed inside, gave it great glory and majesty.

Like the Tabernacle before it, the structure of the Temple, its furniture, and priestly services taught the same spiritual lessons which we learned from our previous lessons on the Tabernacle. In its layout, the Temple was proportional to the Tabernacle, with greater dimensions and richer ornamentation.

The building consisted of a front porch twenty cubits long and ten cubits wide, the Holy Place twenty cubits wide and forty cubits long, and the Most Holy Place again twenty cubits square.

In the outer court were (1) the brasen altar, on which the sacrifices were offered; (2) a molten sea supported by twelve oxen, which was used for the washing of the priests; (3) ten lavers of brass, which were used to wash the offerings.

In front of the Holy Place stood two pillars of brass, one named "Jachin" ("He shall establish"), and the other, "Boaz" ("strength"). These two pillars represented man strengthened and established by the spiritual influences of God's Word.

In the Holy Place stood, (1) ten lampstands of gold, five on each side; (2) ten tables of gold, five on each side, for the shewbread; (3) the golden altar of incense, which most probably was placed in front of the veil before the Most Holy Place.

The veil, which separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy, represented the atonement as achieved by God in Christ, and was of blue, purple and crimson, made of fine linen with wrought cherubim.

In the Most Holy Place, which stood for perfection, were two cherubim of gold which faced the veil and whose wings were outstretched, so that they touched one another and the side walls. On entering the Most Holy Place, the high priest would face the cherubim with their wings stretching right across the chamber. Beneath the outstretched wings of the cherubim was placed the ark, containing only the two tables of stone with their commandments.

Beside the Temple and its furniture various other necessary objects were made, such as pots, shovels, fleshhooks, snufflers, basins and spoons. These items were made by Hiram of Tyre, who was a skilled worker in brass.

A special Bible-insert has been prepared. It features three dimensional views of Solomon's Temple, and the text alongside explains the elaborate spiritual parable of its architecture and appointments. Every scholar should obtain a copy.

#### **THE TEMPLE OPENED. 1 Kings 8, 2 Chronicles 5.**

Now after seven and a half years of building, the Temple was ready to be opened. Solomon and all the elders of Israel gathered to witness the wonderful scene of the Ark being brought up into its resting place in the Temple. It was in the seventh month at the feast of Tabernacles when the priests took the Ark and all the Holy vessels that were in the Tabernacle and brought them to the Temple. Solomon and the people sacrificed a great number of sheep and oxen to Yahweh. Then the Ark was taken into the Most Holy Place, where it was placed beneath the wings of the cherubim. Inside there were only the "two tables of stone which Moses put there at Mount Horeb" (1 Kings 8:9).

Then all the singers and musicians on cymbals, psalteries, and harps and 120 priests with trumpets praised Yahweh saying, "For He is good, for his mercy endureth forever" (2 Chron. 5:12-13). Then the Temple became filled with a cloud, and the priests could not see because of the cloud, "for the glory of Yahweh had filled the house of God" (v.14).

#### **SOLOMON'S PRAYER AT THE CONSECRATION OF THE TEMPLE. 1 Kings 8, 2 Chronicles 6.**

Solomon's heart was full of joy as he offered a prayer of dedication. He knelt in humility and stretched his arms towards heaven and said "O Yahweh God of Israel, there is no God like thee in the heaven, nor in the earth which keepest covenant and shewest mercy unto thy servants" (2 Chron. 6:14). Solomon went on to say that God in His mercy had allowed them to build this great Temple. He knew that God could not be contained in a small building (v.18), but he appealed to God to always look upon the house built for His name (v.19-21).

He asked God to hearken to the prayers of His people in prosperity or adversity. Solomon feared that the people one day would turn away from Yahweh as they had done in the past, so he prayed for forgiveness in such circumstances.

It is very significant that in his prayer Solomon made special mention of the stranger who desires to worship the God of Israel (v.32-33). He was anxious that the whole world might learn of Yahweh and worship Him in Truth.

Finally he appealed to God to hear all the prayers made in that place and to safeguard the throne of David (v.40-42).

To Solomon the dedication of the Temple was but a prefiguring of the more glorious day when Yahweh's glory will fill the earth and His saints will rule in peace.

### **GOD'S ACCEPTANCE OF SOLOMON'S PRAYER AND THE PEOPLE'S DEDICATION. 2 Chronicles 7:1-11.**

When Solomon had made an end of praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifices. God was showing Solomon and the people that his prayer had been accepted. The people bowed down in worship and praised Yahweh, saying, "for He is good; for his mercy endureth forever" (v.3).

It was during the feast of Tabernacles that the Temple was opened. A vast number of people would have been present to watch the opening ceremony of the house of prayer. A great number of sacrifices were offered by Solomon and the people. Solomon alone offered 2,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. There was much joy and gladness and Solomon "sent the people away into their tents, glad and merry in heart for the goodness that Yahweh had shewed unto David and Solomon and to Israel His people" (v.10).

### **GOD'S SOLEMN WARNING TO SOLOMON. 1 Kings 9:1-9; 2 Chronicles 7:12-22.**

God had indicated His acceptance of Solomon's prayer with fire from heaven. He later appeared to Solomon by night with words of comfort and warning. He re-affirmed His promise to bless Israel if they would turn to Him in truth. God promised that His eyes would always be open and His ears attentive to their prayer. If Solomon would walk before God as David his father had done then God would indeed be with him, "Then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel forever as I promised to David thy father, saying, 'There shall not fail thee a man to sit upon the throne of Israel' " (1 Kings 9:5). On the other hand, if Solomon turned away from Yahweh and forsook the statutes and commandments, serving other gods and worshipping them, then not only would the glorious Temple become desolate, but also Israel would be driven from the land and become a "proverb and a byword among all nations" (v.7-9) (cp. Deut. 28:36, 37).

But despite this warning, Solomon in later years departed from the ways of Yahweh.

### **LESSON FOR US:**

The Temple of Solomon must have been a glorious edifice. But it meant nothing if the heart of Solomon and Israel was not right in God's eyes. We too, as young people of God, must recognise our individual attitude is what is important in God's eyes. There is the danger of putting value in external appearance, whereas God looks upon the heart. "For thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isaiah 57:15).

### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

"Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 4, No. 8.

"Law and Grace" (W.F. Barling)—Chapter 5.

"Law of Moses" (R. Roberts)—pages. 95-154.

### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *When the Ark was brought to its resting place in the temple how did God show His presence?*
2. *How did God show Solomon that He had accepted his prayer?*
3. *What was the important warning Yahweh gave to the King Solomon and to us today?*

### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Describe Solomon's Temple and its furniture. Explain how the three divisions of the Temple and their furnishings teach us how to acceptably approach God.*
2. *Describe the opening ceremony of Solomon's Temple.*

## 6. THE GLORY OF SOLOMON'S REIGN — IT'S WEALTH AND FAME

“Because Yahweh loved Israel for ever, therefore made He thee King”

**1 Kings 7; 9; 10; 2 Chronicles 8 and 9.**

### **SOLOMON THE BUILDER. 1 Kings 7:1-12; 1 Kings 9:10-24.**

In addition to the building of the glorious Temple of Yahweh, (as described in lesson 5), Solomon built his own magnificent private palace and the House of the Forest of Lebanon. He built “cities for his chariots and cities for his horsemen” (v.19) and store cities. He also built a palace for Pharaoh’s daughter who was one of his wives (ch. 7:8; 9:24). He established royal gardens and gardens containing artificial lakes, flower beds and orchards (Eccl. 2:4-6).

Solomon’s Judgment Hall was large and lofty, its walls lined with cedar, and housing a large canopied throne of ivory overlaid with gold and flanked by lions. Here Solomon handed down his royal judgments (1 Kings 7:11), prefiguring the greater splendour and solemnity of Christ, of whom it is said that he shall have “a great white throne” of judgment (Revelation 20:11).

Adjacent to the Hall of Judgment and linked with the great “House of the Forest of Lebanon” was the Hall of pillars where interviews of business or state receptions were held.

Rows of massive square cedar pillars supported the roof of the “House of the Forest of Lebanon” (1 Kings 7:1-5). On the panelled walls hung 500 shields of gold (1 Kings 10:16, 17) used for the ceremonial processions of the King, the spectacle of which so impressed the visiting Queen of Sheba. Even the drinking vessels and plates, displayed in this splendid house, were of gold or of “pure gold”. As for silver, “it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon”(v. 21). An even greater glory will characterise the splendour of the royal buildings in the age to come (see Isaiah 60:11, 13, 17).

### **SOLOMON THE MERCHANT. 1 Kings 10:21-29.**

Solomon controlled the north-south caravan routes, and with the aid of the Phoenicians he built a fleet of ships based at Ezion-geber to carry his refined copper and other commerce. This fleet made the trip southward to Ethiopia, the Arabian Yemen and India once every three years, bringing back gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks (1 Kings 9:26; 10:22).

His keen business sense is seen in his becoming the agent through whom the Hittites and Aramaeans had to negotiate in order to buy horses from Kue (Cilicia) or chariots from Egypt (1 Kings 10:28, 29 R.S.V.). These and other enterprises made silver as common as stone and cedar as sycamore, in Jerusalem. Every year 666 talents of gold (reckoned to be over 3 tons) flowed into Solomon’s treasury (1 Kings 10:14).



## **THE QUEEN OF SHEBA VISITS SOLOMON.**

**1 Kings 10:1-13; 2 Chronicles 9:1-12.**

The fame of Solomon soon spread throughout the empires of the world, and in the area of Sheba it was reported to the Queen of this wise King reigning in Israel. As more and more details of the glory of his Kingdom came to her she became more desirous of visiting it to see for herself the Kingdom of Israel and to speak with King Solomon.

Sheba is the area of land at the south eastern end of the Arabian Peninsula, a place that was noted for its spices. Archaeologists tell us that it was a wealthy kingdom with many great and glorious buildings.

The Queen of Sheba decided to ask many difficult questions of Solomon to test him and see if what she had heard was true. To her astonishment she found that Solomon could answer all her queries (1 Kings 10:1-3). Not only did she speak with Solomon, but she saw the Temple, visited the house of Solomon, saw the people who served him; and also noted Solomon's wise government of Israel and the magnificent way everything was done. The whole of what she saw left her "breathless" (v.5). After all this she told Solomon that she had not heard half of all the glory of the Kingdom. She went on to say, "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom. Blessed be Yahweh thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because Yahweh loved Israel for ever, therefore made He thee king, to do judgment and justice" (v.8-9).

The Queen of Sheba gave Solomon many costly presents of gold, precious stones and spices, and returned to her own country.

### **A GREATER THAN SOLOMON. Luke 11:31.**

When Jesus was speaking to the people in his day he reminded them how that the Queen of Sheba came to hear the wisdom of Solomon and gave glory to Yahweh because of what she saw. So likewise Jesus, who is greater than Solomon, has spoken of the wisdom of God, and there will be Gentiles who will hear and listen to him. Also as the Queen of Sheba came with gifts to Solomon, so nations will do again in the future, when Jesus will establish a glorious Kingdom in Jerusalem, and the Gentiles will bring their wealth to him (cp. Psalm 72:10; Isaiah 60:9).

So Solomon and his reign foreshadow (or give us a picture in a small way) of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. This is shown in the following comparison:

<b>SOLOMON</b>	<b>LORD JESUS CHRIST</b>
1. Son of David	So was Jesus (Matthew 1:1).
2. Received wisdom of God	So did Jesus (Isaiah 11:1-3).
3. His reign was peaceful	So will Christ's reign ultimately (Psalm 72:7).

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**SOLOMON**

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**LORD JESUS CHRIST**

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- |                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 4. His Kingdom was glorious | So will Christ's (Zech. 6:13).                                |
| 5. Many nations served him  | All nations will serve Christ<br>(Psalm 72:11; Phil. 2:9-11). |
| 6. He built the Temple      | Christ will build a Temple at<br>Jerusalem.                   |
- 

**LESSON FOR US:**

The golden age of Israel's history was due in part to the thorough preparation of David and more especially to the blessings of Yahweh in approval of Solomon's unselfish request for wisdom and understanding. Under a powerful yet wise administrator the extensive kingdom was consolidated. Peace at home and abroad was experienced by a happy and secure people. Gentiles were attracted to the worship of Yahweh, all of which are features of an even greater Kingdom, to be established by the Son of God.

But this glory was to be short-lived. Solomon was promised wonderful blessings, but if the king and his people forsook Yahweh's commandments, He would severely punish them. Solomon's wealth, weapons and women caused his tragic decline.

We too are promised the blessings of the Father if we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:24-34). If we avoid getting caught up with the cares of this life by a humble devotion to God in every aspect of our daily lives, we can look forward in joyous expectation to participating in the glorious Kingdom of the greater than Solomon. Therefore let us "remember now our Creator in the days of our youth," and "fear God and keep His commandments" (Eccles. 12:1, 13).

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

- "The Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 4, No. 7-9.  
"The Visible Hand of God" (R. Roberts)—Chapter 24.  
"The Ways of Providence" (R. Roberts)—Chapter 18.  
"Biblical Archaeology" (G. Ernest Wright)—Chapter 8.  
"The Companion Bible" Appendix 68.

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *Compare the glory of Solomon's reign with that of the reign of Christ.*
2. *Who visited Solomon — and what did she say about Solomon and his kingdom?*
3. *How did Solomon's kingdom become so magnificent and wealthy?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Describe the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon.*
2. *Describe the wealth and fame of Solomon's reign.*

## 7 THE WARNING OF SOLOMON'S OLD AGE

**“When Solomon was old . . . his heart was not perfect with Yahweh his God, as was the heart of David his father.”**

*The decline of Solomon from a man of faith was gradual, not sudden. A sense of self-importance began to show in his life. The humble attitude he showed at Gibeon, when he spoke of himself as a child, began to fade away. No longer did he serve God with his whole heart. Other interests began to absorb his time.*

### **1 Kings 10:24-11:25.**

#### **SOLOMON'S FAITH BEGINS TO WEAKEN. 1 Kings 10:25-29.**

The record tells us that Solomon gathered together chariots, horsemen and horses from Egypt. He was becoming like the kings of the nations about him, and trusting in the arm of the flesh. When Solomon looked to these, he was in effect turning his back on God, the real strength of Israel. Isaiah many years later issued a warning against putting trust in horses, “Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek Yahweh” (Isaiah 31:1 — see also Psalms 147:10; 33:17). But God had given specific advice to the kings of Israel. Through Moses He commanded that Israel's earthly king was not to multiply to himself horses, nor riches, nor wives. Each would lead the king away from trust in God, to trust in the flesh (note carefully Deuteronomy 17:16-17). Solomon failed in each command.

There is no doubt of course, that Solomon would have been aware of God's command. Each king was commanded to personally write out a copy of the law when he came to the throne (Deuteronomy 17:18). Despite this warning Solomon failed. If ever we have a clear example of the deceitfulness of sin, and how one can slowly drift out of the truth, then we have it in the life of Solomon. Solomon was a man of great wisdom, and perhaps he reasoned that he had the wisdom and strength of character to withstand any temptation arising from such possessions. He thought that others may fail, but he would be able to withstand.

Such is the reasoning of the flesh. Once one step is taken in the wrong direction, further steps will easily follow and be explained away as being in order and “harmless”. So we might be ensnared by our reasoning with very damaging results. Eve found in the garden of Eden that fleshly reasoning led to the sentence of death, and Solomon, reasoning likewise, found out that when a person is led by the human will, the results are fatal. It could have been overcome with a “thus saith Yahweh”, but they did not do this, and the consequences are recorded in scripture as lessons for us all.

## **SOLOMON'S FALL. 1 Kings 11:1-8.**

Solomon's desire for riches and horses weakened his faith. He still, however, recognised Yahweh as the one and only true God. But he had given way to the flesh, and his extra-ordinary wisdom was not sufficient to keep him from falling into another grievous error. We read that "king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians and Hittites" (v.1).

His choice of wives could not have been worse. Everyone of them came from nations "concerning which Yahweh said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you; for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods" (v.2). But the record bluntly states, "Solomon clave unto these in love". Besides the wives listed in verse 1, Solomon had also 700 other wives and 300 concubines! In this his judgment erred and he ignored the unmistakable warning of scripture.

The inevitable soon happened, for we read, "His wives turned away his heart, for it came to pass when Solomon was old that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with Yahweh his God, as was the heart of David his father" (v.3, 4). What a tragic state the wise and privileged king of Israel had fallen into. Love of the world and pleasure-seeking had corrupted his heart and blinded his eyes. The son of faithful David instead of showing wisdom, stability and leadership, became at length an old and foolish king. Solomon seems to confess this, "Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king who will no more be admonished" (Ecclesiastes 4:13).

Through the influence of his heathen wives, Solomon became an idolator, and worshipped images of wood and stone in sight of the Temple which he had erected to the true God. He went after Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians. What a degrading effect this would have had on the nation, quite apart from Solomon. Milcom, or Molech, the abomination of the Ammonites, was another god Solomon turned to. To this god children were sacrificed and drums were used to drown their cries. This abominable worship became a part of the way of life in Israel, and was centred in the valley of Hinnom. It was not until the purges of righteous King Josiah many years later that these abominable religions were abolished (2 Kings 23:10).

## **GOD'S JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON BECAUSE OF FOLLY.**

### **1 Kings 11:9-25.**

The commandments were clear and there was no excuse for Solomon's departure from them. Besides the clear direction from the Law of Moses, God had also appeared unto Solomon twice.

1. At Gibeon with the promise of blessing if he would keep God's commands.
2. At Jerusalem at the dedication of the Temple, with the warning of judgment should he and the nation follow after other gods (1 Kings 3:13-14; 9:6-8).

It is a principle of scripture that to whom much is given, much is expected. It was therefore proper and necessary that on one, who had been favoured so much, a terrible judgment should fall. "Wherefore Yahweh said unto Solomon, forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant" (v.11).

This was indeed a terrible punishment, and Solomon no doubt would have recalled a similar punishment passed upon Saul for his foolishness (1 Samuel 13:13-14). However, because of the righteousness of David, God decreed that the judgment would not take place in Solomon's days, but in the days of his son Rehoboam. Moreover, not all the kingdom was to be rent from Rehoboam, but two tribes would remain; one (Judah) to continue the royal line and Benjamin (1 Kings 12:21). God's mercy would not depart from the seed of David as it was taken from Saul (2 Samuel 7:15).

Though the greater judgment was deferred, God raised up an adversary to the king, namely Hadad, the Edomite. Hadad had fled from an attack made on the Edomites by Joab into Egypt and there remained while David was king. However, upon hearing that David and Joab were dead, he returned to his country with the objective of persuading Edom to revolt against Solomon. Rezon is mentioned in v.23-25 as another adversary stirred up by God to trouble Solomon. He ruled Syria from Damascus and from there raided Israel.

The greatest judgment lay yet in the future. Jeroboam, one of Solomon's servants, would rise up and lead ten of the tribes in rebellion. The days of glory, unity, peace and prosperity were at an end and would be no more until Christ should come and then God would give the throne to him (Ezekiel 21:27; 37:22).

#### **LESSON FOR US:**

Solomon brought tragedy and destruction to himself and the kingdom through his folly. Yet in the life of this man whom Yahweh had loved (2 Samuel 12:24-25), and to whom He had twice appeared, there is a powerful lesson for us. We see an example of the principle that "friendship of the world is enmity with God" (James 4:4).

Solomon's friends in the surrounding nations trusted in horses and riches, and so Solomon, trying to impress them, accumulated both these things. His heart was where his treasure was, on earth; and not where it should have been, with God in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21). We must take care that the things of God always take first place in our lives, and that we do not trust in the material things of this evil age (see Luke 21:34-36).

In his marriage with unbelievers Solomon's heart was turned to follow them in their idolatry. If we form close friendships with people who do not know Yahweh in truth, then we are turning our backs upon Him, for He has forbidden such friendships and marriage with unbelievers (1 John 2:15-16; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 1 Corinthians 7:39). This is a wise prohibition for it spares us much heartache and deep feelings of regret if we ever flout this divine commandment.

We must seek out and keep close to our Sunday School friends, encouraging each other in the ways of righteousness and truth which we learn from the Bible.

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

“Story of the Bible” (H.P. Mansfield) — Vol. 4, No. 10.

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *List the ways Solomon failed and thus caused his kingdom to fall.*
2. *How must we choose our friends so that we are not led away from God as Solomon was?*
3. *What did God say He would do as a result of Solomon’s failures?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

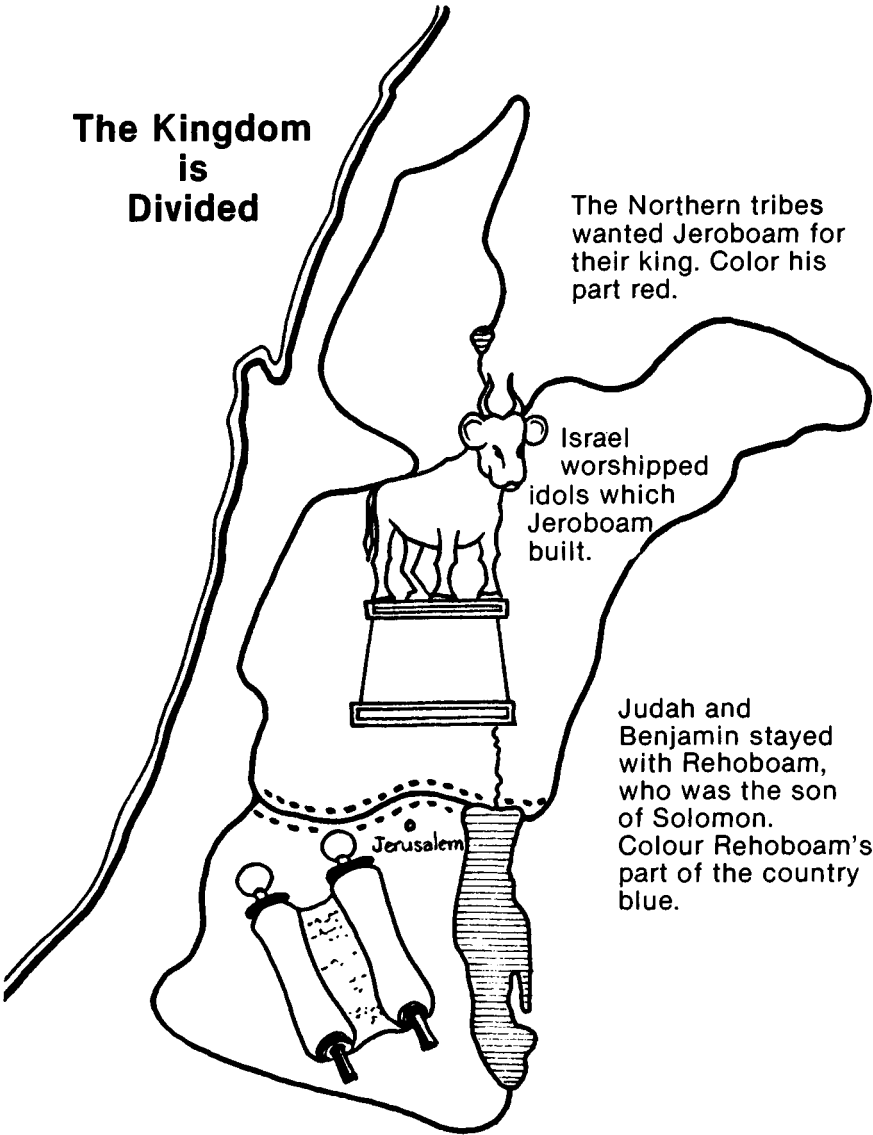
1. *Describe the circumstances that brought about Solomon’s departure from the ways of God.*
2. *Explain the lessons we can learn from the folly of Solomon’s later years.*
3. *Is marriage to the unbeliever allowable? In your answer refer to Solomon’s experiences.*

# The Kingdom is Divided

The Northern tribes  
wanted Jeroboam for  
their king. Color his  
part red.

Israel  
worshipped  
idols which  
Jeroboam  
built.

Judah and  
Benjamin stayed  
with Rehoboam,  
who was the son  
of Solomon.  
Colour Rehoboam's  
part of the country  
blue.



## **8. THE DIVIDED KINGDOM—ISRAEL AND JUDAH**

**“I will rend the Kingdom out of the hand of Solomon  
and will give ten tribes to thee.”**

*King Solomon reigned for 40 years. He was a great poet and very clever in every way. Yet, gradually his love for the wisdom of his God began to take second place; for “Solomon did evil in the sight of Yahweh, and went not fully after Yahweh, as did David his father” (1 Kings 11:6).*

*After Solomon’s death, Israel became divided into two nations — the North and South. The North became known as Israel and the South as Judah.*

### **1 Kings 11 and 12.**

#### **GOD’S WARNING TO SOLOMON BEFORE HIS DEATH.**

##### **1 Kings 11.**

The splendid reign of Solomon drew toward its end. His many wives led him into worship of idols and he built temples for them, “and Yahweh was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away.” Because of this he received a message, “I will surely rend the Kingdom from thee” (11:11-13). However, for the sake of David, his father, it was not to be in Solomon’s lifetime but in that of his son. Solomon commenced to reign when he was young (probably about 18 or 20 years; 1 Chronicles 29:1). He reigned for 40 years so he did not enjoy the long life God had promised him if he obeyed Him (1 Kings 3:14). He slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David, his father, and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead (2 Chronicles 9:31).

##### **THE CONFERENCE AT SHECHEM. 1 Kings 12:1-5.**

Rehoboam, whose mother was an Ammonitess, was to succeed Solomon upon the throne (1 Kings 11:43; 14:21). The public coronation was to take place at Shechem and all Israel gathered for the occasion. Yet in Israel there was trouble brewing. The people were dissatisfied with the high taxes that Solomon had placed upon them and so they appointed Jeroboam to be their spokesman to present their grievances to Rehoboam. Jeroboam had previously been a diligent servant of Solomon’s (1 Kings 11:28), but Ahijah the prophet had been sent by God to tell him, “Behold, I will rend the Kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and will give ten tribes to thee” (1 Kings 11:29-31). When Solomon heard of this he sought to kill Jeroboam (v.40) but he had fled to Egypt.

Now, following the death of Solomon the men of Israel sent for Jeroboam to come out of Egypt (v.2-3). Jeroboam was no doubt anxious to bring about the fulfilment of Ahijah’s prophecy and being a cunning



man he set about to take the kingdom for himself. He knew that there were two things that troubled the people:

1. There had always been jealousy and rivalry between the 10 tribes in the north and the 2 tribes in the south.
2. The people were grieved because of the heavy burdens of taxes they had to pay under the reign of Solomon.

Because of this discontent among the people when Rehoboam came to the throne, a tense atmosphere prevailed. Jeroboam used this opportunity to further his own cause. He headed a deputation and came to Rehoboam with a request. "Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter and we will serve thee." (v.4).

This was a reasonable demand and it shows how clever Jeroboam really was. Jeroboam knew that if Rehoboam rejected the request to make the taxes lighter he would appear a tyrant, but if he agreed with Jeroboam, then Jeroboam would appear a great man in the eyes of the people.

#### **THE FOLLY OF REHOBOAM. 1 Kings 12:6-15.**

Rehoboam told the people to depart for 3 days and then he would give his answer. Rehoboam then sought the advice from the "old men that stood before Solomon his father" (v.6). These wise men advised Rehoboam to give way to the people, otherwise he would have a revolt on his hands. "Speak good words to them" they said "and they will be your servants forever" (v.7). They knew it was important for a new young king to gain the favour of the people. They urged him to accept the conditions before him.

But Rehoboam also asked the advice of the young men who had grown up with him. These young men were inexperienced, impetuous and proud. In their view taxation should be sharply increased. They felt to give way to the demands of the people would be an evidence of weakness. So Rehoboam rejected the wise counsel of the old men and took the counsel of the foolish young men. He had not given heed to the words of his grandfather, David, who had said, "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God" (2 Sam. 23:3).

After 3 days the king came before the people and told them, "My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions" (v.14). He made them to feel the power of his position and roughly announced that their suffering would increase.

The result of this was an outbreak of rebellion.

#### **THE KINGDOM DIVIDED. 1 Kings 12:16-24.**

When the people saw that their request was rejected, they went back to their tents in a rebellious spirit. Rehoboam troubled by the revolt, sent Adoram to speak with the people. But a more foolish move could hardly be imagined for Adoram was in charge of the taxes! His presence incens-

ed the people even more, they took up stones and stoned him to death (v.18).

Rehoboam fled from Shechem to Jerusalem, and made ready a large army to crush the revolt. But God intervened, and through Shemaiah the prophet he was forbidden to go, because it was God's will that this should happen (v.22-24).

Jeroboam was elected king of the northern tribes, thus Israel was divided into two nations. The kingdom might have been taken away from Rehoboam altogether, like it had been taken away from Saul, but God remembered the faithful service of David and so two tribes were given to the seed of David. Not until the return of Christ (who is the seed of David) will the twelve tribes be united again (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30; Ezek. 37:22).

### **JEROBOAM'S FEAR AND APOSTACY. 1 Kings 12:25-33.**

Although Jeroboam was king of the North, he became fearful that his power would be taken from him. He realised that now the kingdom was divided into two, the people would go to Jerusalem to worship, for the law required that all males should appear before Yahweh three times a year (Ex. 23:17). He felt sure that his influence would wane. "If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of Yahweh at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah" (v.27).

So Jeroboam thought of a wicked and cunning plan. He told the people that it was too far for them to go to Jerusalem to worship. He set up two golden calves, one in Bethel and one in Dan and said "Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (v.28). He made priests of the common people, those who were not Levites. The true priests would not come and engage in this evil and wicked worship. Next Jeroboam changed the date of the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast was held on the 15th day of the 7th month but Jeroboam's feast was held on the 15th day of the 8th month. So the people sacrificed unto the two golden calves, making the worship appear to be the same, but it was not; he had perverted the Truth and deceived the people. Jeroboam is recorded in scripture as "the man who made Israel to sin" (1 Kings 14:16). God requires that man must worship Him in the way He has set down, we "must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

All of the 23 kings that came after followed his ways, save the last. Of them the words recur time and time again, "He walked in all the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin". God was so displeased with Jeroboam that He declared His intention to utterly destroy his house (1 Kings 14:7-16).

### **LESSON FOR US:**

Rehoboam was weak and did not understand his duty to lead Israel in

serving God. His own ambition and greed and thoughtlessness of his brethren in Israel lost for him the ten northern tribes. God gives us a task to do in leading others to serve Him and then caring for them. He wishes us to be an example in all godly things, learning His will from the Bible, teaching it faithfully, and doing it always (1 Timothy 4:12-16).

Never forget that God is anxious that we pray to Him about important decisions and tasks (Proverbs 15:8, 29). This Rehoboam failed to do when he turned rather to his young foolish friends for advice.

Whereas Rehoboam was weak, Jeroboam was strong, but only in self-will and determination to gain his own ends. He became infamous for "leading Israel to sin". We must learn to humble ourselves, not seeking our own profit and glory, but rather doing all things to the honour and glory of Yahweh, serving Him as He has commanded in spirit and in truth.

#### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

"The Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 4, No. 11.

"The Ways of Providence" (R. Roberts)—Chapter 19.

"The Visible Hand of God" (R. Roberts)—Chapter 25.

#### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What was the request of Jeroboam and the people to Rehoboam?*
2. *Whose advice did Rehoboam seek and whose advice did he take?*
3. *In what ways did Jeroboam cause Israel to sin?*

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *What was the cause of the kingdom under Rehoboam being divided?*
2. *Describe fully how Jeroboam "made Israel to sin"?*

## 9. ELIJAH THE PROPHET WARNS THE HOUSE OF AHAB

**“There shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word.”**

*With the division of the nation into ten tribes and two tribes, the ten tribes in the north became known as ISRAEL and the two tribes in the south as JUDAH.*

*During the years that followed this division of the nation, the Kingdom of Israel, (the ten tribes in the north) declined spiritually, and their kings walked in ways of wickedness and idolatry.*

*The king who was reigning upon the throne at the time when Elijah the prophet was sent to them was Ahab. Of Ahab it is said, that he “did more to provoke Yahweh God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him” (1 Kings 16:33). He married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians. She was a very wicked woman who worshipped the idol Baal and she urged her husband to build altars for Israel to likewise worship this heathen god. Of Jezebel and Ahab it is recorded, “There was none like Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of Yahweh, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up (incited, mg.)” (1 Kings 21:25). Thus with such leaders to encourage idolatry and wickedness the people of Israel were in a wayward and disobedient state when Yahweh sent His servant Elijah to them.*

### **1 Kings 17 and 18.**

#### **THE SUDDEN APPEARANCE OF ELIJAH. 1 Kings 17:1.**

Suddenly and dramatically a strange and colourful character appeared in the court of Ahab. He was a hairy man, clothed in a leather girdle around his loins with a mantle slung around his shoulders (c.p. 2 Kings 1:8)—Elijah, the Tishbite. He stood before King Ahab and uttered his astounding message, “As Yahweh God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word” (1 Kings 17:1). After delivering this message he left the king.

Many years earlier God had foretold that He would send drought as a punishment upon Israel if they turned to other gods (Deuteronomy 11:16-17). Thus they had brought this fearful punishment on themselves by their wickedness.

#### **ELIJAH AT THE BROOK CHERITH. 1 Kings 17:2-7.**

God directed Elijah to cross Jordan and hide at the brook Cherith. As drought parched the land, Ahab searched everywhere for the prophet who had foretold this would happen. Meanwhile Elijah was sustained by the water of the brook, and bread and flesh brought morning and evening by ravens. Yahweh had said, “I have commanded the ravens to feed

thee there” (v.4). Of the many spectacular ways God could have provided food, it was to be through the humiliating experience of depending upon ravens—unclean birds to Elijah! (Leviticus 11:15). As though to demonstrate God’s overruling power, these scavenger birds, that during a famine would normally consume all they found, were “converted” from scavengers to providers.

But there was another lesson being taught!

### **ELIJAH AT ZAREPHATH: THE CALL OF THE GENTILES. 1 Kings 17:8-24.**

As an unclean bird, the raven symbolised the Gentiles, unwashed by the word of God (Leviticus 20:22-26). But in this case the “unclean” had been “cleansed” and used to provide the prophet of God with food. A clean bird or animal could have been used, but it was not in God’s purpose to do this. Elijah was being taught that those who were esteemed “unclean” by Israel could have their hearts purified by faith. Elijah was about to be told to go to a Gentile woman of faith, with a message of life. God was no respecter of persons.

After some time the brook Cherith dried up because of the drought, and God said “Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon and dwell there: Behold I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee” (v.9). Note how the widow woman is paralleled with the raven (v.4).

This divine command to seek out a Gentile widow woman of the same district as Jezebel no doubt seemed strange to Elijah’s ears (c.p. 16:31 and 17:9).

But this Gentile woman revealed an amazing faith in the God of Israel. She was prepared to deny herself and her son the last morsel of food they had, and because of this faith the prophet of the God of Israel promised an unending supply of meat and oil (v.11-15). She, a Gentile, survived the famine while many in Israel perished for she had the faith that Israel lacked. Without faith it is impossible to please God (cp. Hebrews 11:6, 35, c.p. 1 Kings 17:23).

### **ELIJAH MEETS AHAB. 1 Kings 18:1-20.**

God told Elijah that He was going to end the drought and send rain. He told Elijah to go and reveal himself to Ahab. When Ahab saw Elijah he accused him of “troubling Israel” (v.17). But Elijah fearlessly answered him, “I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father’s house, in that you have forsaken the commandments of Yahweh and thou hast followed Baalim” (v.18).

Then Elijah commanded that all Israel should assemble with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of the groves upon Mt. Carmel.

## **CONTEST ON MOUNT CARMEL: NO MORE TWO OPINIONS**

### **1 Kings 18:21-40.**

With all Israel and the company of false prophets before him, the courageous prophet issued the challenge, “How long halt ye between two opinions? If Yahweh be God, follow him: But if Baal, then follow him.” (v.21). The people were speechless. Elijah pointed out that he, as Yahweh’s sole representative, was set against four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. He laid down a simple test whereby the issue could be settled. The people all agreed.

The prophets of Baal were to make ready a bullock and lay it on wood on their altar and put no fire under it. Then they were to call upon their gods, to send down fire to consume the sacrifice. Elijah was to do the same, and the God that answered would be the true God.

But alas, the prophets of Baal called from morning till noon and no answer came. “And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, Cry aloud; for he is a god, either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey or peradventure he sleepeth and must be awaked” (v.27).

So they cried louder — “O Baal hear us”, and cut themselves with knives, but by evening there was still no answer.

Then Elijah’s turn came, he repaired the old altar of Yahweh that had been broken down. He took 12 stones, representing the 12 tribes and restored the altar, then placed his bullock on the wood on the altar. He dug a trench around the altar and then poured 12 barrels of water over the sacrifice and wood and the trench filled with water.

At the time of the evening sacrifice, the time of prayer, Elijah called upon Yahweh and said, “Yahweh God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel” (v.36). Suddenly without warning, fire from heaven struck the sacrifice and burnt not only the wood and sacrifice but the stones, dust and water as well. Fearful and astonished the people fell on their faces to the ground before the mighty manifestation of Divine Power. “And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, Yahweh, He is the God; Yahweh, He is the God” (v.39). No longer could they halt between two opinions; the issue had been settled. Elijah wasted no time and commanded that the 450 prophets of Baal be executed at the Brook Kishon.

We too must acknowledge that there still is only ONE GOD and ONE FAITH: we cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:24).

### **THE DROUGHT BREAKS. 1 Kings 18:41-46.**

With the prophets’ acknowledgement that Yahweh alone was the true God, Elijah announced an end to the drought. He bade Ahab eat and drink “for there is a sound of abundance of rain” (v.41).

Elijah went to the top of Mt. Carmel and prayed earnestly for rain (c.p. James 5:17-18). He told his servant to go and look towards the sea to see if there was any sign of rain. He came back saying “There is

nothing” (v.43). Six times Elijah prayed and six times his servant had nothing to report.

But on the seventh occasion the servant reported a small cloud, no larger than a man’s hand. God was answering Elijah’s prayer.

Soon the storm clouds gathered until the “heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain” (v.45).

Ahab drove with speed in his chariot to Jezreel. At the same time Elijah with strength given to him by God out-ran the chariot, and arrived in Jezreel before the king (see picture at commencement of notes).

The reform that Elijah brought about was short-lived. Elijah’s work has not been completed. He will take up his work again after he has been raised from the grave at Christ’s coming. His work will be to prepare the hearts of the people of Israel for their king (Mal. 4:5-6). We can look forward to the day when God will make His people “one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all” (Ezekiel 37:22).

#### **LESSON FOR US:**

Let us note how powerful Yahweh’s word is in the mouth of the prophets—even to close or open heaven; to bring fire or rain there from.

As Gentiles and not Israelites of the stock of Abraham, we, like the woman of Zarephath, are saved by faith and obedience. We must not “halt” between two opinions. We cannot serve two masters, and love God AND the world. God rightly demands our WHOLE heart and soul and mind. This is the greatest commandment.

#### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

“The Story of the Bible” (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 5, No. 1.

“The Visible Hand of God” (R. Roberts)—Chapters 25-27.

“The Ways of Providence” (R. Roberts)—Chapter 19.

“Elijah the Tishbite” (J. Martin)—Chapters 1-6.

#### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *Where did God tell Elijah to hide at first and how did God care for him?*
2. *Upon what basis was the woman of Zarephath saved?*
3. *Describe Elijah’s sacrifice and how God showed His acceptance.*
4. *Elijah went to Mt. Carmel and prayed for rain — describe what happened.*
5. *Elijah’s work is not complete, when will he take up his work again and what will his work be?*

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Tell the story of how God cared for Elijah; what lessons can we learn from this?*
2. *Describe the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal; what lessons can we learn from this?*

## 10. JUDGMENT UPON THE HOUSE OF AHAB

“whom Jezebel his wife stirred up”

*Ahab was a man who knew what was right, but lacked sufficient strength of purpose to put his knowledge into practice. Elijah had brought the Divine warning to Ahab and demonstrated it with miraculous signs, such as the famine (1 Kings 17) and the sacrifice on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). Although he recognised the power of Yahweh in these things and did not object to the slaying of the prophets of Baal, yet when Jezebel threatened Elijah's life, he offered no protest. He could not receive Divine thoughts and his behaviour worsened as he allowed his wife to arrange for the murder of Naboth, a man whose righteous life revealed deep religious conviction.*

*The action of Jehu in swiftly annihilating the house of Ahab illustrates the principle that God will not be mocked, but will punish the evildoers.*

**1 Kings 19; 21; 2 Kings 9; 10.**

**ELIJAH REASSURED. 1 Kings 19:1-2.**

Elijah must have thought that after the great demonstration of Divine power on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18) no one would ever again tolerate false worship. His optimism was, however, shortlived. When Ahab told Jezebel all that had happened on Mt. Carmel and how Elijah had slain the prophets of Baal, she was very angry and sent a message to Elijah saying “So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as one of them by tomorrow about this time” (1 Kings 19:2).

In fear of his life Elijah fled and eventually came to Mt. Horeb. The prophet wished that he could die. He could not see how he could succeed in his great mission to turn the hearts of the people away from their idolatrous worship.

As Elijah rested in a cave God spoke to him and asked him, “What doest thou here Elijah” (v.9). Elijah replied that he had done everything possible to reform Israel, but they would not heed, “and I, even I only am left, and they seek my life to take it away” (v.10). God told Elijah to stand upon the mount, “And behold Yahweh passed by and a great and strong wind rent the mountains and brake in pieces the rocks . . . but Yahweh was not in the wind.” “And after the wind an earthquake, but Yahweh was not in the earthquake: after the earthquake, a fire; but Yahweh was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice” (v.11-12).

Elijah's work had been like that of the fierce wind, earthquake and fire, each of which demonstrated the power of God in judgment and destruction. But God was trying to show Elijah that there was something he had overlooked, and this was just as important as judgment. What was needed was the still small voice of instruction in God's Word. Unknown to Elijah there were still 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed



down to Baal. Elijah was questioned: "What doest thou here Elijah?" implying that there remained a great number of people to whom he should teach the "still, small voice" of Yahweh's Word, so that their faith and courage may be built up. There is a great need, today, to "strengthen the things which remain" (Rev. 3:2). This is done in our ecclesias and our Sunday Schools by faithful teachers building up our faith so that we may individually overcome the ungodly pressures of those perilous last days.

### **THE PROMISE OF RETRIBUTION. 1 Kings 19:14-18.**

In His answer to Elijah, Yahweh also encouraged him with a message telling him of the judgment that would fall upon the wicked house of Ahab. God would use the swords of Hazael, King of Syria, Jehu, King of Israel and finally, Elisha the prophet (1 Kings 20:17). Faithful followers of Yahweh today can be assured that evil will be put down in the future when the Kingdom of Men is destroyed and replaced by the Kingdom of God (Psalm 149; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Daniel 2:44-45).

### **THE WICKEDNESS OF AHAB. 1 Kings 21.**

Ahab loved luxury and pleasure; however he wanted the land that was adjacent to his palace in Jezreel. The land belonged to Naboth the Jezreelite. Ahab spake unto Naboth saying, "Give me thy vineyard that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house; and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it, or if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money." (v.2).

But Naboth refused; he was a righteous man and respected God's law. The law strictly forbade the sale of a man's inheritance unless there were circumstances which forced him to sell (Num. 36:7; Lev. 25:23). Even then the land was to be returned to its original owner in the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:13).

Thus Naboth refused to sell and Ahab became sullen and despondent. He could not understand why Naboth refused to sell and like a little sulky boy "he laid down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread" (v.4).

### **JEZEBEL'S CUNNING PLAN. 1 Kings 21:5-16.**

When Jezebel saw Ahab's mood she said, "Do you not govern the kingdom; Arise, and eat bread and let thy heart be merry; I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth" (v.7).

She then cunningly plotted the cold blooded murder of Naboth. She wrote letters in Ahab's name, and arranged that the elders of the city should proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high amongst the people. Then in the midst of this, false witnesses would challenge him and accuse him of blaspheming God and the king, then Naboth would be taken out and stoned to death.

This terrible crime was carried out, and when Jezebel received the news that Naboth and his sons were dead (2 Kings 9:26), she said to Ahab,

“Arise take possession of the vineyard, for Naboth is not alive, but dead” (v.15).

The weak character of Ahab and the ruthless determination of his wicked wife are vividly contrasted. Ahab did not give any thought to poor Naboth; all he could think of was that the vineyard was his, and he joyfully set off to claim it.

### **ELIJAH DENOUNCES AHAB. 1 Kings 21:17-24.**

Nothing can be hidden from God (1 Peter 3:12; Heb. 4:13; Psa. 139:1-4). God told Elijah “Arise go down to meet Ahab, and say; ‘Thus saith Yahweh, Hast thou killed and also taken possession? . . . In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood” (v.18, 19). So Elijah went and met Ahab in the vineyard of Naboth and gave him the message from God. He also said that God would completely destroy his house. When Ahab heard these words he realised the full enormity of what he had done. He rent his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted (v.27).

### **JEHU IS USED TO BRING DIVINE RETRIBUTION UPON THE HOUSE OF AHAB. 2 Kings 9 & 10.**

It was to be through Jehu that the house of Ahab was to be utterly destroyed. Ahab was killed in battle and just as Elijah had prophesied, the dogs licked his blood (1 Kings 22:37-38).

Jehu was a ruthless man and had a reputation for mad, furious driving in his chariot (2 Kings 9:20). Jehu willingly carried out the commands of God (2 Kings 10:30). He slew Jezebel and trod her underfoot with his horse (2 Kings 9:31-33). He killed 70 of the sons of Ahab (2 Kings 10:7), and completely wiped out the worshippers of Baal and broke down the images (2 Kings 10:18-28). “So Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab, all his great men, and his kinsfolks, and his priests, until he left him none remaining” (v.11).

### **JEHU ASSESSED BY THE SPIRIT — HIS FAILURE. 2 Kings 10:29-36.**

Although Jehu was used to destroy the whole house of Ahab and the worship of Baal, he was not himself a man of upright character. “Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of Yahweh God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin” (v.31). He retained the idolatrous calf-worship established by Jeroboam and drew Israel away from the true worship centred in Jerusalem.

### **LESSON FOR US:**

A consistent God-fearing walk in the Truth is required of those who would seek to please God (James 1:5-7). Ahab wavered, and was easily manipulated by his evil and idolatrous wife. Marriage in the Truth avoids this evil (Proverbs 19:14; Ephesians 5:25-33). It produces true balance in

brethren and sisters, for they learn to sacrifice self-interest for others, and not as Ahab and Jezebel, who sought to satisfy their own pleasure at the expense of others. Although the wicked seem to prosper, they have no lasting prosperity or satisfaction (Psalm 73). If we seek shelter in Yahweh through baptism into the Lord Jesus Christ, we may suffer from the evils of this world, but a character acceptable to God will be formed, fitting us to be citizens of Zion in the future.

Yahweh's character is a perfect blend of mercy and justice (Exodus 34:6-7; Romans 11:22). If we follow the example of Christ, we shall benefit from His grace and mercy in the age to come. Those who rebel against His ways, will feel His severity.

This lesson helps us to see God's attitude to sin. He will not tolerate sin, though He gives ample opportunity for sinners to repent. Those who reject His mercy will receive swift and sure punishment.

#### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

- "The Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 5, Nos. 2-4.
- "The Ways of Providence" (R. Roberts)—Chapter 20.
- "The Visible Hand of God" (R. Roberts)—Chapter 27—30.
- "Elijah the Tishbite" (J. Martin)—Chapters 7-10.

#### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What did Elijah learn from the "still small voice"?*
2. *What was it that Ahab wanted, and how did he get it?*
3. *Because of Ahab's evil in taking Naboth's vineyard, God denounced him through Elijah — what was the judgment?*
4. *In what way did Jehu carry out God's judgment against the house of Ahab?*
5. *What sort of man was Jehu? How did he fail before God?*

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *What was it that Ahab wanted and how did Jezebel go about obtaining it?*
2. *What lesson do we learn from Ahab's character and his way of life?*

## 11. ELIJAH AND ELISHA

**“The Spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha”**

*During the reign of Ahab, Israel’s behaviour deserved God’s judgment, and Elijah the prophet was the means by which this was administered to a wicked king and a rebellious nation. However, Elijah needed to be taught that the work of God involved not only the judgment of the wicked and the destruction of idolatry, but also the education and strengthening of men and women in Divine ways. It was this aspect of encouraging and building up a faithful remnant of believers that formed the basis of Elisha’s merciful mission. When viewed together, the work of these two mighty prophets presents a beautifully balanced picture of Yahweh’s character. It should be our endeavour now to manifest those same characteristics.*

### 1 Kings 19 & 2 Kings 2.

#### **ELIJAH AND THE STILL SMALL VOICE**

On Mt. Carmel, before an audience of the people of Israel, the king and the false worshippers of Baal, Elijah was able to dramatically demonstrate that Yahweh was the true and living God.

But Elijah fled from the violent anger of Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1-3), while the weak King Ahab sat by. In these circumstances Elijah was depressed, feeling that his life was in danger because of his stand for the Truth, and was convinced that he alone was left in Israel to serve Yahweh (1 Kings 19:9-10). He was re-assured by God’s demonstration of the fact that He would work through those who would quietly submit to His ways (c.p. 1 Kings 19:10-12; Job 4:16), for 7,000 had also stood aside in Israel and had not worshipped Baal (v.18).

Elijah was humbled by what God had revealed to him at Mt. Horeb. God then directed Elijah to return and perform 3 tasks:

1. He was to anoint Hazael to be king of Syria.
2. He was to anoint Jehu to be king over Israel.
3. He was to anoint Elisha to be his successor (v.15-18).

#### **ELISHA SUCCEEDS ELIJAH. 1 Kings 19:19-21.**

Only the last command was carried out by Elijah, the other two were performed by Elisha.

Elijah returned from Mt. Horeb and found Elisha the son of Shaphat ploughing in the fields. Elijah threw his mantle upon Elisha, indicating that God wanted him to be his successor. Elisha “left his oxen and ran after him, and said Let me I pray thee, kiss my father and mother and then I will follow thee” (v.20). So Elisha willingly separated himself from his old way of life and “went after Elijah, and ministered unto him” (v.21).

During the next few years Elijah and Elisha devoted much of their time restoring the school of the prophets which Jezebel tried to destroy. People gathered together to learn of God under Elijah's teaching. The still small voice of God's word was quietly building up a body of men and women to act as centres of strength within the nation.

In our Sunday Schools, we too can gather together with others of like precious faith to hear the still small voice of God's Word. We can thereby be glorifying God in our study and meditation and thus be an example of the believers who love His word and keep his commandments.

### **ELIJAH TAKEN UP INTO HEAVEN. 2 Kings 2.**

As they were journeying together from Gilgal, Elijah told Elisha to tarry in a certain place because God had directed him to go to Bethel. Elisha refused to leave Elijah's side, so they went on together. At Bethel, the sons of the prophets came to Elisha and asked if he knew that God would take Elijah away that day. A similar incident occurred twice after this, once on the way to Jericho and again on the way to Jordan but as before Elisha refused to separate from his master. When they reached the banks of the river Jordan, Elijah smote the water with his mantle, which caused the river to divide. After they had passed over, Elijah asked Elisha to name just one thing which he would like him to do before he departed, and Elisha said, "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me". He did not mean that he wanted twice the power of Elijah, but rather was he asking to be the successor of Elijah (as is indicated by the original Hebrew). Although Elisha had asked "an hard thing" (because only God could grant such a request) he was assured by Elijah that he would receive it on the condition that he saw him depart. A little later, the two men were separated by a flaming fiery chariot, and Elijah was taken up into the clouds of heaven out of sight by a whirlwind. The great prophet Elijah thus finished his mission — and it was now time for Elisha, the "man of God", to take up the work where his master had left off.

### **ELIJAH'S FUTURE WORK. Malachi 4:5-6; Mark 9:11-12.**

Elijah was taken in the middle of his work — but he will resume his work once again in the future. God tells us in Malachi 4:5 "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD". At the second coming of Christ, God will send Elijah to the people of Israel scattered throughout the world to advise them that their Messiah has returned.

### **THE MAN ELISHA AND HIS MISSION.**

Elisha picked up the fallen mantle of Elijah and turned to retrace his steps, wondering about what he had seen. Would he receive "the double portion" of Elijah's spirit? He tore his own garment into two pieces and took up *Elijah's mantle* which had fallen to the ground as Elijah was taken away. Returning to the river Jordan, he took the mantle and smote the river just as Elijah had done, saying, "Where is Yahweh God of Elijah?" In answer to this cry, God parted the river, not because the mantle

had any power, but because Elisha had asked for a miracle. So, with this great sign that God's spirit was with him, Elisha walked back over the dry river bed. Then the sons of the prophets who had been watching, said, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha" (2:15).

The unyielding, outspoken, determined voice of Elijah demanding reform, denouncing sin, proclaiming coming judgment stirred all Israel. It made the labour and teaching of the quieter, more gentle Elisha more effective. Elijah performed eight miracles during his ministry, most of which spoke of judgment; for example, drought and fire from heaven. On the other hand Elisha's sixteen miracles basically spoke of mercy, of healing, of God's providence, of encouragement in the life of faith, and of God's determination to save those who trust in Him. However, when necessary, Elisha did not fail to reveal Yahweh as a God of judgment. On one particular occasion, early in his ministry, he was on his way to Bethel when a group of children or young men (see use of the same Hebrew word in Genesis 21:12; 41:12; 1 Kings 20:14) began to mock him saying, "Go up thou bald head!" Elisha turned and cursed them in the name of Yahweh, upon which two she bears emerged from the wood and killed 42 of them. Here is an important lesson for us in respect for elders, especially God's servants in the ecclesia. God will not be mocked, nor may His word be counted as a little thing. Elijah's and Elisha's ministry demonstrated that.

God will show His mercy to all who are prepared to turn their hearts to Him, but He will also bring judgment upon those who turn aside from His precepts and disregard Him.

No one today has God's gift of holy spirit power to perform miracles, but we all have God's spirit word which was given by inspiration of the spirit of God (2 Timothy 3:16). Jesus claimed in many places that the words he spoke were God's and not his own (John 12:49, 50); and in John 6:63 he said, "the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." So we can, by believing God's word, obtain from the record of these miracles and the example of so many faithful people, the same certainty that the God we worship is the true and living God.

#### **LESSON FOR US:**

God provided carefully and well for the instruction of His people. Today also God carefully provides instruction for us, for He has preserved his word for us all to use. Let us take an example from Elisha and the "sons of the Prophets" who eagerly followed after Elijah and learnt all they could from this man who spoke God's word (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

Elisha, though only young when called to follow Elijah, did so willingly and eagerly. He became a faithful servant and was chosen by God to follow on Elijah's work. Though we are young, we too can cooperate willingly and eagerly in learning the Truth and working for Christ (1 Timothy 4:12-16).

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

“The Visible Hand of God” (R. Roberts)—Chapters 28-30.

“The Story of the Bible” (H.P. Mansfield)—Vo. 5, No. 4.

“Elijah the Tishbite” (J. Martin)—Chapters 7-10.

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *How did Elijah apply the lesson of the “still small voice” of instruction in the word of God?*
2. *Elijah has a work to do in the future — what is it?*
3. *What request did Elisha make to Elijah before Elijah was taken away in a whirlwind?*
4. *In what ways did the missions of Elijah and Elisha differ?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Describe how Elijah was taken up and how the “spirit of Elijah” rested upon Elisha.*

## THE EIGHT MIRACLES OF ELIJAH

No.	Miracle	Reference	Spiritual Significance
1.	The shutting of heaven	1 Kings 17:1	Spiritual drought (Amos 8:11).
2.	Multiplication of oil	1 Kings 17:14	Food for the godly amidst drought.
3.	Widow's son raised	1 Kings 17:22, 23	The resurrection.
4.	Fire from heaven	1 Kings 18:38	Vindication at judgment.
5.	Rain	1 Kings 18:45	Outpouring of Spirit (Joel 2:23).
6.	Destruction of fifty	2 Kings 1:10	Rejection at judgment.
7.	Destruction of fifty	2 Kings 1:12	Rejection at judgment.
8.	Waters divided	2 Kings 2:8	Dominion over symbolic water (cp. Rev. 17:15).

## THE SIXTEEN MIRACLES OF ELISHA

No.	Miracle	Reference	Spiritual Significance
1.	Waters divided	2 Kings 2:14	The mantle of Elijah rests on Elisha.
2.	Waters healed	2 Kings 2:21	Healing through "the salt of the covenant" (Lev. 2:13; Num. 18:19).
3.	Bears destroy mockers	2 Kings 2:24	Punishment of all mockers and rejecters of God.
4.	Water in a barren land	2 Kings 3:20	God's providential care amidst a barren world.
5.	Oil for the widow	2 Kings 4:1	An unending supply of God's Word to sustain those who trust in Him.
6.	The gift of a son	2 Kings 4:16	Loving service yields a Divinely-given seed.
7.	Raising the dead son	2 Kings 4:35	Resurrection of the God-given seed.
8.	Healing the food	2 Kings 4:41	To add to God-given food results in "death in the pot", but contentment with "our daily bread" gives health.
9.	Bread multiplied	2 Kings 4:43	Even amidst drought, God will supply "the bread of life" to all who come to Him.
10.	Naaman healed	2 Kings 5:10	Belief and burial in water cleanses from sin and leads to newness of life.
11.	Gehazi smitten	2 Kings 5:27	To covet the riches of this world is to court the judgment of God.
12.	Iron made to float	2 Kings 6:6	Those who are lost (the iron) can be recovered through the impact of the Cross (the stake cut down and cast into the water).
13.	Sight to the blind	2 Kings 6:17	Faith enables God's people to see His providential care of them.
14.	Syrians smitten with blindness	2 Kings 6:18	The same Providence operates to protect God's people from those who would destroy them.
15.	Restoration of sight	2 Kings 6:20	It is only when we are led captive by God that wars will cease and we will find true peace.
16.	Life through death	2 Kings 13:21	Jesus Christ "through death, destroyed him that had the power of death" (Heb. 2:14) and contact with him results in resurrection.



## 12. NAAMAN THE SYRIAN

**“Now I know that there is no God in all the earth,  
but in Israel.”**

*The scripture states that “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4). Thus the healing of Naaman’s leprosy is more than just an interesting story. It is recorded, like the rest of the Bible, that we might learn a lesson to help us in our understanding of God’s word and His purpose. The story foreshadows the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles because of the unbelief of Israel. More than that, as our attention is focused upon Naaman, we see his failing — his faulty reasoning and pride — which attitude so often stops God from acting in the lives of those desiring to seek Him. We are shown that obedience is the key to unlock the door to God’s power and bring joy and peace, and we are graphically shown that this obedience must stem from a humble and contrite heart. There are lessons for us all in this simple yet intriguing story.*

### **2 Kings 5.**

#### **NAAMAN THE LEPER GOES TO SAMARIA. 2 Kings 5:1-5.**

Naaman was captain of Syria’s army — a proud man, a courageous soldier and held in high esteem by the King and the people. Although he was a popular and mighty man of valour he was plagued by the dreaded disease of leprosy.

To a thoughtful Israelite, the Law of Moses taught some important spiritual lessons concerning this disease. It was a symbol of sin and mortality, and any Hebrew who was smitten with the disease was put outside the camp and cut off from his people and the worship of the Tabernacle. It was in effect a living death! When a person had leprosy, his flesh would become a mass of putrid sores and ulcers which would disfigure parts of the body and ultimately bring death. When Miriam was smitten with leprosy because of her sin, Aaron said, “Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed” (Numbers 12:12). Just as a leper became weaker and his flesh decayed and eventually died, so mortal man grows old, decays and dies. God gave this disease symbolic meaning in order to impress upon Israel the fact that sin will inevitably cause decay and death. For the Gentiles however, it held no spiritual significance. It was inconvenient and obviously to be avoided because of its consequences, but not a matter of shame.

At the time at which this incident happened, Israel and Syria were not at war, although small bands of Syrians often raided towns in the north of Israel and took spoil and captives. One such captive was a little maid who became a servant to Naaman’s wife. Knowing that Naaman had leprosy, the young Israelitish maid said one day, “Would God my Lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! For he would recover him of his leprosy” (v.3). Before long Benhadad, the king of Syria heard of the

young maid's confident statement about Elisha, the prophet of God in Israel and arranged for Naaman to take a letter of introduction with an explanation of his affliction to the king of Israel along with a present of gold, silver and clothing.

### **JEHORAM'S EMBARRASSMENT. 2 Kings 5:6-9.**

When Jehoram, the king of Israel, read the letter he reacted with fear and anger. The king of Syria had asked him to cure Naaman of his leprosy. What a ridiculous request! How could he cure such a disease? Rending his clothes he exclaimed, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeks a quarrel against me." Jehoram was a faithless man and did not really care about God. He had obviously forgotten the power of God manifested through Elisha's hand earlier in his reign when he went up against the king of Moab (see 2 Kings 3:13-18). He would also forget this incident when some time later Benhadad attacked Israel. He only accepted and worshipped God when it was convenient for him to do so. The little captive maid in Syria showed much greater faith than did the king of her nation.

When Elisha heard of Naaman's visit he sent a message to the king saying, "Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel" (v.8). So the great warrior Naaman was sent to the house of the prophet of God. Until now everything had gone according to plan for Naaman, but he was soon to learn that God will work for man but only on His own terms.

### **NAAMAN'S PRIDE AND HUMILITY. 2 Kings 5:10-19.**

There is no doubt that Naaman came to Elisha with preconceived ideas as to what would be required of him. He no doubt pictured in his mind how the prophet would hurry out to greet him, cure his disease and then in turn, be rewarded by the captain of Syria's host. However, his pride was offended when a servant was sent out to pass on a message from the prophet. Naaman had expected Elisha to come out himself and with a dramatic demonstration of power, call upon Yahweh his God to cure him. Yet all he received was the message, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times". Naaman was furious. Not only did the idea of washing seven times seem ridiculous, but the fact that it had to be the muddy river Jordan made it even worse. Were not the rivers of Syria better than the Jordan? And so he turned away in a rage. Had he returned to Damascus, he would have remained a leper, for as long as he remained stubborn and refused to obey the command of Elisha he would retain his leprosy. Naaman had to learn, like all must learn, that before we can receive God's mercy, we must humble ourselves and obey his commands. Those who refuse to listen to God's word and be baptised can never hope to be cleansed from sin.

Fortunately, in Naaman's case, good sense prevailed, and his servants suggested he reconsider the words of Elisha. If he had been asked to do some great thing he would not have hesitated, so why then did he object

to doing such a simple thing as washing in Jordan seven times? Naaman fortunately was prepared to accept the sound advice of his servants. Not only did this require the acknowledging of the foolishness of his actions before his servants, but also demanded humbling himself before God.

Six times Naaman bathed with no effects, but on the seventh time his body was wonderfully cleansed of the dreaded disease. Moreover, his attitude had also changed. His pride and arrogance were gone and he returned to Elisha's house saying, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel". On this occasion the prophet was pleased to receive him, just as the Lord Jesus Christ will be pleased to receive all those who come to him with humble and contrite hearts through the waters of baptism.

The parallel between the cleansing of Naaman the leper and baptism (cleansing from sin) of those who seek to follow Christ is remarkable. Just as acceptance of what Elisha said and obedience by washing in Jordan were essential for Naaman to lose his leprosy, so today belief and baptism are essential for salvation. Jesus himself said, "Except a man be born of water (baptised) and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God", and, "he that believeth (the gospel) and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned" (John 3:5; Mark 16:15-16, see also Acts 2:28, 41, 44; 8:12-16; 10:45-48; 18:8; 19:2, 4, 5; 22:16). Those who count baptism unnecessary resemble the proud, stubborn spirit of Naaman before he humbled himself.

### **GEHAZI'S GREED AND JUDGMENT. 2 Kings 5:20-27.**

When Naaman returned to Elisha's house from the Jordan, he offered Elisha many gifts as a token of his appreciation for being cured. Elisha refused to take them, for he gave God the glory for this great miracle, and he sent Naaman on his way rejoicing. However, Gehazi, Elisha's servant, looked on with disapproval at what his master had done, and said to himself, "Behold, my master has spared Naaman the Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought; but as Yahweh lives, I will run after him and take somewhat of him" (v.20). Gehazi had witnessed the pride and humiliation of Naaman and had seen the reaction of his master to the Syrian general, and it all seemed so meaningless to him. He lacked perception of the principles upon which God acted — God's grace cannot be purchased with man's money (Isaiah 55:1-3). Gehazi was a type of Israel who with the power of God in their midst, did not recognise the principles contained in the Law. And so he ran after the chariot, and when the company had stopped he told Naaman that his master had sent him to ask for a talent of silver and two changes of raiment because two of the sons of the prophets had come to him. Although Naaman may have been a little surprised, he gladly gave Gehazi more than he asked for, and commanded two of his servants to carry the goods back to the secret place where Gehazi had arranged to hide them (v.24 margin).

However, Elisha exposed Gehazi's deceitful action when he returned and told him that the dreaded disease Naaman had been cured of would be transferred to him. As servant to the great prophet of God and having witnessed the power of God on so many occasions through Elisha's hand, we may think it impossible that Gehazi could have done such a thing. But apparently the riches of this present world meant more to him than anything else. He had greedily sought a reward, and although he gained a rich prize from a worldly point of view, it brought no lasting joy or happiness, but rather sorrow, pain and rejection.

**LESSON FOR US:**

We are all mortal, and like the leper, "diseased" and dying. We too must seek the God of Israel to be cleansed just as Naaman did. Before Naaman could be healed he had to humble himself in the sight of God and obey his commands; so must we. Faithless king Jehoram only believed and recognised God when it suited him. We must take heed and act at all times as though God were at our side; not ignoring Him. We must be content with those things we have and not put aside the things of God to seek after this world's goods as Gehazi did.

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

"The Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield) — Vol. 5, No. 5.

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *Explain how leprosy is used by God to represent sin.*
2. *Describe what Naaman had to do to be healed. Describe his necessary actions and attitude.*
3. *What is the parallel between the cleansing of Naaman and Baptism?*
4. *Describe Gehazi's greed and its consequences.*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Describe the healing of Naaman and show how Naaman found that humility and obedience to God were essential for his cleansing.*
2. *Describe Gehazi's greed and God's judgment and briefly show what we can learn from it.*

## 13. JONAH

### “Salvation is of Yahweh”

*Following the reign of Jehu, King of Israel, the throne was occupied by Jehoahaz, Jehoash (also known as Joash) and then Jeroboam II. During Jeroboam's reign, four prophets, Jonah, Isaiah, Hosea and Amos, prophesied to the nation. While attempting to turn Israel from their wicked ways, Jonah was instructed by God to warn the Assyrians to repent from their wickedness. Jonah reasoned that if the Assyrians did repent then they would prosper and eventually be a real threat to the safety of Israel, his beloved people. So he attempted to avoid the command of God, but he finally learned, as we all must learn, that no man can go against the purpose of God, or stand in the way of Divine justice. Rebellion only brings God's judgment, but repentance will bring His mercy.*

### Jonah 1-4.

#### THE MAN JONAH. Jonah 1:1.

Jonah himself was the son of Amittai, and came from Gath-hepher, a small village in Galilee about three miles north-east of Nazareth (2 Kings 14:25). He was one who showed great concern for the welfare of his brethren — a quality to be desired in all true followers of God. In this, however, he became over-zealous to the extent of endeavouring to turn aside God's righteous judgment from them.

#### JONAH'S COMMISSION. Jonah 1:2.

Although Israel was prospering outwardly, internally the spiritual state of the nation was rapidly declining, even though Jonah was attempting to stop it. It was at this time that Jonah was sent to preach repentance to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire. He was to warn the people that the city would be overthrown within 40 days unless they repented of their evil ways.

#### JONAH FLEES FROM YAHWEH. Jonah 1:3-16.

Although Israel had forsaken God, the Assyrians were worse — not only were they godless, but proud, superstitious and cruel. Jonah could see no reason to preach to them, and tried to avoid God's command by fleeing to Joppa and taking a ship to Tarshish (v.1-3). Perhaps he imagined that if Nineveh's repentance could be deferred for 40 days, then God would destroy the city. He had not perceived that God's mercy will be extended to all people. No man has the right to limit God's goodness and grace (Matt. 20:15). Jonah had to learn that God would have all men come to repentance, even though Israel had been given special privileges (1 Tim. 2:4).

When the ship set sail, Jonah went to sleep below the deck. While he slept, a tremendous storm arose, and the ship was in danger of being

smashed by the sea (1:4). The sailors worked hard and threw the ship's tackling overboard to lighten it (1:5). In desperation each implored his god for help. Finding Jonah still asleep, they woke him that he might also plead with his God (1:6).

They suspected that someone on board was responsible for their plight, so lots were taken, which revealed Jonah as the cause of the trouble (1:7). When questioned by them (v.8), he told them he was an Hebrew and worshipped "Yahweh God of heaven which hath made the sea and the dry land". As such He controlled all things and could therefore calm the sea (Psalm 65:7; 89:9; 107:25-30). Furthermore, he told them that he had fled from Yahweh's presence. When the men heard this they were exceedingly afraid, and asked him how the sea could be calmed (1:9-10). When he suggested that they cast him overboard, they were horrified. But Jonah knew that the great tempest had been sent because of him, and so he was prepared to sacrifice his own life for those on the ship. By this means, he would also escape the commission of bringing God's mercy to the Ninevites, and Israel would therefore be saved through his death!

After the sailors had done all in their power to control the ship with the oars (1:13), they concluded that the only means of saving their own lives was through the death of Jonah, although they did not want to be guilty of his death (1:14). Having cast Jonah into the sea, all became calm (1:15), and the men were finally convinced of the power of Yahweh. They sacrificed to the one true God and vowed to serve Him.

### **JONAH'S LIFE PRESERVED. Jonah 1:17; 2.**

Jonah quickly sank in the raging sea, and the depths closed about him and weeds wrapped around his head (Ch. 2:5). On the point of death, he turned his thoughts toward God and made a vow that if God would save him, he would perform His will (Ch. 2:6-9). A great fish specially prepared by God, swallowed him. For 3 days and 3 nights he remained in the fish's belly, then the fish vomited him out on dry land (v.10).

Full of gratitude, Jonah composed a beautiful psalm of thanks to God (ch.2). In his utter despair "out of the belly of hell" (Heb. "sheol" — grave) he cried to God, and God saved him. This "death, burial and resurrection" of Jonah was an enacted parable. Jesus spoke of it as the "sign of the prophet Jonas". As Jonah was 3 days and 3 nights in the whale's belly; so would the Son of Man be 3 days and 3 nights in the heart of the earth (Matt. 12:40; Jonah 1:17). It was therefore a remarkable type of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

### **JONAH PREACHES TO NINEVEH. Jonah 3.**

Upon the dry land, Yahweh spoke to Jonah a second time, saying, "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee" (v.1-2). This time he obeyed, and set out for the city of

Nineveh, which was so great that it took three days to journey around it — perhaps 100 kilometres in circumference (3:1-3). Proceeding into the very heart of the city he cried out, “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (3:4). He called upon the people to turn from their idols and their wickedness to serve Yahweh. This plain forthright message made such an impression upon them that their response was immediate and widespread. All were affected from the common people to the king upon the throne, who published a decree calling for general repentance and putting away of evil and violence (3:6-9). Seeing their repentant attitude, God “repented” or changed His purpose with them and saved Nineveh (3:10). God is consistent and deals with all men in the same way (see Jeremiah 18:6-10). When man is prepared to repent of his evil ways, Divine mercy is available. But if he rejects His mercy, judgment will come swiftly, as it did later upon Nineveh in the time of Nahum the prophet.

#### **JONAH’S DISAPPOINTMENT. Jonah 4:1-5.**

Jonah had preached God’s message to Nineveh, but he was bitterly disappointed at the success of his work (4:1). His heart was really with Israel, for whose reformation he had worked so hard (4:2). He had travelled through the city of Nineveh from west to east and then outside the city he stopped to see the effect of his preaching upon the people (4:5). Their humble repentance had brought God’s mercy and forgiveness, but it caused him to become angry. He protested to Yahweh, saying he would rather die than see Nineveh repent, this being the reason he had fled away in the first place. Jonah was so biased that he could not understand how God could ever have dealings with another nation, let alone Israel’s enemy. Israel in his eyes had exclusive right to God’s mercy. He had to learn that Yahweh, “which hath made the sea and the dry land” (1:9), was the God of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews (Romans 3:29).

#### **JONAH LEARNS A LESSON—THE PARABLE OF THE GOURD. Jonah 4:6-9.**

Once outside the city, Jonah made himself a booth (a temporary dwelling made of boughs of trees—like those used by Israel during the feast of Tabernacles, Leviticus 23:41-44), and waited to see what would happen to Nineveh. God specially made a gourd or large plant grow up alongside Jonah and this afforded him extra shade which he was pleased to have. But overnight the gourd was eaten by a worm, again especially sent by God. On the next day the sun arose and God caused a strong east wind to blow. Jonah mourned the loss of the gourd which had protected him, and wished he was dead. Catching Jonah in an angry and unrepentant mood God again questioned him, “Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?” Jonah stubbornly maintained his position, “I do well to be angry, even unto death.” God’s question implied that Jonah was wrong and should change his thinking. He had brought repentance to the Ninevites but he *himself* was unrepentant (c.p. 1 Corinthians 9:27).

The folly of his position is then brought out before him in the statement of God that concludes the book. "Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?"

Jonah had more pity for plants than men! Man was the last of God's creation, made in God's image and likeness. Jonah in effect was condemning God for saving man that He had made! The gourd, which Jonah had not laboured to make, and which, unlike man, only lasted a short span, he would prefer to see spared! The lesson is obvious. God is the Saviour of all men: He is not willing that any should perish but that they all will come to Him in *repentance*, as Nineveh did, and live (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; Ezekiel 18:23, 32).

### **THE SIGN OF THE PROPHET JONAS. Matthew 12:38-41.**

When the Pharisees demanded a proof that Jesus was Israel's Messiah he replied, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of the prophet JONAS". He proceeded to show two ways in which Jonah was a sign to that generation.

1. **v.40:** Jonah's three days and three nights in the whale was a sign that he, too, would be in the heart of the earth for the same period. (See section, "Jonah's Life Preserved").
2. **v.41:** The repentance of the Ninevites was a lesson to Israel to repent also and seek God in truth, before He brought punishments upon them (Matt. 12:41). In fact the Jews were given 40 years to repent, but they still proved to be a "wicked and adulterous generation" and so were destroyed in A.D. 70. They had much more evidence to believe in God and serve Him than had the Ninevites.

### **LESSON FOR US:**

We cannot run away from God and prosper.

It is foolish to think that we can change the will of God; Jonah tried, but found out through bitter experience, that "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto Him, What doest thou" (Daniel 4:35).

God made man and would have all men come to repentance.

No man has the right to limit the extension of God's merciful hand. We must preach the saving Word to all people without preferring one above another (Mark 16:15-16).

### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

"Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 5, No. 8.

"The Goodness and Severity of God" (H.P. Mansfield)—pages 2-50.

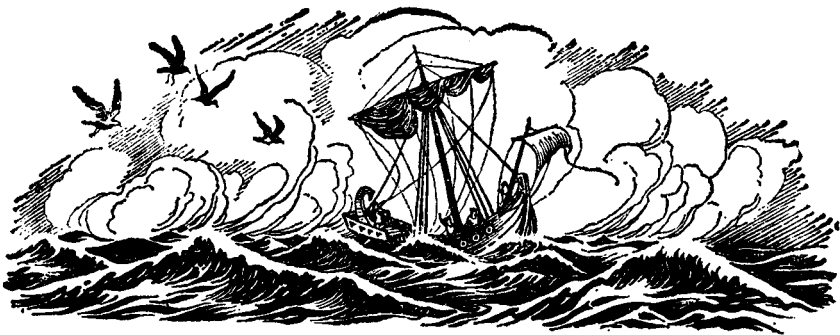


### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *Why didn't Jonah want to preach to the Ninevites? How did he try to escape doing this?*
2. *What fearful event happened to Jonah as he tried to flee from God and how was he delivered out of it?*
3. *When Jonah did preach to Nineveh, what was the effect on*
  - a) *the people of Nineveh and*
  - b) *Jonah himself, when he saw the response of the Ninevites?*
4. *What did Jesus mean when he spoke of "the sign of the prophet Jonas"?*

### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Tell the story of why Jonah wanted to run away from God and what happened when God asked him the second time to preach to Nineveh.*
2. *Explain how Jonah was taught the lesson that all men can be saved if they repent and show the application this lesson has for us today.*



## 14. DECLINE AND CAPTIVITY OF THE NORTHERN TEN TRIBES

**“Yahweh was very angry with Israel and removed them out of His sight.”**

*In our last lesson we considered the life of Jonah and his message to the Ninevites. It was this nation of Assyria that would take Israel captive some 100 years after Jonah’s preaching. Despite Jehu’s thoroughness in destroying the worshippers of Baal, he still continued in the “sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin” as did the kings of Israel who followed him and the nation continued to decline spiritually. Finally, during the reign of Hoshea, Israel was conquered by Assyria and taken into captivity. In this lesson, we will trace this decline and its causes, so that we might learn from Israel’s failure.*

### 2 Kings 17.

#### **THE DECLINE OF ISRAEL. 2 Kings 17:1-6.**

The establishment of false worship by Jeroboam was the beginning of Israel’s decline. There was a complete lack of stability in the Northern kingdom. In the reign of Hoshea, the last king of Israel it is recorded that he “did evil in the sight of Yahweh, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him” (2 Kings 17:2). Hoshea only made a half-hearted attempt to bring about reform in his 9 year reign.

Although he was not as wicked as the kings before him, by this time only outstanding faith and ability would have stopped the pattern of decline.

Instead of seeking the help of Yahweh, Hoshea sought alliance with So, King of Egypt. He imagined that Egypt would be his strength, and so he stopped sending tribute to the King of Assyria (v.4).

Israel who had come out of Egypt in the days of Moses, under the hand of Yahweh had now turned back and sought their help. Hosea the prophet described Israel as a “silly dove without heart” (Hosea 7:11).

When Shalmaneser, the King of Assyria, knew of Israel’s refusal to pay the tribute money, his army swept down and set about destroying them. He ruthlessly destroyed the cities and the people; Hoshea was taken to Nineveh and imprisoned. Israel was finally overthrown and scattered.

#### **THE CAUSE OF ISRAEL’S DECLINE. Vv.7-23.**

In verses 7-23 of 2 Kings 17 the reason for Israel’s captivity is clearly set forth. God is full of compassion and mercy, but He will not leave the wicked unpunished. Israel had ample opportunity to repent, but had hardened their necks against His prophets.

Look at the many sins that Israel did that caused Yahweh to forsake them . . .

## 2 Kings 17

- v.7 —they sinned against Yahweh by worshipping other gods.
- v.8 —they followed the evil practices of the nations around them.
- v.9 —they secretly built high places in which they sacrificed to their idols.
- v.10 —they set up images and groves.
- v.11 —they provoked Yahweh to anger by burning incense to their gods.
- v.12 —they served idols.
- v.13- 14 —they would not listen to the prophets whom Yahweh sent to warn them of their evil ways.
- v.15 —they despised Yahweh’s laws and the covenant that He made with their fathers; they became vain or empty through copying the nations around them.
- v.16 —they made 2 molten calves and worshipped the whole array of heaven, and served Baal.
- v.17 —they sacrificed their sons and daughters by passing them through the fire.

Yahweh was not prepared to bear with them any longer. They had defiled His land, rejected His prophets, and so He “removed Israel out of his sight, as He had said, by all his servants the prophets”. So Israel was carried away out of their own land to Assyria (v.23). Again in chapter 18:12, God emphasises the reason for their captivity, “because they obeyed not the voice of Yahweh their God but transgressed his covenant, and all that Moses the servant of Yahweh commanded, and would not hear them, nor do them”.

### **THE BEGINNING OF THE SAMARITANS. Vv.24-41.**

Many of the Israelites were taken captive and sent to places in Assyria; and the Assyrians brought in foreigners to dwell in the land of Israel. By this means there were small groups of captives spread throughout their empire, which lessened the possibility of revolt. In v.24 we are told “and the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath and from Sepharvaim and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel”. So a mixture of nationalities were brought to live in Israel. After a time Yahweh caused lions to come upon these foreign people, because they were ignorant of Him (v.25). These people appealed to the king of Assyria; they claimed that these troubles came upon them because they were not worshipping the God of the land aright (v.26).

To solve the problem the Assyrians then brought back one of the priests to instruct the foreigners “of the God of the land”. Remember the type of people that were made priests (1 Kings 12:26-33)? So a false form of worship was set up, “they feared, and served their own gods” as well (v.33). It was a mixture of true worship and false worship. They set up

their headquarters in Samaria and thus they became known as the Samaritans. Jesus in speaking to the woman of Samaria said "Ye worship ye know not what" (John 4:22)!

### **ISRAEL YET TO BE REGATHERED.**

The northern kingdom was scattered to all nations of the earth, but there is a day coming when both Israel and Judah will join together as one under their rightful king, the Lord Jesus Christ (Ezekiel 37:16-28). Hosea, who wrote so much concerning the wickedness and apostasy of Israel also prophesied of this time saying, "Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together and appoint themselves one head (the Lord Jesus Christ)", chs. 1:10-11; 3:4-5; 6:1-3. We see a partial fulfilment of these prophecies with Israel back in the land, but they will have their complete fulfilment when Jesus Christ, through Elijah, brings them back, "as in the days of old" (Micah 7:14-15).

### **LESSON FOR US:**

What tragic events we have just considered! We see the scattering of ten of the tribes of Israel, which God allowed to happen, even though He had brought them up into the land and established them there with great blessings. In understanding the reasons for this scattering we can learn for ourselves the powerful lessons in this story.

Israel firstly failed by corrupting the worship that God had established through Moses. We must be careful to maintain a purity of doctrine and worship before God (Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; 2 Peter 3:15-18).

Israel established wicked practices, both in public and in secret, offering their children to the fire and replacing the true God with heathen idols. We must keep ourselves from idols, i.e. anything that would turn our singleness of heart from serving God to serve some lesser purpose (1 John 2:15-17; 5:21).

Israel was stiffnecked, refusing to listen to the voice of Yahweh's prophets, and hardening their hearts against His commandments. We are encouraged to be always open to our God, to be prepared to receive His Word and not to rebel against His precepts (Isaiah 57:15-17; 66:1-2).

Like the Samaritans this age is full of confused and corrupt systems of religion, and the words of Jesus are a guide for us that "true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23).

Let us clearly see these lessons and therefore dedicate ourselves to serving God at all times. We must realise that the world with its friends, hobbies, interests and sports will not only take us from God, but engulf us in ways not pleasing to Him!

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

“The Ways of Providence” (R. Roberts)—Chapters 19, 20.

“The Story of the Bible” (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 5, Nos. 11 and 12, pages 175-186.

“The Ministry of the Prophets” (R. Roberts and C.C. Walker)— pages 95-98.

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What was the reason for Israel being taken into captivity by Assyria?*
2. *How did the Samaritan religion come into existence?*
3. *List the events and conditions that will bring about Israel’s restoration.*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Who was Israel’s last king and what were some of the reasons for Israel’s decline and captivity?*
2. *What lessons can we learn from Israel’s state of spiritual corruption which led to their overthrow and captivity by the Assyrians?*

## **15. HEZEKIAH—JUDAH'S GREATEST KING**

**“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble”**

*Hezekiah's father, Ahaz was a wicked king. He shut the temple and caused wicked pagan worship to come into Judah.*

*It is refreshing to read of Hezekiah. As Ahaz did wickedly so Hezekiah did that which was right in the sight of Yahweh. He followed the spiritual example of one of his forefathers, King David, so that it was said of Hezekiah that he did “that which was right in the sight of Yahweh, according to all that David his father did” (2 Kings 18:3). It is also recorded “in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law and in the commandments to seek his God he did it with all his heart and prospered” (2 Chronicles 31:20-21).*

### **2 Chronicles 29-32; 2 Kings 18-19.**

#### **HEZEKIAH'S FIRST WORK—TO OPEN THE TEMPLE.**

**2 Chronicles 29:1-19.**

Hezekiah was 25 when he began to reign and the first thing he did, in the first month of being king, was to “open the doors of the house of Yahweh” and repair them (v.3). But merely having the temple reopened was not enough, for that would not bring the people to God. For this teachers were needed, so Hezekiah brought together the Levites and priests who were the religious teachers of Israel. He told them to sanctify themselves and to sanctify the house of Yahweh by cleaning it up and preparing it so that the people could worship. The priests obeyed, and in eight days the house was sanctified and on the 16th day everything was ready for worship.

#### **HEZEKIAH OFFERS A NATIONAL SIN OFFERING.**

**2 Chronicles 29:20-36.**

Hezekiah realised the sinfulness of the entire nation, so firstly he gathered the rulers and went up to the Temple. Hezekiah had the rulers and congregation involve themselves with the sin offerings, thus acknowledging that they had sinned in turning away from God. After the sin offering (an offering whereby the nation acknowledged their sinfulness before Yahweh) Hezekiah had a burnt offering made (v.27). Burnt offerings speak of complete dedication to God. As the burnt offering was consumed upon the altar the Levites commenced to sing, accompanied by the musical instruments appointed by King David. Then all present bowed themselves and worshipped and with gladness praised Yahweh.

With the people realising once again how good Yahweh had been to them and how He could bless them if they served Him only, they then brought thank offerings or “freewill offerings” to show their gratitude to God (v.31).

## **HEZEKIAH AND THE PEOPLE KEEP THE PASSOVER.**

### **2 Chronicles 30:1-22.**

Now that the worship had once again commenced in the Temple the feasts could be held, so Hezekiah decided that the Passover should be kept. He sent letters not only to Judah over which he was king, but also to Israel. In the letter he invited everyone to come to Jerusalem to keep the feast of Passover, but since the 14th day of the first month Abib had passed (which was the day the Passover was usually kept) they were to keep the feast this time on the 14th day of the 2nd month. The Law allowed this under certain circumstances (Numbers 9:10-11).

In the letter Hezekiah reminded all the people of their sinfulness and their need to turn again unto Yahweh. If they did this then Yahweh who is "gracious and merciful" would not turn away His face from them. It all depended on whether they would first turn to Yahweh (v.9).

Many in Israel laughed, but others humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem (v.10, 11). In Judah God moved the people to come together as one to keep the Passover.

When keeping the Passover, Israel were to take all leaven out of their land. Leaven is a symbol of corruption, and so the people were being taught to have pureness of heart and mind in service before God. As Israel gathered at Jerusalem they noticed the altars that Ahaz had caused to be built for the worship of pagan idols and gods. This idolatry was like leaven because it had a corrupting (or evil) influence on the nation, so before the feast was held they took all the altars and cast them out of the city into the Brook Kedron (v.14). After this they celebrated the Passover which was followed by the feast of unleavened bread which was held with great gladness for seven days (4:21). Hezekiah spoke words of encouragement to the Levites and they "taught the good knowledge of Yahweh to the people" (v.22).

## **ANOTHER FEAST HELD BECAUSE OF THE JOY OF WORSHIP.**

### **2 Chronicles 30:23-27.**

As the feast of unleavened bread drew to a conclusion, the people gathered together. They rejoiced that they were able to come together to worship Yahweh and be taught of His ways by the priests. Everyone was so pleased that they decided to stay yet another seven days in Jerusalem and continue to worship and learn of Yahweh. "So there was great joy in Jerusalem" (v.26). God was well pleased with his efforts for it is recorded that "he wrought that which was good and right and truth before Yahweh his God ... he did it with all his heart and prospered" (31:20-21).

## **JUDAH'S RESPONSE TO THE ASSYRIAN THREAT**

### **(Isaiah 22)**

Hezekiah had reigned for six years and had led the people to God. The mighty power of Assyria was attacking Israel in the north but Hezekiah's reaction was to place his confidence — not in his defences but in Yahweh his God. He threw off the yoke of Assyria (2 Kings 18:7). Then from the

north news came that the Assyrian king and his army had come up against the kingdom of Israel and taken them captive and scattered them throughout their empire (2 Kings 18:9-12).

A few years later, in the 14th year of his reign, the Assyrians, this time under their king Sennacherib, came against the kingdom of Judah. They took the cities of Judah and only the city of Jerusalem remained.

The threat from the north threw the people of Judah into turmoil. Some wanted to flee into Egypt whilst others trusted in Jerusalem's defences. But they had forgotten Yahweh "the maker thereof neither had respect unto Him that fashioned it long ago" (Isaiah 22:8-11). Yet another group were ready to give up saying, "let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (v.v.12-14). Others took pride in their self righteousness, believing that they themselves would be saved but the others would perish. Finally there were those like Eliakim who supported Hezekiah's faithfulness. These were promised deliverance, not just from the Assyrian invasion but to be numbered amongst the worthies of the house of David (v.v.20-25). Can we imagine the agitated state of the men of Judah and Jerusalem and the added pressure on Hezekiah's faith in Yahweh?

Yet Hezekiah knew that unless Yahweh was with them they would never survive a battle against mighty Assyria. So he gathered the people together and once again spoke heart-to-heart with them.

He told them to be "strong and courageous", the same words as Yahweh had spoken to Joshua as he led Israel into the land (Joshua 1:9). He went on to say that the multitude that was with Israel, even the host of Yahweh's immortal angels, was far greater than the army of Assyria (2 Chron. 32:6-8; Psa. 34:7).

Hezekiah could see that the battle was between the "arm of strength of flesh", that which man worships and trusts, and the God of heaven. With these sound words of faith the people found they had support, so they "rested (mg. leaned) themselves upon the word of Hezekiah".

### **THE ASSYRIANS COME UP TO JERUSALEM.**

**2 Kings 18:17-37; 19:1-8.**

The army of Assyria came to the city of Lachish and while they laid siege to that city, Sennacherib sent part of his army to Jerusalem to weaken the city ready for battle. This army camped in the valleys around Jerusalem, and their leader Rabshakeh began to shout boastfully that none of the gods of the other countries that they had come up against had been able to save those countries from the mighty army of Assyria. He mockingly pointed out that the other cities of Judah had fallen and therefore Yahweh would not deliver Jerusalem and thus compared Yahweh the God of heaven and earth with the pagan gods of other nations. Hezekiah wisely commanded his people not to utter a word in reply to Rabshakeh (v.36). There was no point in answering a fool according to his folly, and it would not calm the people down in this crisis.



Rabshakeh's blasphemy against Yahweh made Hezekiah greatly distressed. Hezekiah rent his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the House of God and prayed (2 Kings 19:1). Hezekiah knew that without Yahweh's intervention the situation was hopeless. How often do we trust in our own solutions rather than to prayerfully seek for God's help. Do we place our trust in Yahweh or in the "arm of flesh"? The word of God came to Isaiah and he told Hezekiah that God would cause news to come to the Assyrians that would cause them to withdraw from Jerusalem and they would return to their own land. And so this came to pass. The army under Rabshakeh withdrew from Jerusalem. But the Assyrians were not going to give up their attack against Jerusalem and its king.

### **A LETTER OF BLASPHEMY AGAINST YAHWEH.**

#### **2 Kings 19:8-19.**

When Rabshakeh returned to join the rest of the army of Assyria he sent a letter of blasphemy to Hezekiah saying that he would return and overthrow Jerusalem and show that Yahweh was not able to save them. "Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee", he wrote.

Hezekiah was greatly distressed by the blasphemy of the letter and again turned to Yahweh. He took the letter up to the House of God and actually spread it out before Yahweh, then he prayed asking God for deliverance, that all kingdoms of the earth might know that Yahweh only is God. Hezekiah's prayer of trust and supplication is very instructive. He declares the majesty and power of Yahweh over all nations. He appeals for Yahweh to hear the proud mocking claims of Sennacherib. His own faith in God is expressed and his knowledge that Sennacherib's gods are "the work of men's hands". Finally Hezekiah pleads for Yahweh to preserve His people, so that "all the kingdoms of the earth may know that Thou art Yahweh God, even Thou only".

### **GOD ANSWERS HEZEKIAH. 2 Kings 19:20-36.**

Once again the word of God came to Isaiah with a reassuring message for Hezekiah. Isaiah said, "Thus said Yahweh concerning the king of Assyria, he shall not come into this city" (v.32). God went on to say, "For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake and for my servant David's sake" (v.34).

How true the words of God were, for that very night the angel of Yahweh went through the host of the Assyrians and killed 185,000 of them. With such a humiliating punishment upon his army Sennacherib returned to Assyria. The news of Yahweh's victory over Assyria soon spread and nations sent gifts to Yahweh and presents to Hezekiah because of this mighty miracle (2 Chronicles 32:23). Sennacherib himself was murdered by his own sons whilst worshipping in the Temple of Nisroch his god. (2 Kings 19:36, 37).

We should note that at the time of this crisis, Hezekiah's faith was

again sorely tested by becoming sick unto death (see 2 Kings 20:5, 6). But Yahweh graciously strengthened him and added fifteen years to his life. Psalms 46-48 and 120-134 were probably written by Hezekiah at this time of deliverance and beautifully expressed his remembrance of God's goodness.

#### **LESSON FOR US:**

We see in the man Hezekiah, characteristics that were well-pleasing to God. Firstly in service to God, "*He did it with his heart*". God wants us to dedicate ourselves to serving Him not part of the time, but all of the time. Hezekiah not only served God himself, but encouraged others in God's way. Let us learn the lesson of Hezekiah's life so that we as a people may rejoice in each other's company around the wonderful things of God's truth.

When troubles arose for Hezekiah he was unmoved by the faithlessness of others realising that Yahweh alone could bring deliverance. His faith was strong, and he continually prayed to God for deliverance from his afflictions. We likewise must always remember God is ever present to help us in our times of distress. The example of our faith and trust in God will be of great encouragement and example to others, even as Hezekiah's was to those in his day.

#### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

"The Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 5, No. 12, pages 188-194, Vol. 6, No. 1, pages 3-36.

"The Ways of Providence" (R. Roberts)—pages 179-181.

#### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. (a) *How is Hezekiah described in the Bible?*  
(b) *What was the first thing he did after becoming king?*  
(c) *What did he command the priests and Levites to do?*
2. *How did Hezekiah arrange the Passover to be kept and what was the people's response?*
3. *When the king of Assyria came against Jerusalem:*  
(a) *How did Hezekiah comfort and encourage his people?*  
(b) *What did the Assyrians say about Israel's God?*
4. *Describe Hezekiah's prayer when receiving Rabshakeh's letter and what was God's answer?*

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Describe the work of Hezekiah in restoring the worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem.*
2. *Describe Hezekiah's response to Rabshakeh's words and Sennacherib's letter. What was God's answer and what lessons do we learn from Hezekiah's attitude?*

## EVENTS CULMINATING IN CAPTIVITY OF JUDAH

JUDAH'S KING	Yr. of Reign	B.C.	EVENTS	REFERENCE
<b>Josiah</b> 31 years	8	631	Seeks Yahweh	2 Chron.34:3
	12	627	First purge	2 Chron.34:3
	13	626	Jeremiah called	Jer.1:1-2;25:3
	18	621	Book found; 2nd purge—Passover	2 Kings 22:14
		609	(Necho, king of Egypt 609-593)	
		608	Battle of Megiddo—Josiah's death. Pharaoh Necho fights Medes and Babylonians at Carchemish and subjugates Judah and Syria.	2 Kings 23:29 2 Kings 23:29,34 Jos.Ant.X,V,1
<b>Jehoahaz</b> (Shallum) 2nd son of Josiah. 3 months		608	Deposed, taken captive to Egypt —Johoiakim made king instead.	
<b>Jehoiakim</b> (Eliakim) 1st son of Josiah. 11 years.		608-597	Tribute paid to Egypt, subjection to Babylon prophesied, Necho defeated at Carchemish.	Jer.27:1-11 2 Kings 23:35-36 2 Kings 24:1
	3-4	605	Nebuchadnezzar takes Jerusalem <b>1st Babylonian Attack</b> 70 years desolation prophesied (Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon 605-562)	Dan.1:1 Jer. 46:2 Jer.25:1,11
		604-603	Nebuchadnezzar dreams in 2nd year	Dan.2:1
	5	603	Public fast. Bible burned.	Jer. 36:9,23
	7	602	Rebels against Nebuchadnezzar after 3 years Bands of Chaldeans, Moabites, Syrians, and Ammonites afflict Judah	2 Kings 24:1 2 Kings 24:2
	11	597	<b>2nd Babylonian Attack</b> City surrendered. Jehoiakim slain in Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar 3,000 captives taken.	2 Chron. 36:5-7 Jos.Ant.X,V1,3 Jer.22:18,36:30
<b>Jehoiachin</b> (Jeconiah, Coniah). Son of Jehoiakim 3 months		597	<b>3rd Babylonian Attack</b> Jehoiachin surrendered and taken captive to Babylon. Huge numbers of captives and vessels. Including Ezekiel and Mordecai.	2 Kings 24:10-16 Ezek. 1:2 Esth.2:6
		597-586		
<b>Zedekiah</b> (Mattaniah) 3rd son of Josiah 11 years	4	594	Enthroned by Nebuchadnezzar Yokes, captivity foretold— Hananiah visits Babylon	Jer. 27:12-28:1 Jer. 51:29
		593	(Psamtick 'Psammetichus ii' King of Egypt 593-588)	
	9	588	<b>4th Babylonian Attack</b> Jerusalem besieged—18 months	
	10	587	Jeremiah imprisoned—Buys field	Jer.32:1-2
	11	586	Temple burned. Zedekiah taken into captivity 19th of Nebuchadnezzar.	2 Kings 25:8-9 Ezek. 12:13 Jer. 52:12-16,29

## 16. JOSIAH'S STAND FOR TRUTH

“Like unto him was there no king before him”

*Though Josiah instituted wide and sweeping reforms they did not really touch the hearts of the people. The people did what the king demanded, not because they loved Yahweh, but because they feared their zealous young king. Because of this Josiah's reform was not really effective.*

### 2 Chronicles 33-35; 2 Kings 22-23.

#### JUDAH TURNS FROM GOD TO IDOLATRY

The death of Hezekiah brought his son Manasseh to the throne. His reign of 55 years was the longest of all the kings of Judah, but it was more notorious for its unrighteousness than for its length of reign (2 Kings 21:1). He came to the throne at the age of twelve and conducted a campaign for idolatry, reversing all the good that his father had done (2 Kings 21:3; 2 Chronicles 33:15). Of especial abhorrence to God was the massacre of thousands of innocent people; “he filled Jerusalem” with their blood! It should be noted that the evil of Manasseh's reign was not forgotten for when some 50 years later the Babylonians came against Jerusalem, it was Manasseh's reign that received principal blame (2 Kings 24:3-4).

In his later years Manasseh repented and tried to repair the damage he had wrought (2 Chronicles 33:11-17). Yet it was too late, for when his son Amon succeeded him, he followed the evil ways of his father's former life. After two years Amon was slain in a conspiracy. The people of the land slew the conspirators and anointed Josiah, son of Amon, king in his stead.

With such a background it is remarkable to read the summary of Josiah's life.

“And he did that which was right in the sight of Yahweh and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left” (2 Chronicles 34:2).

#### AN EARLY BEGINNING

He was a child of only eight years when he began to reign, and at the age of sixteen he “began to seek after the God of David his father” (2 Chron. 34:3). His faith motivated him to perform a great work of reformation. What caused Josiah to seek the God of his father David, when the nation as a whole had become utterly corrupt before God?

It is no doubt that his mother had a good influence over him; her name was Jedidah, which means “beloved”. There were also the prophets — Jeremiah, Zephaniah and Huldah the prophetess. From these people the young king received instruction in God's ways. In the midst of teenage years he learnt the answer to the question posed by David “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his ways? by taking heed thereto according to

Thy word". The R.S.V. puts it "How can a young man keep his way pure? by guarding it according to Thy word" (Psalm 119:9).

By prayer and meditation on the Word he came to see the beauty of God's ways. Then Josiah realised the extent that evil was being practised throughout his realm. This made an enormous impact upon the mind of the young king. His heart was set on fire with the need for reform, and so at the age of 20 he commenced his sweeping purge and reformation (2 Chron. 34:3).

### **JOSIAH'S REFORMATION. 2 Kings 23:5-20.**

Josiah's reform began with the deposing of the idolatrous priests known as the "Chemarim" or black-robed priests (Hosea 10:5 mg.). The king then set about destroying the high places, groves, images and idols that had been set up in Jerusalem and throughout Judah. He broke down the altars of Baal and ground the images to powder.

He destroyed the altar called Topheth, where the people had offered their children as sacrifices to the god Molech (v.10). So thorough was he, that not only were the abominations set up by Ammon and Manasseh removed, but even those which remained from Ahaz's and Solomon's reigns.

Then Josiah's zeal for true worship took him to the cities of Israel in the north. His love of Yahweh and His people caused him to pursue his objectives as far north as Naphtali. Never had there been such an earnest attempt to remove the wickedness of idolatry and superstition. Josiah personally supervised the work, and only when it was completed did he return to Jerusalem (2 Chron. 34:3-8).

### **JOSIAH FULFILLS A PROPHECY. 2 Kings 23:15-17.**

In his travels throughout the land cleansing it from all idolatrous worship, Josiah came to Bethel. You will remember that it was here that Jeroboam set up a golden calf for the people to worship (1 Kings 12:27-33). Because of his evil he caused Israel to sin. Shortly after Jeroboam set up this golden calf a prophet of God came to Bethel and proclaimed these words to Jeroboam "Behold a child shall be born, into the house of David, Josiah by name, and upon thee (the altar) shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee" (1 Kings 13:2).

Josiah destroyed the altar and high places that Jeroboam had set up and he took from the sepulchres the bones of the idolatrous priests and burnt them on the altar (2 Kings 23:15-20). In doing this Josiah fulfilled the prophecy that was given 360 years before, and shows the importance of this young king in the purpose of God.

### **REPAIRING THE HOUSE AND FINDING OF THE BOOK OF THE LAW. 2 Chronicles 34:8-28.**

In the 18th year of his reign, when the king was 26 years of age, he

turned to the building up of true worship. A deputation of four faithful men was sent to oversee the repairing of the house of God, the expense being met by a large sum of money, that had been donated from those of both Israel and Judah, when visiting the Temple during the years of the reformation (2 Chron. 34:8-9). The skilled workmen responded to the spirit of the king in their labours and no account of the money was kept, because they could be trusted (2 Kings 22:7). In the midst of these events a book of the Law of Moses was discovered (2 Chron. 34:14 mg.). Shaphan, the wise and faithful scribe, delivered the precious document to the king. When its words of threatened judgment (e.g. Deuteronomy 28; Leviticus 26) were read before the king, he rent his clothes and wept in dismay. He perceived how much the people had strayed, and realised that judgment was decreed upon them (2 Chron. 34:19, 27). Immediately he enquired of Huldah the prophetess. She revealed that the curses of the book would be brought upon the nation, but that the king would be spared because of his humility before God.

Thus the king's faithfulness preserved a generation in Judah. Yet for all this they did not respond within their heart. They feared the king more than God. Josiah tried to force the people to love God, but the people did not seek to learn about the love of God and therefore never developed a love for Him.

Jeremiah prophesied in the midst of Josiah's inspiring reformation and indicted them in strong terms for their evil ways (Jer. 2:20; 6:13-19). Knowing the nation's reluctance to reform, Josiah was determined to remove all the abominations out of the land and make the people serve Yahweh (2 Chron. 34:33). He gathered the elders together, and caused them to make a covenant to Yahweh (v.29-32). But despite all Josiah's efforts the people were unaffected by what was done: the reform was superficial; external and not internal. "And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith Yahweh" (Jer. 3:6-11).

### **THE GREAT PASSOVER. 2 Chronicles 35:1-19.**

The climax of his restorative work was the convening of a great Passover, a feast which had apparently lapsed over the years of apostasy. Everything was prepared in the proper manner—the sacrifices according to the Law of Moses, the priests' and the Levites' Temple service, according to the writings of David and Solomon (2 Chronicles 35:2-6, 15). The king's appeal brought many to the feast from the northern tribes (v.17-18). By his personal commandment every detail was carefully observed (v.10, 16). Never had there been such an outstanding Passover Feast as in the 18th year of King Josiah.

### **THE DEATH OF JOSIAH. 2 Chronicles 35:20-27.**

Pharaoh-Necho, King of Egypt, passed through Israel on his way to make war with Assyria at Carchemish by the River Euphrates (2 Kings

23:29). Josiah foolishly (v.v.21, 22) went to Megiddo to resist the Egyptians, but was fatally wounded by the archers and brought back to Jerusalem. There he was buried in a solemn and memorable funeral. As the nation remembered his stirring faith and courage they were brought to grief and despair. Many years later, the prophet Zechariah used this incident to describe the depth of mourning that will overtake the Jewish people, when they realise that they pierced the Son of God (Zechariah 12:9-14).

### LESSON FOR US:

As young people being taught by faithful teachers of the word of God, what great lessons we can learn from this young man's life. At the age which you are now he was obviously being taught God's ways and he determined to do that which was right before God. At the age of 16 he was moved by his understanding and love of God to cleanse Judah from idolatry and with great zeal he dedicated himself to this difficult task.

Never let it be said by you that you will concentrate on trying to understand the Bible when you are older. Rather, take Josiah's life as an example for yourselves, and with determination and humility daily read and learn of God's ways, and He will bless your efforts to serve Him.

### REFERENCE LIBRARY:

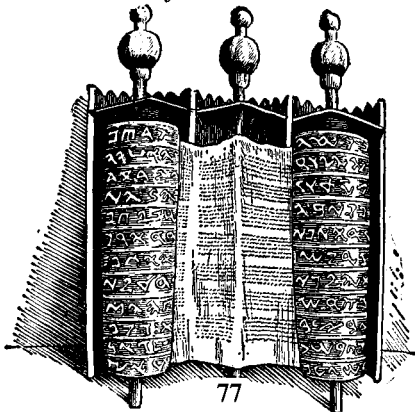
"The Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 6, No. 4.

### PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. Describe the extent to which Josiah tried to rid the land of idolatry?
2. What was so significant about Josiah's actions at the altar at Bethel?
3. What book was found in the temple and what effect did it have on Josiah?

### ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. Describe the circumstances of the finding of a copy of the Law when Josiah was cleansing the Temple and the events which followed.
2. What lessons can we learn from the early years of Josiah's reign in his attitude to the Word of God?



## 17. THE PROPHET JEREMIAH — THE KINGDOM OVERTHROWN

**“Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart”**

*The life of the prophet Jeremiah reveals a wonderful example of patient continuance in well-doing. He bore great responsibilities and suffered powerful opposition as a young man, therefore he has a wonderful reward awaiting him in the kingdom, along with the faithful of all ages. In many ways his ministry foreshadows the experiences of the Lord Jesus Christ. With all his strivings behind him and the hopes of the kingdom before him, he could at the end declare,*

*“It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of Yahweh.*

*It is good for a man that he bear the yoke of his youth.”*

*Lamentations of Jeremiah 3:26-27.*

**Jeremiah 1; 2 Kings 24; 25:1-21; 2 Chronicles 36;  
Ezekiel 21:24-27**

### **JEREMIAH**

Jeremiah's prophetic ministrations began in the 13th year of Josiah and continued for 40 years until after the reign of Zedekiah the last king of Judah. Jeremiah's work continued among the remnant left in the land even to the time of their departure into Egypt (Jer. 40:2, 4, 6; 43:7, 8). Jeremiah showed a remarkable, enduring faith, and steadfastness in the face of opposition and persecution. Judah at this time was in a state of spiritual and moral wickedness (23:14).

Jeremiah was a young man when called to be a prophet for in Jeremiah 1:6 he is termed a “child” (Hebrew “Naar” which means “a lad, servant, young man”). So we have two young men — Josiah and Jeremiah who together tried to bring about a great reform.

### **JEREMIAH'S MESSAGE AND CHARACTER**

Jeremiah's mission was to preach a message of coming judgment upon Judah. He tried, by every means possible to stop the nation from heading towards disaster. As an extremely loyal servant of Yahweh Jeremiah suffered many things — he was hated and despised by the people (Jer. 12:6), he was scourged (Jer. 20:2), he was put in a miry pit (Jer. 38:6), and in prison (Jer. 38:13). Yet despite all this hatred that was heaped upon him, Jeremiah loved his people and it grieved him to see them continue in their sins. In this way he shows a remarkable similarity to the Lord Jesus Christ, e.g. see Jer. 11:19; Isa. 53:7; 1 Pet. 2:23.

This wonderful man, who wept for his people, was quite uncompromising in the message he preached. It was because of his love for his people that he continued his efforts to restore them. Despite the mocking



he received from his opponents Jeremiah's love for the Word of God was deep in his heart and could not be snuffed out. It was a "burning fire shut up in my bones ... and I could not stay" (20:9). Here is a great lesson for us. When wrong is established, and standards deteriorate, then love demands that we take the stand of Jeremiah and speak up for the Truth.

### **GOD'S JUDGMENT BEGINS**

With the death of Josiah the judgments of God fell fast and heavy on the guilty nation. Josiah left 3 sons who each reigned, but they all did evil in the sight of Yahweh. The king of Egypt took away the first king, Jehoahaz, and made the people pay tribute to him. Then Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon defeated Egypt and took the next king, Jehoiakim away to Babylon. Jehoiakim's son reigned for a while, but he too was taken captive into Babylon. Finally Josiah's 3rd son Zedekiah reigned, but he too was forced to promise allegiance to Babylon.

### **JEREMIAH CONTINUES TO WARN THE PEOPLE.**

#### **Jeremiah 27:12-22.**

Right until the bitter end Yahweh's mercy was evident in His sending of prophets to warn and exhort the people of Judah. His compassion was on His people and on His dwelling place. But they "mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words and misused His prophets, until the wrath of Yahweh arose against His people, till there was no remedy" (2 Chron. 36:15-16).

On one occasion Jeremiah wore a wooden yoke about his neck and told the people that they would have to surrender to the Chaldeans and be under the yoke of Babylon or they would die by "sword, famine and pestilence" (Jeremiah 27:8). But a false prophet, Hananiah, stood up and broke the yoke from Jeremiah's neck and told the people that Yahweh had spoken by him to say the power of Babylon would soon be broken and all the captives returned! (28:1-4). Of course the people wanted to believe this instead of Jeremiah's prophecy, which had truly come from Yahweh.

### **ZEDEKIAH—LAST KING IN JUDAH.**

When Zedekiah began to reign he had given a promise of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. As time went by, however, the false prophets in Judah claimed that God would destroy Babylon and that all in Judah would be safe. Zedekiah believed these wrong reports, instead of listening to Yahweh's word spoken by Jeremiah, and he decided to join with Egypt and other surrounding nations to rebel against Babylon. It was on this occasion that Jeremiah, wearing the yoke, warned the king that they would all die if they did not continue to serve Babylon. Zedekiah listened to Jeremiah at this time and did not rebel.

Some years later, however, Zedekiah did break his promise to Babylon (Ezek. 17). He made an alliance with Egypt and openly rebelled against Babylon, believing that Egypt would come and help him fight.

Nebuchadnezzar was very angry and quickly began his march towards Jerusalem. When Nebuchadnezzar heard the Egyptian army was coming, he went on past Jerusalem to fight the Egyptians and defeated them. Zedekiah was now without help, and Nebuchadnezzar returned and besieged the city of Jerusalem.

Then followed a terrible 18 months for the people in Jerusalem. While the army of Babylon weakened the wall from outside, the people in the city suffered disease and starvation, for their food was soon all eaten. So Jeremiah's prophecy (27:8) came true—they had rebelled against Babylon and were now dying by the "sword, famine and pestilence". Again Zedekiah turned to Jeremiah for help, but when the prophet advised surrender to Nebuchadnezzar, the king's princes became angry and had Jeremiah thrown into a dungeon. When Jeremiah was delivered he again told the king to surrender to the Babylonians for in so doing he would both save his own life and spare the city from fiery destruction (38:17-23). But Zedekiah hesitated. He was more worried about keeping in favour with his fellow princes. At last the weakened soldiers could no longer defend the walls. The enemy broke in and began to destroy the people, the city and the Temple. The treasures and furniture of the Temple were carried off to Babylon (approximately 586 B.C.). King Zedekiah was dragged before Nebuchadnezzar, his sons were killed before him, his own eyes put out, and he was taken in chains to Babylon. So by turning from God and not listening to His word, the people brought upon themselves dreadful judgments.

The Babylonians searched for Jeremiah—to release him! They delivered him from prison and bonds, looked after him and even gave him a reward (39:11-14; 40:1-6). King Nebuchadnezzar had decreed, "Take him, and look well to him, and do him no harm, but do unto him even as he shall say unto thee" (30:12). How wonderful then was Yahweh's protection of Jeremiah to ensure that His work would be accomplished.

### **"I WILL OVERTURN . . . UNTIL HE COME".**

Of this overthrow the prophet Ezekiel had clearly warned the people and told King Zedekiah, "Thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end. Thus saith Yahweh God; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until he come WHOSE RIGHT IT IS; and I will give it him" (Ezekiel 21:24-27).

Thus the kingdom of Judah came to a tragic end. Since the overthrow of Zedekiah there has never been a king in the royal line of David reigning over Israel. This one "whose right it is" is the Lord Jesus Christ, David's greater son and son of God (2 Samuel 7:12-14) who is yet to return and rule over the earth as king on the throne of David.

## **PROMISE OF A NEW KING AND THE KINGDOM RESTORED. Jeremiah 23:1-8.**

In the midst of prophesying trouble for Israel and Judah, Jeremiah spoke a wonderful promise from God (Jeremiah 23:5-6). God said, “I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely”. What a different king this would be from the many who had ruled so badly over Israel. We know this promised king is the Lord Jesus Christ, for at his birth the angel said of him “and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob (i.e. Israel and Judah) forever” (Luke 1:32-33). We, too, look forward to the coming of this king who will not only rule over all Israel, but will bring judgment and justice to all the earth.

### **LESSON FOR US:**

Jeremiah was a man of faith and courage who was true to God even though the people hated him for it. Zedekiah was a weak and faithless man who turned from God and broke his word of promise to Nebuchadnezzar. Let us be like Jeremiah and have steadfast faith in God at all times.

We look forward to the time when God will give the throne to him “whose right it is”, even the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us be aware of the signs of his near return and like faithful Jeremiah, prepare ourselves for that day.

### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

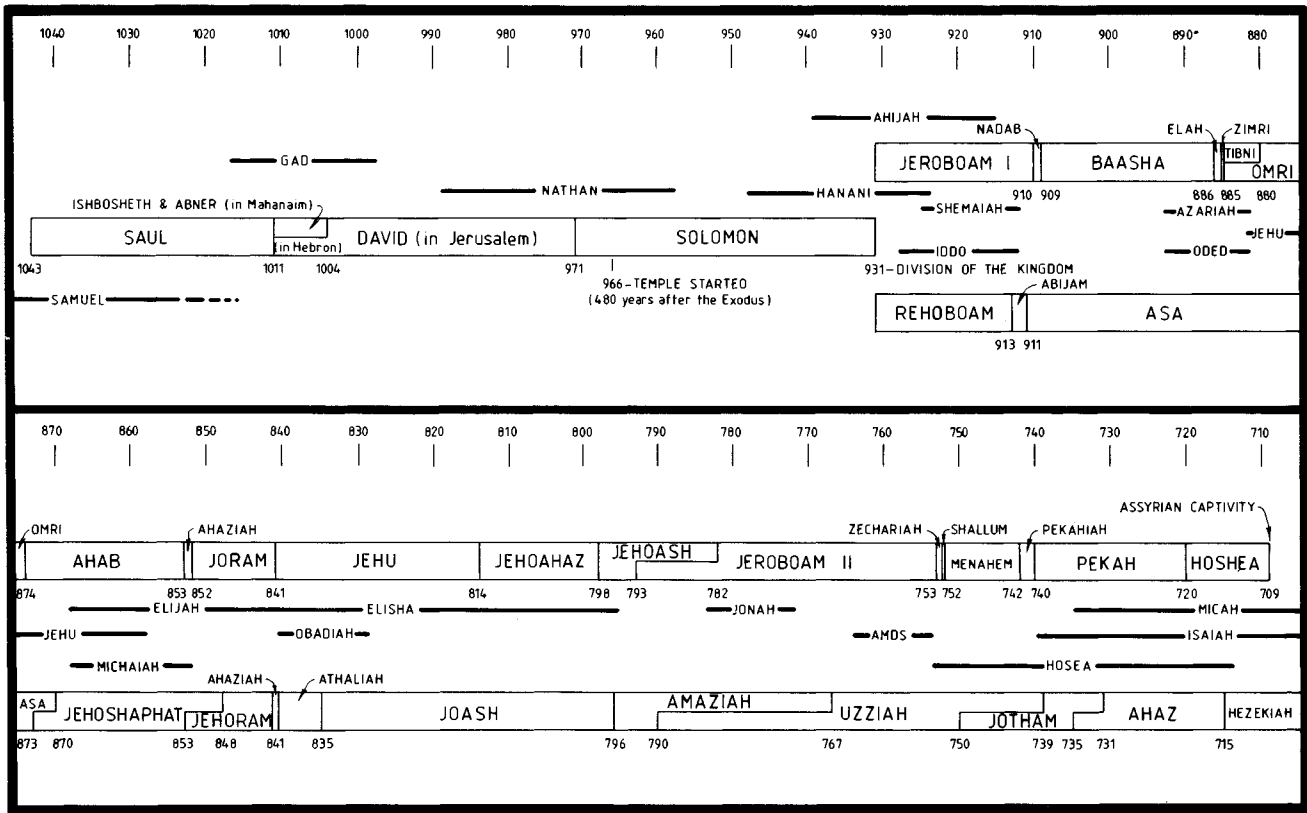
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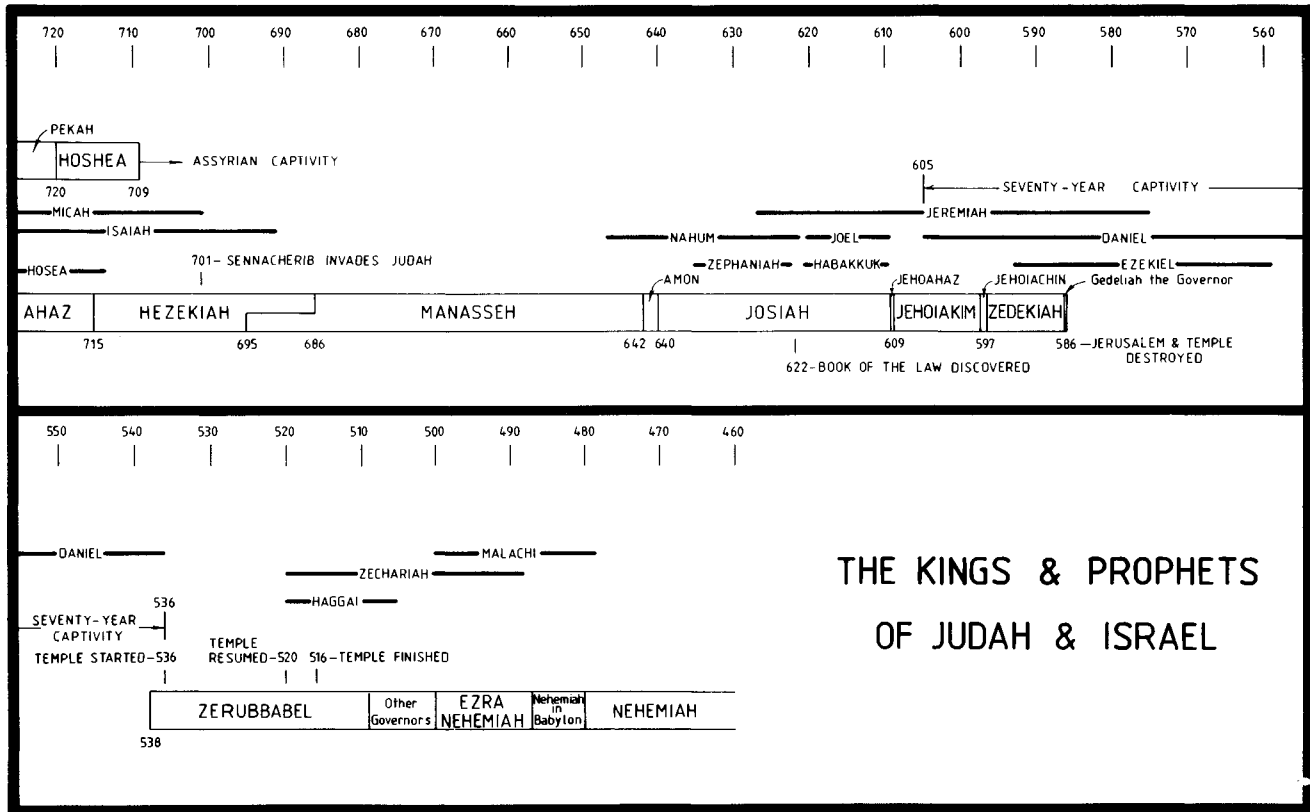
### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What was Jeremiah fortelling when he wore a yoke on his neck?*
2. *What were some of the things that Jeremiah suffered at the hands of his brethren?*
3. *Ezekiel the prophet told of the overturning of the Kingdom of Judah (Ezekiel 21:24-27). What did he speak of in this prophecy?*

### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Describe the prophetic warnings that Jeremiah made in word and in actions during the reign of Zedekiah.*
2. *The people of Judah mocked Jeremiah and despised His words, until the wrath of God arose against His people—*
  - (a) *Explain how Jerusalem was finally overthrown.*
  - (b) *Zedekiah was the last king to sit upon the throne of Judah — give proof to show that the throne will be restored to Christ.*





## 18. THE JEWS IN EXILE

**“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea we wept,  
when we remembered Zion” (Psalm 137:1).**

*Upon being interrupted in the pursuit of the Egyptians by the news of his father's death, Nebuchadnezzar hastily placed Johoiakim under tribute; seized some Temple vessels, and took a few hostages back to Babylon. The young man Daniel, of the royal house of Judah, was amongst those captives of the first deportation. He was to be joined by many others in the following deportations, until David's throne was overturned, and a 70 year captivity commenced a severe and purging discipline upon Yahweh's rebellious people.*

### Daniel 1 and 3.

#### THE DEPORTATION OF THE JEWS.

The overthrow of Judah was not accomplished overnight. The following list of deportations serves to illustrate the repeated intensity of the overturning process of David's throne (Ezekiel 21:27).

1. In the fourth year of Jehoiakim (Dan. 1:1).
2. 6 years later — 3,023 people taken captive (Jer. 52:28).
3. Next year — 10,000 with Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:12-16).
4. 10 years later — 832 (Jer. 52:29).
5. Next year — more upper classes (2 Kings 25:11-12).
6. Four years later, corresponding to the 23rd of Nebuchadnezzar — 745 in last deportation (Jer. 52:30).

#### BABYLON.

Babylon was viewed as “the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency” (Isaiah 13:19). Herodotus states that Babylon was surrounded by a wall of brick 26.7 metres wide and 107.7 metres high. On top of the walls were two rows of houses with a road between. The entrances to the city were through 100 gates of brass. The Euphrates divided the city into two parts which were joined in the middle by a bridge 9.2 metres wide. Idolatry was found in every part of Babylonian life. Hundreds of temples and altars catered for pilgrims and merchants alike. Temple authorities operated department stores, shopping centres, warehouses, banks and lending institutions. Such was the idolatrous environment that confronted the Jewish captives. Many felt a bitter sense of mourning for their country and Temple. They wept as they remembered Zion (see Psalm 137). As they watched the arrival of more Jewish captives and the humiliation of their leaders, such as Zedekiah, they gradually repented of their nation's wickedness and shunned the idolatry of their captors. They were encouraged by the remarkable prophecies of Isaiah (chapter 13), and Jeremiah (chapter 51), which spoke of the destruction

of Babylon. The signs of Ezekiel, and the faith and courage of Daniel and his companions, strengthened their dependence upon Yahweh. Those who were chastened by this captivity returned vigorously to worshipping the one true God.

The Jews who were taken captive lived in small communities throughout the Babylonian Empire. They were encouraged by God to build houses and plant gardens, to marry and raise families (Jer. 29:4-7), because they had to face up to the fact that they would be in captivity for 70 years. Ezekiel the prophet lived with them and endeavoured to show them by word and sign that their captivity would be a long one.

### **DANIEL: PRINCE OF THE PROPHETS.**

Another prophet who played an important role in the re-education of God's exiled people, was Daniel. He was of the seed royal and in Daniel 10:11 he is styled as "greatly beloved" of Yahweh. Daniel was taken captive along with others of the royal family. He outlived the 70 year captivity (Dan. 1:21), and therefore the change from being apostate to being a God fearing nation when they returned from captivity is largely due to the long consistently faithful witness of Daniel and others who showed much godliness in a land full of idols. It is thought that Daniel would then have been 17-18 years of age. In Daniel 1:3 the word "children" is "yeled" meaning "a youth". So in his young teenage years Daniel showed outstanding faith in the things of God. How important it is for us to remember our Creator in the days of our youth (Eccl. 12:1)!

### **HEATHEN WISDOM JUDGED. Daniel 1:1-4.**

When Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem he took the vessels out of the Temple and brought them back to Babylon and placed them in the temple of his god. This was an attempt to show the superiority of the god Bel over Yahweh the God of Israel.

Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were put into the charge of the Chaldeans, that they might learn all the wisdom and tongue of the Babylonians (v.4). Nebuchadnezzar was trying to force upon them the teaching of paganism, that he might draw them away from the Truth. The young captives had names that honoured the God of Israel but Nebuchadnezzar changed their names to honour the gods of Babylon. DANIEL whose name means "judgment of God" was given the name Belteshazzar which means "keeper of the hid treasures of bel". HANANIAH, "Yahweh has been gracious" was changed to Shadrach, "Inspiration of the sun", the sun being one of the gods of Babylon. MISHAEL, "Who is like God" was changed to Meshach "He who belongs to the goddess Shaca" and AZARIAH "helped of Yahweh" to Abednego, "Servant of the shining fire" or "servant of Nebo".

By changing their names Nebuchadnezzar wanted them to identify themselves with the worship of Babylon, and if they conformed to this learning, then he would honour them. This is a warning to all young people — the world is ever trying to entice you into their evil ways — be

strong and resist the temptation and God will bless you as He did Daniel and his three friends.

**DANIEL AND HIS THREE FRIENDS REFUSE MEAT AND WINE. Daniel 1:5-21.**

Daniel and his friends were appointed a daily provision of the king's meat and wine (v.5). But Daniel "purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself" (v.8). The meat and wine which was given to them had been first offered to idols and Daniel determined that he would have nothing to do with such meat and wine. To eat such meat would show that he was a worshipper of the idols and he was going to "abstain from every appearance of evil" (c.p. Acts 15:29 and 1 Cor. 8:10; 10:28).

So Daniel asked the chief of the stewards to give them pulse to eat and water to drink. But the steward was reluctant to do this because he feared the king. He did not want them to look unwell compared to the others who ate meat. But it was agreed that for 10 days they would eat pulse (vegetables, grain and fruit) and drink water, and at the end of this time they would compare their countenance with the others.

Then "at the end of 10 days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat" (v.15). So, young people we are assured that if we acknowledge Yahweh in all our ways, He shall direct and prosper our path (c.p. Prov. 3:1-6).

God blessed Daniel and his three friends "and gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom" (v.17).

**HEATHEN WORSHIP JUDGED. Daniel 3.**

After Nebuchadnezzar's dream (which we will learn about in detail in the next lesson) he set up an image of gold and commanded that everyone worship it or face the penalty of death. This placed Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego in a difficult position.

The three friends went to the dedication, submitting to the ordinance of the King to attend (cp. 1 Peter 2:13-15), but when commanded to worship the image, they decided to obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29; Deut. 5:6-10). They stood out conspicuously as they refused to prostrate themselves before the flesh-glorifying idol. They were conscientious objectors. There are times too when we must not flinch from our convictions, despite the reproach it may bring. Let us be strengthened in our faith by this outstanding example of courage in the face of persecution.

Their defiance filled the king with rage and fury. He was not prepared to tolerate any disobedience. He called them before him and gave them one last chance to submit and if they did not they would be thrown into the burning, fiery furnace. "Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands" he said (v.15).

Calmly and courageously they answered the king "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto



thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (v.17, 18).

Nebuchadnezzar flew into a terrible rage and commanded that the furnace be heated 7 times hotter than normal. They were bound and thrown into the fire; but those that threw them in were themselves slain by the heat.

Then as Nebuchadnezzar peered into the furnace he was filled with amazement. He said "Did not we cast 3 men bound into the midst of the fire? Lo, I see four men loose" (v.24-25). God had sent His angel to save His servants, and in so doing vindicate the faith of His servants.

Then Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego came forth out of the fire. The amazed Babylonians found that the fire had no power over them, nor was their hair singed, neither was the smell of fire upon them (v.27). In a wonderful way the angel of God had "encamped around about them that feared Him and delivered them" (Psalm 34:7).

The king acknowledged that the God of Israel was the all powerful God. He therefore made a decree that the God of Israel was to be honoured "because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort" (v.29).

#### **LESSON FOR US:**

The 70 year captivity chastened and purged the Jews in exile. They went into captivity steeped in the worship of their idols and trusting in the arm of flesh, and during their time there they underwent a tremendous change. They had been taken into captivity for their own good so that they might return to their land strong in faith. They were encouraged by Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. We too should live as sojourners and pilgrims with our hope being centred on Zion. We are encouraged by these men of faith to maintain our separateness from the ungodly world about us, and to look forward with eager anticipation to the dramatic advent of the Lord Jesus Christ who comes to judge the world in righteousness and to reward the faithful remnant.

#### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

"Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 6. Nos. 9-11.

#### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

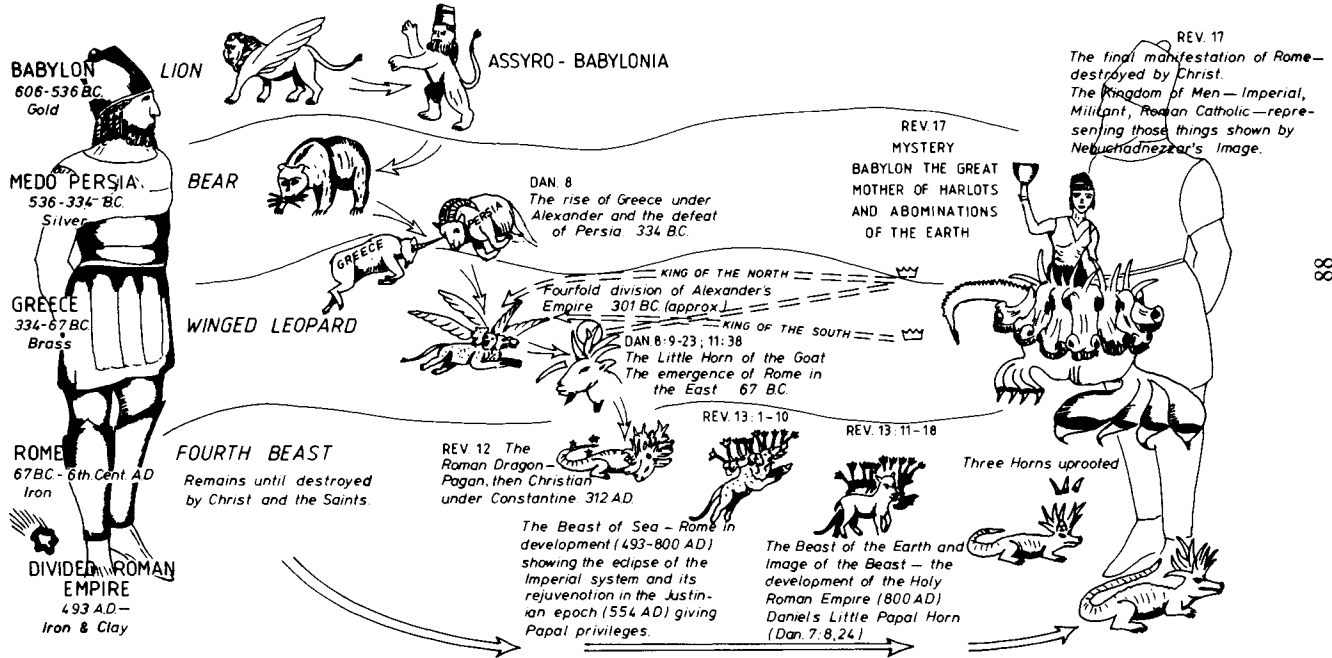
1. *How did Nebuchadnezzar try and force upon Daniel and his three friends his pagan beliefs?*
2. *Why wouldn't Daniel and his three friends partake of the king's meat and wine?*
3. *Show how Daniel's three friends obeyed God rather than man.*

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Describe how and why Daniel and his three friends refused to partake of the king's diet and the lessons we learn from this?*
2. *Tell why Daniel's friends were cast into the fiery furnace and tell how and why they were delivered.*

# THE KINGDOM OF MEN

*Christadelphian Teaching since 1848*



## **19. DANIEL'S OUTLINE OF WORLD HISTORY**

**“God maketh known to the King Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the LATTER DAYS”**

*The fact that God guides the destiny of nations is illustrated in this chapter. Heathen might is judged and found to be subject to God's will. Human glory is shown to be as a passing shadow. Though Nebuchadnezzar imagined himself to be able to decide his own destiny, he is made to realise that he is but an instrument in the hand of Yahweh.*

*It is the first of three incidents proving Yahweh to be all wise (Daniel 2:47), all powerful (Daniel 3:28-29) and supreme (Daniel 4:37).*

### **Daniel 2**

#### **THE KING'S TEST. Daniel 2:1-9.**

God, through a dream, revealed to Nebuchadnezzar “what should be in the latter days” (v.28). The dream left the king in a state of shock. He was agitated and disturbed and called upon his magicians, astrologers and sorcerers to help. He not only wanted them to tell him the meaning of the dream, but the dream itself. The so-called wise men were thrown into a state of confusion, and pleaded for information about the dream. But the king was determined . . . “I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time, because you see that the word from me is sure . . .” (v.8 R.S.V.). The king threatened them with death if they failed to reveal the dream and its meaning.

Desperately the wise men pleaded with the king saying, “There is not a man upon the earth that can meet the king's demand; for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician . . .” (v.10 R.S.V.).

#### **THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WISE MEN DECREED.**

##### **Daniel 2:10-16.**

The wise men's reaction to the King's request only enraged him more and he ordered the immediate execution of all the wise men. This involved Daniel too, for although he and his three companions had yet to finish their three years training, they were counted in the number (c.f. 1:5 with 2:1). Being absent at the time the decree was issued, they were surprised at the visit of Arioch, the chief of police or “chief of the butchers” (v.14 margin). Daniel's assurances that he would declare the dream persuaded the King to allow an extension of time, although an earlier request from the Chaldeans, the clergy of Babylon, had been refused (v.8).

#### **THE POWER OF PRAYER. Daniel 2:17-23.**

Daniel and his companions made their need a matter of prayer together (v.17). As Yahweh had blessed them in their stand against defilement

(1:8-17), so too they believed that He would reveal “His secret unto His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). We can have the same confidence in the promise of God to hear such pleas (Matthew 7:7), and to grant wisdom (Psalm 25:14; James 1:5). They prayed that they might “not perish with the rest of the wise men” (v.18), and in so doing reacted in a similar fashion to Abraham, who pleaded the cause of Lot “be it far from thee to slay the righteous with the wicked: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25).

Again through a dream (v.19) God revealed to Daniel the King’s dream and its interpretation. Immediately Daniel responded in praise, not because his life would no longer be in jeopardy, but to extol the wonderful name of Yahweh, His wisdom and power in controlling the destiny of the Kingdom of Men.

Daniel felt a deep sense of gratitude at the revealed purpose of God. He had revealed Himself as He did to the patriarchs in former days. Daniel called Him the “God of my Fathers” and thanked Him. Let us be similarly appreciative of the scriptures and the power of prayer in our lives.

#### **DANIEL BEFORE THE KING. Daniel 2:24-31.**

Hastily Daniel was brought before the king, but before describing the dream and its meaning, Daniel was careful to call Nebuchadnezzar’s attention to the fact that “there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets” and that it was this God Who had revealed unto him the dream and its meaning (v.28).

Daniel therefore confidently explained the dream — what a contrast to the ignorance of the king’s advisers.

#### **THE DREAM. Daniel 2:21-35.**

Daniel described the object of the dream as a colossal statue of awesome majestic appearance. It was composed of different metals — the head was of gold, the chest and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the legs of iron and its feet partly iron and partly clay. An unhewn stone, cut out of rock “without hands”, i.e. without human hands, struck the image at its feet, causing it to collapse. The metals were broken together and reduced to dust by the stone which then grew into a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

#### **THE INTERPRETATION. Daniel 2:36-45.**

##### **1. THE HEAD OF GOLD — THE BABYLONIAN EMPIRE**

Although Nebuchadnezzar vainly imagined that he personally was responsible for his power, Daniel revealed to him that “the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, strength and glory” (v.37, 21). God had made him a ruler over all nations (v.38; Jeremiah 27:4-5), and as he represented that golden city (Isaiah 13:19, 14:4), he was appropriately described as the “head of gold”.

## **2. THE BREAST AND ARMS OF SILVER — THE PERSIAN EMPIRE**

Babylon was taken by Darius, the Mede, together with Cyrus, the Persian, in the year 539 B.C. The river Euphrates was diverted and the forces of Darius entered up the river bed through the city and Babylon fell (chapter 5; Isaiah 45:1-3). Thus the Babylonian dynasty was succeeded by “the breast and arms of silver”, the inferior Kingdom of the Medes and Persians. It’s glory was inferior to the Babylonian empire, but it lasted some 200 years. This was largely due to the blessing of Israel by its founder, Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-4; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23).

## **3. THE BELLY AND THIGHS OF BRASS — THE GRECIAN EMPIRE**

The Medo-Persian dynasty was in turn succeeded by “another third Kingdom of brass, which bore rule over all the earth” (v.39). The “belly and thighs of brass” answer to the Grecian empire. In two decisive battles, of Granicus and Issus in B.C. 334 and 333, Alexander the Great of Greece overthrew the power of Persia and rapidly extended his dominion. After the sudden death of Alexander, four generals of his army divided up his empire.

## **4. THE LEGS OF IRON — THE ROMAN EMPIRE**

Gradually Rome rose to the ascendancy, as “strong as iron; forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things; and as iron that breaketh all these shall it break in pieces and consume” (v.40). The Roman legions brought Europe, Britain, Spain and the Mesopotamian countries under their heel. In A.D. 70 Jerusalem “fell by the edge of the sword” (Luke 21:24; Deuteronomy 28:48-57). But one beneficial effect of imperial Rome was the building of roads into Asia and Europe, enabling the extension of the gospel in the name of the risen Christ. The then-known world was turned “upside down” by the power of this message (Acts 17:6), leaving an imprint upon mankind far greater than the power of Rome.

It is interesting to note that no world empire conquered Rome. The Empire disintegrated: it became divided into 10 small nations. These 10 nations became the foundations of the nations of Europe today which are represented by the ten toes of the image’s feet. The feet were part of iron and part of clay, indicating that some nations would be powerful and some weak. As iron and clay do not mix together, or “cleave one to another” (v.43), nor does the divided state of Europe with strong nationalistic feelings amongst the European countries preventing total unity of government.

## **5. THE LITTLE STONE — THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

Nebuchadnezzar had seen in his dream the image standing up in all its power and glory, only to be broken to pieces by the little stone. Daniel said this would take place “in the latter days” (v.28). In the latter days all the nations represented by the different metals would be welded into one great power under the control of one autocratic power, namely Russia. This power will gain control over all the territories previously known as the

Babylonian, Persian, Grecian and Roman Empires. This mighty confederacy of nations under the control of Russia, will cause fear in the hearts of all who might oppose its power. Prophecies such as contained in Ezekiel 38, Daniel 11, Joel 3, Zechariah 14, together with Daniel 2, show us clearly that it is God's purpose to overthrow this kingdom of men by destroying the Russian confederacy.

This fearsome Colossus will seem to dominate the world, unable to be conquered. But despite its lion-like power, its bear-like fierceness, its leopard-like swiftness and its ruthless ambition for world domination, it will totter and fall to ruin at the hand of the stone power. He shall come to his end. He shall be broken "by no human hand" (Daniel 8:25 R.S.V.).

Who is the stone-power? None other than the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 21:42-44). Note carefully Daniel 2:44 where the interpretation is given.

In the king's dream it must have seemed impossible to Nebuchadnezzar that a little stone could destroy such a mighty image. Men today do not realise the mighty power of God, and that He will bring about vast changes in the very near future. So it will be that "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed . . . and it shall stand for ever" (v.44). We can certainly look forward to the time when God's Kingdom will be established upon this earth and all nations will come to Jerusalem to worship Christ as the King. "The dream is certain and the interpretation thereof sure" (v.45)!

#### **LESSON FOR US:**

As Daniel concluded, "the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure" (v.45). Let us acknowledge with Nebuchadnezzar that, of a truth it is, that our God is a God of gods, and a Lord of Kings, and a revealer of secrets (v.47). Daniel chapter 2 is a typical example of God giving us a key to the understanding of His purpose. We are living in the closing days of the Gentiles, when current events vividly demonstrate the accuracy of the prophetic Word.

History and the twentieth century confirm to us that "the Most High rules in the Kingdom of Men" (Daniel 4:17), assuring us that He will soon bring to an end the times of the Gentiles with the dramatic advent of His Son. Our participation in the extension of the Kingdom is invited. Let us diligently prepare now for the time when "the kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose Kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him" (Daniel 7:27).

#### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

"The Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 6, No. 10, pages 148-154.

"Exposition of Daniel" (J. Thomas)—Sections 1-2.

"Elpis Israel" (J. Thomas)—Part third, Ch. 1.

"Daniel" (M. Stewart).

**PARAGRAPH QUESTION:**

1. *Describe Nebuchadnezzar's dream?*
2. *Briefly outline the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream?*
3. *Who is the "stone" of the dream and what is his work?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Describe fully Nebuchadnezzar's dream, how it was interpreted and what it means.*
2. *Who is the "stone" of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, what is his work and when will all these things be fulfilled?*



## 20. BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST — DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN

“My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut  
the lions' mouths.”

*After the death of Nebuchadnezzar whose reign lasted for 43 years, a series of kings reigned, but only for a short space of time. Then Belshazzar, grandson of Nebuchadnezzar was co-ruler with his father, Nabonidus. Daniel still retained his high position. There was great excitement among the Jewish captives in Babylon; those who were keenly watching the signs of the times, had heard that a new king had come to power in Persia — his name was Cyrus. Some 200 years before, Isaiah the prophet had revealed that this would be the name of the king who would overthrow Babylon. Nabonidus was absent from Babylon organizing an army to attack Cyrus and Belshazzar remained in Babylon awaiting his father's return.*

### Daniel 5 & 6.

#### **BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST. Daniel 5:1-4**

Belshazzar was conceited, arrogant and pompous, he did not fear the army of Cyrus who was approaching Babylon. He was confident that no power could ever take this great city.

While his father was organizing an army to attack Cyrus, Belshazzar made a great feast to a 1000 of his lords. During the feast the wine was supplied without measure and soon he became reckless. He did not fear the coming army and in his intoxicated state he commanded that they “bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar (grandfather — see margin) had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem”. The vessels were brought in and the king and his princes and his wives and concubines drank from them, and “praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood and of stone” (v.4). That was a fatal mistake!

By using these vessels from the Temple Belshazzar was mocking God, but God was not to be mocked. The very vessels that showed forth the “holiness of Yahweh” were treated as common playthings by a proud and foolish pagan king. Foolish, too, in that he had completely forgotten the fear and awe of Yahweh shown by Nebuchadnezzar on earlier occasions (2:47; 3:28, 29; 4:34-37).

#### **THE WRITING ON THE WALL. Daniel 5:5-9.**

While the feast continued and the revelry was at its height the king suddenly froze in horror; his countenance changed, and “his knees smote one against another” (v.6). This man of flesh in affect, “fell apart” in absolute terror.

He saw a man's hand writing on the wall; there was no arm or body attached to it, just a hand. The hand covered the writing that was on the wall. A deathly silence filled the banquet hall. A chill of fear passed through the revellers.



Then Belshazzar called for his astrologers, the Chaldeans and the soothsayers and said, "Whosoever shall read this writing and show me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet and have a gold chain about his neck, and shall be third ruler in the kingdom" (v.7).

But try as they could, the wise men could not make known the writing or the interpretation for the hand covered the writing. Their wisdom was turned to foolishness for "confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols" (Psa. 97:7).

#### **DANIEL INTERPRETS THE WRITING. Daniel 5:10-29.**

Then the queen remembered the help that Daniel had previously rendered Nebuchadnezzar. "There is a man" she said "who has knowledge and understanding, who can interpret dreams". So Daniel, over 80 years old, was brought in before the king, and was offered the rich rewards promised to the wise men of Babylon if he could make known the writing and the interpretation (v.16).

But Daniel calmly answered this agitated king, "Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another, yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation" (v.17).

Firstly Daniel in fearless, indignant words reminded Belshazzar that it was God who had given his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar the kingdom and it was God who had taken it away from him. Belshazzar had refused to acknowledge this and had now praised the gods of gold and silver in complete defiance of the God of Heaven.

"Then was the part of the hand sent from him" (v.24); the hand was removed so the writing could be seen. The words were MENE, MENE, TEKEL UPHARSIN

This, Daniel the prophet said, was the interpretation —

"*Mene*" — God has numbered thy kingdom and finished it.

"*Tekel*" — Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting.

"*Upharsin or Peres*" — Thy kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians (v.25-28).

God was clearly telling Belshazzar that his kingdom was finished and that God was going to give it to the Medes and Persians.

"Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet and put a gold chain about his neck and made him 3rd ruler in the kingdom" (v.29).

That very night the Medo-Persian army entered the city. They had diverted the river which ran through the city and entered the city along the dry river bed. "That night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain" (v.30). So the truthfulness of his grandfather's words came to pass in dreadful reality: "the king of heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase" (4:37).

## **BABYLON'S OVERTHROW TYPICAL OF PRESENT DAY EVENTS.**

The overthrow of Babylon in the past is used as a type of the overthrow of the nations in the future when Christ will establish the kingdom of God on earth (see Rev. 16:12-21). Just as Belshazzar refused to recognise God as Supreme, so the world today does not acknowledge God as All-Powerful. The world around are worshipping their gods of gold and silver and their actions are in complete defiance of God's ways. But God will not tolerate such, and just as the Medes and Persians overthrew Babylon, so God will bring the day of Armageddon upon the modern world, a world engrossed in riotous living and shake it out of its drunken stupour. They will be shocked by the sudden, thief-like earth shaking return of the Lord Jesus Christ who will bring terrible judgments to bear, especially on those who have dared to mock Yahweh or have brought shame and destruction upon Israel, God's people.

### **DANIEL HONOURED BY DARIUS. Daniel 6:1-5.**

After Babylon had been conquered Cyrus set Darius the Mede on the throne. Darius appointed 127 princes to govern the kingdom and over these princes were 3 presidents — of the 3 presidents Daniel was given the greatest honour. Darius preferred Daniel "above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him, and the king thought to set him over the whole realm" (v.3). Daniel was highly respected by the king and admired for his trustworthiness and conscientious service to man and to his God.

This aroused the jealousy of the other presidents and they determined that they must get rid of Daniel, so they thought of a plan. They knew that Daniel was honest and trustworthy and they said "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning his God" (v.5).

### **THE KING'S FOOLISH DECREE. Daniel 6:6-9.**

They decided that they could only get rid of Daniel by causing trouble because he worshipped the God of Israel praying daily for the "peace of Jerusalem". They suggested to the king that he issue a decree that no one should ask any prayer or petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of the king. If this law was broken the guilty person was to be cast into the den of lions. They told the king that all the presidents and princes had agreed to this, which of course was not true because Daniel had not agreed to such a decree. So the king agreed to the idea and signed the decree. Now that the law was signed, it became binding and could not be changed.

### **A FAITHFUL MAN OF PRAYER. Daniel 6:10-11.**

The crafty presidents knew that Daniel prayed three times a day to God. At morning, mid-day, and evening he would kneel in prayer at the window which faced towards Jerusalem. Daniel knew the decree had

been signed forbidding him to pray, but he was determined that nothing would prevent him from praying unto God. All his life he had been constant in prayer - it was an unalterable practise. So he knelt down before the window and prayed. What faith and courage he had. He showed that he was prepared to "obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29). Like the apostle Paul, Daniel had lived in all good conscience before God unto that day (see Acts 23:1). The fear of consequences would not turn him aside from a daily offering of prayer to the God whom he had served from his youth.

#### **DANIEL IS THROWN TO THE LIONS. Daniel 6:12-17.**

The presidents wasted no time in letting the king know that Daniel had broken the decree. When the king heard this he was "sore displeased with himself and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him". He worked until sundown to try to save Daniel, but the decree had been signed and could not be changed. He knew that his counsellors had trapped him into condemning a righteous man to die. With a heavy heart the king knew that Daniel would have to be thrown into the lion's den. The king said to Daniel, "Thy God whom thou servest continually, He will deliver thee". What amazing words! He acknowledged that Yahweh could save where he could not. After Daniel was thrown to the lions the den was sealed with a stone.

#### **FAITH STOPPED THE MOUTH OF LIONS. Daniel 6:18-23.**

The king was so grieved by the crime against Daniel that he did not sleep, but spent the night fasting. He felt moved to believe the impossible! No one had ever come out of the lion's den alive before, so why should Daniel? Strangely he believed in hope of seeing Daniel alive as soon as dawn broke over the city. Man-eating lions were as harmless as kittens under the control of the angels of Yahweh (Psa. 34:6, 7). "Then the king arose early in the morning and went in haste unto the den of lions" (v.19). When he came to the den he called out "Daniel . . . is thy God whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions" (v.20).

Then Daniel answered, "My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lion's mouths, that they have not hurt me" (v.22). Imagine the overwhelming joy and relief of the king. The king was "exceedingly glad" and Daniel was brought out of the den. Faith which comes by belief had saved him (Heb. 11:33). The king then commanded that the presidents, together with their families, be thrown into the lion's den and the lions leaped upon them and destroyed them before they reached the ground.

#### **DARIUS HONOURS THE LIVING GOD. Daniel 6:25-28.**

Darius was so impressed that he made a decree that men shall "tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for He is the living God, and stedfast forever, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall be even to the end. He delivereth and rescueth and He worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions" (v.v. 26, 27).

Where did the king obtain this knowledge of the God of Israel? Undoubtedly from Daniel. He had witnessed a miracle and was convinced that Daniel's God was the living God.

Christ will shortly return to the earth and will make his decree that everyone, everywhere must serve the living God.

#### **LESSON FOR US:**

Belshazzar was conceited and arrogant and deliberately mocked God, but Daniel with faith and courage spoke openly with him. Daniel was not interested in the reward offered by a king that openly blasphemed the God of Israel. He knew that the Babylonian Empire was soon to be conquered and such a reward would mean nothing. The world today tries to entice us away from the Truth, they offer us all sorts of fun and temporal pleasures — but they will only last for a while. Christ is coming and will bring with him rich rewards for those who remain faithful.

How different was Darius from Belshazzar. Darius was willing to listen to Daniel and quick to acknowledge that the God of Daniel was the true God. Daniel by his faith was saved from the lions, and it was by his good example that he was able to convince Darius of the Truth. Our good behaviour, like Daniel's can make opportunities for us to show the gospel to those around us. Daniel was a man of prayer and without fail he prayed three times a day. God is pleased if we turn our hearts to Him each day, being impressed with the reality of His power to save and acknowledge that He is the all-wise all powerful God of Heaven and Earth.

#### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

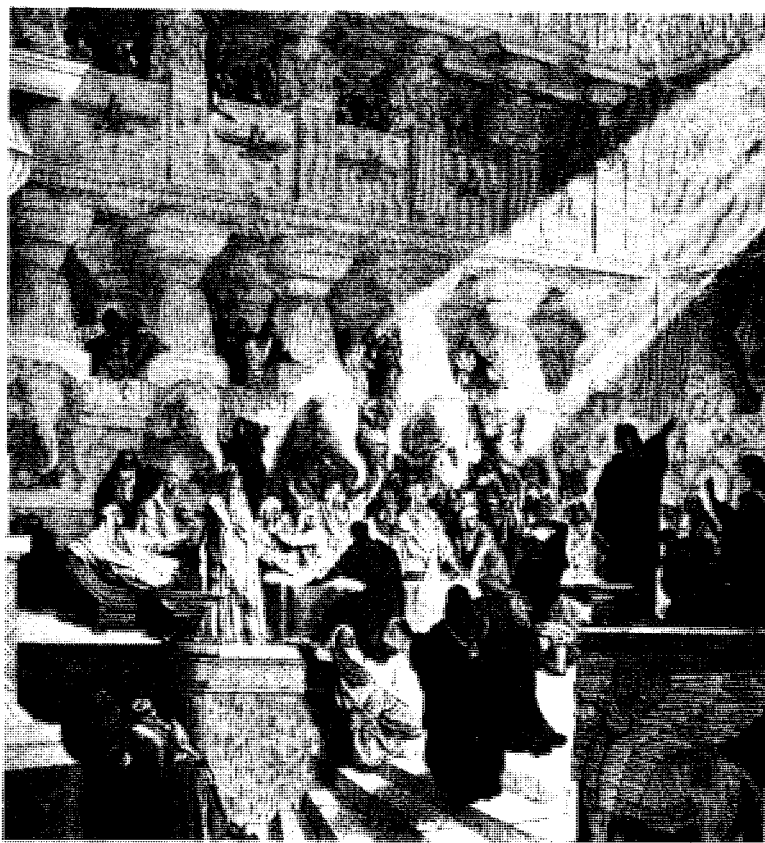
*"The Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 6, Nos. 11, 12.*

#### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *In what way did Belshazzar mock God?*
2. *What did Belshazzar see that made him fear and tremble?*
3. *Why were the presidents jealous of Daniel, and what plan did they make to get rid of Daniel?*
4. *What did Daniel do when he heard of the plan of the presidents?*
5. *Show how faith stopped the mouths of lions when Daniel disobeyed the king's decree.*

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *What happened at the feast Belshazzar held. What lesson does this contain for us today?*
2. *Describe the evil plot against Daniel, how he reacted to the king's decree and the lesson for us today.*



## 21. RESTORATION UNDER CYRUS

“Cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary”

*Judah was in captivity in Babylon. Throughout the years of the exile, the faithful ones were convinced of their return and restoration because of the prophecies of Ezekiel and Jeremiah. The prophet Jeremiah, under the inspiration of God, proclaimed the fall of Babylon and the return of Israel to their land, after their spending a period of seventy years in captivity.*

*Daniel, a man of prayer, having witnessed the fall of Babylon, and realising what the word of God had to say regarding the return of his people and the restoration once this period had expired, prayed to Yahweh to “cause Thy face to shine upon Thy sanctuary that is desolate” (Daniel 9:2, 17).*

*At the time appointed the city of Babylon was captured by the Medes and Persians. Several decrees were later issued allowing the Jews to return to their land and rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem.*

### **Ezra 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6.**

**THE DECREE OF CYRUS. Ezra 1:1-4; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23.**

Two hundred years before the event, the prophet Isaiah spoke of one, Cyrus, as Yahweh’s shepherd, His anointed, who would subdue nations and perform His pleasure “even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the Temple, Thy foundation shall be laid” (Isaiah 44:28-45:4).

As was predicted in this remarkable prophecy Cyrus (king of Persia) and Darius (King of Media) came against the mighty city of Babylon and overthrew it. Cyrus reigned in association with Darius for two years, at which time Darius died. Cyrus then reigned alone over Babylon and immediately instituted a policy of religious tolerance. He invited those people who had been taken captive by Babylon to return to their respective countries if they desired to do so. He showed special favour to the Jewish people.

**THE RESTORATION BEGINS. Ezra 3.**

Excitement filled the hearts of many and they encouraged one another “to go up to build the house of Yahweh which is in Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:5). About 50,000 people returned in the first return of the exiles to commence the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 2:64-65). Zerubbabel was appointed the governor and Joshua the high priest (Ezra 3:2) and then the following work was undertaken:

- ★ The “altar of the God of Israel” was built and the appropriate sacrifices made (3:1-6) during the seventh month of the first year. This was the month of the Feast of Tabernacles which celebrated deliverance from Egypt. What extra significance lay in their recent deliverance from Babylonian exile as they joyously celebrated this Feast?

- ★ Money was used to obtain materials and labour for the laying of the foundation of the Temple (3:6-7).
- ★ Work on the foundations commenced in the second month of the second year (vv.8-9).

When the foundations of the Temple were laid a special service of thanksgiving was held. Joshua the High Priest wearing his resplendent robes of office with the priests and Levites likewise dressed in their apparel, together with the musicians and singers sang praises to Yahweh through the glorious Psalms of David (Ezra 3:10). The hills around about Jerusalem echoed to the shouts of joy from the people. But many of the old priests and Levites and chief men who still remembered the glorious Temple of Solomon before it was destroyed over 70 years earlier wept loudly because this new temple could not be compared in glory and magnificence to that of Solomon's (vv.12-13). Later the prophet Zechariah rebuked those who made such comparisons, "dispising the day of small things" (4:10). A faithful remnant will be blessed by God but often discouraged by the faint heartedness and limited vision of many others.

#### **TROUBLED BY ADVERSARIES — THE WORK CEASES. Ezra 4.**

The Gentile people of the land desired to help build the Temple (4:2). "Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do . . ." However, their worship was a mixture of a little truth with much error, and Joshua and Zerubbabel knew that if these people joined the rebuilding team it would certainly lead to the truth being weakened.

Their reply was, "Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto Yahweh God of Israel, as King Cyrus the King of Persia hath commanded us" (4:3).

This reply caused trouble and opposition to the building project, and eventually brought the work to a halt. These "trouble-makers" discouraged the people and tried to divide them; they even wrote letters full of accusations to Ahasuerus (v.6), the son of Cyrus, but this failed to stop the work. However, later, another letter was sent, this time to Artaxerxes (v.7), a heathen priest who had taken the Persian throne. And so proclamation was made calling for an end to the building (4:17-22). The adversaries, upon receiving the replies, eagerly hastened to the building site and forced them to cease the work.

#### **THE WARNING OF THE PROPHETS—THE WORK RECOMMENCED. Ezra 5.**

The people were discouraged, and soon growing apathetic towards the work, turned to their own interests. It was in this depressing situation that the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, appealed to the people. They had occupied themselves with their own personal pursuits and interests. So, too, might we fail if we become engrossed in the material possessions this world has to offer, and say within our hearts, "My Lord delayeth his coming" (Matthew 24:48).

Haggai exhorted the people to consider their ways, and declared that their agricultural calamities were the direct result of spiritual apathy. But if they changed their ways, he assured them that blessings would take the place of cursings (Haggai 1:7-11; 2:15-19). So through the vigorous exhortations of the prophets the people were aroused to action.

Despite the renewed hostilities on the part of Tatnai, the governor and Shethar-boznai, the work progressed: "The eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease" (5:5).

The adversaries asked the question, "Who hath commanded you to build this house?" (v.9). The Jews replied that they did so by the decree of Cyrus, and they ignored the decree of Artaxerxes which forbade them.

Tatnai, Shethar-boznai and his companions took up the matter and wrote to Darius II. They implied that there was rebellion in the Jews' haste. Doubting that Cyrus had even made a decree at all they suggested that Darius search out the matter (5:6-17).

### **THE COMPLETION OF THE TEMPLE. Ezra 6.**

By the grace of God the record of the decree had been preserved and was found by Darius (vv.1-6). He replied to Tatnai and Shethar-boznai's letter saying, "let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place . . . that they be not hindered". He made a decree that all the expenses for the Temple should be provided from the Samaritans, that they should supply their sacrifices daily, and he threatened to destroy those who would alter his decree or destroy the Temple (vv.6-12). We can imagine how shocked and embarrassed the cowardly Samaritans looked as they hurriedly set to and helped the Jews.

The work of the rebuilding of the Temple proceeded, and was finally completed after four years of activity (4:24 c.f. 6:15).

There is a lesson in this account. When the Jews neglected God's house they suffered, but when they took up the work and overcame the obstacles they were blessed beyond their expectations. The same is true today, for Yahweh has not changed. If we "draw nigh to God, He will draw nigh unto us." He is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (James 4:8; Ephesians 3:20).

### **THE TEMPLE OF THE FUTURE AGE.**

The Lord Jesus Christ will soon return to this earth to establish the Kingdom of God. The centre of this kingdom will be the wonderful Temple located at Jerusalem. The magnificence of this Temple is outlined in detail in Ezekiel chapters 40-48. Haggai describes the glory of Messiah's Temple saying, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says Yahweh of hosts. The latter splendour of this house shall be greater than the former" (Hag. 2:8-9 RSV). There are a number of references to this Temple in the Bible where it is shown to be "an house of prayer for all nations". See Zechariah 14:16; Mark 11:17; Isaiah 56:7; 2:1-5; Psalm 122.



## LESSON FOR US:

Yahweh told Isaiah two hundred years before the event took place that Cyrus was to perform the task of causing the Jews to return to Jerusalem after seventy years of captivity in Babylon. At the “appointed time” the city of Babylon was captured and decrees were issued allowing the captives to return to their land. Truly, “the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will . . .” (Daniel 4:17). We, as young people anxiously awaiting the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, must consider the political events taking place in the world today so that we can discern the “signs of the times”. We must remember that God is guiding the destiny of the nations, making ready for the final act which will usher in that time when God’s Kingdom will be established upon this earth, and when that glorious Temple will be built in Jerusalem.

On the day the foundations were laid the old men who remembered the glorious Temple of Solomon wept when they compared this new Temple with the old. The prophet Zechariah later rebuked those who made these comparisons with the words “who hath despised the day of small things!” (Zechariah 4:10). We can fall into a similar error if we attempt to measure the work of the Truth by human standards.

However, if we devote our time and dedicate our service to Christ, the blessings of the Father will abound, and we will not be like those old men who “despised the day of small things”.

The Temple built under the leadership of Zerubbabel was a shadow of a greater and more glorious Temple to be built by Christ in the near future. However, today we can become a Temple (a place for God to dwell) if we cleanse our hearts by overcoming the evil desires of the flesh, and building into our lives the qualities and characteristics God desires of us. “Ye are the Temple of the living God” (2 Corinthians 6:16).

## REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“Prophets after the Exile” (J. Carter).

“The Story of the Bible” (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 7, Nos. 1, 2.

“Consider Your Ways” (H.P. Mansfield).

## PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. (a) *What did God say to the prophet Isaiah about Cyrus?*  
(b) *How was this prophecy fulfilled?*
2. *Describe why the work of rebuilding the Temple ceased.*
3. *What were the main points of the letter written by Darius II to Tatnai and his companions?*
4. *Why did Joshua and Zerubbabel refuse to let the Samaritans help them rebuild the Temple?*

## ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe the work of Haggai and Zechariah in the restoration of the Temple. What lessons can we learn from their work?*
2. *Describe the incidents leading up to the rebuilding of the Temple and why the work was stopped and then recommenced.*

## 22. NEHEMIAH — MAN OF FAITH AND ACTION

“Let us rise up and build”

*After the first return under Joshua and Zerubbabel, there was a further restoration under Ezra the scribe. Twelve years later Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem as Governor of the Province. The inhabitants were disorganised and despondent. It required a man of prayer, faith and action to stabilise the little state and inspire his fellow countrymen with the fear of Yahweh. Nehemiah was just such a man. We will learn important lessons from him which can help us to overcome our own problems.*

### Nehemiah 1-6.

#### **BAD NEWS FROM JUDEA. Nehemiah 1.**

Nehemiah held the honoured position of cup-bearer to Artaxerxes, King of Persia. Hanani, his brother, and others, had just come back from Judah, and Nehemiah asked them concerning the newly established nation. Notice that this was the first question he put to his brother, for though he worked in Shushan the palace, his heart was in Jerusalem. He was greatly concerned for his people at Jerusalem and became more so when he received the report, “The remnant . . . are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire” (v.3). When he heard these words he sat down and wept, and mourned for several days, during which time he fasted and prayed to Yahweh.

#### **NEHEMIAH’S PRAYER. Nehemiah 1:4-11.**

After several days of mourning and fasting, Nehemiah was prepared to approach Yahweh and pray for the restoration of Jerusalem and her people. As a model prayer, Nehemiah spoke of Yahweh’s covenant with the faithful, and an admission of the sins of himself and the nation. He appealed to Yahweh to remember His covenant with His people and the promise that Zion was the chosen place for His Glory. In conclusion, Nehemiah pleaded for Yahweh to hear his prayer, and that of the other faithful servants “who desire to fear Thy Name”. He sought the Father’s blessing upon himself as he came before Artaxerxes as his cupbearer.

#### **THE PRAYER IS ANSWERED. Nehemiah 2:1-8.**

Four months had passed since Nehemiah had received the distressing news from Hanani, and once again it was his duty to act as cupbearer to the king. He was downcast and pre-occupied when at last he stood in the presence of the king. Noticing the unusual change of his countenance, the king asked “Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart” (v.2). Nehemiah now became fearful and replied that the cause of his sorrow was the desolation and destruction of his beloved city, Jerusalem. Suddenly, a wonderful opportunity

was opened to him when the king replied, “For what dost thou make request?” And immediately Nehemiah, in acknowledging Yahweh in all His ways (Proverbs 3:6), uttered a short, silent prayer to his God that He might bless the petition he was about to make, and grant him favour in the sight of the king.

Nehemiah requested permission to go to Judah to rebuild Jerusalem. His prayer was wonderfully answered. The king granted his request and set a time for him to later return to Persia (v.6). Nehemiah requested letters securing his protection and authorising him to obtain timber from the king’s forest (v.7, 8). As a man of prayer and action, Nehemiah acknowledged that “the king granted me, *according to the good hand of my God* upon me” (v.8). With that reassurance Nehemiah determined to help his brethren in Jerusalem. The apostle Paul explains the cause for his enthusiastic service as being, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31-39).

### **NEHEMIAH ARRIVES AT JERUSALEM. Nehemiah 2:9-18.**

Protected and fortified by a Persian escort, Nehemiah soon was on his long journey to his beloved city. Following his arrival, he presented his credentials to the surrounding rulers, but was received with sullen resentment by the enemies of the Jews sensing their hatred and impending opposition (v.10). Although the Temple had been built, there were no walls around the city, and hence those living in the city were open to every hostile and dangerous influence.

He waited 3 days so that he might be able to fully assess the work of restoration that lay before him. Then, one night, with a few trusty companions, and riding upon his beast, he reviewed the state of the walls of his beloved city. He loved the city, even in its broken-down state where the history of the past had been enacted — but the wall was in ruins and its gates blackened with fire. Areas were cluttered up with huge masses of broken masonry, so that the beast on which he rode could no longer make its way. He then returned to the Jews, but said nothing about his tour of inspection until they were ready to receive it.

A few days later he gathered the rulers of the Jews together and carefully outlined to them the sorry state of the city in ruins and the disgrace this brought them in the sight of the Gentiles round about (v.17). He identified himself with their problems, “Ye see the distress that WE are in”. He enthused them with his outline of the good hand of God upon him and the blessings of the king of Persia, so that when he had finished his discourse, they all enthusiastically exclaimed “Let us rise up and build” (v.18). His own enthusiasm had become contagious.

### **NEHEMIAH ANSWERS THE CHALLENGE FROM THE ADVERSARIES. Nehemiah 2:19-20.**

The enthusiasm of Nehemiah had inspired the people with a zeal to work, but had produced an unfavourable reaction from their enemies. It was not long then before they came to the site and laughed the workers to scorn, suggesting also that the workers were planning to rebel against the King (2:19).

However, Nehemiah, a truly great leader, was able to meet this challenge with a forthright proclamation of Truth which silenced his enemies but encouraged his brethren, “The God of heaven, He will prosper us, therefore we His servants will arise and build, but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem” (v.20).

### **REBUILDING COMMENCES FOLLOWED BY MORE OPPOSITION. Nehemiah 3 & 4.**

Words became actions as Nehemiah organised all the people into the work of rebuilding the walls (see plan of Jerusalem next page). Family groups worked together as did all classes: Priests, Levites, labourers, tradesmen, perfume-mixers, rulers, women and merchants. Many laboured in sections where they had a particular interest.

The surrounding people viewed the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem with the greatest concern. Their leader was Sanballat who had with him “the army of Samaria” (4:2). He and Tobiah the Ammonite stirred them up by saying “Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall” (v.3).

Upon hearing of their sarcasm and ridicule, Nehemiah sought God’s help through prayer, that He would curse them and not forgive their sin as they had brought dishonour upon Him before His people. So the people were encouraged and “had a mind to work” (v.13), and they completed the wall around the city to half its original height. Now their enemies were furious “and conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it” (4:8). Again, Nehemiah turned to God in prayer and then set up watchmen upon the walls both day and night.

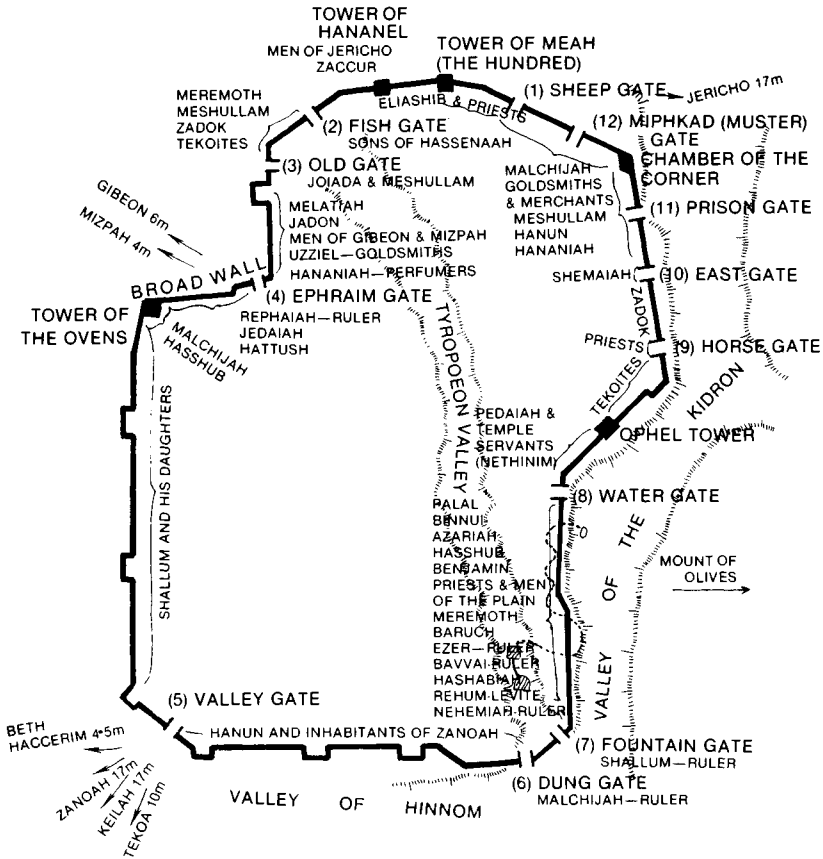
But now troubles arose from within their own midst. Some of the men of Judah became discouraged, wearied and afraid, and so were not able to build the wall. Complaining, like enthusiasm, is infectious! Rumours started to circulate of a threatened attack. When Nehemiah saw the forces of Sanballat around the city and about to attack, he exhorted the people to remember Yahweh and to fight for their families and homes. At this show of defiance, the enemy withdrew because “God had brought their counsel to nought” (v.15), and so the people returned to their work on the walls.

Nehemiah then made an arrangement that half of those who had come with him from Persia stand guard, while the other half continued with the work of rebuilding the walls. In addition, every Jewish worker should keep his weapon close handy, so that at the sound of the trumpet, he would put down his tools, pick up his weapons, and assemble at the point of attack. Nehemiah himself became the principal watchman upon the walls of the city, and with him was the trumpeter to raise the alarm. He also instructed the people that they were to lodge within Jerusalem of a night time, and not return to their individual villages as they had previously been doing.

Nehemiah provided a wonderful example of devotion to duty as he and those with him never relaxed, even to change their clothes — they even

# JERUSALEM IN THE TIME OF NEHEMIAH

The family groups involved in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.



“SO WE BUILT THE WALL FOR THE PEOPLE HAD A MIND TO WORK”

took their weapons with them when they went to obtain their daily water needs (v.23 marg). They were always found at their post, always labouring on the wall or standing guard in its defence.

### **THE LAST ATTEMPT BY THE ADVERSARIES FAILS. Nehemiah 6.**

The adversaries had failed in all their attempts to stop the building of the wall so they turned to other more cunning and devious methods. They knew Nehemiah was a brilliant leader who could encourage and strengthen the workers and therefore they planned to destroy him. They asked him to meet them, but he quickly realised their objective and replied (with a classic answer to any who would interfere with the work of God), "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, while I leave it, and come down to you" (6:3). They asked him four times, and on each occasion he gave them the same answer (6:4).

Sanballat's final plea came in the form of a letter saying that it was commonly reported that the wall was being built for the purposes of rebellion, and that Nehemiah was intending to appoint himself as king. Again Nehemiah realised that this was a scheme to destroy him and replied, "There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest (inventest) them out of thine own heart" (v.8).

Finally, they schemed to destroy his reputation by showing everyone that he was fearful and afraid. They told Shemaiah to meet Nehemiah in the Temple with the doors locked, saying that his enemies were going to kill him that night. But his fearlessness had always encouraged the people, and therefore it was necessary that on this occasion he did not yield to this request. So he replied "Should such a man as I flee? . . . I will not go in" (v.11).

### **THE WALL IS FINALLY COMPLETED. Nehemiah 6:15, 16.**

Despite all hindrances, difficulties, attacks, threats, treachery and opposition, the wall was completed in the incredibly short time of 52 days. Sanballat and his allies had been defeated at every turn, and the enemies of Judah looked upon the completed walls of Jerusalem with a feeling of utter depression, and they became very much down-cast in their own eyes. They could only acknowledge that the work was wrought by the God of Nehemiah. Truly Nehemiah could reflect upon the words of Psalm 34:19 "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but Yahweh delivereth him out of them all".

### **LESSON FOR US:**

Nehemiah had a deep love for Jerusalem and an earnest desire to return to Judah, and so Yahweh graciously answered his prayer in Shushan the Palace. As a great leader, he did not give up in the face of problems, but continually sought Yahweh's help in time of need, as well

as working with the people. He was a man of Prayer AND ACTION — his Faith was manifested by his Works. We must do the same today in our lives, for by our works of faith we shall be judged.

Enthusiasm and pessimism are both very contagious. We can inspire others in the Master's service only if we are keen and dedicated ourselves. We, like Nehemiah, should be able to quickly perceive the deceit and opposition of those around us, and seek Yahweh's assistance and protection whilst continuing to work in harmony with His will.

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

"The Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 7, Nos. 6, 7.

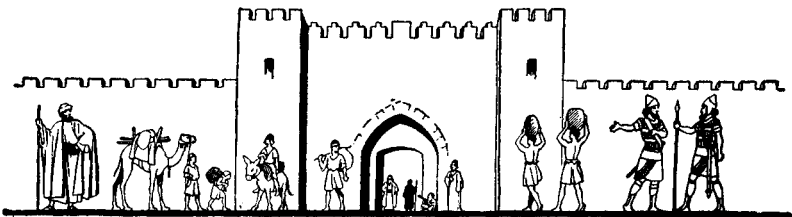
"Nehemiah" (R. Abel)—C.S.S.S. Notes.

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *How was Nehemiah's prayer to return to Jerusalem answered?*
2. *What was Nehemiah's plan to protect the workers from attack whilst they rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Describe the events which led up to Nehemiah's journey to Jerusalem, emphasising his attitude to that city.*
2. *Explain how Nehemiah solved the problems which confronted him in the rebuilding of the city.*
3. *What lessons can we learn from the example of Nehemiah as:*
  - (a) *a man of prayer?*
  - (b) *a man of action?*



## 23. MALACHI THE PROPHET

### “Who may abide the day of His coming”

*The work of rebuilding the Temple had received encouragement from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Nehemiah had returned and undertaken the rebuilding of the wall. He had remained in Jerusalem for twelve years and then returned to Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 13:6). While he was away spiritual decay set in and on his return he commenced a series of reforms (Nehemiah 13). The problems he had to contend with are the same ones mentioned in the prophecy of Malachi and so it is reasonable to assume that Malachi prophesied at this time.*

### Malachi 1-4.

#### MALACHI'S METHOD OF WRITING.

In this prophecy there is an interesting style of writing by the prophet Malachi, as he endeavours to arouse his people to their responsibilities. The prophet first made a declaration which was countered by an objection from the people. Then the prophet proceeded to expose their sins.

For example:

1. The prophet's declaration: "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is my honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith Yahweh of hosts unto you" (1:6).
2. The people's objection: "Wherein have we despised thy name?"
3. The prophet's exposure of their sin: "Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar . . ." (v.7).

There are eight such queries and answers. Read through the prophecy and locate them all and this will help your understanding. The prophet had to use this way of speaking because it clearly brought home to Israel their godlessness. They were blind to the extent of their sins. Like Laodicea, they "knew not" that they were "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Revelation 3:17). Not only were they blindly engrossed in evil attitudes and practices, but they even posed as righteous. Sin is deceitful, and it is only by constantly examining ourselves with God's righteousness and our waywardness as shown in the word of God, that we can avoid falling into the same trap.

#### “MY MESSENGER”

Malachi's name means "My Messenger". He represents the voice of Yahweh in Israel; and as he warned the people, he spoke of another messenger who would come — even the Lord Jesus Christ (Malachi 3:1) who will bring about a great reformation at his second coming (Malachi 3:13-4:6).



## WORDS OF CONDEMNATION AND COMMENDATION.

Not all the words of this prophet were of condemnation and warning. There were some in Israel at this time who had not followed the evil practices and wickedness which was the way of life for many. These few would have gathered together regularly to speak "one with another" concerning the things of Yahweh and to strengthen themselves in the glorious hope set before them (Malachi 3:16).

But there were those who said, "It is vain to serve God". They were discontent and their faith was weakened because of it. It seemed to them that the arrogant were happy while the righteous were miserable: that the wicked seemed to prosper while those who were faithful were in poverty (Mal. 3:14-15).

But Malachi was quick to remind them that there is a day coming when those who tempt God will be cut off, but the righteous shall be saved (Mal. 4:1-2).

### MALACHI WARNS — NEHEMIAH ACTS.

#### Malachi and Nehemiah 13:7-31.

Malachi's message sounded forth with the voice of protest and warning before Nehemiah appeared on the scene to perform the more vigorous acts of reform.

Notice the following comparisons between the words of Malachi and the way in which Nehemiah acted:

	Malachi	Nehemiah
1. Marriage with those outside the Truth:	2:10-16	13:23-27
2. Corruption of the covenant made with the Levites.	2:1-9	13:29
3. The tithing laws forgotten	3:8-10	13:10-14.

#### 1. MARRIAGE WITH THOSE OUTSIDE THE TRUTH— Malachi 2:10-16.

In the wisdom of God it was declared " . . . Thou shalt not make marriages with them . . . for they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods . . ." (Deuteronomy 7:3-4; Joshua 23:12, 13). There were many tragic examples of failure due to marriages made with those outside the Truth to back up the prophet's warning. One obvious example was that of King Solomon (see lesson No. 7).

During the days of Malachi many had put away their Jewish wives and married strange women. God who is loving and sympathetic was grieved at the distress of these Jewish women who came and wept at his altar. He therefore said to the cruel husbands that unless they showed love and kindness to their wives, He would not accept their sacrifices. (Mal.2:11-17). Malachi plainly states God's attitude to divorce: He hates it! (v.16).

During the days of Malachi, even the priests had broken this law. There were so many mixed marriages that the children born as a result of these unions could not speak the language of the Law resulting in their disinterest for the Truth (Nehemiah 13:24). Those children who should have been a "godly seed" were so confused in their spiritual understanding that they were in danger of becoming like the Samaritans (cp. 2 Kings 17:33-41).

## **2. CORRUPTION OF THE COVENANT MADE WITH THE LEVITES—Malachi 2:1-9.**

The priesthood is directly addressed — "And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you". God threatened to turn the blessings of the priesthood into a curse if they would not hearken to His words (2:2). God reminded them (i.e. the Levites) of how He had chosen them to be honoured with the priesthood and indirectly mentioned two occasions which brought about this choice (v.5-6).

- (a) At Sinai when they "feared before" Yahweh and refused to worship the golden calf (Exodus 32:26-29);
- (b) At Shittim when Phinehas reacted against Israel's conduct at Baal-Peor and received a covenant of peace and everlasting priesthood (Numbers 25:12-13).

As God's mouthpiece they had instructed many, but because they had now "departed out of the way" they had "caused many to stumble at the law", and "corrupted the covenant of Levi" (2:8). The following generations failed to live up to the faithful instruction of the forefathers. There is a great need for children of Christadelphian parents to value the heritage of the Truth, to regard as precious the privilege of knowing the Truth and to resolve to preserve it from falling away to apostasy (see Psa. 78:1-8).

## **3. CORRUPTION OF THE PRIESTHOOD. Malachi 3:8-10.**

Nehemiah, upon his return from Babylon, had found that Eliashib the High Priest was friendly with Tobiah and had given him lodging in a chamber of the house of God (see Nehemiah 4:3). Also he found out that one of Eliashib's sons was married to a daughter of Sanballat (Nehemiah chapter 4).

Obviously, if there was such corruption in the high places of the priesthood, then it was inevitable that this would have its effect upon the rest of the priesthood; so much so that the administration of the law became neglected. The tithes were not given to the Levites (Nehemiah 13:10; Malachi 3:8), trading, etc., was allowed to take place on the sabbath (Nehemiah 13:15-22), and marriages outside the Truth were not questioned (Nehemiah 13:23-30; Malachi 2:10-16). They above all should have obeyed the Law, their bad example had turned many away from serving Yahweh (Mal. 2:8).

### **COMING JUDGMENT. Malachi 2:17-3:6; 3:13-4:3.**

The people saw that God's judgment did not come upon those who did wickedly, therefore they thought that all their efforts to do righteously were pointless. It seemed that those who tempted God were delivered from evil whilst those who humbled themselves before Him still seemed to suffer (Mal. 3:15). They even questioned whether there was a righteous God at all. "Where is the God of Judgment?" (Mal. 2:17) they said.

Even though God did not bring judgment upon the evil-doers in the prophet Malachi's day, this does not mean that He had set it aside. His purpose involves a day in which the righteous and wicked will be dealt with according as their works have been by the "messenger of the covenant" (3:1), even the Lord Jesus Christ. The important question which these people of Malachi's day had to ask themselves was whether or not they were ready for him! "But who may abide the day of His coming?" In Him (the Lord Jesus Christ) Yahweh will "come near to judgment" and be "a swift witness" against all who do wickedly (3:5). Contrasted to those who did wickedly were the righteous, those "who feared Yahweh and spoke often one to another" about the truth (3:16). Their names are written in the "book of remembrance" and they will be given eternal life in the day of judgment.

"And they shall be mine saith Yahweh of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels" (Mal. 3:17). God has promised to make them His special treasure in the day when Christ returns.

### **BETWEEN MALACHI AND MATTHEW.**

Upon the death of Malachi, the voice of the prophets was not heard for four hundred years, thus fulfilling the words of Micah who said that because of continued wickedness they would "not have a vision" (Micah 3:6).

During this period the following history took place:

- \* The Persians were defeated by the Greeks.
- \* Revolt by the Jews, led by the Maccabees.
- \* Judas Maccabeus in B.C. 165 recaptured Jerusalem, cleansed the Temple, and rededicated it.
- \* The Romans moved into Palestine in B.C. 66 — led by General Pompey.
- \* The Parthians took Jerusalem and placed a Maccabee on the throne.
- \* Herod the Great took Jerusalem and was made "King of the Jews". He was the terrible ruler who ordered the slaying of the Bethlehem babies at the birth of Christ. Upon Herod's death Jesus and his parents returned from Egypt (Matthew 2:1, 16-23).

### **LESSON FOR US:**

Malachi denounced the priests for their lack of knowledge and failure to teach and uphold the truth. We as young people learning the Truth should not display these characteristics (1 Timothy 4:12-13). For example we should heed the warning of Malachi regarding marriage outside the Truth, recognising that it is against the commandment of God (2 Corinthians 6:14-17; 1 Corinthians 7:39).

Even though those who do wickedly may seem to prosper, remember that it is only for a time. God has not overlooked judgment — only reserved it for the day He has appointed. The “messenger of the covenant” (the Lord Jesus Christ) will come suddenly, and we must watch and pray always and speak often one to another about the things of the Truth, that we may be accounted worthy to escape that judgment (Psalm 37:1-3; Luke 21:36).

### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

“Prophets after the Exile” (J. Carter).

“The Story of the Bible” (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 7. Nos. 9, 10.

“Malachi” (J. Ullman)—C.S.S.S. Notes.

### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What does Malachi’s name mean, and what message did he give to the people?*
2. *What were three of the things about which Malachi warned the people?*
3. *Who is the “Messenger” that is to come, and what will His work be?*
4. *How was the work of Malachi and Nehemiah similar?*
5. *Using the events of Malachi’s days as an explanation show why it is wrong to marry an unbeliever.*

### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *God sent His prophet Malachi to reprove the people — in what ways were the people, Levites and the priests disobeying God?*
2. *Who is the “Messenger of the covenant” (Mal. 3:1) and what will His work be? What lesson can we learn from this?*

## 24. JOHN THE BAPTIST: HIS BIRTH AND MISSION

**“Thou, child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest:  
for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare  
his ways”**

*Malachi had told the people of his day that the “God of Judgment” would come, and warned them that few would be ready to receive Him when He did. Because of this evil state, it would be necessary for God to send another messenger first, to “prepare the way” (Malachi 3:1). For four hundred years God remained silent while Israel corrupted their way by ignoring His word. The silence was broken by the sudden appearance of Gabriel to Zacharias. The subsequent birth of John the Baptist, the herald of Messiah, led to a religious reformation as the conscience of the nation was probed by the forthrightness of the wilderness prophet. In this way the hearts of the people were prepared to receive the “messenger of the covenant”, the only begotten Son of God.*

### **Luke 1:1-27, 57-80**

#### **CONDITIONS IN ISRAEL WHEN JOHN WAS BORN.**

Because of Israel’s wickedness, God had permitted evil nations like Babylon, Persia, and Greece, to conquer and rule them, and now Rome, having conquered the broken Greek Empire, was the Master of the World! Remember how God had foretold this through Daniel (chapter 2:31-40). The Jews were a proud nation who hated to be under the rule of foreigners, and they looked forward to the day when they would be free again.

The Jews not only saw the hated Romans ruling as overlords, but found themselves under the control of a foreigner. Herod the Great an Idumean (or Edomite) had married a beautiful Jewish princess as “converted” to Judaism and had been appointed by the Romans as King of Judea.

What marked the Jews as a separate people was the Law which God had given them through Moses. This law was the basis of the nation’s life. Although Rome ruled the land, it allowed the Jews to control the affairs of the Temple in Jerusalem. In these times there were many religious sects. There were the proud, haughty Pharisees, and the wealthy Sadducee priests; there were the Lawyers and Scribes, all of whom held different beliefs, none living the Law as God intended.

In the midst of all this religious confusion there were the common people, looking for guidance, and vainly seeking a shepherd who could lead them into Truth. But to those who followed the Old Testament writings and the words of the prophets, it was an age of hope. Although these prophets had lived hundreds of years before, their sayings had been kept in books named after them, and they had not been forgotten. For example, Isaiah wrote about the time when Israel would again be a great nation (Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-10): Daniel foretold the coming of the Messiah (Daniel 9:24-27).

## **ZACHARIAS IN THE TEMPLE. Luke 1:5-22.**

A faithful priest and servant of God named Zacharias, and his wife Elisabeth, were among those who awaited the coming of Messiah. The Hebrew word "Messiah" means "anointed" (in Greek the word is "Christ") and tells of a Prince who would come as a leader of His people. Zacharias and Elizabeth were "both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (1:5).

But life had brought one great disappointment — they had no children, even though they had often prayed for them (1:13). Unknown to them, they would become the parents of the greatest of the prophets who should prepare the way for God's Son.

As a priest, Zacharias' "lot was to burn incense" in the Temple. This was done in the morning and evening, and when the priest entered the Holy Place silence fell upon the assembly of worshippers outside. The sweet-smelling incense which ascended from the golden altar was like the prayers of saints in which praise and thanksgiving ascend to God (cf. Psalm 141:2; Revelation 5:8; 8:3). The Jews had learnt the spiritual significance of the fragrant incense, for we read that they were "praying without at the time of incense" (1:10).

Whilst Zacharias went about his solemn duties, he suddenly became aware of someone standing at the right hand of the incense altar. It was an angel of Yahweh, illuminated by the dim reflection of the seven-branched lampstand. It seems that he sensed the figure was an angel, for he was petrified with fear. The silence of four hundred years was about to be broken and the voice of God was again heard, "Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John". He could scarcely believe his ears as words of comfort and importance came from the lips of the angelic visitor. John means "the Grace of Yahweh". This one to be born would usher in a new era in which Divine grace would lead men to repentance, and replace law, fear, and death (Romans 2:4; John 1:17). What a son! What an important role to play!

The angel Gabriel proceeded to tell of John's special mission as prophet and forerunner of the Messiah. John's mission was to be like that of Elijah. He was to go forth "in the spirit and power of Elijah" to prepare the hearts of the people that they might accept their Messiah (Luke 1:15-17; 1 Kings 18:37; Malachi 4:6).

Zacharias was staggered by the angel's appearance and words. He wanted confirmation of the promise, especially as both he and Elisabeth were old. The angel in reply informed him of his identity. He was the angel Gabriel, of such importance that he "stood in the presence of God!" Zacharias was given a sign, which by its very nature, was a rebuke for his unbelief. He would be dumb until the words of promise would be fulfilled (Luke 1:19-20).

Outside the people grew anxious fearing that something had happened to him. When he emerged from the door he was faced with the problem

of explaining his delay. Beckoning to them, with his hands he endeavoured to convey the strange tidings, and when he could not speak they realised that he had seen a vision. The people left the Temple in bewilderment, wondering about the strange happening.

Zacharias departed home after his ministrations were over, and, in accordance with Gabriel's words, at the appointed time, their son was born.

#### **THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST. Luke 1:57-80.**

Gabriel had said that they would have joy and gladness and that many would rejoice at his birth (Luke 1:14). Elisabeth and Zacharias were not the only excited ones. So were all the inhabitants of the small town in the hills. They knew how much this couple had desired children, and now their prayers had been answered.

On the eighth day after his birth neighbours and cousins gathered to witness the circumcision and naming of the child. Those present took matters into their own hands and named him Zacharias. Was not this his father's name and the name of many an honourable Israelite? Its meaning, "Yahweh hath remembered", seemed appropriate, too. But Elisabeth's wishes had not been sought, and she declared that he should be called John. This raised a storm of protest, in the face of which she had to appeal to Zacharias! They felt sure that he would confirm their choice and when, quite independently, he obtained a slate and wrote down, "his name is John", they were amazed. At that instant his mouth was opened and he spoke and praised God (1:64). The people wondered at the strange turn in events and no doubt many of these impressions would have been remembered in the years to come. So from a very early age John became the object of curiosity as people wondered "what manner of child he would be" (Luke 1:65-66).

#### **THE MISSION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST. Luke 1:15-17, 76-80.**

Zacharias, being filled with the Holy Spirit, thanked God for His goodness in visiting and redeeming His people, for the time had now come when the promised seed of David (v.69) and Abraham (v.73) would appear to deliver those faithful Israelites who looked for salvation. He then addressed his own son, "and thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways" (vv. 76-80).

Zacharias knew well the words of Isaiah the prophet "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of Yahweh" (Isaiah 40:3) and now it was revealed to him that his son would be the one to do this great work.

He also knew the words of Malachi: "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his Temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith Yahweh of

hosts” (Malachi 3:1). Zacharias knew the son to be born to him would be a forerunner, and that his work would be to “prepare the way” for Jesus Christ, described as “the messenger of the covenant”. As Gabriel had told Zacharias (v.15) John was to be “great in the sight of the Lord”. Like a Nazarite he was to drink neither wine nor strong drink, and he would be filled with the Holy Spirit from his birth.

“So the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel” (Luke 1:80). In solitude, living on locusts and wild honey, he grew to manhood. Far away from the corruption of the townspeople, engrossed in absorbing the mind of the Spirit, John waited for the moment when God would send him upon his mission as forerunner of Messiah. He would fearlessly challenge the conscience of the nation and lead men back to God.

#### **LESSON FOR US:**

We have learned that there were those who studied God’s Word and were expecting the coming of a great leader. Many in Israel at this time were watching the signs of the times. Others were waiting patiently for Israel’s Messiah to appear. It is good to watch the signs of the times, but much patience is required to wait for their fulfilment. When we are young the time of fulfilment seems so far away and it does not seem so important, but God’s will is always fulfilled and we have to learn to wait upon Him in patience. As people in those days waited patiently for the appearance of John and Jesus, we now await with patience, beholding the wonderful signs of the second coming of Jesus to this earth.

#### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

“The Ministry of the Prophets” (C.C. Walker)—Chapter 40.

“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Chapter 4 and 5.

“The Story of the Bible” (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 8, No.1.

#### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *Describe the conditions in Israel when John was born.*
2. *Why did the angel Gabriel reveal himself to Zacharias in the Temple?*
3. *What was the mission of John the Baptist?*
4. *Describe what happened when the friends gathered to witness the naming of John.*

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Describe in detail the visit of the angel Gabriel to Zacharias the priest.*
2. *Tell the story of the birth of John the Baptist and describe his mission.*



## 25 THE MESSIAH IS BORN

**“Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man”**

*This lesson records the most momentous event in history thus far. The birth of the Son of God brought to a climax the promises that a redeemer would be provided. Here was the one who would bring the blessings of God to all nations. The earth that had been cursed as a result of sin would ultimately be glorified and man restored to favour with God.*

**Luke 1:26-56; 2; Matthew 1 and 2.**

### **THE ANGEL SPEAKS TO MARY. Luke 1:26-38.**

In the town of Nazareth lived a young maiden called Mary, of the house of David, who had promised to marry a godly man named Joseph. Six months after Gabriel appeared to Zacharias, God sent him to tell Mary that she had been chosen to be the mother of a child who would become the Saviour of the world. “Fear not, Mary,” the angel said, “for thou hast found favour with God.” In humility, she listened intently to the wonderful message: “Thou shalt bring forth a son and call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:31-33). Compare this with the promise God gave to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-16, where Messiah is plainly prophesied as being both son of God and a descendant of King David. Jesus was also son of Abraham to fulfil the promises made to him. (Matthew 1:1). The angel told Mary that this child was to be born by the power of the Holy Spirit, and thus would be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35). Mary also learned that her cousin Elisabeth was going to have a child, “for with God nothing shall be impossible” (1:37). These words reminded Mary of the assurance given to Sarah that she would give birth to a son of promise. How thrilled and yet how humble Mary must have felt as she realised the great privilege and responsibility of caring for God’s son, the very one who would fulfil all the prophecies and promises of Messiah.

### **THE ANGEL SPEAKS TO JOSEPH. Matthew 1:18-24.**

Not only did the angel appear to Mary, but he also appeared to Joseph, telling him that Mary was to have a child by the power of the Holy Spirit and that the baby’s name was to be Jesus, for he would save his people from their sins (1:21). The name Jesus means “Yahweh will save” and so in his name we have a prophecy of the work that God had prepared for him to perform. And so Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth, took Mary to be his wife, and together they shared the privilege and great responsibility of caring for Jesus and bringing him up in the way of Truth, thus helping to prepare him for his great work of salvation.

### **THE BIRTH OF JESUS. Luke 2:1-7.**

The prophet Micah had written 700 years before that the birthplace of Jesus would be Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), but Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth. However God's word never fails, and this time it was fulfilled in a wonderful way.

Mary and Joseph, who belonged to the house or family of David, had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the city of David, because the Roman Emperor had ordered that his subjects must enroll to be taxed. This enrolment was to be carried out in their family city.

The journey of about 100 kilometres was long and hard, and it was nearly time for Mary's baby to be born. When they arrived in Bethlehem the only shelter they could find there was in a stable. Here in the night the baby Jesus was born. There in surroundings that had all the appearance of extreme lowliness and humility, in the rough basic setting of a stable, the Son of the Highest gave a tiny cry. Tenderly his mother wrapped him in swaddling clothes and placed him in a manger (a feeding stall for the animals). From this humble beginning, and in the city in which God had anointed David King of Israel, David's greater Son was born. Truly God would exalt His Son, and all them of "low degree", all who despise not the day of "small things" (see Zech. 4:10; Luke 1:52; 1 Cor. 1:27).

### **THE SHEPHERDS OF BETHLEHEM. Luke 2:8-20.**

In the fields near Bethlehem, shepherds were guarding their flocks by night. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the heavens were filled with the brightness of the glory of God, and they were afraid. The angel reassured them: "Fear not: for, behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." (Luke 2:10-12).

The shepherds listened in amazement. The significance of the birth of the Son of the Highest was revealed in a vast display of angels celebrating the birth. Suddenly there appeared a multitude of angels praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (v.4). The shepherds were excited and in haste left their sheep to go into Bethlehem to find the babe. They found him just as the angel had said and gave praise to God, "for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them" (v.20).

### **THE BABY JESUS TAKEN TO THE TEMPLE. Luke 2:21-39.**

According to the Law God gave through Moses, every infant boy had to be circumcised on the eighth day. Mary and Joseph obeyed this Law at which time his name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel (Luke 2:21; Matthew 1:21). On the 40th day Mary went with

Joseph to Jerusalem to make her offering for her firstborn son and present him to God. Whilst in the Temple an old man called Simeon, who was guided by the Holy Spirit, saw the infant and took him in his arms. Simeon had been promised that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ. With gentle reverence Simeon was moved to say, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32). At the same time, Anna, the aged prophetess, came into the Temple, and hearing Simeon, and beholding the scene, she thanked God and spoke of Jesus "to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38). What gracious words of praise and testimony came from these aged folk in Jerusalem whose hearts yearned for "the consolation of Israel". Their faith had been turned into sight, to see the fulfillment of so many prophecies in the face of this little babe.

#### **THE WISE MEN FROM THE EAST. Matthew 2:1-12.**

Mary and Joseph returned to Bethlehem where they lived for some time. Far away, in the land to the East, wise men looked for a sign which would tell of the birth of Messiah. When they saw a new star in the heavens, they knew the time had come. Great preparations were made for the journey, which was a very long one. Gifts were packed and they set out for Jerusalem. They arrived excitedly at the city and began asking, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews, for we have seen his star in the East and are come to worship him?" News of this reached the wicked King Herod, who first called to him the chief priests and scribes and demanded of them where Christ should be born. They told him that Bethlehem was the place according to the prophet Micah (5:2). Herod called the wise men to his presence and sent them to Bethlehem.

Cunningly he asked them to find the infant king so that he too could worship him. Herod really intended to kill the baby, not honour him, for he jealously guarded his power and wanted no rival king. As suddenly as the wise men saw it at first, the star appeared again, and guided them to the place where the young child was.

There they worshipped Jesus and offered him their precious gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. God warned them in a dream not to return to Herod, but to go home a different way.

#### **LIFE IN NAZARETH. Matthew 2:13-23.**

An angel then appeared to Joseph and urged him to leave and flee to Egypt with Mary and the baby Jesus until it was safe to return. As time went by and Herod found that the wise men did not return, he became enraged. He then made a wicked and cruel decree that all the children in Bethlehem under two years old must be put to death, and so great mourning filled the land. But Joseph and Mary and the

precious boy were already far south in Egypt, beyond the reach of the king.

Joseph and Mary remained with the infant Jesus in Egypt until Herod died. Guided by God they returned to Israel and lived in Nazareth, where Jesus spent the greater part of his life. There, the Lord grew up in the midst of a large family, as other children were later born to Mary and Joseph. Nazareth was close to several main trade routes, and was situated in a high valley. It was here that Jesus learned to follow the trade of Joseph the carpenter, during which time he “increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:52). Jesus grew up like any other Jewish boy, learning to help in the home, for he was the eldest son of what became quite a large family of half-brothers and half-sisters (Matthew 13:55-56).

### **JESUS ATTENDS THE PASSOVER. Luke 2:40-52.**

Jesus knew many things about the Law of Moses, the Psalms and the prophets, and possessed understanding far beyond his years, for his Father made him of quick understanding in His ways (Isaiah 11:2-3).

At the age of twelve he accompanied his family to Jerusalem to keep the Passover Feast. This was a Feast kept every year to remember how God had delivered the Jewish people from bondage in Egypt.

To the twelve-year-old Jesus, it was a great event. There were many sacrifices offered; he watched the priests perform their duties, listened to the singing of the Psalms, and heard the discussions between the learned people who gathered to keep the Passover. Jesus was especially interested in anything he could hear about God, and he pondered the meaning of all he saw and heard.

After a short stay in Jerusalem, Mary and Joseph, together with many others, began to make their way home, thinking Jesus was somewhere in the large company. After a day's journey it was found he was not there. Hurriedly, they returned to Jerusalem, but it was the third day before they found him in the Temple, sitting among the old teachers, both hearing them and asking questions. Joseph and Mary looked upon this scene with amazement. They knew that because Jesus was the Son of God his life would be given to doing the will of his Father: “How is it that you sought me?” he said. “Do you not understand that I must be about the things of my Father?” Gently, Jesus tried to explain that already he had an understanding of the great work that was before him. He knew the reason why he had been born into the world, and he prepared himself to fulfil that purpose. Nevertheless, Jesus returned with Joseph and Mary to Nazareth and “was subject unto them.”

### **LESSON FOR US:**

Consider Jesus at the age of 12 as he took a journey to Jerusalem with Mary and Joseph and their friends. He was a young lad learning

obedience, not only to God but to Mary and Joseph (cp. Hebrew He would have helped in the household in times of both joy and sadness. He worked with his hands as a carpenter (Mark 6:3), and he listened carefully to daily lessons from the Scriptures. Both Mary and Joseph knew that God was his Father, and that he was being prepared for the work ahead. About 18 years from this time, he left his home to commence the great work his Father had given him. We are not called upon to do the exact work Christ did, but in following his example, we should remember how important it is to learn about God and His Truth when we are young, so that when we grow older, we may serve Him in the way He has set down.

Jesus was the one promised who would save the people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). He is the seed promised to Abraham and the one to be King on David's throne (Matthew 1:1; Luke 1:32-33).

In Galatians 3:26-29, we learn how we can share in the blessings promised, by baptism into Christ.

#### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

- "Nazareth Revisited" (R. Roberts)—Chapters 6, 7 and 8.
- "The Story of the Bible" (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 8, Nos. 1, 2.
- "Life of Jesus" (M. Purkis)—Chapter 1.

#### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary in Nazareth. What wonderful message did he give her?*
2. *Describe the visit of the wise men from the East to Bethlehem.*
3. *Tell what happened when Jesus, at the age of 12, visited Jerusalem at Passover.*
4. *What great promises were fulfilled in Jesus' birth and mission?*

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Describe the birth of Jesus and the joyful news the angels gave to the shepherds.*
2. *Describe the visit to Jerusalem by Mary, Joseph, and Jesus at Passover time.*