

# The Glory & Decline of the Kingdom



**SENIOR NOTES – 15 Years and over**

**STAGE THREE OF FIVE YEARS**

CHRISTADELPHIAN SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION  
P.O. BOX 121, ST. AGNES 5097. SOUTH AUSTRALIA



*“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

## SENIOR 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 1000 years of history will be reviewed in which we see, in the words of the title to these notes,

**“THE GLORY AND DECLINE OF THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL”.**

Israel's golden age of David and Solomon did not last very long. Spiritual decay soon set in and grew worse despite the valiant efforts of godly men such as Hezekiah and Josiah. During the year, we shall look at their lives and endeavour to assess why they were different. We shall also study the periods of exile and of restoration. The reasons why God led both houses of Israel into captivity constitute grave warnings for us in these perilous last days. The resurgence of faith, which the years of punishment in exile brought about, will inspire us as we consider the stirring examples of Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah. But we shall find that apathy and worldliness again crept in and marred the work of reform. Israel's worship lost its power and degenerated into formalism and faction. In the period of 400 years between the Old and New Testaments, successive waves of Gentile empires dominated the holy land. In B.C. 65 the iron heel of the Roman legions suppressed the budding spirit of Jewish nationalism. Rome's presence presaged the calamities of A.D. 70 and the captivity predicted by the prophets.

In this time of distress, the hand of God was again manifest. The Messianic Scriptures foretold divine intervention and the promises of God received tangible fulfilment when the Son of God was born: the “Word was made Flesh”! This remains the greatest event of history up to that time, 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 and which are deliberately highlighted. All is vanity and vexation of spirit unless we are ourselves affected by the Word and motivated to obedience. Wherever possible the lessons have been related to the Lord Jesus Christ so that a balanced outlook on Old Testament history 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.

The Committee, Christadelphian Sunday School Association

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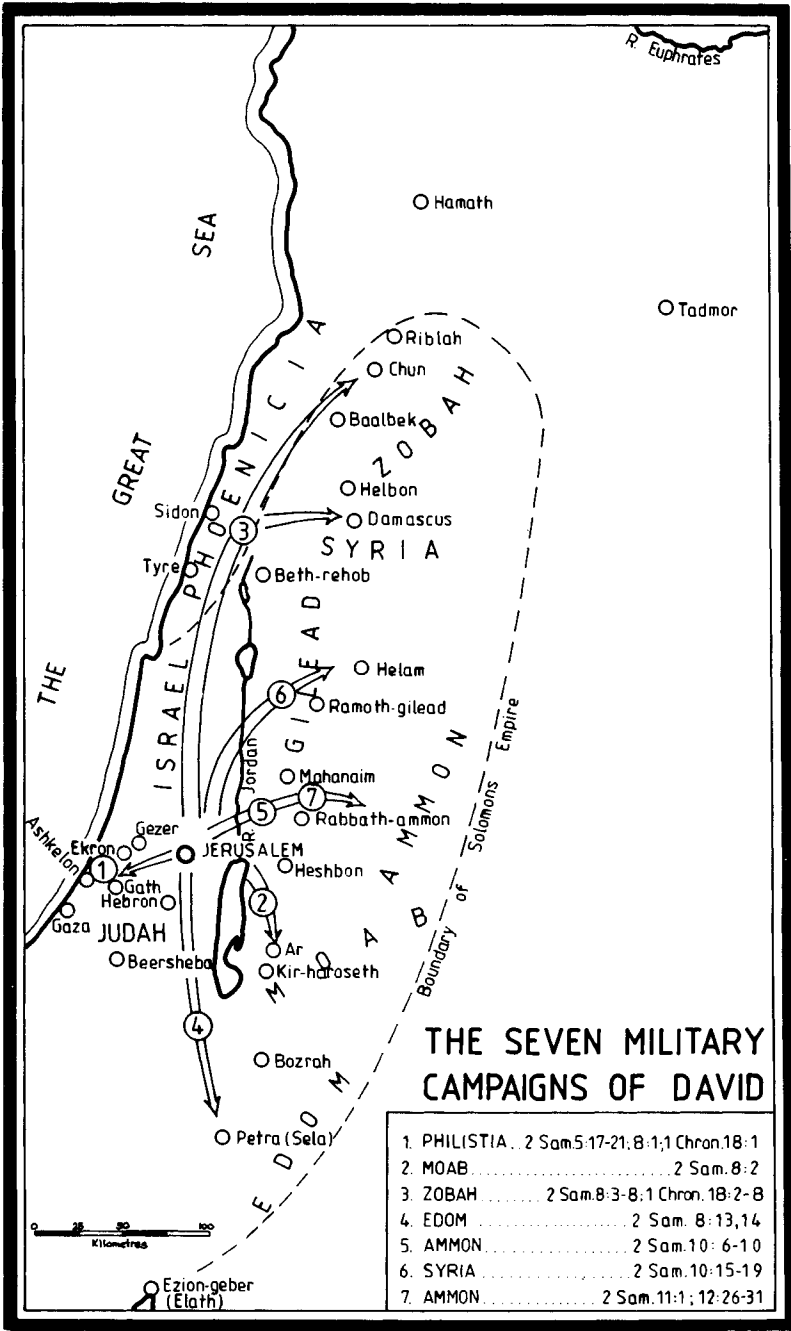
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# **Section 1**

## **THE GOLDEN AGE OF ISRAEL'S HISTORY**

The age of David and Solomon has been called the golden era of Israel's history. It was a time when wars of conquest ended in a glorious peace, with a king ruling upon the throne of David in Jerusalem, and noted for his unerring judgment and divine wisdom. The beautiful temple that was built attracted attention from all over the world, so that Jerusalem became the place of pilgrimage; and Gentiles, such as the Queen of Sheba, were attracted to the worship of Yahweh. In many respects, Israel's golden age typified the future glory of Christ's reign on earth.



## THE SEVEN MILITARY CAMPAIGNS OF DAVID

- 1. PHILISTIA . . . . . 2 Sam.5:17-21; 8:1; 1 Chron.18:1
- 2. MOAB . . . . . 2 Sam. 8:2
- 3. ZOBABH . . . . . 2 Sam.8:3-8; 1 Chron. 18:2-8
- 4. EDOM . . . . . 2 Sam. 8:13,14
- 5. AMMON . . . . . 2 Sam.10: 6-10
- 6. SYRIA . . . . . 2 Sam.10:15-19
- 7. AMMON . . . . . 2 Sam.11:1; 12:26-31



# 1. DAVID ESTABLISHES HIS KINGDOM

## “And Yahweh preserved David whithersoever he went”

*One of the first acts of David on ascending the throne of Israel was the reinstatement of the ark into its proper place. Unlike Saul before him, David knew that the success of the kingdom depended upon the nation seeing God as the very centre of its existence. This duty performed, David proceeded to extend and securely establish his borders. By a series of seven remarkable campaigns he defeated the nations about Israel. Though success accompanied him even against great odds, he had no doubt as to the source of victory. Following his victory over the chariots and cavalry of Syria he wrote: “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses but we will remember the name of Yahweh our God” (Psa. 20:7).*

*Our aim in this lesson is to see how David brought Israel to strength and overcame the surrounding nations.*

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

### THE ARK COMES TO ZION. (2 Samuel 6).

The Ark was God’s meeting place with Israel and was therefore the symbol of His presence and glory (Ex. 25:22). It was therefore fitting for David, with Jerusalem now in his hands, to immediately seek to bring the Ark to Zion and reorganise the worship of God.

For the past 20 years the Ark had remained in the home of Abinadab in Kirjath-jearim. It had been captured and returned by the Philistines after it had been inadvisedly taken into battle in the days of Eli (cp. Josh. 18:1; 1 Sam. 4:3; 6:1, 19; 7:1-2).

Now David made known his intentions to the people and they readily assembled for the great occasion. The ark was mounted on a new cart which was driven by the two sons of Abinadab, Uzzah and Ahio. It was a time of great joy. “David and all the house of Israel were making merry before the LORD with all their might, with songs and lyres, and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals” (2 Sam. 6:5 R.S.V.).

But alas, in the midst of great elation tragedy struck. Uzzah was smitten dead when he put forth his hand to steady the ark which was shaken by the oxen. David was stunned and afraid. Why should such a calamity attend such sincere intentions?

Further progress of the Ark to Zion was inappropriate so it was taken aside into the house of Obed-edom. David pondered the divine judgment. Later he realised his mistake: God’s Word had not been honoured. He acknowledged that, “none ought to carry the ark of God but the **Levites**”, and he said, “for because ye (the **Levites**) did it not at the first, the LORD our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order” (1 Chron. 15:2, 13; Deut. 10:8). This lesson teaches us the importance of carefully doing what God requires. It is not sufficient to be sincere in our motives. We must also consult the Word of God

to see if our plans are in accordance with His will. God desires that men worship Him in “sincerity AND TRUTH” (Josh. 24:14; John 4:23).

After three months news reached David that the house of Obed-edom had been blessed. This was like a signal to David to carry on with his plans. So all Israel was reassembled and the Ark of Yahweh was brought up with shouting and rejoicing to Zion. The event was charged with profound significance. David wore a “robe of fine linen” (1 Chron. 15:27); he offered the sacrifices; he blessed the people; he dealt out a generous gift of bread, flesh and wine to all — all prerogatives of a priest! Here then was a Priest from the tribe of Judah, clothed in righteousness, who was also King of Jerusalem. He truly portrayed the role of a king-priest after the order of Melchizedek (cp. Heb. 7). The words of Psalms 110, 132 and 68 and 1 Chron. 6:8, 36, which were composed at this time, show the great significance of the occasion.

Moreover, the Ark, the Glory of Yahweh, which had departed for so long was returning in power and splendour and a strong King was about to extend the glory of Yahweh’s Kingdom to its greatest bounds. The Lord Jesus was like the Ark for he revealed his Father’s glory and “tabernacled” among men (John 1:14 Diaglott). After a long period of absence, he shall return in power and great glory and “build again the Tabernacle of David” and subdue and incorporate all nations in his Kingdom (Acts 1:11; Zech. 14:4; Ezek. 43:2; Acts 15:16-17).

#### **DAVID EXTENDS HIS BORDERS. (2 Samuel 5:17-25).**

When the Philistines of the south-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, whether they would be delivered in 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: “The LORD hath broken forth upon mine enemies before me, as the breach of waters”. 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 employ a different strategy. He was not to go forth as before, as the Philistines no doubt anticipated, but was rather “to fetch a compass 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”. 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. 14:18). There is a lesson here. Do we always follow the course the Word of God would indicate when problems confront us, or do we do that which is right in our own eyes?



## THE SEVEN CAMPAIGNS OF DAVID.

(2 Samuel 8:1-14; 11:1; 12:26-31).

Following the giving of the great promise to David and his house (2 Sam. 7 — refer Stage 2 Notes, Lesson 25) we learn that David extended his borders almost to the dimensions promised to Abraham, “from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the River Euphrates” (Gen. 15:18; 1 Chron. 18:3; 1 Kgs. 4:21). This was achieved in seven campaigns:—

1. **Against the Philistines** (2 Sam. 8:1). The Philistine menace had still not been quelled 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 (1 Chron. 18:1).
2. **Against Moab** (2 Sam. 8:2). Though David’s great grandmother, Ruth, was a Moabitess, and though he had recently sought asylum there for his parents from Saul’s ravages, the Moabites must have given cause for David’s assault upon them (Ruth 4:21-22; 1 Sam. 22:3-4). 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. 8:3-8). 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; 1,000 chariots, 700 horsemen and 20,000 footmen being captured. As a token of his disdain for relying on many horses, David hamstringed the horses, saving only sufficient for 100 chariots. Psalm 20 seems to reflect his praise on this occasion, “Now I know that Yahweh saveth His anointed; He will hear him from His holy heaven with the saving strength of His right hand. Some trust in chariots: but we will remember the name of Yahweh our God” (vv.6-7). This spirit was God’s counsel for kings of Israel, but alas in only one generation the desire for security led to a multiplication of horses, and at length, a mind void of trust in Yahweh (Deut. 17:16; 1 Kgs. 10:26). What warning there is in this example.

David’s victory provoked two effects. First of all, the wary Syrians of Damascus came forward to succour Hadadezer — but 22,000 were smitten and Damascus was garrisoned: “Yahweh preserved David whithersoever he went” (v.6). Secondly, 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 (vv. 9-12). Thus the northern boundary was restored.

4. **Against Edom** (2 Sam. 8:13, 14; in verse 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 Kgs. 11:15-16). Joab remained there six months and slew 12,000, including "every male in Edom". Thus David was secure from these vicious enemies in the south.

Psalms 60 was written upon these victories. (Note the superscription). David's attitude is important to follow: "Moab is my wash pot; over Edom will I cast my shoe . . . Who will bring me into the strong city? Who will lead me into Edom? Will not thou, O God, which hadst cast us off? . . . Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man" (vv. 8-11).

When men are exalted they generally forsake God. David was different and his greatness lay in his complete ascription of victory to his God.

5. **Against Ammon** (2 Sam. 10:1-14). David proceeded to organise his realm, executing his power "with judgment and justice" (2 Sam. 8:15-18). Mercy was not forgotten in the extension of his power, as seen by his kindness to Mephibosheth, the crippled son of Jonathan (2 Sam. 9). Then 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 when it was from a powerful neighbour! The Ammonites heard about David's wrath and, fearing reprisal, sent for help from the Syrians of Rehob and Zobah, from the King of Maacah and from the men of Tob. Thus 33,000 in all came to their aid. Joab divided his host and with the choice men of the army, and attacked the mercenaries who were behind Israel. They were put to flight and this injected fear into the Ammonites who fled before Abishai with the balance of the army into Rabbah, their capital city. This was a brilliant piece of military strategy on Joab's part.
6. **Against Syria** (2 Sam. 10:15-19). The Syrians regrouped along with others beyond Euphrates and challenged Israel. When this news reached David, he crossed Jordan, marched north and smote the confederacy of Helam. Their captain perished and all the kings sued for peace and served Israel.
7. **Against Ammon** (2 Sam. 11:1; 12:26-31). Though David had already fought against Ammon, his attention had been diverted 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 MESSIAH'S WORK.**

As David put down his enemies by a series of seven campaigns, so, it appears, will the Lord Jesus Christ. The Rainbow Angel of Revelation 10, which represents Christ and the saints, is seen with his feet on both sea

and earth indicating universal dominion (Rev. 10:1-7). His face is as the sun and his feet as pillars of fire, showing that his aspect is one of judgment by fire (cp. Mal. 4:1-2; Mic. 4:13; 2 Thess. 1:8). His voice is as the roaring of a lion and gives rise to “seven thunders” which speak of the day of Yahweh’s wrath and intervention. John was prevented from giving details of the seven thunders but from other parts of the Word it is clear that, following intervention at Jerusalem, the judgments of God will follow to Catholic Europe until at length the kingdom of Christ will extend to all parts of the world (Zech. 14:9; Psa. 2:8; 72:8).

#### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- David always put God first and sought to bring the ark back to Zion soon after being anointed.
- He enquired of God before embarking upon conquest and so received the Divine blessing on his campaigns.
- He always ascribed praise to God, being very different from most men whose pride upon success usually makes them forget God.
- There are typical lessons in the return of the ark and conquests of David that can strengthen our faith in things shortly to come upon the earth.

#### **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. *What lessons can we learn from the death of Uzzah?*
2. *Why was David such a great military hero?*
3. *Why did not David save all the horses of the King of Zobah for his own use?*

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Why did David bring the ark to Zion? How do his actions on this occasion anticipate Christ’s Priesthood?*
2. *Describe David’s victories and show how they foreshadow Christ’s conquests when he returns.*
3. *“Yahweh preserved David whithersoever he went”. Give some illustrations of this quotation from the times when David conquered the surrounding nations.*

## 2. DAVID'S SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

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

*This lesson makes us realise that there are greater enemies inside human nature than the combined force of all outside. David had been greatly blessed by God and his fame had increased with the conquest of his foes on every hand. Yet even with one so great, who formerly could say, “I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God”, there are hidden enemies — inward temptations and basic sinful urges, which come to the fore when idle moments allow the mind to relax from following the thoughts that the Word of God promotes. The lesson of David's sin is, “He that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”.*

*Our aim in this lesson is to see the great tragedies which sin can bring into our lives and the abhorrence with which God views sin.*

### 2 Samuel 11 and 12

#### **DAVID'S SIN. (2 Samuel 11:1-15).**

With the change of season, the army of Israel under Joab returned to finalise the war against Ammon. David, who was now probably nearer 50 than 40, remained at home. Refreshed after an afternoon siesta, he walked upon the roof top. It was an idle, pleasant moment, far from the din of battle where Uriah fought with Israel's valiant men. Bathsheba, the beautiful wife of Uriah, bathed in her courtyard in sight of the king. Greatly affected by her beauty, David sent and enquired after her. To be summoned to the king was flattering; to be able to refuse his subsequent approaches required a strong determination which she was unable to exercise.

David did not have an evil reputation and his behaviour had always been regarded as honourable throughout his kingdom; but now through lust he had set out on a disastrous course.

“He who commits adultery has no sense;

He who does it destroys himself,

Wounds and dishonour will he get;

And his disgrace will not be wiped away” (Prov. 6:32-33 R.S.V.).

#### **DAVID CONCEALS HIS SIN. (2 Samuel 11:6-25).**

David's sudden sin was something which most of us understand. We may, however, find it difficult to comprehend the extent to which he went to conceal it. But David's actions followed the pattern of all flesh from Adam onwards, in not wanting to bring sin into the open. Moreover David possessed great power to accomplish whatever he wanted.

Not long after the incident, David was confronted with Bathsheba's inconvenient and utterly unwanted message: “I am with child”. David determined to conceal his involvement and his attempts grew more desperate with successive failures.

Uriah was withdrawn from battle and David encouraged him to rest at home. David was informed that he had declined and Uriah gave to David his reasons: "The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? as thou livest and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing?" Such words of loyalty and integrity must have caused an unintentional thrust into David's conscience. Uriah was detained by the king the next day and though he was regaled with David's food and overmuch wine, he refused to go home to Bathsheba.

David was driven by Uriah's self-denial to find another way to deliver himself from the consequences of his sin. Deeper and deeper in the dye of sin David thrust his hands. Uriah was despatched to Joab, carrying a message which was his death warrant: "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten and die"!

One sin had led to another and, as with all sin, David would not be able to extricate himself from his action without paying dearly. Three of the 10 commandments concerning the love of one's neighbour had been broken. "Thou shall not covet thy neighbour's wife . . . thou shall not commit adultery . . . thou shall not kill" (Ex. 20:13-17). Thrice guilty, and more as the days wore on, David stood under the condemnation of death: "The adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death" (Lev. 20:10).

The evil plot to abandon Uriah in a position that would lead to his death was duly executed. A tactic that normally would have incited David's rebuke (i.e. of approaching too close to the city wall) was casually dismissed by David — "the sword devoureth one as well as another" — when once he knew that Uriah's death had been secured. After mourning the death of her husband, Bathsheba was summoned and she became David's wife. Outwardly there did not appear anything incongruous in what had transpired. But David's sin was unconfessed and the dark harvest of it lay yet before him: "But the thing that David did displeased the LORD" (2 Sam. 11:27).

### **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 for Nathan replied, "Thou art the man!" The words came unexpectedly and pierced David's heart.

David was shattered. Nathan spared him nothing, even applying to David the words which Samuel had used of Saul. "Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD?" (2 Sam. 12:9; 1 Sam. 15:19).

Because he had used the sword, he was told that it would not depart from his house. As he had taken another's wife, so his neighbour would take his wives. David's attempts to conceal his sin were vain. The Word, which is "living and energetic" (Heb. 4:12, Diaglott), had exposed the "thoughts and intents of his heart", leaving him uncovered and ashamed. "Thou didst it secretly", said Nathan. David had acted as though God had not existed and for this reason his punishment would be open.

There was no hesitation in David's reply, no excuse, no plea for a lesser punishment, no blame upon Bathsheba; simply: "I have sinned against the LORD". David's confession brought forth an immediate response from Nathan: "The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die". Despite the forgiveness, however, there would be consequences to be borne. A moment of sin was to bring forth years of sorrow — as a constant humbling reminder of human weakness and need. David was not the same from that day forward. No longer could he pass judgment upon others, even when they were deserving of it. He had to live with the rebukes of men like Joab and Shimei and to leave the matter in Yahweh's hands.

Nathan impressed David with the far-reaching consequences of his actions: "Because by this deed thou hast given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child that is born unto thee shall die." Because Yahweh's honour had been mocked, David must pay in a very real way and the child conceived would die. Thus death led to death.

### **FORGIVENESS THROUGH GRACE (Psalms 32 and 51).**

God's forgiveness of David contains a great lesson. There was nothing David could do, no sacrifice he could make, to avert the penalty of death according to the Law of Moses. Yet he was delivered from death. In this there lies hope for sinful men — if they repent. Salvation is not of works lest men should boast, but through grace to the repentant and faithful (Romans 3:26-28; Eph. 2:8). "David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, 'Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin' " (Rom. 4:6-8). These words of David are quoted from Psalm 32 which was written on this occasion (vv.1-2). In it David speaks of the anguish which was his, when he concealed his sin and "kept silence" (vv.3-4), and the sense of relief which came with confession and forgiveness (v.5).

Psalms 51 was written "when Nathan came to him", as the superscription informs us. In this psalm David's spirit lacks the confidence seen in earlier Psalms (e.g. Psa. 139:23-24), but he confesses his weakness and need of cleansing from God. Sacrifices he declares to be valueless, for the "sacrifices of God are a broken spirit". Moreover, he counsels sinners (and there are none who sin not) to heed his experiences and realise that "there is forgiveness with God that he might be feared" — "Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee" (Psa. 51:13; cp. Psa. 130:4).

## **THE CHILD DIES 2 Samuel 12:15-23).**

David had been told that Bathsheba's child would die as a consequence of him giving the enemies of Yahweh occasion to blaspheme. Looked at in the long term, this may well have been an act of mercy toward David, for had the child lived he would have been a constant reminder, a living impersonation of David's sin. Nevertheless David prostrated himself and fasted in an endeavour to reverse the Divine decree of death. The pleas of his servants to rise and eat went unheeded in his earnestness. At length after seven days the child died, uncircumcised and un-named. He never entered the covenant people and, like David's sin, passes away forgotten.

Sorrow upon sorrow was the lot of Bathsheba. But as time went by their marriage took a happier turn. Hope sprang again with the promise of another child. As Nathan appeared at the birth of the first son, so now he appeared at the birth of the second son. He came with another message from Yahweh, an antidote to melancholy and fear, a sign of Divine favour restored. Nathan called the new son "Jedidiah", meaning "Beloved of Yahweh", and the record adds that he did it "for Yahweh's sake". His parents called him "Peaceful one" — Solomon. Wrapped in the naming of the little one were the promises of even another son, the One who would truly come "for Yahweh's sake", the "Beloved" Son, the Peaceful One, the man of rest, the Lord Jesus Christ. Bathsheba was comforted and David sensed that God had restored him to favour.

## **CONSEQUENCES OF DAVID'S SIN.**

Though forgiven, a turning point had passed in David's life. Things would not be, could not be, the same thenceforth. In many ways David would be a greater man. The joy, certainly, the fellowship and confidence of past years had gone. Joab had seen the fatal weakness in David's armour. Henceforth David would be in his power. His words to David calling him to come and take Rabbah, the city of such painful memories, lest he take it and call it after his name, hardly spoke of the respect that should exist between general and monarch (2 Sam. 12:27-28). David's immediate family, the royal circle and probably others further afield had seen the king take another man's wife in circumstances that created suspicion, and this gave license for them to do likewise. In particular his family was deeply affected. Some of his sons were grown men whose behaviour required a restraining hand, but their father had rendered himself impotent to exercise it. The death of Bathsheba's child was followed by the death of three other sons of David. Inordinate Amnon perished by the vengeful sword of the proud and rebellious Absalom (2 Sam. 13:28-29). He in turn was slain by Joab (2 Sam. 18:14). Later presumptuous Adonijah, the brother of Absalom, was slain by the just sword of Solomon (1 Kgs. 2:25). It was as though David had to restore fourfold for the life he had taken (2 Sam. 12:6; cp. Ex. 22:1). Truly Yahweh had said, "the sword shall never depart from thine house".



## LESSONS FOR US:

- Sin is short-sighted. It may give pleasure for a season but its evil consequences are long-lasting and painful.
- We live in the midst of a world whose temptations present themselves on every hand. The children of God must be alert to the fatal consequences of indulgence in such sins as are recounted in this story of David and Bathsheba.
- Painful memories remained in the minds of David and Bathsheba and were not removed by forgiveness. Forgiveness removes the eternal consequences, but God often leaves temporary punishments to be endured as part of the sinner's necessary chastening.
- Sin stains, warps, scars the life of the sinner and clings to his heels as if in hot pursuit.
- "Flee fornication". "Neither fornicators . . . nor adulterers shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:18, 9-10).

## 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. *Why was David forgiven his sin with Bathsheba?*
2. *How did David's sin affect himself and his family?*
3. *Which of the 10 commandments did David breach in the events surrounding his sin with Bathsheba? What does this teach us?*
4. *What lessons would David impress upon us in the Psalms 32 and 51 which he wrote after his sin with Bathsheba?*

## ESSAY QUESTIONS:



1. *Describe how David killed Uriah after his sin with Bathsheba and how Nathan the prophet revealed to David the wickedness of his actions.*
2. *How did David's sin affect himself and his family? What lesson about sin do we learn from this?*
3. *What lessons can we learn from the sin of David and Bathsheba?*

### 3. MESSIAH IN DAVID'S PSALMS

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

*The Book of Psalms is the largest book in the Bible and David composed many of the Psalms in the Book. David's mind was in harmony with the God of Israel and, following his anointing, the “Spirit of the LORD came mightily” upon him (1 Sam. 16:13). In this way the mind of Yahweh was communicated to him, so that his words were of God. As David later recorded, “The Spirit of the LORD spake by me and his word was in my tongue” (2 Sam. 23:2). David also had an exceptional appreciation of music. This is apparent from the fact that he was chosen above all to play on the harp before Saul (1 Sam. 16:16-23). This talent was utilised and the utterances of the Spirit were set to music and are known to us as The Psalms. It was David also who organised the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun, to “prophesy with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals”. The Word of God was put to song and in this way the people were taught His ways (1 Chron. 25:1).*

*Our aim in this lesson is to see examples of how the Psalms of David foretell the things concerning Christ.*

#### **Psalms 2; 16; 22; 69; 110**

#### **STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS OF DAVID'S PSALMS.**

Many of the Psalms of David were written on specific occasions and this is indicated by the superscription at the beginning of them. For example, Psalm 63 has the superscription: “A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah”, and thus is related to his experiences as recorded in 1 Sam. 23, etc. The words: “To the chief Musician” appear above Psalm 64, but should be found below Psalm 63 to form the subscription of that Psalm. Thus there are three parts to an ideal Psalm; namely, the superscription, the Psalm itself, and the subscription. This division into three parts can be seen in the psalm recorded in Habakkuk chapter 3.

David's experiences in many ways run a close parallel with those of his greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The feelings he had in exile, when he despaired of life and was thrust upon his God, were made the basis of the Psalms which portray Messiah's sufferings. In these prophetic Psalms the “Spirit of Christ . . . testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow” (1 Pet. 1:11). In fact the life and mission of Christ is revealed in profound detail; so much so that it is only possible in this lesson to touch upon the major events as recorded in a selection of Psalms by David, namely Psalms 2, 16, 22, 69 and 110.

The importance of these Psalms cannot be over-emphasised. They are frequently quoted in the New Testament and contain many of the stock quotations used in apostolic preaching. The Lord Jesus appealed to them

to convince his bewildered disciples that his sufferings and death were the guarantee, not the disqualification, of his Messiahship: "And he said unto them . . . all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the Law of Moses, in the prophets, and in the PSALMS, concerning me . . . thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day" (Lk. 24:44-46).

### **SUFFERING AND DEATH. (Psalms 22 and 69)**

These two psalms in particular portray the sufferings unto death of Messiah, even though written by David. The words of Psalm 69:9, "the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up," were called to mind by the disciples early in the Lord's ministry, when he was repulsed by merchandising in the very precincts of God's Temple (Jn. 2:17). The multiplication of his enemies, because he faithfully did his Father's will, and their hatred towards him is expressed in the words, "They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head" (v.4; Jn. 15:25), and "the reproaches (insults) of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me" (v.9; Rom. 15:3). In David's experiences were found the counterparts of Messiah's earnest pleas for deliverance (vv.13-18). Even the offer of vinegar to the crucified Lord was foretold (v.21; Matt. 27:34).

Psalm 22 takes us to the cross itself. So accurate was this prophecy that the impaled Lord uttered its words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me" (v.1; Matt. 27:46). The words which would fall unconsciously from the mouths of his murderers were known to the Spirit: "He trusted in the LORD that He would deliver him: let Him deliver him, seeing He delighted in him" (v.8; Matt. 27:43). The parting of his garments and the casting of lots for his vesture, minor but specific prophecies, were likewise specified and fulfilled (v.18; Matt. 27:35). The precise mode of his death, the piercing of hands and feet without bone fracture, was likewise brought about by an amazing conjunction of circumstances (v.16; Psa. 34:20; Jn. 19:31-37).

Thus both Psalms depict the sufferings and death of Messiah, but they also teach his resurrection, for they conclude upon a happier note. His cries were not in vain. His Father heard and "set him upon high" (Psa. 22:24; 69:29). Psalm 22 concludes with the picture of the victorious Lord in the midst of the ecclesia and the final conversion of "all the ends of the world" (vv. 25-31; cp. 69:35-36).

### **RESURRECTION. (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 and that his kingdom would be "established FOREVER" (2 Sam. 7:16). The question then arose in David's mind — how could one of his mortal descendants live forever? David solved the problem by realising 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 ex-

plain 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 forever (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 accord (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 used this Psalm in exactly the same way (Acts 13:34-37).

### **ASCENSION AND SECOND COMING (Psalm 110).**

If the Lord had risen, where was he? This question confronted 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 was here foretold (cp. Acts 2:33-35).

The Psalm also foretells an important consequence of his ascension, i.e., that during his absence the Lord Jesus would be a priest after the order of Melchizedek (v.4). Because he rose from the dead, he must have been without sin — "King of Righteousness" ("Melchizedek") — and since he now has eternal life he can mediate in heaven at God's right hand, a place forbidden to mortal man.

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

The Lord Jesus placed a question before the Pharisees based on Psalm 110:1. He asked them whose son Messiah would be. They replied without hesitation, "the son of David". But in Psalm 110:1 David addresses his son as his "Lord". The Lord Jesus asked them why David did this, for a father, in Jewish reckoning, was always of greater honour than his son — and surely this would apply in the case of illustrious King David! But it did not in the case of Messiah — why? The Pharisees could not answer and dared not ask him any more questions (Matt. 22:41-46). But why was David's son also his "Lord"? The answer lies in the fact that he was also the Son of God. It was this that the Jews so consistently refused to acknowledge and accept, and for which they called him a blasphemer (Jn. 5:18; Matt. 26:63-65).

## **HIS UNIVERSAL POWER AND KINGDOM (Psalm 2).**

This psalm may have been written by David following his victory over the confederacy that came against him when he attacked Ammon (2 Sam. 10:6-19). In it is seen the confrontation 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 (vv.1-3). But the wrath of man is a puny thing in the path of God's judgments and He will laugh and vex them (vv.4-5). Because he is God's Son he has "a more excellent name" and shall inherit "the uttermost parts of the earth". Sonship entitled him to heirship and he will use divine power to crush the nations (vv.8, 9). Verse 9 is cited in Rev. 2:27 where 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 (Rom. 8:17).

The Psalm concludes with some good advice for rulers when Christ returns. They are called upon to submit to him or perish (vv.10-12). The following quotations show that some will and some will not submit (Mic. 4:2-3; Psa. 72:9-11).

### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- The Psalms reveal David's innermost feelings in his distresses. These were taken and amplified by the Holy Spirit, so that they accurately prophesied Messiah's experiences.
- Meditation upon these remarkable prophecies made 1,000 years before Christ, and their subsequent fulfilment, should deepen our appreciation of the power and authority of the Word.
- Some of these Psalms envisage both advents. The fact that the prophecies of the first advent have been fulfilled, should assure us of the fulfilment of those events which still lie in the future.

### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *How do we know that the Psalms of David are inspired?*
2. *Why did Peter quote from Psalm 16 in his speech recorded in Acts 2?*
3. *Why did David call his son his Lord? Base your answer on Psa. 110:1 and say why Jesus asked the Pharisees this same question.*

### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *How do David's Psalms reveal the life and mission of the Lord Jesus Christ? Give examples from two Psalms.*
2. *Show how Psalms 22 and 69 portray the sufferings and glory of Christ.*
3. *What do Psalms 2 and 110 say about Christ's second coming?*

## 4. SOLOMON SUCCEEDS DAVID

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

*The time drew nigh when David should die. Certain important matters had to be attended to beforehand; the kingdom had to be secured in the hands of Solomon and the plans for the Temple, which had been revealed to David by the Spirit, had to be made known. It seems that David's last thoughts were preoccupied with the House of Yahweh which he had been forbidden to build. He had nevertheless gathered together a vast store of wealth to ensure that it would be “exceedingly magnificent, of fame and glory throughout all lands” (1 Chron. 22:5 R.S.V.).*

*The aim of this lesson is to see how Solomon began his reign with a wise sense of justice as well as mercy, just as Jesus Christ will begin his reign.*

### 1 Kings 1-3; 1 Chronicles 28 & 29

#### THE REVOLT OF ADONIJAH (1 Kings 1:1-31).

It was obvious to all that David's life was coming to an end: “he was advanced in years and could not get warm”. It was known that Solomon was the crown prince, but the position had not been made sufficiently clear. With David physically impaired, the political opportunist, his son Adonijah, seized the occasion to revolt. He prepared chariots and horsemen and 50 men to be his personal vanguard. He conferred with important figures in the kingdom whom he felt he could trust, such as Joab the captain of the host and Abiathar the priest, and invited them to a feast. There were some significant omissions, however, among them being Nathan the prophet, Benaiah and his mighty men, and Solomon. Sheep and oxen were slain and Adonijah's inaugural feast got underway.

But Nathan the prophet learned of Adonijah's plans and was quick to perceive the implications. Not only was God's promise to Solomon being violated, but those who were not invited would be counted as offenders if Adonijah was made king. He acquainted Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, with the news and proposed a plan to arouse the ailing king to publicly anoint Solomon. He suggested that Bathsheba go into King David and seek confirmation that her son Solomon had been promised the throne. Then she was to ask a second question, “Why then does Adonijah reign?” While she was speaking Nathan would himself come in and support her words. So Bathsheba did as planned and expressed her fears for herself and Solomon after David's death. Then Nathan made his dramatic timely entrance. He set out the urgency of the situation and even implied that if Adonijah had David's consent then he and Zadok and Benaiah had been slighted and uninformed (vv.22-27). David was deeply concerned. First of all he called Bathsheba back and repeated his earlier oath to her that Solomon would reign after him. He then told her that he would anoint him that day king over Israel.

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

David acted on his word immediately. He called Zadok, Nathan, and Benaiah together 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” (vv.33-35). David’s will was duly executed and there was great jubilation 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 arrested the attention of Adonijah’s guests. Joab was alerted by the trumpet’s peals and enquired why the city was in an uproar. At that moment, in came Jonathan, Abiathar’s son, with the explanation. Adonijah may have thought that the city had heard about his moves and were celebrating him, for he welcomed Jonathan, “Come in, for thou art a valiant man, and bringest good tidings”. But, alas, his exuberance was changed into consternation. Jonathan gave a full report, “Verily our lord king David hath made Solomon king . . .” (vv.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 to his way”. Adonijah trembled and he realised his life was in jeopardy. 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).**

The first anointing of Solomon had been done in haste to meet the needs that had arisen. Later all Israel was gathered and David formally inducted Solomon as king and gave him a charge. The details of this gathering are contained in 1 Chron. 28 and 29. We read that “David the king stood upon his feet” to address his people. He was old and ailing and he summoned all his strength. From the faithful and courageous words he spoke, we can see how much he desired to leave a God-fearing heritage. He rehearsed Yahweh’s choice of himself as king and then recounted how he had specifically nominated Solomon of all his sons to succeed him and “sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel”. Adonijah may have been in the audience. The will of God and David was clear now for all time. He encouraged Solomon to serve Yahweh with a “perfect heart” and “willing mind”, but made it abundantly clear that cursing would replace blessing if he should forsake Yahweh. In retrospect such words are tragic and prophetic.



David entrusted Solomon with the sacred duty of building the house of God. He gave to him the plans which had been made known to him by the Spirit. They had been given him directly (28:12). They had not come via Nathan or Abiathar. In this the mercy of God is seen, for although David had not been allowed to build the house as he had greatly desired, he was the recipient of the plans. David realised how great an undertaking the temple was and he entreated the princes to give generously. He set before them his own example, "I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God", he said. He had not only devoted the spoils of conquest and public revenues but had made personal sacrifices (29:3). He had set his delight upon that house; would they, the princes?

The people were inspired by David's ready spirit and responded to his appeal. The effect is worthy of our notice and meditation: "the people rejoiced, for they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the LORD: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy" (v.9). This in turn led to a prayer of thanksgiving which was made by David and which in part is the basis of the Lord's prayer (cf. vv.10, 11). His heart overflowed with thanks to Yahweh and he acknowledged that He was the source of ALL riches and that man is a mere sojourner on the earth. David then conducted the worship of Yahweh. The people blessed him and sacrificed and rejoiced as Solomon was anointed the "second time" as king "on the throne of the LORD instead of David his father" (vv.20-23).

#### **PARTING ADVICE FOR SOLOMON (1 Kings 2:1-9).**

When David realised that his death was nigh he gave Solomon some sound parting advice. He charged him to keep the commandments of God. By so doing he would prosper in his ways and the words of the promise, guaranteeing an unbroken line of Davidic kings until the coming of Messiah, would be fulfilled (vv.1-4).

Then David advised Solomon how to deal with certain ones in his kingdom who were potential rebels and dangerous. Because of his sin, his age, and circumstances, David could not punish these evil doers. He directed Solomon to cut off Joab for his flagrant breach of the king's commands, when in cold-blood he slaughtered two "captains of the hosts", Abner and Amasa (vv.5-6; 2 Sam. 3:27-39; 20:10). Shimei was to be treated likewise for the grievous curse spoken against David when he retreated before Absalom (vv.8-9; 2 Sam. 16:6-14). On the other hand Barzillai's sons were to be treated with kindness, for he had succoured David in a time of need (v.7).

#### **SOLOMON'S JUDGMENT AGAINST EVIL-DOERS (1 Kings 2:10-46).**

David died after 40 years as king and a lifetime filled with activity and drama, joy and sorrow. Solomon immediately set about securing his throne and power. "Then Solomon sat upon the throne of David his

father; and his kingdom was established greatly” (v.12). Evil-doers were moved from office or executed:—

1. **Adonijah** (vv.13-25). He had been granted pardon after his attempted revolt on condition that he “show himself a worthy man”. But through Bathsheba, Solomon’s mother, he requested Abishag to be his wife. Adonijah made the request on the grounds of grievance. He said to Bathsheba, “Thou knowest that the kingdom was mine . . . ; howbeit the kingdom is turned about, and is become my brother’s.” Now Abishag had been given to David, the king, in his old age. This request on the basis of grievance was presumption and was tantamount to rebellion. Solomon saw the issue and executed judgment speedily.
2. **Abiathar** (vv.26-27). He was relieved of his office as priest and banished to Anathoth because he had supported Adonijah, and betrayed the Word of Yahweh which had plainly indicated God’s choice of Solomon. Thus the last vestiges of judgment were poured out on the house of Eli (v.27; 1 Sam. 2:31-35). Zadok, the faithful priest, was appointed in his stead to walk before Yahweh’s anointed (v.35).
3. **Joab** (vv.28-34). He heard of Solomon’s purge and knew that he would be next for he too had followed Adonijah. Like Adonijah earlier, he fled to the Tabernacle and took hold of the horns of the altar in the hope that he would obtain mercy. He was executed by the sword of Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada. Benaiah was appointed over the host in Joab’s stead.
4. **Shimei** (vv.36-46). He was permitted to live without interference upon the condition of abiding in Jerusalem and not going beyond the brook Kidron. For three years the terms were upheld, but then two of his servants fled to Gath and Shimei set out to recover them. Word reached Solomon of the breach of the conditions which were sworn as an oath before Yahweh. Therefore he was put to death.

In these ways Solomon’s firmness and justice were seen. There would be no toleration of rebels and so his kingdom would be undisturbed by usurpers (see v.46). We might heed two lessons at this time:

1. The delay in punishment seen in the world today is an encouragement to evil-doers to work abomination. Solomon knew this and later said, “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Eccl. 8:11).
2. When the Lord comes he, like Solomon, will root out the workers of iniquity, execute speedy and righteous judgment, and so bring peace to the world (cf. Mal. 4:1-3; Isa. 11:4-5; 32:1-6).

## **YAHWEH APPEARS TO SOLOMON AT GIBEON (1 Kings 3:2-15).**

Solomon made an excellent start: he “loved the LORD walking in the statutes of David his father” (v.3). While in Gibeon sacrificing, Yahweh appeared to him and said, “Ask what I shall give thee.” Solomon reviewed how his family had become bound up in the divine plan of the ages; Yahweh had kept His word to David and set his son upon his throne; he was young and inexperienced; and his subjects were God’s and very numerous. In view of these things he humbly replied:

“Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may be able to discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great people” (v.9).

This request is a model answer to such an offer. All young people who would be prospective kings and priests in the Age to Come do well to make the same request. Such wisdom is freely available from the Bible and especially in the full revelation of the Father when He spoke in His Son and the holy apostles.

Yahweh was delighted with Solomon’s answer and not only did He grant him the greatest wisdom of any man, but added the things which he might have requested, namely, riches and honour, and long life if he walked in the commandments.

## **SOLOMON’S WISDOM: THE TWO HARLOTS (1 Kings 3:16-28).**

The great wisdom of Solomon is illustrated by the judgment passed when two harlots came to him. They lived alone in the same house and each had given birth to a son three days apart. During the night one died because it was laid on by its mother. Realising what had happened she exchanged babies, but the next day the other mother perceived what had happened for the dead child was not hers at all. The case was brought before Solomon. It was difficult to judge for there were no witnesses; it was an emotional issue, and both pleaded innocence. What was to be done?

Solomon called for a sword and proposed that the living child be divided and that both should have half. The demand produced an immediate reaction. The true mother’s bowels yearned for her child and she was prepared to surrender the child that at least it might live. The other callously accepted the decision to divide it.

Judgment was now clear and the true mother abundantly apparent. King Solomon clearly reigned with justice and judgment. His reputation spread abroad. “All Israel heard of the judgment that the king had judged: and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment” (v.28).

### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- Presumption and love of power involving trespass does not pay. Fear, shame and death followed Adonijah.
- David’s love of Yahweh and His House dominated his closing

thoughts. His generosity inspired his companions. All we have belongs to the Father and should be used in His service. He loves a cheerful giver. We invest wisely when we spend time and money in the Truth.

- Firm judgment brought respect. The Kingdom will see workers of iniquity destroyed. We must deal firmly with ourselves, subjecting and cutting off the evil of pride and lust now if we would reign then (2 Cor. 10:4-5).
- Solomon had great wisdom and power to discern. Christ has even more and we should remember this at all times.
- Solomon's request for an "understanding heart" is a guide to all young Christadelphians in their prayers.

#### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

"The Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 4, No. 7

"The Man David" (H. Tennant)—Pp. 207-215

#### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *How did Adonijah seek to succeed his father David as king?*

2. *What did Solomon do to Joab and why?*

3. *For what did Solomon make request when God said to him, "Ask what I shall give thee"? What could he have asked for, but did not?*

4. *Briefly state two events which showed that Solomon reigned with justice and righteousness.*

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Relate what David did to establish Solomon on his throne.*

2. *Write a character study of the man Adonijah.*

3. *How did Solomon firmly establish his throne when he succeeded his father?*

4. *Write an essay on the wisdom of Solomon.*

## 5. THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON

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

*David, Israel's illustrious 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 kingdom was noted for its peace, to construct the glorious building which stood for over 350 years before being destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.*

*Our aim in this lesson is to see the greatness of the Temple and to learn spiritual lessons from its construction and its opening ceremony.*

### **1 Kings 5-8; 2 Chronicles 2-7**

#### **SOLOMON PREPARES MATERIALS FOR CONSTRUCTION (1 Kings 5; 2 Chronicles 2).**

Once peace had been established in the kingdom, Solomon began the preparatory work for constructing the Temple. He was helped considerably, for much of the treasure and material to be used in the Temple had already been collected by David years before (cf. 1 Chron. 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 (1 Kings 5:13-14).

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 labourers 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 (cp. 2 Chron. 2:17).

The 3,300 overseers were Solomon's own officers (1 Kgs. 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.

#### **CONSTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE (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 4th year and was completed in the 8th month of his 11th year. Seven and a 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 its priestly services were a parable of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, who was greater than Solomon. 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 (i.e. around 10 metres) square, the Holy Place twenty cubits (10 m.) wide and forty cubits (20 m.) long, and the Most Holy Place again twenty cubits (10 m.) 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.

Students should be aware of the spiritual significance of these items from their lessons on the Tabernacle (Refer Stage 1 notes, Lesson 22).

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, spoke of 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 which by now contained 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, snuffers, basins and spoons. These items were made by Hiram, a skilled worker in brass from Tyre.

### **THE TEMPLE OPENED (1 Kings 8; 2 Chronicles 5).**

After seven and a half years in building, it must have been a very joyous

occasion when the Temple was completed and ready for the opening ceremony. After installing the various items of furniture, Solomon then brought in the treasures which David his father had collected for the House. He then assembled the elders of Israel and all the princes to witness the wonderful scene of the Ark being brought up into its resting place in the Temple. It was in the 7th month at the Feast of Tabernacles when the priests took up the Ark, together with all the holy vessels that were in the Tabernacle, and brought them to the doors of the Temple. There Solomon and all the people sacrificed great numbers of sheep and oxen to Yahweh, and amidst all the splendour, the Ark was taken into the Most Holy Place, where it was placed beneath the overshadowing wings of the cherubim.

The climax of the opening ceremony had now been reached. As the priests retired to the Holy Place, the singers of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun with their sons and brethren uttered a glorious song of praise and thanksgiving to Yahweh accompanied by cymbals, psalteries and harps and 120 priests sounding with trumpets. As they sang to Yahweh, "for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever", the Temple was completely filled with a cloud, a manifestation of God's glory. So great was the glory that the priests could not stand to minister in their services.

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

No doubt Solomon was overwhelmed on this momentous occasion as he gazed upon the glorious structure filled with God's glory. Here was a typical fulfilment of the great promise made to his father David. With his heart full of joy, he outstretched his hands to Yahweh in heaven before all the people and offered a prayer of thanksgiving and praise. In his prayer Solomon extolled the virtues of Yahweh for His faithfulness and great mercy in allowing them to build the great Temple to be His dwelling place. Yet Solomon recognised that God could not really be contained in a small building when even the very heavens cannot contain Him: "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!" (2 Chron. 6:18; cp. Acts 7:47-49). Acknowledging his and the nation's lowly position before such a great God, Solomon then appealed to God to always look upon the House built for His name, to always hearken to the prayers of His people, whether in prosperity or adversity. Indeed Solomon feared that history would repeat itself and Israel would turn away from Yahweh. So he prayed for forgiveness in such eventualities (2 Chron. 6:22-39).

It is very significant, that in his prayer Solomon makes special mention of the stranger who desires to worship the God of Israel. There is no hint of Israelitish exclusiveness in Solomon's mind (vv.32, 33). He was anxious that the whole world might learn of Yahweh and worship Him in truth. Finally he appealed fervently to God to hear all supplications made



in that place and to safeguard the throne of David (vv.40-42). To Solomon the dedication of the Temple was but a prefiguring of the more glorious day when Yahweh's glory would fill the whole earth and His saints would be clothed with salvation.

### **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. Here, in a dramatic way, God was indicating to Solomon and the people that his prayer had been accepted. The fire from heaven and the glory that filled the House had a marked effect on the people. They bowed to the ground and praised Yahweh, saying, "for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever" (v.3).

It was during the Feast of Tabernacles, which speaks of the ingathering of all nations into the purpose of God (Zech. 14:16), that the Temple was opened (2 Chron. 5:3). A vast number of people would have been present to watch the opening ceremony of the House of prayer. A multitude of sacrifices was offered by Solomon and the people — Solomon alone offered 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. There were songs of joy and praise as well. Catch the feeling of joy and gladness in the following words, "And on the three and twentieth day of the seventh month he sent the people away into their tents, glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the LORD had shewed unto David, and to Solomon, and to Israel his people. Thus Solomon finished the house of the LORD, and the king's house; and all that came into Solomon's heart to make in the house of the LORD, and in his own house, he prosperously effected" (2 Chron. 7:10, 11).

### **GOD WARNS 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 of warning. He re-affirmed His promise to bless Israel, if they would turn to Him in truth, and He told Solomon that His eyes would always be open and His ears attentive to prayer made in the House. However, the issues that faced Solomon and the people were made plain. If Solomon would walk before God as David his father had done, then God would indeed be with him and the Kingdom would remain: "There shall not fail thee a man to be ruler in Israel" (v.18). 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 plucked up out of their land and become a byword among the nations.

With such a warning as this, one would have thought that Solomon would choose the path of wisdom: but alas, he too departed from the ways of Yahweh, and the terrible prediction of 2 Chronicles 7:20-21 became a reality.

## **SOLOMON'S TEMPLE A TYPE OF THE FUTURE TEMPLE.**

Solomon's Temple was constructed as a dwelling place for Yahweh, but it also revealed by symbols and types how a true Israelite could approach unto the Father and so become in turn a "dwelling place" of God. In the Temple of the future age to be established in Jerusalem, faithful Israelites and Gentiles will find a place of immortality in the presence of David's greater son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are many spiritual lessons that can be gained from the construction of Solomon's Temple. The Scriptures present the Temple as a type of the House of prayer for all nations to be set up at Christ's return. Full details of this glorious Temple are given in Ezekiel 40-48. An interesting exercise is to explore the many lessons and types in Solomon's Temple. Listed below are but a few:—

1. The stone for the Temple was quarried from the hills near Jerusalem and shaped, away from the Temple, before being fitted in the construction. Likewise the saints, creatures of the earth, are shaped by the influences of God's word, to become the living stones of God's spiritual temple (1 Pet. 2:5; Eph. 2:19-22).
2. Three timbers were used. Cedar, being very durable, spoke of incorruption (Psa. 92:12). The fir tree, being very strong, spoke of strength derived from God (Hab. 3:19). The olive, which produces light-giving oil, is a symbol of divine enlightenment and truth (Zech. 4:3).
3. Both Israelites and Gentiles were involved. Isaiah indicates that not only will "strangers" assist in the building in the future, (Isa. 60:10), but "the glory of Lebanon" shall come to beautify the place of God's Sanctuary.
4. Tyre assisted Solomon, and in the Age to Come, modern day Tyre will be among the first to honour the greater than Solomon (Psa. 45:12).
5. Solomon not only built the Temple, but also made a house for Pharaoh's daughter, his wife (1 Kgs. 7:8). Those who attain unto immortality, having come out of spiritual Egypt, shall likewise find a dwelling-place with Christ as his "bride" (Psa. 45:10-11, 14-15). Psalm 45 may have been based on the marriage of Solomon to the daughter of Pharaoh.
6. Just as the glory of Yahweh filled the Temple at the opening ceremony, so Ezekiel reveals that the Temple of the Age to Come shall be filled with God's glory (Ezek. 43:4).
7. Solomon desired that the Temple be the house of prayer, not only for Israel, but "for all people of the earth" (2 Chron. 6:33). The Temple of the future age will indeed become "the House of Prayer for all nations", when God's glory shall fill the whole earth (Isa. 56:6-8).
8. The opening of Solomon's Temple was during the Feast of Tabernacles. From year to year people shall go up to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh and there keep the Feast of Tabernacles (Zech. 14:16).

### LESSONS FOR US:

- Though the Temple of Solomon was a glorious edifice, it would avail nothing unless the hearts of Solomon and Israel were right in God's eyes. There was always the danger of assuming that the building itself imparted sanctity to the people irrespective of their attitude.
- We too, as young people of God, must recognise that the ecclesia cannot give us righteousness, but 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" (Isa. 57:15).

### REFERENCE LIBRARY:

"The 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

### PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What things are taught by the fact that Solomon used Gentile workmen in building the Temple?*
2. *In what way did the Temple of Solomon differ from the Tabernacle?*
3. *What main lessons can we learn from Solomon's prayer at the opening of the Temple?*
4. *What warnings did God give to Solomon when the Temple was consecrated?*

### ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Give a description of Solomon's Temple and its furniture and briefly outline the spiritual lessons gained therefrom.*
2. *Outline how the construction and opening of Solomon's Temple prefigured the Temple of the Age to Come.*
3. *What main points did Solomon cover in his prayer at the consecration of the Temple? What was God's answer to him? Briefly comment on the lessons for us in these things.*

# 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.

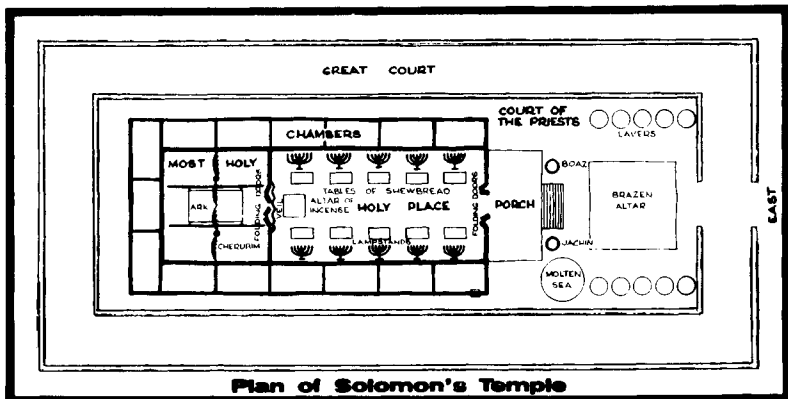
- The walls were made of quarried stone shaped and hewn prior to construction. These were lined with cedar, carved with cherubim,

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

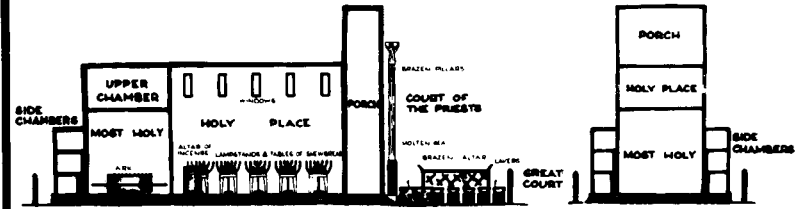
- The Floors were of fir or cypress and lined with gold (1 Kgs. 6:15, 30).
- The Ceiling was of beams and planks of cedar and lined with gold (1 Kgs. 6:9, 22).
- The Doors of the Most Holy Place were of olive carved with cherubim, palm trees, open flowers and overlaid with gold (1 Kgs. 6:31-32).
- The 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 (Gal. 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 Brazen Altar for significance).



## Sections Through Temple



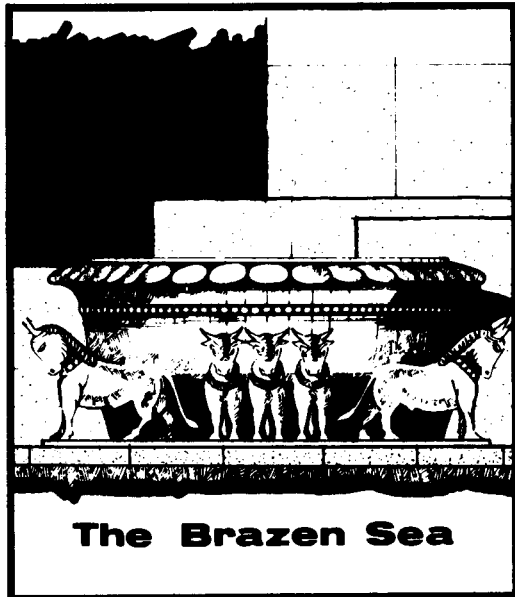
### THE OUTER COURT

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 brazen 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 Brazen Sea**

## 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:

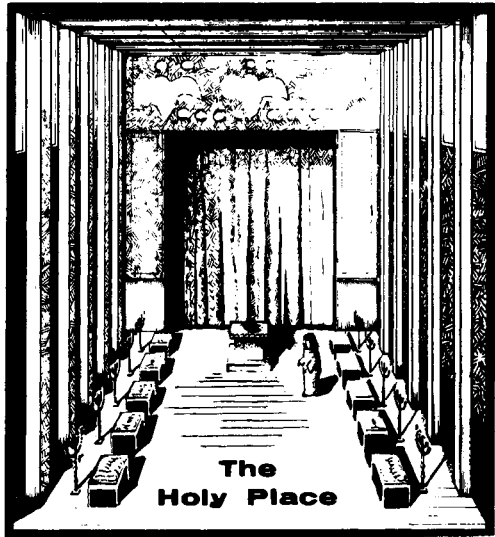
1. **TEN LAMPSTANDS** of gold, 5 on each side of the Holy Place (2 Chron. 4:7; 1 Kgs. 7:49) = Jesus and Ecclesia from whom the light of the knowledge of the Truth radiates in a dark world (2 Cor. 4:6; Jn. 1:9; Phil. 2:15; Rev. 1:20; Matt. 5:14-16; Deut. 4:6; Ps. 119:105; Prov. 6:23).

**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).

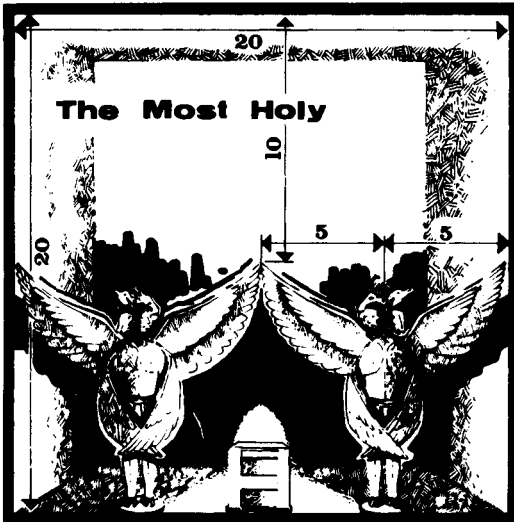
2. **TEN TABLES OF SHEWBREAD** (2 Chron. 4:8, 19; 1 Kgs. 7:48), with 12 loaves on each (Lev. 24:5-9). 12 = 12 tribes of Israel; loaves = meal offering, the fruit of their labours; and Aaron and the priests represent God. When the priests ate the "bread of God" (Lev. 21:6), God was symbolically accepting 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** (cp. Ex. 26:31-35). It is not mentioned, but was present (cp. Heb. 10:20; Matt. 27:51). 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 magnifical, 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**, in corruption, 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 incorruptible, 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.

## 6. THE GLORY OF SOLOMON'S REIGN

**“Behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard”**

*The reign of Solomon ushered in a glorious period in the history of Israel that will never be equalled until the “greater than Solomon”, the Lord Jesus Christ, sits on the “throne of the LORD” in Jerusalem.*

*Solomon received a kingdom prepared for him. He was given wisdom by God that excelled the wisest scholars of that day and all nations sent their ambassadors to pay homage to the King and to hear his words. Riches and honour poured into Jerusalem, so increasing the splendour of his reign. The 40 years of Solomon's reign typify the everlasting Kingdom of God to be ruled over by Christ at his second advent.*

*Our aim in this lesson is to see the magnificence of Solomon's reign, a reign which types that of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

### 1 Kings 10

#### THE HERITAGE OF DAVID.

This golden age of Israel's history was made possible by the successful military campaigns of David against neighbouring enemies. Solomon's task was therefore to maintain and control the expanse of territory handed down to him by David. As a wise administrator, Solomon was in a position to reap the fruits of David's victories.

Altogether he reigned over Israel for a period of forty years (2 Chron. 9:30), and it was in this period of Israel's prosperity that Solomon transformed Israel from its pre-Davidic state of confederate tribes to a strong, centralised government, superintending the multitudinous activities of a far-flung empire (1 Kgs. 4:20-21). The traditional tribal boundaries were replaced by administrative districts. Over these twelve districts he placed a taxation officer, one of whose main duties it was to see that his district furnished provisions for the royal court one month in twelve. This would have entailed quite a burden, for we are told the food consumed in just one day consisted of 240 sacks of flour, 480 sacks of meal, ten fattened cattle, twenty pasture-fed cattle, one hundred sheep, besides numerous fowls and animals of the deer species (1 Kgs. 4:22-23).

#### SOLOMON — THE BUILDER (1 Kgs. 7:1-8; 9:15-24).

In addition to the building of the glorious Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem (as described in Lesson 5), Solomon's tremendous building activity is seen in the refortification of Jerusalem, the building of his palace and administrative head-quarters, and further afield in the building of “store-cities” and “the cities for his chariots and the cities for his horsemen”.

As glorious as the Temple was, the other buildings linked with it were



also magnificent. Solomon's Judgment Hall was large and lofty, its cedar-lined walls housing a large canopied throne of ivory, overlaid with gold and flanked by lions (1 Kgs. 10:18-20). Here Solomon handed down his royal judgments (1 Kgs. 7:7), prefiguring the greater splendour and solemnity of Christ, of whom it is said that he shall have "a great white throne" of judgment (Rev. 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 and state receptions were held.

Rows of massive square cedar pillars supported the roof of the "House of the Forest of Lebanon" (1 Kgs. 7:1-5). On the panelled walls hung 500 shields of gold (1 Kgs. 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 Isa. 60:11, 13, 17).

As well as the buildings of state, Solomon had his own magnificent private palace together with a palace built for one of his wives, the daughter of Pharaoh (1 Kgs. 3:1; 7:8). He also established royal gardens and parks containing artificial lakes, flower beds and orchards (Eccl. 2:4-6).

Archaeologists have uncovered convincing proof of Solomon's building activities throughout the land, especially at Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer, the remains of which give witness to the truth of 1 Kings 9:15. Megiddo is especially noteworthy with its stables for 450 chariot horses. Solomon's formidable army necessitated the building of 4,000 stalls for horses, servicing the ring of cities strategically located near the borders of Israel and manned by companies of charioteers (1 Kgs. 9:15-19; 10:26; 2 Chron. 9:25).

Solomon also developed a highly industrialised metal refining network, with the mining of ore in the Arabah south of the Dead Sea, and a great smelting refinery at Ezion-geber, the place also of Solomon's seaport on the Red Sea. In describing the site, the excavator has written: "An effective business organisation had to be called into existence to regulate the profitable flow of raw materials and finished and semi-finished products. There was, so far as we know, only one man who possessed the strength, wealth and wisdom capable of initiating and carrying out such a highly complex and specialised undertaking. He was King Solomon. He alone in his day had the ability, the vision, and the power to establish an important industrial centre and sea-port such a comparatively long distance from the capital city of Jerusalem. Ezion-geber represents one of his greatest, if indeed up to the present time his least known accomplishments" — Nelson Glueck, "The Other Side of the Jordan".

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

Solomon capitalised upon the strategic advantage of Israel in its geographical position between Asia and Africa. He 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 Kgs 9:26; 10:22).

His enterprising business sense is seen in him becoming the exclusive agent through whom the Hittites and Armenians had to negotiate in order to buy horses from Kue (Cilicia) or chariots from Egypt (1 Kgs. 10:28, 29 R.S.V.). These and other enterprises made silver as common as stone and cedar as sycamore in Jerusalem. In one year 666 talents of gold flowed into Solomon's treasury (1 Kgs. 10:14).

## **THE QUEEN OF SHEBA (1 Kgs. 10:1-10).**

The spices of Sheba were exported along the "Incense Road" terminating at Ezion-geber and from thence north to Jerusalem and Syria or south to Egypt. With the build-up of Solomon's industry at this terminus the Queen of Sheba became increasingly aware of the glory of the Kingdom. Further, 1 Kings 10:1 indicates that she heard (continuous tense) of the "name of Yahweh" in relation to Solomon's kingdom. Taking a very great train of camels laden with spices, gold and precious stones fit for such an important monarch, the Queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem and immediately plied Solomon with questions and examined thoroughly the worship at the Temple and all the evidences of a prosperous, well-organised and happy nation. She was stunned at the glory of Solomon's reign. Her speech reveals her comprehension and acceptance of Yahweh's sovereignty in this, the Kingdom of God of the past (vv.6-9).

The visit of the Queen of Sheba bearing her gifts and returning in praise of Jerusalem's King is highly typical of the Gentile rulers, particularly Britain, accepting the greater than Solomon, even the Lord Jesus Christ. When these "modern" rulers see the glory of Christ's Kingdom, the magnificence of his court with his immortal attendants, the beauty and purity of worship and a faithful redeemed Israel, they will also declare that the "half has not been told them". Being powerfully impressed they will return home to their peoples full of praise for Zion's King (Psa. 72:10; Isa. 60:3-11; Zech. 14:16).

## **THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON (1 Kings 4:29-32).**

Solomon's wise choice in asking of Yahweh "an understanding heart to judge thy people" (1 Kgs. 3:5-9), resulted in Yahweh's approval and granting of a "wise and an understanding heart" and in addition "both riches and honour" (1 Kgs. 3:13; 4:29).

His wisdom was acknowledged to far surpass those of his contemporaries in Egypt, Arabia, Canaan and Edom (vv. 30-31), causing the surrounding nations and their kings to come up to Jerusalem to hear his

wisdom. In a similar way the nations of the future will desire to be educated at the house of the God of Jacob (Isa. 2:2-4), acknowledging that the wisdom of the world in these times of the Gentiles amounted to "lies, vanity and things wherein there is no profit" (Jer. 16:19).

The combination of international contacts, wealth and relief from war provided an ideal time of literary productivity. Solomon collected and composed thousands of proverbs and songs (v.32). He also studied botany and zoology (v.33), using them in his observations of nature in his proverbs (e.g. Prov. 30:24-31). Extensive collections in the Book of Proverbs are credited to him (10:1 to 29:27) and the entire collection bears his name as the chief contributor (1:1). The Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes also bear eloquent testimony to his wisdom.

### **SOLOMON COMPARED WITH CHRIST.**

There are many points of comparison between Solomon, the last king to rule over a united Israel, and Christ, the next king to rule over all Israel (Ezek. 37:20-24).

- Solomon's Temple was intended to be a house of prayer for all nations: Christ will build the Temple of the Age to come for the same purpose (Zech. 6:12, 13; Isa. 56:7).
- In the construction of Solomon's Temple, the men of Tyre were involved as well as men of Israel: in Christ, Gentiles and Jews make up God's spiritual temple (cp. Eph. 2:19-22 and 1 Pet. 2:4-5); and in the coming Kingdom, men of all races will worship in the House of Prayer (Isa. 56:7).
- Under Solomon, Israel was prosperous and happy, and so will the nation be under Christ (Zech. 8:13).
- Solomon entered into a league with the mercantile power of Tyre to establish his Kingdom; Christ will do likewise with the English-speaking peoples, the Tyre of the latter-days (cp. 1 Kgs. 10:22-23; 2 Chron. 9:10-22 with Isa. 23:17-18).
- Solomon divided the nation into twelve districts, and placed over them twelve princes (1 Kgs. 4:7): Christ will do likewise with the land (Ezek. 48) and princes (Matt. 19:28).
- Under Solomon, the world's wealth flowed to Israel, and this will happen again under Christ (cp. 2 Chron. 9:13-14 with Hag. 2:8-9 and Isa. 60:11 A.V. mg.).
- People from all parts of the world flocked to hear the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kgs. 4:34; 10:23-25), and when Christ rules in Jerusalem everyone will go up to hear his marvellous wisdom (Zech. 14:16; Isa. 2:2-4; Jer. 16:19).
- Solomon was a man of peace — Christ is the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6; cp. Ps. 72:7).
- The world admired the glory of Solomon, and when Christ reigns "the whole world shall be full of his glory" (Ps. 72:19).


### LESSONS 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 response to Solomon's request for wisdom and understanding.
- During Solomon's reign there was peace at home and abroad, the people were happy and secure and Gentiles were attracted to the worship of Yahweh; all these features will be seen in perfection in the Kingdom to be established by the Son of God.
- We too are promised the blessings of the Father if we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:24-34).
- If we avoid the entanglement of 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 one greater than Solomon.

### REFERENCE LIBRARY:

- "The Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 4, Nos. 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:

 What was the Queen of Sheba's reaction when she visited King Solomon? How will this visit be re-enacted in the future?

Solomon's reign is a type of the Kingdom age. Briefly explain and illustrate this statement.

### ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. Describe how Solomon extended the preliminary work of David in establishing the Kingdom.
2. Describe the physical achievements of Solomon's Kingdom.
3. Compare the glory of Solomon's reign with that of the future reign of Christ.

*Matt 6 28-29*

## 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.

<b>PAST</b>	<b>FUTURE</b>
A time of peace preceded by great wars — 1 Kings 5:4 . . .	Psa. 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 . . . . .	Psa. 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. 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 (Psa. 134), thus figuratively immortal (Isa. 40:28-31) . . . . .	Heb. 7:15-16; Rev. 4:8; 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

## 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 arrival of the queen of Sheba to view the prosperity of Solomon's kingdom and hear his wisdom was perhaps the pinnacle of Solomon's reign. He had already established peace on every side, built the magnificent Temple and installed the Ark in the Most Holy Place, and now a Gentile queen had come to see all that he had done. But it is a pity that Solomon did not later remember the queen's comments: “Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king to do judgment and justice” (1 Kgs. 10:9).*

*The queen of Sheba recognised that everything Solomon had was of God. In His great mercy He had exalted Solomon and the Kingdom above all the surrounding nations. If only Solomon had kept this fact in mind, the sad record of his decline would not be found in the Scriptures.*

*Our aim in this lesson is to take note of the things which led Solomon astray so that we may avoid them in our lives.*

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

#### **SOLOMON'S FAITH BEGINS TO WAVER (1 Kings 10:24-29).**

The decline of Solomon from a man of faith was gradual, not sudden. Dignitaries of other nations, besides the queen of Sheba, sought to hear Solomon's wisdom and no doubt view the glories of his Kingdom. Each visitor brought lavish presents of rich metals, armour, spices and animals, which Solomon added to his already abundant possessions.

A sense of self-importance began to enter his life. The humble aspect he displayed at Gibeon when he spoke of himself as a child, began to erode away. His vision became clouded and no longer did he serve God with his whole heart. Other interests began to absorb his time.

A desire for fleshly glory had been aroused and he began to look for other avenues to fulfil these desires. 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, trusting in the arm of 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 the LORD” (Isa. 31:1 — see also Psalms 147:10-11; 33:16-19). God had given specific advice to kings of Israel.

Through Moses He commanded that an earthly king of Israel was not to multiply to himself horses, nor riches, nor wives. Each would be instrumental in leading the king away from trust in God to trust in the flesh. Note carefully Deut. 17:16-17. Solomon failed in each respect.

There is no doubt of course that Solomon would have been aware of God's command in these matters, for each king was commanded to personally write out a copy of the law when he came to the throne (cp. Deut. 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. He 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. 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 be justified as being in order and expedient. So too 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. Solomon likewise found out that when one is led by the dictates of the human will, the results are fatal. Temptation can be overcome with a "thus saith the Lord", but when it is not, the terrible 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 sown to the flesh and his extraordinary wisdom was not sufficient to preserve 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).

Polygamy was accepted at the time of Solomon, and he deemed that many wives and concubines were in keeping with his honour. His choice of wives, however, could not have been worse. Everyone of them came from nations "concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, 'Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods' " (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 the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father" (vv.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 grace of God deserted him. 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" (Eccles. 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. The rites of this worship included grossly immoral acts and licentious orgies. What degrading effects this would have had on the nation, quite apart from the King himself. 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 as they burned. 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 Kgs. 23:10).

### **GOD JUDGES SOLOMON FOR HIS FOLLY (1 Kings 11:9-25).**

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

1. At Gibeon he was promised blessings if he kept God's commands (3:13-14).
2. At Jerusalem, when the Temple was dedicated, he was warned of judgment if he and the nation followed after other gods (9:6-8).

It is a principle of Scripture that to whom much is given, much is expected. It was therefore proper that one so privileged should suffer a terrible judgment: "Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou has 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" (11:11).

This was indeed a terrible punishment and Solomon no doubt would have recalled a similar punishment passed upon Saul for his foolishness (1 Sam. 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 would be rent from Rehoboam, but two tribes would remain to continue the royal line with Jerusalem as the capital city. God's mercy would not depart from the seed of David as it was taken from Saul (2 Sam. 7:15). There were outstanding kings among David's descendants (e.g. Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah), and they helped to preserve the Truth, while apostasy characterised all the kings of the northern ten tribes.

Though the greater judgment was deferred, God did raise 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.

Josephus records that Hadad failed to persuade his nation to revolt, and that instead he went to Syria and there joined with Rezon in raiding Israel and causing great annoyance. Rezon is mentioned in vv.23-25 as another adversary stirred up by God to harass Solomon. Rezon ruled Syria from Damascus and from there raided Israel, for he abhorred it.

The greatest judgment lay yet in the future. Jeroboam, one of Solomon's servants would rise up and incite ten of the tribes to revolt. The days of grandeur, 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 (Ezek. 21:27; 37:22-25).

### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- No sadder spectacle can be imagined than the apostasy of Solomon. It began with what appeared harmless — the gradual accumulation of riches. In this there is a warning for us who live in an age of unprecedented affluence. Today young people particularly have possessions and money never dreamt of by their parents. Young people beware! If Solomon, the king of great wisdom, could not withstand the temptations of the pleasures of his age, can we afford to indulge in them? “He that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”.
- Just as God warned Solomon, so Jesus Christ has left a clear warning of the dangers of our age. Our days are likened to the days of Noah when the people scorned Noah and God and were preoccupied with ease and pleasure (Matt. 24:36-41). The Lord said that the day of his return would come on a world unprepared; “And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life and so that day come upon you unawares” (Lk. 21:34-36). “Surfeiting” is an old-fashioned word for riotous feasting, whilst “drunkenness” needs no explanation. The world is full of such behaviour, and it is sad to say that some young people have been caught up in these activities in their desire to taste of the world.
- Besides the influence of the ungodly behaviour of the world, we can also be affected by the cares of this life. Respect for God and His Word is out of fashion in today's world where men think they are self-sufficient. They do not realise their need of the Creator. Such an attitude can easily rub off on us if we are not awake to our responsibilities in life. Material affluence can blind our eyes to spiritual dependence on God. Our time and energy can so easily be spent in acquiring this world's goods, idolising that which we have and becoming anxious over what we have not, or what we are to acquire next, or what we may lose. In such a frame of mind the awareness of our great privileges as Christadelphian young people can be lost.

- Most tragic of all is the case of a young person who seeks outside the Truth for a partner in life. Abraham was very definite that Isaac should not take a Canaanite woman for his wife, nor was he to return to Chaldea to seek one (Gen. 24:3-6). Isaac and Rebekah were grieved by Esau's choice of Hittite women and directed Jacob to find a wife from among his own relatives (Gen. 26:34-35; 27:46; 28:1-2). The same standard applies today and, as Solomon found, much unhappiness eventually comes the way of those who would flout this divine command (Deut. 7:3-4; 2 Cor. 6:4; Prov. 7:24-27).

#### REFERENCE LIBRARY:

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

#### PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What did the Law of Moses say about horses, riches and wives in regard to kings? How did these things cause Solomon to fail?*
2. *How did Solomon's wives cause him to err from God? What lessons do we learn from this?*
3. *What punishment did God bring upon Solomon for departing from the way of truth?*
4. *What caused Solomon to depart from God's ways?*

#### ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe the circumstances that brought about Solomon's departure from the ways of God.*
2. *What lessons can we learn from the folly of Solomon?*
3. *In what ways are the temptations we face in our days like those to which Solomon succumbed? What must we do to overcome these temptations?*

(1 Peter 3:12)

## Section 2

### THE KINGDOM DECLINES

Following the reign of Solomon, Israel fell into a sad decline, the seeds of which had been sown by Solomon himself. First the nation was divided by civil dissension, and then the breach was widened as Jeroboam in the north instituted his own form of religion to keep his people away from Jerusalem in the south. Apostasy inevitably set in both in north and south and the worship of Yahweh became neglected. Though in the south there were occasionally kings who introduced grand reforms, both parts of the nation were firmly set on a course which could only end in the punishment of exile.

Yet in the midst of this state of affairs, a faithful witness was maintained as the voices of the prophets were raised in protest against the prevailing sin and in proclamation of Yahweh's ultimate purpose. Some heeded this message and, in spite of the wickedness of the times, remained steadfast in their faith. They provide a wonderful example for us in these wicked closing days of the Gentiles.

## 8. DIVISION IN THE KINGDOM

**“So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day”**

*Solomon's sin was to bring great suffering to the nation. His folly led to division and enmity which will only be healed when Jesus Christ returns (Ezek 37:22). This was brought about by a man who left an indelible mark of evil in Israel's history and became known as the man “who made Israel to sin” (1 Kgs. 14:16). His name was Jeroboam.*

*The aim of this lesson is to see the great tragedies which occur when God is forsaken in the hearts and minds of men.*

### **1 Kings 11:26-43; 12**

#### **THE MAN JEROBOAM (1 Kings 11:26-28).**

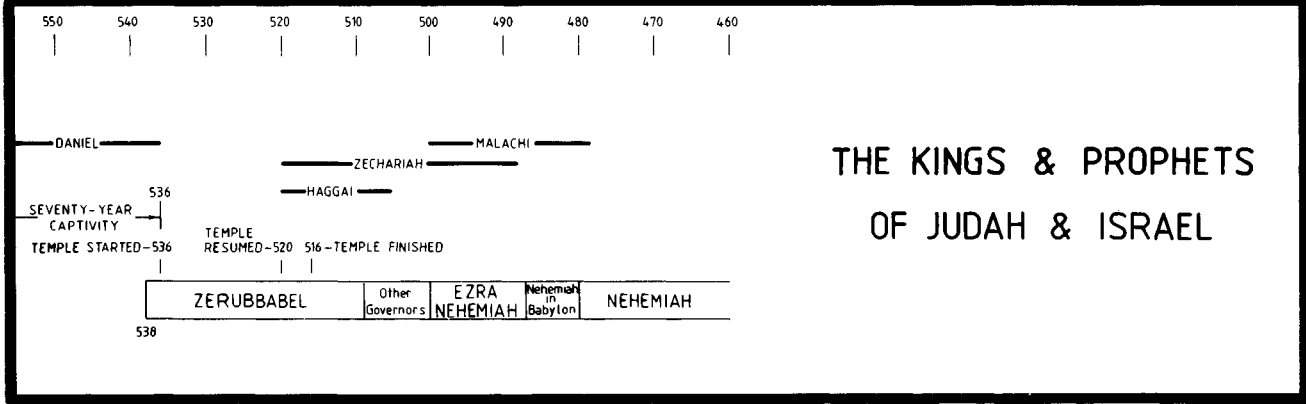
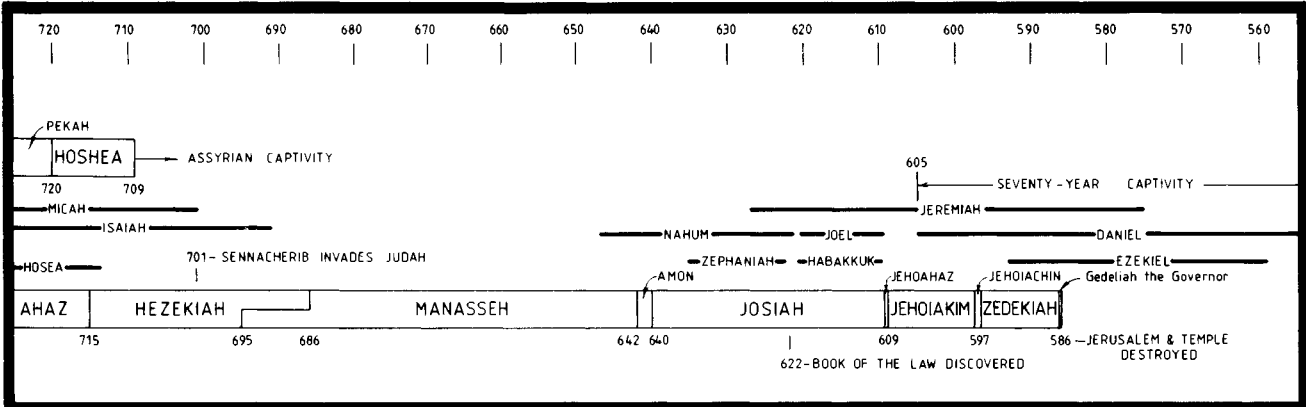
Jeroboam was a man of considerable ability and initiative. While he was still young, Solomon recognised his value and put him in charge of workers from Ephraim repairing the fortifications around Jerusalem. The words of Proverbs 22:29 applied to him: “Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men”. In fact, Jeroboam was destined to become a king himself.

#### **THE PROPHECY OF AHIJAH (1 Kings 11:29-40).**

The prophet Ahijah was instructed by God to accost Jeroboam on his way from Jerusalem in the open country. There he was to reveal the purpose of God to him. Accordingly Ahijah found him on the road, laid hold of the new garment that was on him and tore it into twelve pieces. Ten of these he gave to Jeroboam while he retained two. He told Jeroboam that this act was symbolic of what God was about to do to Israel. The twelve pieces were the twelve tribes, ten of which God was going to rend out of the hand of Solomon while one tribe (in addition to Solomon's own tribe of Judah) would be retained on account of the promise to David and the sanctity of Jerusalem which was situated on the border with Benjamin (vv. 31-32, 36). The reason for such a judgment was carefully spelled out for Jeroboam's instruction: “Because that they have forsaken me and have worshipped Ashtaroth . . . and have not walked in my ways” (v.33). More directly still, he was told that if he hearkened to God's commandments, then a “sure house” would be built for him.

Jeroboam was greatly pleased with these words, for he was ambitious and sought power. But the message was potentially dangerous. If Solomon should find out, then his life would be in jeopardy. But instead of keeping the words to himself, Jeroboam foolishly told others! Solomon already had good cause for suspicion and vigilance, for Yahweh told him that he would raise up one who would divide the kingdom following his death (1 Kgs. 11:11-13). When the message of Ahijah's prophecy reached him, he therefore wasted not a moment in ascertaining the





# THE KINGS & PROPHETS OF JUDAH & ISRAEL

identity of the rival. "Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam. And Jeroboam arose, and fled into Egypt unto Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon".

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

Solomon died after he had reigned forty years. His son Rehoboam, whose mother was an Ammonitess, succeeded him upon the throne (1 Kgs. 11:42; 14:21; cp. Deut. 23:3). The public coronation of the young monarch was to take place at Shechem and all the people had assembled for the occasion.

But the elders of Israel meanwhile had called Jeroboam from Egypt upon Solomon's death. Jeroboam was no doubt anxious to bring about the fulfilment of the promise of Ahijah to him. But how would it come about?

There were two issues which Jeroboam seized upon and was able to cunningly exploit to his own end.

1. There had always been jealousy and rivalry between the northern ten tribes and the south (v.16; cp. 2 Sam. 19:41-43).
2. The people were grieved because of the heavy burden of taxes they had to pay in order to maintain Solomon's public works.

Jeroboam combined both factors and agreed to represent the people's case. Time and opportunity played into his skilful hands. By the time Rehoboam arrived a tense explosive atmosphere prevailed. Jeroboam headed the deputation and the request was made, "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."

This was a reasonable demand which shows how clever Jeroboam was. If Rehoboam rejected it, then he appeared a tyrant; if he accepted it, then Jeroboam's prestige would be enhanced. Whatever happened must be to Jeroboam's advantage. Moreover, Rehoboam could not argue against the reasonableness of such a request. He could not brand Jeroboam as a disturber of the peace, or charge him with treason. In fact, Jeroboam had posed as a patriot, anxious to serve the king and the country rather than cause any trouble.

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

Rehoboam told the people to depart for three days and then to return and he would give them his answer. In that time he sought advice from the experienced counsellors of Solomon, who had witnessed his wisdom and judgment, as well as from the young men, his contemporaries, who had grown up with him. The voice of age and experience counselled moderation: "Speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants forever" (v.7). They knew how important it was for the young new king to gain the favour of his subjects, and they were more aware of the mood of the people, the ambitions of Jeroboam, and the dangers of the situation. They urged Rehoboam to accept the conditions set before him.

But Rehoboam forsook their counsel. Perhaps he had made up his mind beforehand. Perhaps the very presence of his known rival, Jeroboam, hardened him against compromise. So he went to the young men. They were impetuous, short-sighted and aggressive. In their view taxation should be sharply increased. To give way to the demands of the people, they argued, would be an evidence of weakness.

For three days the people were kept in suspense. The king in his inexperience, placed before them the suggestions of the young men: "My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins . . . I will add to your burdens . . . I will chastise you with scorpions". He made them feel the power of his position, and roughly announced that their suffering would be increased. This confirmed the fears of the people: it was the last act of tyranny as far as they were concerned. The result was rebellion.

In retrospect the folly of Rehoboam is transparent to all. Yet, without at all seeking to excuse Rehoboam, the record does add that the turn of affairs had been brought about by Yahweh so that the words of Ahijah would be fulfilled (v.15 R.S.V.).

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

When all the people saw that their request had been repulsed, they were enraged. "What portion have we in David? . . . to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David". This was the language of division. Jeroboam sensed that his plans were bearing fruit. The foolish answer of Rehoboam had incited rebellion. Rehoboam sought desperately to quell the revolt. He sent Adoram to speak with the people. He could hardly have made a worse move — Adoram was in charge of taxation, and his presence incensed the people more! They took up stones and stoned him to death. Rehoboam fled to Jerusalem for his life and meditated revenge. He gathered together a large army to crush the revolt, but was forbidden by Shemaiah, the prophet, to proceed with his plans, for what had happened was of God.

Jeroboam was elected king by the will of all Israel. Now division was cemented and Israel was divided into two nations. Because of iniquity, Saul, the first king, had the kingdom taken away from his family and given to David. David proved himself worthy and was promised a sure "house" (2 Sam. 7:11-16, 26). Now David's son was unworthy and the kingdom might have been taken away, as it was from Saul, if it were not for the unqualified promise of God's mercy: "But my mercy shall not depart from him as I took it from Saul whom I put away before thee" (2 Sam. 7:15). Thus two tribes were left with the seed of David. Not until the return of Christ will the twelve tribes be united again (Matt. 19:28; Lk. 1:32-33; Ezek. 37:22).

#### **JEROBOAM'S FEAR AND APOSTASY (1 Kings 12:25-33).**

Jeroboam could have profited by the mistakes of Solomon and Rehoboam. He could have consolidated his position and maintained favour with God. But the maintenance of his own authority was more



important to him than maintaining the authority of the Word of God. He realised that though Israel was now divided politically into two kingdoms, the worship of Yahweh, centred in Jerusalem, would provide a unifying influence which would prove stronger than the forces driving them apart. The Law required that all males should appear before Yahweh three times a year (Ex. 23:17). Surely this would result in his influence waning while Rehoboam's position would be enhanced, he reasoned.

“If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD in Jerusalem, then will the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall go again to Rehoboam king of Judah” (v.27).

How was he going to handle this situation? His solution reveals his cunning and unscrupulous ways. Under religious pretence, he perverted the truth in such a way that many failed to perceive the gross evil of his deceptive mixture of good and evil. He did three things:

1. Vv.28-30: He denied a fundamental doctrine and made two golden calves which he placed in the north and south, at Dan and Bethel (cp. Ex. 20:3-4; 32:7-8). He argued that it was too far to go up to Jerusalem and in any case God was everywhere present (Josephus).
2. V.31: He did not deny the need for a priesthood, but he changed their qualifications: instead of being drawn exclusively from the sons of Aaron, he made priests of the humble, common class (Num. 3:10).
3. Vv.32-33: He did not deny the need for feasts, but he changed the day; whereas the feast of Tabernacles was appointed to commence on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, Jeroboam's feast began on the fifteenth day of the eighth month.

Thus his religion became a worship of the will of man. But God requires man to worship Him in the way He lays down; they that “worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4:24). All else is superstition.

For his sins Jeroboam became a marked man in Israel. All of the twenty-three kings that came after followed his ways. Of them all, except the last, the words recur: “He walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin . . .” The calves of Bethel and Dan became a snare to the ten tribes and were the root of the sins that finally brought captivity (cp. 2 Kgs. 17:21-23; Hos. 10:5-6). As far as Jeroboam himself was concerned, God declared His intention to utterly destroy his house (1 Kgs. 14:7-16). So the age of gold and glory under David and Solomon descended to an age of division and apostasy.

### LESSONS FOR US:

- Sin and apostasy from the Truth inevitably bring disaster to men's lives. The greatness and glory of Solomon's reign melted away through his departure from God's commandments.
- As God is just and equal in all His ways, so we ought to be just in our dealings with men. Rehoboam answered his people in a way which cut right across the words of his grandfather David: "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God" (2 Sam. 23:3).
- We ought to value the voice of experience among us. Rehoboam listened instead to the young and inexperienced and thereby lost most of his kingdom.
- A bad example lives long in the minds of mankind. Jeroboam introduced false worship, causing Israel to sin, and twenty-three subsequent kings walked in the same way.
- Jeroboam's religion had elements of true worship in having central places of worship, priests and feasts, but each was a deviation from what God required and He rejected it. God will not be mocked. In our worship we must uphold God's commands and His standards.

### REFERENCE LIBRARY:

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

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

### PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *Why was the kingdom divided and why were two tribes given to Rehoboam?*
2. *How was Jeroboam told that the kingdom would be divided and he would be king?*
3. *Briefly state the request which the people made to Rehoboam at Shechem. What advice did he receive and how did he answer the people? What lesson do we learn from this incident?*

### ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Explain the causes and results of the failings of both Rehoboam and Jeroboam.*
2. *Describe how the division of the kingdom occurred after Solomon's death.*
3. *How and why did Jeroboam introduce a false worship into Israel and what was the effect on the kings who followed him? What are the main lessons for us from this?*

## 9. ELIJAH WARNS THE HOUSE OF AHAB

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

*During the years following the division of the kingdom, the history of the ten tribes in the north was one of decline, bloodshed and misery. Successive monarchs exceeded each other in wickedness — first Jeroboam (1 Kgs. 14:9), then Omri (1 Kgs. 16:25) and finally Ahab (1 Kgs. 16:30).*

*Yet in spite of their waywardness and disobedience, God was prepared to extend mercy in abundance, if they would seek Him in truth. It was Elijah's mission, midst bitter opposition from Jezebel, to restore true worship to apostate Israel.*

*The aim of this lesson is to show that Yahweh alone is God and that the words of His prophets are powerful.*

### **1 Kings 17; 18**

#### **THE CHARACTER OF AHAB AND JEZEBEL (1 Kings 16:30-33).**

The reigning king during the greater part of Elijah's ministry was Ahab. He married a Phoenician princess, Jezebel, thus introducing into Israel Baal worship, a religious superstition of the most degrading and offensive kind (1 Kgs. 16:31).

Jezebel was a most wilful, determined woman and a more forceful character than Ahab, whom she incited to do the most abhorrent practices (1 Kgs. 21:25). Her name, ironically, means “chaste”, though she was anything but that, being associated with the worship of Astarte (A.V. “groves”), with its religious rites involving all forms of uncleanness.

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

“With the suddenness of a flash of lightning and a clap of thunder” (as one writer put it), Elijah the Tishbite burst upon the scene. A hairy man, clothed in a leather girdle tied around his loins and with a mantle slung around his shoulder (cp. 2 Kgs. 1:8), this stern and yet majestic man stood before Ahab, and in the name of Yahweh, prophesied drought upon Israel. The message delivered, Elijah departed.

Drought was God's decreed punishment for apostasy (Deut. 11:16-17; 1 Kgs. 8:35-36), and, in this instance, it was to be prolonged for 3½ years (Lk. 4:25; Jas. 5:17).

Elijah's name (“My God is Yah”) was a declaration of his purpose to show that Yahweh, and not Baal, was their God (1 Kgs. 18:21).

#### **ELIJAH AT CHERITH (1 Kings 17:2-7).**

Elijah was now in danger from Jezebel, and God directed him to cross Jordan and hide at the brook Cherith. As drought parched the land, Ahab searched everywhere for the prophet whose word had signalled it. 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! (Lev. 11:15). As though to demonstrate God’s over-ruling power, these scavenger birds, that during a famine would consume all they found, were “converted” from being scavengers to providers!

But there was another lesson being taught.

As an unclean bird, the raven symbolised the Gentiles, unwashed by the Word of God (Lev. 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.

### **ELIJAH AT ZAREPHATH (1 Kings 17:8-24).**

“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 of the same district as Jezebel no doubt seemed strange to Elijah’s ears (cp. 16:31 and 17:9)! She belonged to a group so low and insecure, so poor and oppressed, that God saw fit to give special laws of protection to ensure their existence among His people. But this 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, because the prophet of the God of Israel promised an unending supply of oil. Like Abraham, her spiritual father, she believed and acted (vv.11-15).

She, a Gentile, survived the famine while many in Israel perished. She had the faith that Israel lacked. Without faith it is impossible to please God (cp. Heb. 11:6, 35 with 1 Kgs. 17:23).

### **TWO IMPORTANT NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCES.**

1. **Luke 4:22-32.** When the Lord came to his home town of Nazareth the people were unbelieving and challenged him to repeat his miracles before their eyes. To them he was “Joseph’s son” and not the Son of God. Their unbelief placed a limit upon what he did. Even though they were descendants of Abraham they lacked faith. To illustrate the fact that God receives those who believe, independent of race, he used the illustration of Elijah:

“Verily, I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were IN ISRAEL, in the days of Elias (Elijah) when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout the land; But unto

none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of SIDON, unto a WOMAN, that was a WIDOW”.

2. **Acts 10.** In this chapter the first Gentile convert to the gospel of Christ is made by the apostle Peter. Peter was prepared for his work in exactly the same way as Elijah. Both men, being Israelites, were prejudiced against Gentiles; but like Elijah, Peter was taught that the unclean beasts could be cleansed by God and in his dream he was commanded to “arise, kill and eat”. Straight after this event he was sent to the Roman centurion, Cornelius. There Peter too learned the lesson that “God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness is accepted of him” (Acts 10:34-35).

### **MEETING WITH OBADIAH (1 Kings 18:1-20).**

The time drew near when God determined to end the famine and He told Elijah to reveal himself to Ahab. So sore was the famine at this time that Ahab and his chief steward, Obadiah, personally supervised a search for food for the horses and mules that remained. This same Obadiah “feared the LORD greatly” and had nourished in secret a hundred of His prophets, when they were being purged by the sword of Jezebel. Elijah met him in the way and Obadiah immediately recognised him. “Art thou that my lord Elijah?” he asked (v.7). Abruptly Elijah replied, “I am: go tell thy Lord, Behold, Elijah is here”.

When Ahab saw Elijah he accused him of “troubling Israel”, but the dauntless prophet rebuffed the accusation and rightly blamed Ahab. The root of Israel’s trouble lay in their forsaking of Yahweh and preference for Baalim. Elijah took the initiative and directed Ahab to assemble all Israel, together with the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, upon Mount 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”. The people were speechless. Elijah pointed out that he as Yahweh’s sole representative, was ranged 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 called upon their god to consume the bullock upon the altar they had made. But though they called from morning till noon, there was no answer (Psa. 115:3-9). So pathetic was the display that Elijah began to taunt them. Perhaps Baal’s indifference lay in the fact that he was about personal business — talking, pursuing or even sleeping — most ungodlike qualities indeed! Their “vain repetition”, “O Baal, hear us”, continued until the time of the evening sacrifice, but still nothing happened. Then Elijah’s turn came. He called the people near him and then did some significant things:—

1. He repaired an old altar of Yahweh which had been broken down, an act symbolical of what he was attempting to do in Israel, that is, restore the fear of Yahweh (vv. 30, 37, cp. 19:10).
2. Twelve stones were taken for the altar representing the twelve tribes who would be one in spirit and in truth when Messiah appears to rule over them (v.31, cp. Ezek. 37:22).
3. He pointed to the origin of the nation and the change of Jacob's name to "Israel" in which the divine purpose was memorialised. Israel means "prince with God". Israel would prevail with God's help, but without it would be caused to "halt" (vv. 31, 21; Gen. 32:28-31; Mic. 4:7).
4. He required that more difficult conditions be made. A trench was dug around the altar and water was poured over the sacrifice and wood until the trench was full (vv.33-35).
5. At the time of the evening sacrifice, the time of prayer, he called upon the God of Israel by His covenant name (v.36; cp. Ezra 9:4-5).

Elijah pleaded earnestly that Yahweh would vindicate Himself, and Elijah as His prophet. "Hear me, O Yahweh, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back".

Suddenly without warning, fire from heaven struck the sacrifice. Reversing the course of nature it burnt downwards, consuming in fire the sacrifice, wood, stones, dust and water in the trench. Fearful and astonished, the people fell on their faces to the ground before the mighty manifestation of Divine power.

"Yahweh, He is the God! Yahweh, He is the God!", they shouted. In so doing they acknowledged the meaning of the prophet's name, "My God is Yah". No longer could they halt between two opinions. The issue had been settled. Elijah wasted no time and in the zeal of the moment he had the false prophets executed at the brook Kishon.

There is still only One God and One Faith. We cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). If we are to serve God, then we must do it with all our heart, not trying to accommodate the opinion of the world as well.

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

With the people's 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". Elijah himself went to the summit of Carmel and prayed earnestly for rain (Jas. 5:18). His servant was told to look out to sea for any sign of rain. Six times Elijah prayed and six times his servant had nothing to report. But on the seventh occasion the servant reported a small cloud, that soon increased till "the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain".

Ahab drove his chariot towards Jezreel, knowing that unless he arrived before the rains came, he would be bogged in the valley of Esdraelon. At

the same time, the hand of Yahweh was on Elijah and he outran the chariot. Elijah went before the king of Israel to Jezreel as a forerunner, an act symbolic of his future work in "the day of Jezreel" (Hos. 1:10-11; 2:21-22).

His work has not been completed and the reforms he instituted were shortlived. He will take up his work again after his resurrection and will prepare the hearts of Israel for their king, the Lord Jesus Christ (Mal. 4:5-6). Then the day of Jezreel shall be truly great, for the children of Judah and Israel shall "be gathered together, and appoint to themselves one head" (Hosea 1:11).

### LESSONS 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 rain or fire therefrom.
- 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, loving God and the world. God rightly demands our WHOLE heart and soul and mind. This is the greatest commandment.

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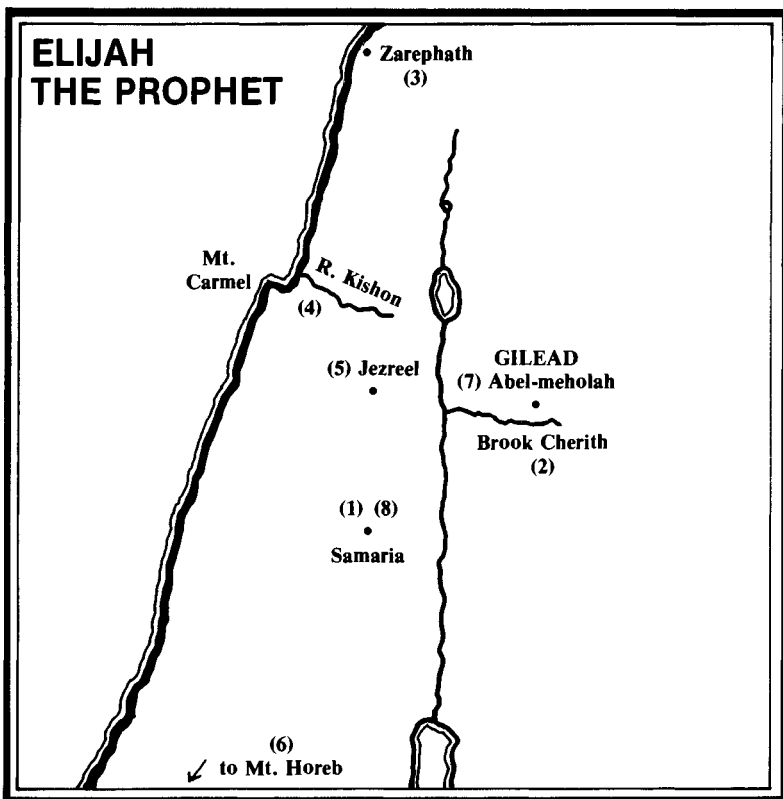
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### PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *An unclean bird, a raven, fed Elijah at the brook Cherith. What lesson did Elijah learn from this?*
2. *Upon what basis was the woman of Zarephath saved?*
3. *Elijah's name means "My God is Yah". In what way did this indicate the purpose of his mission?*
4. *What lessons do we learn from the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel?*

### ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Describe Elijah's visits to Cherith and Zarephath. What lessons do we learn from those incidents?*
2. *Describe the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.*
3. *Write a character sketch of Ahab and Jezebel.*
4. *In what ways are the following two incidents alike?*  
(a) *Elijah's visit to Cherith and Zarephath.*  
(b) *Peter's vision of the unclean animals and the subsequent conversion of Cornelius.*



1. Elijah comes from Gilead and prophesies before Ahab that there would be no rain (1 Kings 17:1).
2. He retires to the Brook Cherith where he is fed by ravens (17:5-6).
3. When the brook dries up, Elijah is sent to a widow of Zarephath (17:9-10).
4. Elijah contests 450 prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. The prophets of Baal are slain by the river Kishon (18:19, 38-40).
5. Elijah runs before the chariot of Ahab from Carmel to Jezreel (18:45-46).
6. Under the threat of revenge from Jezebel, Elijah flees to Horeb (19:1-3, 8).
7. He calls Elisha of Abel-meholah to take over his role (19:16, 19).
8. He confronts Ahab in the vineyard of Naboth, who was stoned at the instigation of Jezebel (21:17-19).



## **10. ELIJAH AND ELISHA**

### **“Behold the goodness and severity of God”**

*Whilst Elijah’s mission was one of judgment and denunciation, manifesting the severity of Yahweh, Elisha demonstrated the merciful aspect of the Divine character (Rom. 11:22). Israel’s behaviour warranted Divine judgment and Elijah was the stern instrument to administer this to a wayward king and a wicked nation. But he needed to be taught that within the nation was a remnant which had to be educated and strengthened. It was this aspect of consolidating and building up a core of strength that formed the basis of Elisha’s merciful mission. These two together presented the balanced character of Yahweh, which it is our life’s work to endeavour to manifest.*

*The aim of this lesson is to show that God corrects the wicked with punishment, but the righteous are built up by the “still small voice” of instruction of His prophets.*

### **1 Kings 19; 2 Kings 2**

#### **ELIJAH AND JOHN THE BAPTIST**

After three and a half years of drought had failed to awaken repentance in Ahab, or turn his alien wife Jezebel from her idolatry, Elijah appeared before him the second time to propose the contest of Mount Carmel. This ended with the slaughter of the prophets of Baal. Afterwards the prophet ran before the chariot of Ahab 25 kilometres across the plain of Jezreel in the face of a wild storm. In so doing he performed the work of a herald or a forerunner of the King.

The work of John the Baptist was similar to this. He has to “prepare the way” before the coming king, the Lord Jesus Christ (Mal. 3:1). At his birth it was revealed that he would “go before” Christ “in the spirit and power of Elias (Elijah), to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just” (Lk. 1:17). So far as the generation of Israelites alive at the time of Christ was concerned, John the Baptist “was” Elijah: “If ye will receive it, this is Elijah, which was for to come” (Matt. 11:14). At Christ’s second coming Elijah himself will again “first come” and prepare the hearts of his people to receive the Messiah (Mal. 4:5-6; Matt. 17:11).

#### **ELIJAH ON HOREB — THE STILL SMALL VOICE (1 Kings 19:1-18).**

The effects of Elijah’s reforms on Mount Carmel were short-lived. When Jezebel heard of his deeds and in particular how he had slain the prophets of her cherished religion, Baal worship, she immediately dispatched a messenger to Elijah. Elijah was told that she would dispose of him as he had disposed of the prophets of Baal, and that if she failed in this determination she willed that the gods would do likewise to her! Elijah’s

courage evaporated before this threat and he turned and fled for his life to Mount Horeb (1 Kgs. 19:1-3).

He lodged in a cave (lit. "the cave", cp. Ex. 33:22) on the mount and was challenged by the word of Yahweh, "what doest thou here, Elijah?" In his desperation he made "intercession against Israel", saying "I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (v.10; Rom. 11:2). He was called upon to leave the cave and go forth and stand before Yahweh. There he witnessed three dramatic demonstrations of Yahweh's power, a fierce wind, an earthquake and finally a fire (vv.11-12). He was told that Yahweh was "not in" any of these manifestations. Then there was a fourth revelation of an entirely different character, "a still small voice" (Roth. "the voice of a gentle whisper"). Clearly Yahweh was "in" the voice, which proceeded to address him (vv.12-13).

In these strange events there was a message for the prophet which he was slow to perceive. His mission had been one of severity and judgment in which he had inflicted drought on Israel and called forth fire and death etc. — he had been like the wind, the earthquake and the fire. He was oblivious of the fact that there were others who were still faithful in Israel and who had not bowed down the knee to Baal (v.18). While it appeared to him that he "only, was left" in fact he had erred greatly, for there yet remained 7,000 faithful!

He was duly reminded of this fact and, by implication, that he should be back in Israel with them: "What doest thou here Elijah?" (v.13). They needed to hear the still small voice of mercy and instruction so that their faith might be built up. Manifestations of power can destroy, but mercy and instruction develop faith and build up. There is a place for judgment in God's economy and the Lord will "cry, yea, roar" when he comes a second time; but at his first appearing his voice was not "lifted up" in judgment, but he spoke words of instruction and comfort which developed men of faith and courage (cp. Isa. 42:13-14 with vv.1 and 2).

Elijah was directed to return and was given a three-fold commission:

- (1) To anoint Hazael King over Syria
- (2) To anoint Jehu, the son of Nimshi, King over Israel
- (3) To appoint Elisha, the son of Shaphat, to be his own successor (vv.15-18)

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

Of these three commands, the first two were reserved for Elisha to do, and the last one was done by Elijah himself when he found Elisha ploughing. By throwing his mantle upon him, Elijah indicated that he desired Elisha as his successor. Immediately, Elisha parted with his old way of life to follow Elijah (vv.20-21), and there commenced the companionship that continued for some years until Elijah was taken up by a whirlwind into heaven.

In the final years of his ministry, and with Elisha's help, Elijah set about restoring the schools of the prophets which the murderous Jezebel had tried to destroy (cp. 1 Kgs. 18:3-4, 13). Thus there was guaranteed a continuing place of honour for God's Word in Israel. Before he was taken up in the whirlwind, Elijah had established schools at Bethel (2 Kgs. 2:3), Jericho (v.5), and Gilgal (4:38). "The still small voice" of God's Word was quietly building up a body of men to act as cells of strength within the nation, and it was this work that Elisha continued.

### **CHRIST GREATER THAN ELIJAH (1 Kings 19:19-21; Luke 9).**

Elisha's ready response to the call of Elijah is impressive. "And he left his oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother and then I will follow thee". Elijah made no objection to this request and, in fact, endorsed it, "Go back again: for what have I done to thee?" So he went back and slew a yoke of oxen and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen and gave to the people. He had turned his back on this world: a call from Elijah was to him indisputably a call from God. Then he arose and went after the prophet Elijah and ministered to him.

Many years later a man came to the Son of God, acknowledged him as Lord, and said, "I will follow thee; but first let me go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house". The request was identical to that which Elisha had made. Surely it was only reasonable that he should inform his next of kin of his new vocation! But in **STARK CONTRAST** with Elijah the Lord Jesus Christ refused permission; "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk. 9:61-62). Why did the Lord refuse what Elijah had permitted? The answer lies in the fact that a greater than Elijah was there. This lesson had been impressed, but apparently not fully grasped, in the incidents preceding. They failed to realise just how great he was. Do we? Have we yielded the same response?

During the Transfiguration Peter virtually equated the Lord with Moses and Elijah, when he suggested that they make a tabernacle for each. Then the voice from heaven drew attention to the surpassing excellence of Christ, "THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, HEAR HIM" (Lk. 9:33-35).

Later on as the Lord made his way to Jerusalem, he was refused passage by the Samaritans (Lk. 9:51-53). The place was close by the site of one of Elijah's miracles. On two occasions Elijah had called down fire from heaven to consume fifty men and their captains sent from the wicked king Ahaziah to lay hold of him (2 Kgs. 1). He had said to the captains, "If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume thee and thy fifty". A third captain was spared only when he besought the prophet with the plea, "O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants be precious in thy sight . . ." Thus the lives of the captain and his fifty were spared by the angel's intervention.

When the Samaritans refused the Lord Jesus Christ access through Samaria, James and John (“sons of thunder”) sought permission to call down fire in proof of his divine mission, “even as Elias did”. Here was another failure to perceive the surpassing greatness of their Lord and the nature of his mission. They had not grasped the purpose of God in sending His beloved Son into the world (Jn. 3:16). He turned and rebuked them, saying, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them” (Lk. 9:54-56). His “still small voice” led to repentance and life, whereas fire and earthquake were the instruments of vengeance and death (compare Isa. 42:1-3).

### **THE MAN ELISHA (2 Kings 2).**

Before Elijah was taken away, Elisha sought a “double portion” of his spirit. A “double portion” was the right of the first-born (Deut. 21:17), so in effect Elisha was seeking the right of succession to Elijah. This he obtained by his unswerving determination to remain with Elijah until the end. The story in 2 Kgs. 2:1-15 is recorded so that we might take the example of Elisha’s steadfast commitment to his master in our own lives.

Elisha was quite different from the outspoken Elijah, whose home was the wilderness and who disdained the refinements of a civilised community. He came from an agricultural settlement (his family had 12 yoke of oxen at Abel-meholah — “the meadow of dancing”) and, though a much younger man, was soon bald (2 Kgs. 2:23), a stark contrast to Elijah (1:8).

There was also a contrast in their miracles (refer table at the end of the lesson).

**The miracles of Elijah spoke of judgment** — drought and fire from heaven — all in keeping with “wind, earthquake and fire”, the symbols of God’s determination to root out the unrighteous and fulfil his Word. It is not enough, however, to break down. One must also build up, or exploit the power of “the still small voice”. Elijah was told that he had to go back, seek out the faithful remnant in Israel, and build them up with the Word of God.

**The miracles of Elisha spoke of mercy** — healing, God’s Providence, encouragement in the life of faith, warnings against sin, the certainty of judgment, and above all, God’s determination to save those who trust in Him — all in keeping with “the still small voice”. The extension of this mercy was dependent upon a prior acknowledgement of God’s justice and judgment, as seen in the first miracle done by him. It was not the smiting of the waters with the mantle of Elijah that divided the waters, but his recognition of, and his calling upon, the power of God (2 Kgs. 2:14).

Two incidents early in the ministry of Elisha highlight the balance that the Word demands of those who would seek after God:

1. The people of Jericho appealed to the prophet concerning the bitter spring outside the city (2 Kgs. 2:19-22). The waters were healed. It was not the salt that performed the miracle, but the power of God working through Elisha. Israel knew the significance of salt (Num. 18:19) — it is a preservative and so is a symbol of the permanent basis of Yahweh's covenant with Israel. Hence the sacrifices were required to be made with salt (Lev. 2:13).
2. Later, as the prophet approached the town of Bethel, he was mocked by some young men of the city (in 2 Kings 2:23 the A.V. says they were "little children" but compare the use of the Hebrew word 'Naar' in Gen. 21:12; 22:5; 41:12, and for Ahab's soldiers in 1 Kgs. 20:14). Elisha cursed them and forty two were destroyed by two angry she bears. God's Word may not be set at nought. While He will demonstrate His mercy to all who will turn their hearts toward Him, God will also bring judgment upon those who turn aside from His precepts.

#### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- God used Elijah to bring judgment upon Ahab and Israel because of wickedness. Judgments destroyed the wicked but warned the righteous. The "still small voice" of instruction in the Word of God, however, builds up men and women so that they can resist evil and walk faithfully before God.
- The mission of instruction and salvation is greater than that of destruction, even as Christ was greater than Elijah. We must teach the Word to our acquaintances so that they might be saved. The goodness of God leads men to salvation (Rom. 2:4).
- Young men who mock God's prophets will be torn apart, even though those prophets proclaim the mercy of God. God's mercy is not indifferent to His holiness.

#### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

"The Visible Hand of God" (R. Roberts)—Chapters 27-30

"Elijah the Tishbite" (J. Martin)—Chapters 7-8, 10

#### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *How was Elijah's mission similar to that of John the Baptist?*
2. *What was Elijah to understand by "the still small voice"?*
3. *In what way did the miracles of Elijah differ from those of Elisha?*
4. *Outline the differences between the work of Elijah and the work of Elisha?*

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Describe what happened to Elijah when he fled to Horeb? What lessons can we learn from this incident?*
2. *What was the main work of Elijah after he was joined by Elisha?*
3. *How did Elijah call Elisha? What was Elisha's reaction?*

## 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.

## 11. NAAMAN, THE SYRIAN

**“There is no God in all the earth but in Israel”**

*“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable . . .” (2 Tim. 3:16). The story of the healing of Naaman’s leprosy really is more than just an interesting story. It foreshadows the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. It shows how the unbelief of Israel (typified in Jehoram and Gehazi) opened a door of salvation to other nations. Then, as our attention is focused upon Naaman, we are shown through his initial reaction to Elisha’s message the failings, the faulty reasoning, and the pride that so often stops the power of God’s word from acting in men’s lives.*

*When Naaman’s rage abated and he became amenable to reason he willingly submitted to God’s simple requirements. Obedience must stem from a humble and a contrite heart.*

*The aim of this lesson is to show that there is salvation in none other than the God of Israel, and that we must humbly obey His will if we would be delivered.*

### 2 Kings 5

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

The story of Naaman the leper is an interesting one and familiar to most scholars. The incident however, like all accounts in Scripture, is recorded that we might learn a lesson to help us in our understanding of God’s Word and His purpose. We have seen previously how the ministry of the prophet Elisha typified that of the Lord Jesus Christ, and this is again brought out in the story of the healing of Naaman the leper.

\* Leprosy in Israel was a symbol of mortality and any Hebrew who contracted the dread disease was put outside the camp and thus cut off from his people and the worship of God. Mortality and death entered the world as the wages of sin (Gen. 3:17-19; Rom. 5:12; 6:23), so that man grows old, decays and dies. In order to impress on Israel the great consequences of sin, God gave a typical significance to the dreaded chronic disease, leprosy. Leprosy was like mortality, only the process of decay was increased and visible! It was living death. Corrupting flesh can be seen upon the victim even while still alive! Miriam was smitten because she sinned and Aaron said of her, “Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother’s womb” (Num. 12:12). Just as the disease had a spiritual significance, so did the cure, for it involved the shedding of blood (Lev. 14; Heb. 9:22). 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.

Naaman was captain of Syria’s army. He was a proud man, a courageous soldier and loyal to his king. He was obviously highly respected by the king and by all who came in contact with him. (Note the term “my father” used by his servants, v.13.)

The Syrians were noted for their cruelty, particularly toward their enemies and captives, but it is obvious from the record, that this man was capable of warmer feelings, as shown in the response of the Hebrew girl who suggested that Elisha could cure her master's disease.

Benhadad himself was not slow to take up the suggestion and prepared a very valuable present to be sent to the King of Israel if only his captain could be cured. Armed with the letter of introduction and appeal from the King of Syria, Naaman presented himself before the surprised Jehoram.

### **JEHORAM'S EMBARRASSMENT (2 Kings 5:6-7).**

When the King of Israel read the letter from Benhadad, King of Syria, he was beside himself. Rending his clothes he exclaimed, "Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends unto me to cure a man of leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me" (2 Kgs. 5:7). To him the letter amounted to a declaration of war! What was being asked of him was an impossibility!

Jehoram did not have the faith exhibited by the young Israelitish maid who had suggested Naaman's journey. In this she was much greater than her king. He had forgotten the power of God manifested through Elisha's hand when, earlier in his reign, he had gone up against the King of Moab (cf. 2 Kgs. 3:13-18). He would also forget the lesson of this incident when Benhadad attacked Israel some time later.

The power of God did not penetrate into the mind of Jehoram. He accepted it when undeniably displayed before him, because of the convenience to himself. He did not realise that Yahweh manifested His power in order that He might be glorified. Jehoram had a mind of flesh and could not discern spiritual things. He had learnt nothing from God's dealings with him and became the first of Ahab's family to be destroyed at the hands of Jehu.

### **NAAMAN IS SENT TO ELISHA (2 Kings 5:8-9).**

Meanwhile Elisha heard of the Syrian's visit and sent a message to Jehoram: "Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel" (2 Kgs. 5:8). And so Naaman was directed to the house of the prophet.

Thus far everything had gone according to plan for Naaman. He no doubt pictured in his mind how the prophet would greet him, cure his disease and then in turn be rewarded by the captain of the Syrian host.

But God was not interested in currying the favour of Naaman. The Syrian's total lack of appreciation of the God of Israel, whose ways are past finding out, is typical of the attitude of many people who show merely an academic interest in the Word of God. Interestingly enough, Naaman did not seem to doubt that he could be healed in Israel, but he had his own preconceived notion as to how this would be done. Naaman had to learn that Yahweh alone would be glorified — man, however elevated, must be abased.



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

His preconceived idea as to how the healing would be carried out was rudely shattered when Elisha sent his servant to pass on the message: "Go and wash in Jordan seven times"! In proud rage Naaman turned away. In his own mind he justified his anger with excuses, lauding the excellencies of Syrian rivers over the muddy Jordan! And had he returned to Damascus full of patriotic indignation, his leprosy would have remained with him.

Similarly those who hear the Word of God and refuse to humble themselves in obedience to its commands will never be cleansed from sin. Naaman was willing to make some kind of sacrifice in order to be healed, but was he willing to obey? "Obedience is better than sacrifice", for the sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination to Yahweh (1 Sam. 15:22; Prov. 15:8).

Fortunately, in Naaman's case, the good sense of his servants prevailed. The suggestion that he reconsider Elisha's words could have incensed him even more. But the characteristics that Yahweh knew were in this man came to the fore and he accepted the advice. He now had to acknowledge his own foolishness before his servants and humble himself before God. This was doubly humiliating for Naaman, and yet very necessary to promote in him a contrite spirit which God could take pleasure in. He had to acknowledge that the muddy waters of Jordan were, for this purpose, better than Abana and Pharpar!

As he rose from the water the seventh time the process was complete. His body was immediately cleansed of the disease and his mind purged of the arrogance that had stood between him and healing. His return to the house of Elisha shows his change of heart: "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel", he said. A Gentile had come to the God of Israel (cp. Lk. 4:25-27).

The prophet was pleased to receive him on this occasion. Likewise the Lord Jesus Christ will be pleased to receive all who come to him through the waters of baptism "with a humble and a contrite heart" (Isa. 57:15; 66:2).

## **THE PARALLEL WITH BAPTISM.**

The parallel between the cleansing of Naaman the Syrian and baptism of those who seek to follow Christ is remarkable and very clear. Belief and baptism are essential for salvation. The Lord Jesus said, "EXCEPT a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God", and, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned" (Jn. 3:5; Mk. 16:15-16). In all cases where a detailed record of conversion is found in the book of Acts, belief precedes baptism (cp. Acts 2:38, 41, 44; 8:12-16; 10:45-47; 18:8; 19:2, 4, 5; 22:16-19). Some speak as though baptism is optional. This proud spirit resembles Naaman's before he humbled himself. The commandment is

specific and all who disobey will be “condemned”. In fact, the word “dipped” in the Septuagint is “baptiso” (2 Kgs. 5:14). From this the English word “baptism” is derived and when it occurs in the New Testament it is translated “baptise”.

Young people approaching this step should think deeply upon the lesson of Naaman and search out their hearts to ascertain the motive for their action.

### **GEHAZI'S AVARICE AND JUDGMENT (2 Kings 5:20-27).**

Gehazi was incensed at the refusal of Elisha to accept any of the gifts proffered by Naaman. He showed an evident lack of spiritual perception of the incident that had been enacted before him. He had seen Naaman's pride and humiliation. He had seen the reaction of Elisha to the Syrian general as he returned from Jordan acknowledging and honouring the God of Israel.

The lesson was lost on Gehazi. “Behold my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought”. He found it incredible that a Gentile, and a high-ranking Syrian soldier at that, should be let off so lightly after his master had cured him. He did not give God the glory for the miracle of healing. What had been effected was to him all in a day's work. So he ran after the company and by deceit gained two talents of silver and two changes of raiment. In this he detracted from the honour due to God by taking some reward for a miracle God had performed (v.16).

Gehazi had witnessed the power of God many times during his service to Elisha. He did not lack belief or recognition of the God of Israel, but he lacked perception of one of the principles upon which God acted on this occasion — God's grace cannot be purchased with man's money (Isa. 55:1-3; Matt 10:8; cp. Acts 8:20). The significance of Naaman's healing meant nothing to him. He typified Israel who, with the power of God manifest in their very midst, could not recognise the eternal principles contained in the Law, which could have guided them to salvation (cf. Gal. 3:23-25).

Elisha exposed Gehazi's deceit and the servant went out from his presence a leper, the disease of Naaman clinging to him. He had sought a reward and gained a rich prize from a worldly point of view. However, his wealth brought no lasting joy and he had to endure for the remainder of his life the punishment and shame of leprosy.

### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- “Salvation is of the Jews”. The proud and victorious captain of Syria's host was unable to cope with the mortal disease of leprosy and had to seek the prophet of the God of Israel in order to be healed.
- Jehoram was a faithless king, for even though Elisha's miracles were performed in his land, he trembled and was at a loss when informed that Naaman was coming to be healed of his leprosy. Let us not act as though there is no God.

- There are miracles in the political heavens and marvels in creation that make it very clear that God exists.
- Naaman humbled himself against his natural inclinations and because of his obedience was healed. We are all mortal and, like the leper, “diseased” and dying. Sin stands between us and God but He has offered us deliverance through belief and baptism. If we obey in humility we too shall be saved.

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

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

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What lesson did the disease of Naaman teach the discerning Israelite?*
2. *What was wrong with Naaman’s attitude when he came to Elisha to be healed? What did he expect would happen?*
3. *How was Naaman taught the lesson that obedience is better than sacrifice?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Explain how Naaman’s attitude affected his opportunity to be cured of leprosy.*
2. *Describe how Naaman’s cure typifies the obedience required of any who desire baptism into Christ.*
3. *Explain the typical significance of leprosy.*
4. *Briefly explain the significance of the attitudes of Jehoram and Gehazi toward Naaman.*

## 12. JUDGMENT ON THE HOUSE OF AHAB

**“Evil doers shall be cut off, but those who wait upon Yahweh shall inherit the earth”**

*Ahab was a man who lacked strength and decision. He knew what was right in the sight of Yahweh but he failed to put it into practice. The main reason for this was his wife Jezebel. She was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, and a Baal worshipper. She had no respect for the God of Israel and because she had a strong character she was able to mastermind and manipulate Ahab to do things against his own conscience.*

*In this lesson we shall go back to the days of Elijah to see the lengths Jezebel and Ahab were prepared to go to persecute the servants of Yahweh. Then we shall look at a later time when the terrible judgment that such actions reap were unleashed at the hand of Jehu.*

*The aim of this lesson is to show that the prosperity of sinners is short-lived, for they will ultimately be consumed out of the earth.*

### **1 Kings 21; 2 Kings 9**

#### **NABOTH IS SLAIN BY JEZEBEL (1 Kings 21:1-14).**

King Ahab loved luxury and pleasure and he desired to make a garden of herbs. To do this he needed more land and the most suitable piece was a vineyard alongside his palace on the hill of Samaria. So he approached the owner, Naboth, with what appeared to be a very reasonable request: “Give me thy vineyard . . . 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 for religious reasons: “Yahweh forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee”. The Law strictly forbade the disposal of a man’s inheritance unless there were circumstances compelling him (Num. 36:7-9). Even then the land had to be returned to its original owner in the year of jubilee (Lev. 25:13-16).

Ahab’s reaction to this rebuttal is an index to his character. He knew that the law made such stipulations and he did not attempt to argue against the words of Naboth, but he became sullen and sulky: “he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would not eat” (v.4). It was not long before Jezebel his wife perceived that he was melancholy. Upon her enquiry he told her the story, but he made no mention of the reasons Naboth gave for not giving up his vineyard. Breaking Yahweh’s Law mattered not to Jezebel. Knowing this, Ahab did not bother to explain Naboth’s reasons. Jezebel scorned Ahab for his weakness, “Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel?” and she called upon him to cast off his woes and be merry for she would see to it that his wishes were fulfilled (v.7).

Jezebel devised a plot in which false witnesses were to accuse Naboth of blaspheming God and the king before the people. The intimidated

elders of Jezreel were to carry out this plan. Naboth was accused and then carried forth out of the city and stoned, along with his sons (v.13; 2 Kgs. 9:26). Thus Naboth died for his faith and he is no doubt one of the faithful referred in Hebrews 11:37, who through faith “were stoned”.

Unlike Ahab, Jezebel had no scruples and did not hesitate to act. She cunningly plotted the cold-blooded murder of one of the faithful in Israel in a way which left her free of suspicion in the eyes of the people. Triumphant she received the news that her intrigues had been successful.

### **CONFRONTATION WITH ELIJAH: THE HOUSE OF AHAB DOOMED (1 Kings 21:15-24).**

It was with a great deal of satisfaction that Jezebel, on hearing of the success of her scheme, called upon Ahab to “Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth . . . which he refused to give thee for money” (v.15). Jubilantly Ahab arose in order to formally take possession (v.16).

But Ahab had put out of his mind one important fact — Yahweh had seen all the evil that had taken place. Because of this he had determined to utterly destroy Ahab’s house. Herein lies a great lesson for us all. We cannot hide any deed or even any thought from God (1 Pet. 3:12; Psa. 66:7; Jer. 17:10). This realisation should always be with us for it will help us put away evil thoughts and keep us from sin.

Yahweh informed Elijah of all that had happened and put in his mouth the words with which he was to convict Ahab: “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, even thine” (v.19).

Ahab’s pleasure was soon to be turned into fear. When he saw Elijah coming to meet him his conscience began to stir and he said, “Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?” (v.20). Elijah proceeded to pronounce solemnly the most terrible judgment imaginable upon Ahab and his house. The reason is given first — he had sold himself to work evil in Yahweh’s sight — he knew what was right, but he had deliberately become the tool of the forces of evil. In the light of this statement we do well to ask ourselves the question, to whom have we sold ourselves, to God or to Sin? We can only serve one master. If we are not serving God in working for His Truth, then we must be serving Sin (Rom. 6:16-17; Matt. 6:24). Ahab was told that his posterity would be utterly destroyed and none would be left; in order to emphasise this he was told that his house would be made like that of Jeroboam and Baasha, both of which were brought to an abrupt and violent end (1 Kgs. 16:3, 11). So far as Jezebel was concerned, a particularly revolting end was decreed. Because she had incited her husband to do evil in the sight of the Lord, “the dogs would eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel”.

### **AHAB REPENTS (1 Kings 21:25-29).**

Because Jezebel was a stronger character than Ahab, she dominated him and caused him to do evil. She overrode his conscience when she

sought to kill Elijah (19:1-2), and also in the case of Naboth. Through her influence Baal worship was introduced into Israel and the immoral practices of the Amorites were brought back. These abominable iniquities had been the cause of Yahweh casting the Gentile nations out before the children of Israel in the days of Joshua (vv.25-26; Gen. 15:16; Lev. 20:23-24). Ahab had, however, a lingering fear of Yahweh and this is clear from his reaction to the dreadful sentence passed on him: "he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly" (v.27). The amazing grace and mercy of God is seen in His response to Ahab's repentance — there would be a partial stay of judgment: "I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house". This amazing mercy shows how true it is that Yahweh has "no pleasure in the death" of the wicked, but will have all men come to repentance and be saved (Ezek. 18:23, 32; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9; Ex. 34:6, 7).

### **JEHU DESTROYS THE HOUSE OF AHAB (2 Kings 9, 10).**

The judgment upon the house of Ahab was deferred until after his death. Ahab was slain in battle by the Syrians at Ramoth-gilead. His blood-stained chariot was brought back and washed in the pool of Samaria along with his armour. There the sure and certain word of Yahweh was vindicated — "dogs licked up his blood" (1 Kgs. 22:38; 21:19).

There was to be poetic justice in every way; seeing Ahab had slain both Naboth and his sons, so he and his descendants would be annihilated. The man God raised up to carry this out was Jehu, the son of Nimshi. He was anointed king by one of the children of the prophets and given the solemn task of exacting Yahweh's retribution upon the whole house of Ahab. With great skill and cunning he ruthlessly and systematically eradicated all the family of Ahab.

The following list shows how completely Jehu carried out this commission:

1. **2 Kings 9:26.** He slew Jehoram the son of Ahab, and cast him in Naboth's field, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Elijah (1 Kgs. 21:29).
2. **2 Kings 9:27.** He ordered the slaying of Ahaziah, King of Judah, the son of Athaliah who was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel.
3. **2 Kings 9:30-37.** He slew Jezebel in Jezreel and trod her under foot.
4. **2 Kings 10:1-10.** He terrified the men of Samaria, killing 70 of the sons of Ahab.
5. **2 Kings 10:12-14.** He killed 42 princes of the court of Ahaziah, King of Judah, all relatives of Ahab through Athaliah who had married the King of Judah.
6. **2 Kings 10:17.** He slew all those in Samaria connected with Ahab.
7. **2 Kings 10:18-28.** He completely wiped out the worshippers of Baal in Israel.

## **THE SPIRIT OF JEZEBEL IN THE ECCLESIA (Revelation 2:20-23).**


It is with the history of this period in mind that Revelation 2:20-23 makes mention of Jezebel. She accelerated the spread of false worship in Israel and persecuted the prophets of Yahweh, but at length she and her children were utterly destroyed. In the days when the Apocalypse was given false teachers were making inroads into spiritual Israel and corrupting true worship: “seducing my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols”. Collectively these apostates were called “that woman Jezebel”. The fate of Jezebel and her children is the same as that decreed for these apostates: “I will . . . cast them into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation. . . . And I will kill her children with death . . .” (Rev. 2:22-23). Thus we learn the lesson to cleave fast to the Word of our God, and not to be led astray by false theories and philosophies which have their source in the fallible human mind (1 Thess. 5:21; Acts 17:11).

With the passing of time false teachers gained the upper hand in the midst of the ecclesias; and the Truth was corrupted and lost, except for a small and persecuted remnant. The Jezebel-class developed further and matured with the emergence of the Roman Church as head over all churches and a persecutor of the true witnesses. In the hour of her judgment she (like Jezebel, cp. 2 Kgs. 9:30) is likened to a woman arrayed in purple and scarlet and she is called the “Mother of Harlots”. As in the case of Jezebel, the latter-day Jehu, the Lord Jesus Christ, will swiftly and completely destroy this evil system (Rev. 18:21-24).

### **JEHU ASSESSED — A FAILURE (2 Kings 10:19-36).**

Although Jehu was used to destroy the whole house of Ahab, he was not himself a man of upright character. He was a negative man, quick to judge others, but who himself walked in “the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin” (v.29). While we, too, are required to act against evil, it is equally important to purge fleshly ways from our own lives. Only then may the balance of the “goodness and severity” be seen in us. Jehu could find fault in others, but could not implement the Truth in his own life.

### **LESSONS FOR US:**



We must be stable and steadfast as we walk towards the Kingdom. Ahab was easily manipulated by his evil and idolatrous wife and so ruin was brought on him, his house and Israel.

Marriage with one of like mind avoids this evil (Prov. 19:14; Eph. 5:25-33). It produces stability and harmony.

Yahweh does observe those who suffer for righteousness' sake and will bring just retribution upon those who afflict them. The prosperity of the wicked is but for a moment (Psa. 37:1, 2; 73:3-19).

Yahweh is just and merciful. His incredible mercy is seen when He deferred judgment on the house of Ahab because he humbled himself. But though He is longsuffering, those who reject His mercy will be swiftly destroyed.

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

"The Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 5, No. 2, 6-7

"The Ways of Providence" (R. Roberts)—Chapter 20

"The Visible Hand of God" (R. Roberts)—Chapter 27

"Elijah the Tishbite" (J. Martin)—Chapter 9

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *Describe the incident concerning Naboth the Jezreelite, showing briefly how his character contrasted with the character of Ahab and Jezebel.*
2. *When did Elijah announce God's punishment on Ahab and what was this punishment?*
3. *Jehu carried out God's judgments on the house of Ahab, but God was not pleased with him. Why was this and what lesson do we learn from it?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Write a character study on Ahab.*
2. *Jezebel is the name given in the book of Revelation to the false teachers who crept into the first century ecclesias. Show how appropriate this is by reviewing her life as revealed in the Book of Kings.*
3. *Outline the main lessons we learn from the lives of Ahab and Jezebel and the destruction of their house by Jehu.*



## 13. JONAH THE PROPHET

### “Salvation is of Yahweh”

*Following the reign of Jehu, King of Israel, the throne was occupied by Jehoahaz, Jehoash (known also as Joash) and then Jeroboam II. During the reign of Jeroboam II the prophets Jonah, Hosea, Isaiah, and Amos prophesied to the nation. Jonah had noted the prosperity of the nation of Israel at a time when the Assyrian power was in decline. Though Israel was prospering politically and economically, Jonah had endeavoured to stem the tide of spiritual decay.*

*When instructed by Yahweh to preach repentance to the Assyrians, Jonah saw the inevitable result — that they would be used to bring retribution upon Israel, his beloved people. Motivated by what would have seemed the best of intentions, he sought to evade the command of Yahweh.*

*The aim of this lesson is to see that no man can thwart God’s purpose and election: those who repent will receive mercy, but the rebellious will be destroyed.*

### Jonah

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

Jonah himself was of Gath-hepher, a small village in Galilee about five kilometres north-east of Nazareth. He was the son of Amittai (from “Emeth” meaning “truth”). His name, meaning “dove”, suggests that he was the “dove of truth”. He was one who showed great concern for the welfare of his brethren, a quality to be desired in a follower of God. In this, however, he became over-zealous and endeavoured to deflect God’s righteous judgment from them.

#### JONAH STRIVES FOR NATIONAL REFORM (2 Kings 14:23-29).

The events of the book of Jonah occurred during the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel (B.C. 799-759). The history of the times is recorded in 2 Kings 14:23-29. Israel had been reduced by affliction and God purposed to give them a final chance, that they might reform and turn again to Him. His purpose demanded that they should not be blotted out (Mal. 3:6). So He raised up Jeroboam II, the son of Joash, but he refused the way of Yahweh spoken by Jonah, and instead chose the path of Jeroboam I, son of Nebat (v.24). Nevertheless Israel was saved from her enemies “by his hand” (vv.26-27), and during his long, powerful and stable reign the nation prospered and the borders were extended. Jonah had prophesied this (v.25). To the north the border was extended to the “entering of Hamath”, Syria being invaded and Damascus recovered, while to the south Jeroboam conquered as far as “the sea of the plain”, a possible reference to Edom (v.25; Deut. 3:17; 4:49).

## **JONAH'S COMMISSION (Jonah 1:2).**

Whilst Israel was in a state of moral decline Jonah was commissioned to preach repentance to Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian Empire. He had to warn the people that the city would be overthrown within 40 days unless they repented.

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

Jonah realised that Assyria's decline stemmed from their sins and also that if they repented, they would recover and prosper. He feared that they would then threaten Israel's security.

Although Israel had forsaken God, the Assyrians were proud, superstitious and cruel. He could see no reason to promote the well-being of Assyria. So he tried to evade God's charge by fleeing to Joppa and taking a ship to Tarshish (v.3). Perhaps he imagined that if Nineveh's repentance could be deferred for 40 days it would be destroyed (3:4). He had not perceived that God's grace will be extended to all people and that no man has the right to limit His mercy (cp. Matt. 20:15). God desires men of all nations in His Kingdom (Gen. 12:1-3; Acts 10:28, 34-35). Jonah had to learn that God would have all men come to repentance, even though He had given Israel special privileges (1 Tim. 2:4).

When the ship set sail, Jonah went to sleep below. He must have been exhausted for he slept while a tremendous storm arose. The ship was in danger of breaking up (v.4). The sailors worked hard and threw overboard the ship's tackling to lighten it (v.5). Each implored his god for help. Finding Jonah still asleep, they woke him that he might also plead (v.6).

They suspected that one of their number was responsible for their plight. Lots were cast and Jonah was taken as the cause of the trouble (v.7). Questioned by them (v.8), he revealed that he was an Hebrew and worshipped "Yahweh, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land". As such He controlled the elements and could calm the sea (Psa. 65:7; 89:9; 107:25-30; Matt. 8:26). He told them that he had fled from Yahweh's presence. They asked him how the sea could be calmed (vv.9-10), and when he suggested that they cast him overboard, they were horrified. But Jonah perceived that the great tempest had been sent because of him and he was prepared to sacrifice his life for those on the ship. Moreover, he would thereby escape the obnoxious commission of bringing mercy through repentance to Israel's foes (4:3). Israel would be saved through his death!

They endeavoured to bring the ship under control with oars, but their task was hopeless (v.13). They concluded that the only means of salvation was through the death of Jonah, but did not want to be held accountable for his death (v.14). Compare them with Pilate, who desired to be innocent of the blood of Christ.

After Jonah had been cast into the sea, the storm abated (v.15), and the sailors were convinced of the power of Yahweh. They sacrificed to Him and vowed to serve Him.

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

Jonah was thrown into the raging sea. He quickly sank and the depths closed about him and weeds wrapped round his head. Reaching the bottom, he considered himself doomed to a watery grave, when an amazing thing happened. A great fish, specially prepared by God, swallowed him. He remained in its belly for three days and nights, until, at Yahweh's decree, the fish vomited him out upon dry land. Jonah 2:2-9 records his prayer of thanks for his deliverance from death. In his utter despair, "out of the belly of hell" (Heb. ~~"sheol"~~ = the grave), he cried to God and his voice was heard. Yahweh had become his salvation: "Thou hast brought up my life from corruption", he said. This death, burial and resurrection of Jonah was an enacted parable, for Jesus spoke of it as the "sign of the prophet Jonas". He said, "as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40; Jonah 1:17).

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

Upon the dry land, Jonah was recommissioned by Yahweh, "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee" (vv.1-2). This time he obeyed and set out for the city of Nineveh, which was so great that it took three days journey to compass — perhaps 100 kilometres in circumference (v.3). Proceeding into the very heart of Nineveh he cried out: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (v.4). He called upon them to turn from their wickedness and to serve Yahweh.

This plain, forthright message was just what the people required. It made such an impression upon them that the response was immediate and widespread, reaching from the common people to the King upon the throne. He published a decree calling for general repentance and repudiation of evil and violence (vv.6-9). Seeing their repentant attitude, God turned from His purpose and spared Nineveh (v.10). This is His consistent manner of dealing with man (see Jer. 18:6-10). When man is prepared to repent of his evil ways, Divine mercy is available. Reject His mercy and judgment comes swiftly, as it did later upon Nineveh in the time of Nahum the prophet.

### **JONAH'S DISAPPOINTMENT (Jonah 4:1-3).**

Jonah had conveyed God's message to Nineveh, but he was bitterly disappointed at the success of his preaching (v.1)! His heart was really with Israel for whose reformation he had worked so hard. The humble repentance of Nineveh yielded God's mercy and forgiveness, but caused him to become angry. He remonstrated with Yahweh, saying that he would rather die than see Nineveh repent! This was why he had fled away in the first place, he said (v.2). He had feared that Yahweh would change His mind and not destroy Nineveh, Israel's enemy.

What a strange twist of prejudice we see in Jonah's mind. He could not conceive that God could ever have dealings with another nation. 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 (Rom. 3:29).

### **JONAH LEARNS A LESSON — THE PARABLE OF THE GOURD (Jonah 4:4-11).**

Yahweh replied to Jonah in a way which challenged his motives, "Doest thou well to be angry?" Jonah retired from the city, made himself a booth (a temporary dwelling such as Israel made of boughs during the feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:41-44), and waited to see the fate of Nineveh. God caused a large plant to grow up alongside Jonah which afforded him extra shade, and he was pleased to have it. But overnight the gourd was eaten by a worm. God was, in a wonderful way, preparing circumstances whereby Jonah would appreciate the folly of his prejudice as well as the greatness of Yahweh, as God of Jew and Gentile. On the next day the sun arose and God caused a vehement east wind to blow. Jonah mourned the loss of the protective gourd and wished that he was dead. Catching Jonah in an unrepentant mood, God again questioned him, "Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?" Jonah with hardened heart maintained his position: "I do well to be angry, even unto death". God's questions implied that he should adjust his thinking. He had brought repentance to the Ninevites, but he himself was unrepentant (cp. 1 Cor. 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 a plant, because it afforded him pleasant shade, than for men! Man was the last creature made by God, the crown of His creation, made in His 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 should come to Him in REPENTANCE, as Nineveh did, and live (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9; Ezek. 18:23, 32).

### **THE SIGN OF THE PROPHET JONAS (Matt. 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 enumerate two ways in which Jonah was a sign.

- (1) V.40. Jonah's 3 days and 3 nights in the great fish was a sign that he, too, would be in the heart of the earth for the same period.
- (2) V.41. In this verse he contrasts the reception that the men of Nineveh gave to Jonah's message with the way in which he had been received. The Ninevites had repented, but they were "an evil and adulterous generation" (v.39), and would at length crucify him. And the Jews in Jesus' day had every reason to repent, for they had already been given many signs, which in themselves proved that he was Messiah (Jn. 15:24). For these reasons they would be condemned by the Ninevites in the day of judgment.

It is interesting to compare Jonah with Jesus and Peter.

#### JONAH

#### JESUS AND PETER

- |                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Jonah (= Dove) Son of Amitai (= Truth)                                                                       | As a dove the Holy Spirit, the source of Truth, descended upon Jesus (Matt. 3:16; Jn. 16:13).                                                                               |
| 2. Commissioned to take the gospel to the Gentiles, he left from Joppa. He was prejudiced against the Gentiles. | Peter, or "Simon son of Jonas" (Jn. 21:15), was commissioned to take the gospel to the Gentiles from Joppa (Acts 10:5). He was prejudiced against the Gentiles (Gal. 2:12). |
| 3. The Ninevites repented.                                                                                      | The Gentiles repented (Acts 10:48).                                                                                                                                         |
| 4. Jonah warned the Ninevites to repent within 40 days, or face judgment.                                       | Jesus warned Israel and 40 years later (A.D. 70) judgment came.                                                                                                             |
| 5. Jonah "died" and rose again after 3 days and nights.                                                         | So did the Lord.                                                                                                                                                            |

#### LESSONS FOR US:

- We cannot run away from our responsibilities to 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?" (Dan. 4:35).
- God has made man and will 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 and not hide our lamps (Mk. 16:15-16).

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

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

“The Goodness and Severity of God” (H.P. Mansfield)—Pp.2-50.

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *How did Jonah try to thwart God's purpose?*
2. *What was wrong with Jonah's attitude towards the Ninevites?*
3. *Make a list of the miracles which took place in the story of Jonah.*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**



*Briefly outline the story of Jonah. What lessons can we learn from the life of Jonah?*



*Jesus said to the men of his day: “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas”. In what way was Jonah a “man of sign”?*

*mat 12 39-40*

## 14. DECLINE AND CAPTIVITY OF THE 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, who 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.*

*Our aim in this lesson will be to trace the causes of Israel’s decline and to observe the punishments which came on them so that we might avoid them.*

### 2 Kings 17

#### DECLINE OF ISRAEL.

The establishment by Jeroboam of apostate worship, under the direction of priests “of the lowest of the people, and which were not of the sons of Levi”, was the beginning of Israel’s decline. Many fled the northern kingdom, seeking the religion of their fathers in Judah and Jerusalem. Twenty years after the division, Israel had an army of 800,000 (2 Chron. 13:3), but by the reign of Ahab this had declined to 7,232 (1 Kgs. 20:15). Judah on the other hand commenced with 180,000 (2 Chron. 11:1) and grew to 1,160,000 in the time of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 17:14-18).

There was a complete lack of stability in the northern kingdom. Unlike Judah which had a continuous line of kings from the house of David, Israel had six dynasties from the days of Jeroboam. The capital city was also changed twice, from Shechem to Tirzah and later from Tirzah to Samaria. This instability was symptomatic of their real problem — disobedience to God. In the reign of Hoshea, the last king of Israel, it is recorded that “he did evil in the sight of the LORD, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him” (2 Kgs. 17:2). This is certainly not an enviable record, but it is the best of all the kings of Israel! Every other king of Israel is said to have followed the sins of Jeroboam, to have sinned against Yahweh and to have made Israel to sin. Let us now trace the latter end of the kingdom of Israel until its ultimate captivity by Assyria.

#### THE GROWING THREAT OF ASSYRIA (2 Kings 15:8-31).

The wickedness of Israel is emphasised in the reigns of its last five kings. Each of them (except for Menahem) was overthrown by violence and intrigue. Zachariah the son of Jeroboam II, of the line of Jehu, ascended the throne and continued the corruption commenced by Jeroboam I. He reigned for only six months and was slain by Shallum (v.10). This fulfilled the word of Yahweh in 2 Kings 10:30 (cp. 15:12). But Shallum’s conspiracy was shortlived, for in the space of a month he, too, was slain by Menahem (v.14).

Menahem reigned for ten years. They were years of turmoil within Israel, due to the unsettled state of their rulers. The eye of faith would have seen these troubles as indicative of Yahweh's displeasure with His people, but most of the faithful had long since fled to Judah. There was, however, a greater threat to Israel than internal strife. The growing power of Assyria was beginning to make itself felt. Menahem was forced to pay tribute to Pul, the king of Assyria, to dissuade him from attacking Israel (vv.19-20). In fact, Chronicles tells us that, from this time on, portions of the northern tribes began to be taken into captivity (1 Chron. 5:26). Instead of seeking the riches of faith and trust in Yahweh, Menahem sought to buy off the Assyrians, but to no avail. Israel's doom was sealed.

Menahem was succeeded by his son Pekahiah, who reigned for two years, continuing the corruption of his father (vv.23-24). He was overthrown, in violence, by Pekah, who then reigned for twenty years (vv.25-27). Pekah sought to strengthen Israel. His efforts were entirely in his own strength — he neglected the source of real strength. He sought an alliance with Rezin, king of Syria, and came against his brethren in Judah, successfully defeating them under the weak leadership of Ahaz. He was forced by the prophet Oded to return his captive brethren back to Judah (2 Chron. 28:6-11). He was, however, in the words of Isaiah, only "a tail of smoking firebrand" (Isa. 7:4) and was in due course extinguished as such. During his reign Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, continued the ravages of his predecessor, taking many in Israel captive to Assyria (v.29). Israel still continued in wickedness. Pekah was overthrown in the same way that he had come to the throne — by conspiracy and violence (v.30).

### **ISRAEL'S LAST KING — HOSHEA (2 Kings 17:1-6).**

Hoshea ascended the throne and reigned for nine years. Israel's doom had been sealed and Hoshea made only a half-hearted attempt to effect reform. He was not as wicked as the kings before him (v.2), but by this time only outstanding faith and ability could have averted the pattern of decline. Hoshea sought an alliance with So, king of Egypt, and stopped sending tribute to the king of Assyria (v.4). Israel, which had come out of Egypt under the hand of Yahweh, now turned back and sought an alliance with that broken reed. Like "a silly dove" they sought an alliance with the power of darkness, for says Hosea, "Israel hath forgotten his maker, and buildeth temples . . . but I will send a fire upon his cities and it shall devour the palaces thereof" (Hos. 7:11; 8:14). That fire was Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria, who came upon Israel and utterly devastated them (vv.5-6, 23). The kingdom of Israel was no more.

### **THE CAUSE OF DECLINE AND CAPTIVITY (2 Kings 17:7-23).**

The reasons for Israel's captivity are clearly set forth in this section of the record. 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 catalogue of sins in these verses:



- they walked in the statutes of the gods of other nations and not in the law of Yahweh (vv.7-8).
- they secretly, as well as openly, performed abominations against their God (v.9).
- they set up groves and built idols to worship in defiance of God's law (vv.10-12).
- they refused God's prophets, hardened their necks and would not believe in Yahweh their God (vv.13-14).
- they followed vain things, worshipped the two calves, and served Baal (vv.15-16).
- they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire (v.17).

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 was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day" (v.23). Again in 2 Kings 18:12, God emphasises the reason for their captivity: "because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD their God but transgressed his covenant, and all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and would not hear them, nor do them".

#### **THE BEGINNING OF THE SAMARITANS (2 Kings 17:24-41).**

The Assyrians had a practice of settling their conquered victims in other lands. Their objective was to stifle the spirit of nationalism from growing in the lands they controlled and so to forestall revolt. The rest of chapter 17 is an account of this practice in the cities of Samaria; many peoples from distant lands were deported to Israel, and settled there, along with their idolatry. Yahweh caused lions to come against these settlers from other nations (vv.25-26). The Assyrians then brought back one of the priests of Israel to instruct the foreigners in the ways "of the God of the land". The resultant confused and corrupt form of worship became known as the religion of the Samaritans. Note verse 32-33; "They feared the LORD and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places. They feared the LORD and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence". As Jesus said to the Samaritan woman in John 4:22, "Ye worship ye know not what".

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

The northern kingdom was scattered to all nations of the earth and, unlike the southern kingdom of Judah, has remained that way until our generation. The time is approaching when the northern kingdom of Ephraim will become the arrow and Judah the bow of Yahweh (Zech. 9:13-14). Both Israel and Judah have yet to be joined together as one under their rightful king, the Lord Jesus Christ (Ezek. 37:16-28). Even Hosea, who wrote so much concerning the wickedness and apostasy of

Israel, prophesied of this time (see 1:10-11; 3:4-5; 6:1-3). We see a token 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; Ezek. 20:33-44).

### LESSONS FOR US:

- Israel failed initially by corrupting the worship that God had established through Moses. We must be careful to maintain a purity of doctrine and worship before God (Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; 2 Pet. 3:15-18).
- Israel established harmful practices, both in public and in secret, offering their children to the fire; and replaced the true God with heathen idols. We must keep ourselves from idols, i.e. anything that would divert 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 hardened their hearts against His commandments. We must be prepared to receive God’s Word and not to rebel against His precepts (Isa. 57:15-17; 66:1-2).
- Like the Samaritans we come from a confused and corrupt system of religion and the words of Jesus are particularly relevant — “true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23).

### 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, Pp. 175-186.  
“The Ministry of the Prophets” (R. Roberts and C.C. Walker) — Pp. 95-98.

### PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *How did the Samaritan religion commence?*
2. *Contrast in general terms the king of Israel with those of Judah.*
3. *What fate befell the kingdom of Israel? Give brief details.*

### ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Explain the part that Israel’s kings played in the decline of the kingdom of Israel.*
2. *What were the basic reasons for the decline and captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel?*
3. *What lessons do we learn from the decline of the 10-tribe kingdom of Israel and its removal into captivity?*

## 15. HEZEKIAH: THE CHALLENGE FROM ASSYRIA

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

*At the time when the northern kingdom came to its end, the truth was being revived in Judah. Hezekiah, who came to the throne in the third year of Hoshea (2 Kgs. 18:1), had commenced a spiritual reform. The record says “that Hezekiah did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did” (v.3). Thus a refuge was provided for true Israelites. As the ten tribes in the north, steeped in apostasy, went into captivity, there commenced in Judah one of the greatest attempts at spiritual reformation that the nation had seen.*

*Our aim in this lesson is to see that when a crisis overtakes us the only solution lies in turning to God in trust and in prayer.*

### 2 Kings 18 & 19

#### HEZEKIAH'S REFORMATION

Hezekiah began his reign at the age of twenty five. His mother's name was Abijah which means “My Father is Yah” (2 Chron. 29:1). His earthly father was the weak, evil Ahaz, but Hezekiah did not follow his ways; rather, he espoused the principles of “David his father” (v.2). In the very first month of his first year upon the throne, Hezekiah commenced his reforms. He repaired and cleansed the temple, sanctified the priests and instructed them to revive the ordinances of the Law, pointing out that many had already gone into captivity because of the discontinuance of the Law of God. Even the daily offerings had been neglected for some years (2 Chron. 29:1-9; 2 Kgs. 18:1-6).

Hezekiah also revived the feast of Passover which had been neglected during Ahaz's rule. He cleansed the land from idolatry, and established the priests and the Levites in their courses, as they had originally been under King David (2 Chron. 31:1-4). He also reinstated tithing as it was under the Law of Moses and appointed officers to administer the receipt and distribution of the tithes. Yahweh was well pleased with his efforts — he “wrought that which was good and right and truth before the LORD his God . . . he did it with all his heart and prospered” (2 Chron. 31:20-21).

The Assyrian power was mounting to the north and had ravaged Israel from time to time. Hezekiah, however, placed his confidence in Yahweh and threw off the yoke of Assyria (2 Kgs. 18:7). For a while nothing happened. Then in the sixth year of Hezekiah, the ninth year of Hoshea, king of Israel, the northern kingdom was taken into captivity by the king of Assyria. Israel had gone into captivity — would Judah be next? What was the reaction of the men of Judah?

## **JUDAH'S RESPONSE TO THE ASSYRIAN THREAT (Isaiah 22).**

The prophet Isaiah was contemporary with Hezekiah and he tells us what the inhabitants of Judah were thinking at this time of impending invasion by the Assyrians.

Some wanted to flee to Egypt, but Isaiah warned them of the folly of such a course (Isa. 20:3-6). Others trusted in their own strength to prevail. Why, if they fortified the walls of Jerusalem, could they not withstand Assyria? But they had forgotten Yahweh "the maker thereof, neither had respect unto him that fashioned it long ago" (Isa. 22:8-11). Yet another group took a defeatist attitude and said, "let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (vv.12-14). A further group, headed by Shebna, were self-righteous, thinking that the rest of the city would certainly be taken captive, but they were too righteous to have that happen to them (Isa. 22:15-19). Finally, there were those who supported Hezekiah in his faithfulness, like Eliakim, who were promised by Yahweh a deliverance, not only from Assyria, but an eventual abiding place among the "offspring and the issue" of the house of David (Isa. 22:20-25). So we have a graphic picture of the reaction of the men of Judah and Jerusalem to this crisis.

## **RABSHAKEH'S BLASPHEMOUS SPEECH (2 Kings 18:17-37).**

Sennacherib sent Tartan, Rabсарis and Rabshakeh to Jerusalem with the Assyrian army (v.17). Notice the place they came to — "the conduit of the upper pool". This was precisely the place where Ahaz, Hezekiah's father, had refused the sign of Yahweh, but had nevertheless been given the wonderful prophecy of Isa. 7:3-16. How this must have encouraged Hezekiah to know that from this same location Isaiah had previously uttered the irrevocable prophecy concerning Immanuel, "God with us". Nonetheless, Rabshakeh's blasphemous words rang out, striking fear into the hearts of the men of Jerusalem. He boasted of Assyria's exploits over other nations. Had their gods been able to deliver them? (vv.19-21, 33-35). He tried to undermine their allegiance to Hezekiah by saying that he had taken away their altars of Yahweh and established his own in Jerusalem (v.22). He mocked them by saying that the weakest Assyrian captain could destroy the best force Hezekiah could assemble on horses provided by Assyria! He even claimed that his exploits against Judah were at the behest of Yahweh (v.25). Perhaps he had been informed of Isaiah's prophecy about the coming invasion of Israel and Judah by Assyria (Isa. 8 and 10). But these same prophecies forecast his destruction about the walls of Jerusalem (Isa. 10:24-34)!

Hezekiah wisely commanded his people not to utter a word of reply to Rabshakeh (v.36). There was no point in answering a fool according to his folly, and it would have further discouraged the people. How wise was Hezekiah even at this time of crisis.

### **HEZEKIAH'S APPROACH TO YAHWEH (2 Kings 19:1-7).**

Eliakim, Shebna and Joah brought Hezekiah the report of Rabshakeh's words. Hezekiah went into the temple, placed the matter in Yahweh's hands and sent his servants to Isaiah (vv.1-2). Hezekiah realised that the matter was beyond his power. He instructed his servants to tell Isaiah of Rabshakeh's blasphemy. He requested Israel to plead with Yahweh to vindicate Himself, reprove the Assyrians, and save the remnant that was left, for "there is not strength to bring forth". Hezekiah did not attempt to solve the situation by himself. How often do we try and find our own solution to problems that clearly are the province of our Father in heaven? Do we put our trust in Him or in the arm of flesh? Hezekiah's plea was not in vain, for Yahweh, through Isaiah, told his servants that the Assyrian host would be destroyed and that Sennacherib would return humiliated to his own land and perish.

### **SENNACHERIB'S MESSAGE TO HEZEKIAH (2 Kings 19:8-14).**

Rabshakeh had failed to intimidate the people or to allure them away from Hezekiah with promises of peace and prosperity (2 Kings 18:30-31). He therefore withdrew from Jerusalem. But he was not content to let matters rest there. A letter from Sennacherib was sent to Hezekiah reiterating the blasphemous words of Rabshakeh and defying the God of Israel. Again the claim is made that the gods of other nations could not deliver them, "Let not thy God deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria" (v.10). Again Hezekiah turned to Yahweh for comfort and guidance.

### **HEZEKIAH'S PRAYER AND ITS ANSWER (2 Kings 19:15-37).**

Hezekiah's prayer in verses 15-19 provides a beautiful pattern, not unlike the Lord's prayer in structure. He firstly declares the majesty and power of his God over all nations and kingdoms, for all have come from Him. He then appeals to Yahweh to hear the reproach of Sennacherib and lays before God his trust in Him and his own rejection of Sennacherib's claims — "they were no gods, but the work of men's hands". He concludes by appealing to God's purpose to preserve Israel — that "all the kingdoms of the earth may know that Thou art the LORD God".

Isaiah the prophet then comes to Hezekiah with the reassuring answer of Yahweh. He was not unmindful of Sennacherib's words, and in vv. 20-34 we have the detailed answer to Hezekiah's prayer. In beautiful words, it told Hezekiah that Yahweh would redeem His people, that Sennacherib would not take the city and in fact, he would not even "shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it" (v.32). In the final verses of the chapter, we see this prophecy vindicated, for the angel of Yahweh smote the Assyrians by night and Sennacherib himself was murdered by his sons in his own country whilst worshipping in the temple of Nisroch his god (vv.35-37)!

Psalms 46-48 were probably written by Hezekiah at this time. They express his thankfulness and relief at the deliverance of Yahweh. His mind contemplated the events of the Assyrian threat, the blasphemy of Rabshakeh and the deliverance of Jerusalem and Judah — “we have thought of thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple . . .” (Ps. 48:9). There are many allusions in these Psalms to these events.

When a crisis such as Hezekiah experienced comes upon us, do we react as did Hezekiah? When the crisis is past, do we express our thankfulness to Yahweh, as he did in these Psalms? We can certainly learn much from this faithful king’s life.

Although not part of this lesson, we mention in passing, that Hezekiah was sick unto death at the time of the events of 2 Kings 19 (the two events are related in 2 Kgs. 20:5-6). Again Yahweh delivered him and granted a further fifteen years to his life. It has been suggested that the Songs of Degrees, i.e. Psalms 120-134, were compiled by him in remembrance of God’s goodness. This theme would make a very profitable study in conjunction with this lesson.

#### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- Hezekiah set about enthusiastically reforming the people and encouraging them in God’s ways. We need to be always diligent about our Heavenly Father’s business, enthusiastically upholding the principles of truth, like Hezekiah (1 Tim. 4:12-16; Tit. 2:6-8; 3:8-9).
- Our faith should be matched with action. Hezekiah placed his confidence in Yahweh, and went about fortifying the city. Our faith should not be passive, but “mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:4-5).
- In any time of crisis and trial, we should, like Hezekiah, turn first to our God. His strength and wisdom alone will guide and deliver us. (Ps. 127:1; 1 Cor. 10:12-13; Rom. 8:31-39).
- The scorning of a fool like Rabshakeh is best answered with silence. Mockers pull down and destroy. They desire to weaken our confidence. Whilst we ought to give witness to truth, we ought not to “answer a fool according to his folly” (Prov. 26:4; 1 Pet. 2:21-23).
- When we experience God’s deliverance and guidance we ought to remember this in thankfulness, just as Hezekiah praised Yahweh for His lovingkindness (1 Thess. 5:18; Col. 3:15; Phil. 4:11).

#### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

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

“The Ministry of the Prophets” (R. Roberts and C.C. Walker) — Pages 517-524.

“The Ways of Providence” (R. Roberts) — Pages 179-181.

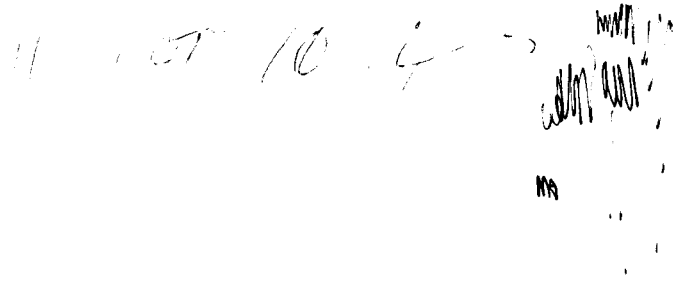
**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What reforms did Hezekiah institute in Judah and Jerusalem?*
2. *Explain some of the attitudes of the inhabitants of Jerusalem at the time of the Assyrian threat.*
3. *How was Hezekiah's faith seen in action during the Assyrian invasion?*
4. *How did Rabshakeh seek to undermine the faith of the inhabitants of Jerusalem during the Assyrian invasion?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Describe Hezekiah's response to Rabshakeh's words and Sennacherib's letter.*
2. *What do we learn from the deliverance of Hezekiah and Jerusalem from the Assyrian host?*
3. *Recount how Hezekiah reacted to the challenge of the Assyrians. Make special mention of lessons we can learn from his attitude.*

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## 16. THE CALL AND MISSION OF JEREMIAH

**“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. 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 the Lord.*

*“It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth” (Lamentations of Jeremiah 3:26-27).*

*Our aim in this lesson is to learn to be steadfast when faced with persecution and strong opposition to what God has revealed.*

### Jeremiah 1

#### THE STATE OF THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH.

Jeremiah's prophetic ministrations began in the 13th year of King Josiah and continued for forty years through the reigns of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah (Jer. 1:1-3). Though the kingdom of Judah came to its end in the 11th year of king Zedekiah, 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).

His life was therefore set in the tragedy of those times and it is little wonder that he is known as the prophet of doom. The prophets were sent to warn of war, evil and pestilence. His times called for urgent appeals and warnings of punishment (28:7-9), for Judah was in a state of spiritual and moral depravity. All people from the highest to the lowest had set their hearts to do evil.

“I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hand of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah” (Jer. 23:14).

It was not by choice that Jeremiah denounced his contemporaries. He was moved by his love and loyalty to Israel's God. It was not pessimism that characterised the man, but a remarkable faith, a steadfastness in the face of opposition and persecution. This is seen as he testified for God of the calamities to come.

#### TWO YOUNG AND FAITHFUL COMPANIONS.

Jeremiah is introduced as “the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin” (1:1). Anathoth was a small village



five kilometres north of Jerusalem, given to the Levites by the tribe of Benjamin (Josh. 21:18). Apparently an important line of priests dwelt in this city, it being readily accessible to Jerusalem and the Temple where they served. In 2 Kgs. 22:8 we learn that Hilkiah was the high priest in Josiah's reign. He may have been the father of Jeremiah. In his life Jeremiah had to appear before kings and principal men and this task would have been easier if his family was prominent.

It was in the 13th year of Josiah's reign that the word of Yahweh first came to Jeremiah. From 2 Chron. 34:1-3 we can determine that Josiah was then only 21 years of age and that it was the first year of his reformation. Jeremiah was also a young man, for in Jer. 1:6 he is termed a child (Heb. "nar" = lad, servant, young man, e.g. Psalm 119:9). So in the kingdom of Judah at that time there were two young men of the most zealous spirit, living only five kilometres apart, and most likely known to each other because of their family backgrounds. God was providing Judah with a final opportunity to repent: Prophet and King were united in their determination to reform the nation. In the early days of the kingdom Samuel the prophet-priest had co-operated with king David (1 Chron. 9:22). Now as the end of Judah approached, a similar combination of faithful leaders was raised up.

Later none mourned the untimely death of Josiah more than Jeremiah (2 Chron. 35:25). He had lost a strong and faithful companion whose support he could count on; thereafter his bold denunciations put his life in jeopardy.

#### **KNOWN BY GOD BEFORE HIS BIRTH (Jeremiah 1:4-10).**

Jeremiah, like Josiah, was "known" to God before he was born (Jer. 1:5; 1 Kgs. 13:2). He was a vessel prepared by Yahweh: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee and I ordained (Heb. "nathan" = "gave" cf. Isa. 9:6) thee a prophet unto the nations". Jeremiah was only a young man, and the responsibility and difficulty of his calling made him protest his inadequacy, "Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child" (v.6). But God did not accept his refusal: "Say not I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid . . . for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD." (vv.7-8). He was like Moses, who was meek and initially shrank from the calling and responsibilities that Yahweh called him to bear (Ex. 4:10; 3:12). Yahweh put forth His hand and touched the mouth of Jeremiah and said, "Behold I have put my words in thy mouth". Like Isaiah before him and "the prophet like unto Moses" to come after him, Jeremiah was thereby prepared for his mission (Isa. 6:5-7; Deut. 18:15-18).

#### **TWO SIGNS OF ENCOURAGEMENT (Jeremiah 1:11-16).**

As God encouraged Moses with two miracles, so He now emboldened Jeremiah with two impressive visions. The first was that of the rod of an almond tree followed by the dramatic statement, "I will hasten my word

to perform it". God's message is made clearer when we realise that the word "almond" (Heb. "shaged") is very similar to the word "hasten" or "watch" (Heb. "shaqad"). The almond tree is the first to blossom while all the other trees lies dormant. The time of Yahweh's judgment on the nations was rapidly approaching; He was "watching over" or "hastening" the fulfilment of His Word. Thus the almond blossom spoke of the determination of Yahweh to carry out His Word, which Jeremiah would utter.

In the second vision a seething pot was seen with its aspect toward the north. Terrible trouble was brewing for Jerusalem and Judah. In the heat of His wrath, Yahweh had united all the kingdoms of the north under the banner of the Chaldeans and was going to pour their boiling hatred upon the people of Judah (vv.13-16).

In this vivid way, Jeremiah was impressed with the power and urgency of the Word that God would speak through him. There was not time for delay or hesitation. "Thou therefore gird up thy loins and arise and speak unto them all that I command thee" (v.17; cf. Ezek. 3:8-9).

#### **SET OVER THE NATIONS (Jeremiah 1:17-19).**

Principally Jeremiah's mission was to preach a message of coming judgment upon Judah. Warning of impending judgments was the main duty of a prophet. As Jeremiah expressed it, "the prophets that have been before me and before thee of old prophesied both against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war and of evil, and of pestilence" (28:7-9). Yet there is much in Jeremiah's 52 chapters about the future peace and glory of Jerusalem; but this would come after judgment. "See", said God, "I have set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build and to plant" (1:10). So whilst he declared that the land would be desolate, the cities waste, and Jerusalem without an inhabitant (e.g. 4:7; 25:34-38; 26:9; 4:23-31), he also foretold the day when Jerusalem would be occupied by David's righteous Son (23:5-8; 33:15-16); when all nations would gather to it (3:17); when the two kingdoms of Israel would be re-united (3:18; 31:1); when the land would be restored and houses and cities rebuilt amidst thanksgiving and joyfulness (30:11-22; 31:2-29; 50:4-5, 19-20, 33-34). His message was therefore two-fold: negative AND positive.

Nor was his mission restricted to Judah. "Over nations and kingdoms" God appointed him, and so we find in the compass of his words that "all the kingdoms of the world, which are upon the face of the earth" are indicted for their evil and warned of judgment to come (1:10; 25:26-31; chaps. 44-49). On one occasion Jeremiah sent yokes of wood to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon to symbolise their approaching servitude to the king of Babylon (27:1-8; 28:12-14). Yet chapters 50 and 51 describe the destruction of the mighty kingdom of Babylon.

Before these days Jeremiah had advised the inhabitants of Jerusalem to surrender to the Chaldeans; thereby they would secure their lives. To resist, on the other hand, would result in death (21:8-9; 27:1-8). Again, he sent to those already in captivity, saying, "Pray for the peace of Babylon" (29:1-7). Without question Jeremiah's words reached the ears of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. When finally the Babylonians took Jerusalem, the princes of Babylon, on instructions from Nebuchadnezzar, searched for Jeremiah. They released him from prison and bonds, providing him with every necessity, and even a reward (39:11-14; 40:1-6)! The king of Judah had imprisoned him and the people rejected him but the great king Nebuchadnezzar gave the decree, "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). In such remarkable ways the prophet learnt the meaning of his name, "Yahweh exalts".

### **A SUFFERING SERVANT YET FULL OF COMPASSION.**

After Josiah's death, his life was even sought by those of his own city of Anathoth (11:19); he was plotted against (18:18-23); was defamed (20:10); reproached, derided all day long (20:7); cursed by the people as they curse those who practise usury (15:10); accused falsely (37:13-15); placed in the stocks (20:2, 3); put on trial for the Truth (26:10-24); imprisoned (32:1-2); and given over to death (37:15; 38:4-5). In all these ways he showed the pattern of Yahweh's Suffering Servant to come (c.f. Jer. 15:11; Isa.52:13-15).

Yet Jeremiah never exalted himself above his brethren. Despite the bitterness of their opposition he prayed for them on many occasions (e.g. 10:23-25; 11:5; 14:7-9); was moved by compassion because of their plight (4:19); and wished that his eyes were a fountain that he could weep over the coming slaughter (9:1-2; 13:17). How beautifully he fore-shadowed the spirit of the Lord "who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered he threatened not", and who instructed his disciples, "Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you" (1 Pet. 2:23; Matt. 5:44).

### **AN UNCOMPROMISING MESSAGE.**

Yet this wonderful man, whose eyes wept for his people, was quite uncompromising in the message he preached. He never failed to tell them of the terrible consequences of their evil ways. The lesson for us is that love is not merely tolerance. Love is tolerant, "it suffereth long and is kind"; but when wrong is perpetuated and standards deteriorate, then love demands that we take the stand of Jeremiah. We must be concerned with eternal things and cannot idly stand by when the eternal well-being of those whom we love is endangered. It may well bring the reproaches that the faithful prophet experienced. However, "the Lord will not cast off forever, but though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies" (Lam. 3:31-32).

### LESSONS FOR US:

- Young men and women are wise to hearken carefully to faithful elders who teach the Word of God.
- Apostasy and indifference in ecclesial life are not to be faced with dismay.
- We ought to be very thankful for companions in the Truth.
- Our sufficiency is of God by Whom we can do all things (Phil. 4:13).
- All that live godly lives in Christ Jesus will suffer persecutions.
- True love for our companions is humble and tenacious.
- Tolerance of evil is not love.

### REFERENCE LIBRARY:

“The Prophecy of Jeremiah” (C.C. Walker)

“The Story of the Bible” (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 6, Nos. 6, 9

### PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *How was Jeremiah strengthened for his great work?*
2. *How was Jeremiah a type of Christ?*
3. *What lessons can we learn from the life of Jeremiah?*

### ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Outline the calling and mission of Jeremiah.*
2. *What sufferings did Jeremiah have to endure? How is he an example to us?*
3. *Jeremiah’s message was positive and negative. Illustrate by referring to his prophecy.*
4. *“The spirit of Christ was in the prophets” (1 Pet. 1:11). Write an essay showing how this was true of the prophet Jeremiah.*
5. *Write a character study of the prophet Jeremiah.*

## **17. JOSIAH'S STAND FOR TRUTH**

**"Like unto him was there no king before him"**

*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 is notorious for its unrighteousness (2 Kgs.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 Kgs. 21:3; 2 Chron. 33:15). Manasseh deliberately set out to provoke the LORD to anger. He set up idols throughout Judah and led the people into greater evil than the original Canaanites. He even set up idols in the Temple itself, of which Yahweh had said, "In this house will I put my name for ever"! The prophets arose to declare God's impending judgment against the king and his people. 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 indelibly imprinted upon Judah, for when some 50 years later the Babylonians came against Jerusalem, it was Manasseh's reign that received principal blame (2 Kgs. 24:3-4).*

*In his later years Manasseh repented and tried to repair the damage he had wrought (2 Chron. 33:11-17). Yet it was to little avail, 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.*

*Our aim in this lesson about Josiah is to see the need to carry out reformation in our lives when the Word of God exposes our shortcomings.*

### **2 Kings 22 & 23**

#### **A ROOT OUT OF A DRY GROUND.**

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 the LORD and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left" (2 Chron. 34:2).

It is interesting to note the expression, "David his father", for whilst it is true that he was in the line of David yet there is more intended than this. He was the "son of David" because he thought and acted like David, in contrast to Amon his actual father. Josiah = "Yah supports", or "Yah heals". His mother's name was Jedidah, meaning "beloved of Yah", and she came from Boscath, meaning "stony ground". Since Josiah was such a key man in the Divine plan we might see in these details a shadow of the greater Son of David. Mary was beloved of Yahweh and she gave birth to one who grew up as a root out of dry ground (Luke 1:30, 32, 38; Isa. 53:2).

## **AN EARLY BEGINNING.**

He was a child of only eight years when he began to reign. His influence in those early years would have been negligible, but at the age of 16 he “began to seek after the God of David his father” and 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 apostasised? There were at that time a number of very faithful elders, e.g. Hilkiah the high priest (2 Kgs. 22:8), Shaphan the scribe (father of three faithful sons, Jer. 26:24; 29:3; 36:10), Achbor (father of courageous Elnathan, Jer. 36:12, 25), Asahiah the king’s servant (2 Kgs. 22:12), Maaseiah the governor of Jerusalem, and others (2 Chron. 34:8). There was also the voice of the prophets Jeremiah (Jer. 1:2) and Zephaniah (1:1), and Huldah the prophetess (2 Chron. 34:22). From such as these the young king received instruction in God’s ways. In the midst of teenage 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” (Psa. 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).**

He began by deposing the idolatrous priests (margin “Chemarim”, black-robed priests, Hos. 10:5) throughout Jerusalem and the cities of Judah. Then the king removed the idol from the house of Yahweh and burned it in the valley of Kidron. He ground it to powder, which he cast upon the graves of the children of the people (v.6). By so doing he showed that vanity and death would be the lot of those who worshipped idols. He demolished the house of the Sodomites (cf. Deut. 23:17). The king then moved his demolition workers to the countryside of Judah. In every city they utterly destroyed the high places and idols (v.8). He turned to the Valley of Hinnom where children had been offered as burnt sacrifices to Molech, and defiled its altar (called Topheth) (v.10; 2 Kgs. 21:6). So thorough was he, that not only were the abominations set up by Amon and Manasseh removed, but also 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. 34:3-7).

## **“A CHILD SHALL BE BORN—JOSIAH BY NAME”.**

Of especial interest are the actions of the king when he went to the altar

of Bethel, 16 kilometres north of Jerusalem. This altar had a most significant history. When the kingdom divided, Jeroboam set up an idol, a calf at Bethel, and this became a source of transgression throughout the history of the ten tribes (1 Kgs. 12:27-33; Amos 3:14; 4:4; see lesson 8). Shortly after, God sent an unnamed prophet from Judah to denounce this altar and to proclaim these words, "Behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee". The details of the event are given in 1 Kgs. 13:1-10. This shows the importance of Josiah in the purpose of God. Three hundred and sixty years passed and then the young king devastated the altar at Bethel and took from the nearby sepulchres the bones of those priests who had offered thereon and burnt them upon the altar (2 Kgs. 23:15-23). Josiah's role in the purpose of God was the elimination of idolatry in Israel. This he did throughout the length and breadth of the land, and so the idols which had been set up from the days of Solomon and Jeroboam through to Manasseh and Amon were destroyed.

### **REPAIRING THE HOUSE AND FINDING OF THE BOOK OF THE LAW (2 Chronicles 34:8-33).**

In the 18th year of his reign, when the king was 26 years of age, he began to restore 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 offered by both Israel and Judah when visiting the Temple during the years of reformation (vv.8-9). The skilled workmen responded to the spirit of the king and no account of the money was kept because they could be trusted (2 Kgs. 22:7). In the midst of these events a book of the Law of Moses was discovered (v.14 — margin). Shaphan, the wise and faithful scribe, delivered the precious document to the king. When its words of threatened judgment (e.g. Lev. 26; Deut. 28) were read before the king, he rent his clothes and wept in dismay. He perceived anew how far the people had strayed, and realised that divine judgment was impending (v.19). Immediately he despatched a deputation to Huldah the prophetess. She revealed that the curses of the book would certainly be brought upon the nation, but that the king would be spared because of his humility before God (vv.23-28).

Thus the king's faithfulness preserved a generation in Judah. Yet, for all this, they did not respond within their heart, for Jeremiah, prophesying at the very time of Josiah's inspiring reformation, indicted them in strong terms for their evil ways (Jer. 2:20; 6:13, 19).

Despite the irreversible sentence which had been passed on the nation through Huldah the prophetess, Josiah was not content to sit back, having secured his own deliverance, and wait for the inevitable. If the curse could not be averted from the nation as a whole, then perhaps some individuals could be saved from the consequences. He gathered the elders together, and caused them to make a new covenant of personal integrity to Yahweh (2 Chron. 34:29-33). Despite the example of their king, the

people were unaffected by what was done. The reform was superficial, and not of the heart:

“And yet for this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD” (Jer. 3:10).

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

The climax of Josiah’s 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 (vv. 2-6, 15). The king’s largeness of heart brought many to the feast from the northern tribes (vv. 17-18). By his personal commandment every detail was meticulously observed (vv. 6, 10). Never had there been such an outstanding Passover Feast as in the 18th year of King Josiah.

### **BELOVED OF JUDAH (2 Chronicles 35:20-27).**

Pharaoh-Necho, King of Egypt, passed through Israel on his way to make war at Carchemish by the River Euphrates (2 Kgs. 23:29). Josiah 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 contemplated his stirring faith and courage they were brought to grief and remorse. 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 (Zech. 12:9-14).

### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- Despite difficult times, we must labour with the same zeal as Josiah, to strengthen the Truth in the last days.
- It is most important to pray and study the Word of God if we would be useful vessels in the ecclesia.
- Diligence and self-sacrifice are essential in the lives of the leaders of God’s people.
- We cannot love God without loving the people of God. Josiah’s heart reached out to all Israel and he sought to reform the whole nation.
- Though faithfulness is not always appreciated by fellow mortals, it will be rewarded by Christ in the day of resurrection.

### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

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

### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What did Josiah do when the Book of the Law was found?*
2. *What prophecy was fulfilled during Josiah’s reform?*
3. *Why did Josiah’s reforms ultimately fail?*
4. *How can we be like Josiah today?*



**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Write an account of Josiah's reforms.*
2. *What was God's purpose in raising up Josiah?*
3. *Outline the important events in the life of King Josiah.*
4. *Write a character study of King Josiah. What lessons can we learn from his life?*

## 18. THE KINGDOM OVERTHROWN

**“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”**

*The untimely death of Judah's dedicated reformer, Josiah, paved the way for the outpouring of Yahweh's disciplinary judgments upon Judah. Their king had, by his enthusiastic stand for the Truth, restrained the impending judgments. But 120 years after the fall of Israel, Judah had also succumbed to the corruption of apostasy. They had been privileged because of the importance in Yahweh's mind of David and His covenant, of Jerusalem being the “city chosen to put His Name there”, and because of the priests and Levites who attempted to strengthen the things which remained. Despite this, the four kings after Josiah were evil. They hastened the rate of spiritual decay and so the day of captivity drew near.*

*Our aim in this lesson is to see how the judgments decreed by God against Judah came to pass in exact accordance with the words of His prophets. The same Word has appointed destruction upon the Gentile world in the last days.*

### 2 Kings 24 & 25

#### ASSYRIA FALLS, BABYLON RISES.

The Assyrian stronghold of Nineveh was caught in a pincer movement, when Cyaxeres of Media and Nabopolassar of Babylon (father of Nebuchadnezzar) attacked the city. Nineveh fell in the year B.C. 612. The Empire was divided and Media annexed the north and north east, and Babylon the south and south west. This included Syria, Palestine and Egypt. The weakened Assyrian removed the remnant of his power to north Syria at Harran.

Egypt wanted to preserve Assyria as a buffer state, and therefore went to the aid of Assyria (2 Kgs. 23:29-30 R.S.V.). As Pharaoh-Necho marched north, Josiah decided to intervene and, despite the Egyptians' warnings, attacked Egypt at Megiddo. Josiah was fatally wounded in the battle.

Thus at a time of international crisis, Judah was destitute of its dedicated reformer. This tragic loss spelt the death-knell of Judah. The prophetess Huldah had said of Josiah, “thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place” (2 Kgs. 22:20); his wicked sons were to bring on themselves the impending calamities (Zeph. 1:8).

#### THE FOUR KINGS WHO CLIMAXED JUDAH'S WICKEDNESS.

Josiah was survived by three sons, Eliakim, aged 25 (2 Kgs. 23:36), Shallum, aged 23 (2 Kgs. 23:31; Jer. 22:11) and a younger son, Mattaniah aged 10 (2 Kgs. 24:17-18).

**SHALLUM:** Following the inopportune loss of Josiah, the people of Judah appointed the second son of Josiah, Shallum, as their king. They changed his name from Shallum to **Jehoahaz** (“Yahweh upholds”). He was looked upon as a “young lion” (Ezek. 19:3, 5), but he failed to live

up to his name or to the people's expectations. Yahweh did not uphold him, for after Pharaoh-Necho's unsuccessful support for Assyria (Nabopolassar having completed the overthrow of Assyria) the Egyptians returned and placed Judah under tribute. They deposed Jehoahaz, who had reigned only three months, imprisoned him at Riblah and eventually exiled him in Egypt where he died (2 Kgs. 23:33; 2 Chron. 36:1-3; Jer. 22:12).

**ELIAKIM:** Josiah's eldest son, Eliakim ("El establishes") was set up by Pharaoh-Necho as a vassal-king (2 Chron. 36:4-8). The Egyptians changed his name to **Jehoiakim** ("Yah establishes"), but, like his predecessor, he also proved to be undeserving of his name. He was required to pay a large tribute to Egypt. To achieve this, he imposed upon the nation heavy taxation and this at a time of severe drought (Jer. 14:1)! The prophet Jeremiah denounced the covetousness of Jehoiakim. He built luxurious royal apartments in difficult times and used forced labour (Jer. 22:13-19).

Far from returning to the ways of Josiah, as exhorted by the prophets, he reverted to the heathen practices of Manasseh. He was "unjust and malignant, neither holy towards God, nor forbearing towards man" writes Josephus (Ant. X, 5, 2). The rapid rate of spiritual decay only emphasised the need for the purging effects of God's wrath.

It was in the third year of Jehoiakim's eleven-year reign that Nebuchadnezzar set out to consolidate his power, especially against Egypt (Dan. 1:1; 2 Kgs. 24:1). The two mighty armies clashed at the great battle of Carchemish on the Euphrates. Nebuchadnezzar was victorious, so fulfilling the predictions of the prophet Jeremiah (46:5-11). Intent on adding to his conquests, the Babylonian marched south and seized Jerusalem. However he was suddenly interrupted in his southern campaign by the death of his father in Babylon. He hastily placed Jehoiakim under tribute, demanding that the taxation which was previously exacted for Egypt, be sent to Babylon instead. He seized some of the Temple vessels as spoils of war (2 Chron. 36:7), and took a few hostages from the royal family back to Babylon. Daniel was amongst those in the first deportation into Babylonian exile (Dan. 1:1-3).

### **AN APOSTATE JUDEAN KING AND A REVERENTIAL BABYLONIAN MONARCH.**

In the fourth and fifth years of Jehoiakim's reign Jeremiah recorded all the messages from Yahweh on a scroll, in the hope that Judah might heed the warnings of impending judgments and repent. However, their arrogant and profane king, upon hearing the reading of the scroll, slashed it in pieces and destroyed it in the fire (Jer. 36:20-26). He proudly imagined that he could oppose and belittle the judgments of Yahweh.

And yet in the same year (the fifth year of Jehoiakim corresponding to the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign), the Babylonian monarch, ruler of a world empire, acknowledged Yahweh as "a God of gods, and

a Lord of Kings, and a revealer of secrets” (Dan. 2:47). Note the contrast — an impious, apostate king, Jehoiakim, and a humbled Emperor Nebuchadnezzar: one despising God’s word and the other honouring it.

Jehoiakim’s rejection of Yahweh’s counsel only consolidated His determination to execute punishment upon him. Our Bibles reveal the folly of the king and nation in detail for our learning and admonition. Let us realise that “there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel **against** Yahweh” (Prov. 21:30; see also 1:27-30; 5:11-12; 13:13; 19:21; 29:1).

Jehoiakim paid tribute for three years, until Nebuchadnezzar suffered a setback in his attack on the Egyptians. Ever ready to turn to Egypt, Jehoiakim rashly supposed that the Babylonian power was vanquished. But Nebuchadnezzar recovered his forces and for a while was content to punish Jehoiakim with local armies (2 Kgs. 24:1, 2). Finally Nebuchadnezzar decided to put down Jehoiakim’s rebelliousness himself. He bound him in chains to take him to Babylon, but then seems to have changed his mind and cast him over the walls of Jerusalem, where he perished as Jeremiah had prophesied (Jer. 22:18, 19; 36:30; 2 Chron. 36:6).

**JEHOIACHIN:** The Babylonian overlords placed Jehoiachin, otherwise known as **Jeconiah** or **Coniah** (1 Chron. 3:16; Jer. 22:24-28), the 18 year old son of Jehoiakim, as the successor on the throne. His name means “Yah will establish”, but his reign of three months and ten days indicated otherwise (2 Chron. 36:9; 2 Kgs. 24:8). Nebuchadnezzar changed his mind about Jehoiachin’s appointment, returned and carried him, his mother and 10,000 others away as captives to Babylon. The city fell in the year 597 B.C. and, of those taken captive, many were of the wealthy, influential class. Among the captives were Ezekial and Mordecai.

Jehoiachin continued to live for many years in Babylon and received favourable treatment from the son of Nebuchadnezzar. It is interesting to note that his grandson, Zerubbabel, was one of the leaders of the return from exile (Ezra 3:2; Hag. 1:1).

**ZEDEKIAH:** The last king of Judah and youngest son of Josiah, **Mattaniah**, was set up by the Babylonians over a depleted nation. Being only the uncle of the previous king, he was not a member of the line of David’s kings — he is omitted from the genealogy in Matthew 1. Ezekiel calls him, not a king, but a “profane wicked **prince**” (21:25). His name was changed to Zedekiah (“Righteousness of Yah”), as a sign of his vassalage to the Babylonians.

These last days were marked by religious apostasy and moral degeneracy (Ezek. 8-11; 22). Zedekiah, with the backing of a pro-Egyptian court, was constantly agitating against the Babylonian yoke and turning to Egypt for aid (Jer. 27). Not only was this political suicide, but it was also a flagrant violation of his oath of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar (Ezek. 17). The full weight of Yahweh’s wrath was now about to be unleashed against Judah.

Zedekiah's eleven year reign came to an end when Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem for 18 bitter months. The city, reduced to famine conditions, fell in the year 586 B.C. (2 Kgs. 24:18-25:7; 2 Chron. 36:10-21; Jer. 52:1-11). Zedekiah attempted to flee under cover of darkness but was overtaken. He was dragged before Nebuchadnezzar, and forced to watch the execution of his own sons. Then his own eyes were put out. As a wretched prisoner he was taken to Babylon along with the remnant who survived the dreadful carnage of the overthrow of Jerusalem. Only the poorest sort of people were left in the land.

### **“I WILL OVERTURN . . . UNTIL HE COME”.**

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 the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy” (2 Chron. 36:15, 16). Thus was fulfilled the prophecy, “Remove the diadem, and take off the crown . . . I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it” (Ezek. 21:26-27).

The land enjoyed her sabbaths, even a seventy year period of rest (2 Chron. 36:21; Jer. 25:11, 12; 29:12). The throne of David would remain without a king until, as predicted in Ezekiel 21:25-27, one would come forth **“whose right it is; and I will give it him”**. This did not eventuate in the return from captivity, for the one marked out for this honour was of a much later dispensation. He “whose right it is” had to be David's greater son and son of God (2 Sam. 7:12-14), a just ruler (2 Sam. 23:3; Isa. 11:1-15), a slain Messiah (Psa. 22; Isa. 53) and a resurrected King after the order of Melchizedek (2 Sam. 7:16; Psa. 110:1-4). In Jeremiah 23:5, 6 and 33:14-16 this great Davidic King is described as the “righteous branch” to be raised up unto David, to reign and prosper and reunite Israel and Judah under his royal name of “Yahweh our righteousness”. He will be faithful to this title. Zedekiah's name also means “Righteousness of Yah”, but he did not live in accordance with its meaning.

That King of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ and as promised to Mary, “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” (Lk. 1:31-33). He who was slain will soon return and “reign in righteousness” (Isa. 32:1). Then shall the “righteous flourish” and delight themselves in the “abundance of peace” (Psa. 72:7; 37:11).

### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- The Gentile world in which we live is rapidly approaching the appointed day when God shall judge the world in righteousness.
- Shall we earnestly contend for the faith, as did the dauntless Jeremiah, or shall we be corrupted by the faith-destroying influences of our times?

- Shall we trust in Yahweh or shall we trust in Egypt, as did those Kings of Judah?
- We must resolve to “strengthen the things which remain” and assist those of like precious faith.
- Only then can we look beyond the storm clouds of judgment now appearing, to a participation in the kingdom when David’s power is re-established.

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

“The Story of the Bible” (H.P. Mansfield) — Vol. 6, Nos. 5-9

“Josephus” (Antiquities) — Book 10, Chapters 5-8

“The Ministry of the Prophets — Jeremiah” (C.C. Walker)

“The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel” (W.H. Boulton)

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What is the meaning of King Zedekiah’s name? How was this made the subject of prophecy?*
2. *Write brief notes on King Jehoiakim and his reign.*
3. *Describe the power struggle between Egypt, Assyria and Babylon in relation to Judah at the time of her captivity.*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *What was the consistent fault in the attitudes of the last kings of Judah?*
2. *Briefly show how the three sons of Josiah failed to live up to their changed names.*
3. *“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” (Ezek. 21:25-27).*
  - (a) *When were these words said and to whom?*
  - (b) *Who is spoken of in the phrase “until he come”?*
  - (c) *What will he be given and what will be his role?*
4. *Describe the attacks conducted by Babylon against Judah which culminated in the captivity in Babylon.*

## EVENTS CULMINATING IN THE CAPTIVITY OF JUDAH

JUDAH'S KING	Yr. of Reign	B.C.	EVENT	REFERENCE	
<b>Josiah</b>	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	
	31	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	3rd mth	608	Deposed, taken captive to Egypt—Jehoiakim made King instead.		
<b>Jehoiakim</b> (Eliakim) 1st son of Josiah		608-597	Tribute paid to Egypt, subjection to Babylon prophesied.	Jer. 27:1-11 2 Kings 23:35-36	
	3-4	606	Necho defeated at Carchemish. Nebuchadnezzar takes Jerusalem. <b>1st Babylonian Attack</b> 70 years desolation prophesied. Captives taken to Babylon including Daniel.	2 Kings 24:1 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 from Nebuchadnezzar after 3 years. Bands of Chaldeans, Moabites, Syrians, and Ammonites afflict Judah.	2 Kings 24:1	
	11	597	<b>2nd Babylonian Attack</b> City surrenders, Jehoiakim slain in Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, 3,000 captives taken.	2 Kings 24:2 2 Chron. 36:5-7 Jos. Ant. X,VI,3 Jer. 22:18; 36:30	
	<b>Jehoiachin</b> (Jeconiah, Coniah) Son of Jehoiakim	3rd mth	597	<b>3rd Babylonian Attack</b> Jehoiachin-surrenders, taken captive to Babylon with many vessels and captives, including Ezekiel and Mordecai.	2 Kings 24:10-16 Ezek. 1:2 Esth. 2:6
			597-586	Enthroned by Nebuchadnezzar. Captivity foretold — Hananiah visits Babylon.	Jer. 27:12-28:1 Jer. 51:29
	<b>Zedekiah</b> (Mattaniah) 3rd son of Josiah	4	594		
		9	588	<b>4th Babylonian Attack</b> Jerusalem besieged for 18 months.	
10		587	Jeremiah imprisoned—buys field.	Jer. 32:1-2	
11		586	Temple burned, Zedekiah taken into captivity.	2 Kings 25:8-9 Ezek. 12:13 Jer. 52:12-16, 29	

**N.B.** There are 6 attacks by Babylon if (1) the invasion of Judah by bands of Chaldeans after Jehoiakim's rebellion is counted (2 Kings 24:2), and (2) we also count Nebuchadnezzar's resumption of the siege against Jerusalem after he retreated from before the Egyptians (Jer. 37:8).

## Section 3

# THE EXILE AND RETURN

Punishment rested sore on the nation of Israel. Wave after wave of spoilers had swept down from the north, taking the people away from their houses, their land, their city and their Temple. Their heads were hung down and they wept as they sat by the rivers of Babylon and remembered Zion.

Yet in the midst of the deprivation of captivity, a change came over the people. Ezekiel the prophet spoke of the reasons for the captivity, the need of repentance and the glorious future ahead for the nation. Daniel's friends stood apart from the idolatry of Babylon and inspired obedience of God's commandments. Daniel himself, by his God-given wisdom and understanding, made even the great ruler of Babylon's empire confess that there is a King of Heaven Who controls the inhabitants of the earth.

Gradually the people of the captivity were turned to their God, so that, when the 70 years were completed and Cyrus the Persian gave his decree, there were thousands who rejoiced to follow Zerubbabel back to the land of their fathers to build up again the Temple of their God.

Ezra arrived on the scene, then Nehemiah, and as a backdrop there were the voices of the prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. The heroic endeavours of faithful men and women striving under difficulties to do the work of God provides a thrilling record of adventure, and a powerful example for all who, in any age, would build for the Truth.



## 19. THE JEWS IN EXILE

**“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea we wept,  
when we remembered Zion”**

*The young man Daniel of the royal house of Judah was amongst those captives of the first deportation at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. Upon being interrupted in the pursuit of the Egyptians by the news of his father's death, Nebuchadnezzar hastily placed Jehoiakim under tribute, seized some Temple vessels and took a few hostages back to Babylon. Daniel 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.*

*Our aim in this lesson is to see how that punishment purged and rekindled faith in the Jews in exile.*

### **Daniel 1 & 3**

#### **BABYLON.**

Babylon was viewed as “the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency” (Isa. 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. The King left on record the following, “I finished the great two-fold wall of Babylon. I made strong the city with bricks burnt hard as stones, and piled high in huge masses as mountains. Thus I made strong the defences of Babylon. May it last forever. Babylon the city which is the delight of my eyes which I have made glorious”.

Idolatry permeated every stratum 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. Thus an idolatrous materialistic environment confronted the Jewish captives. They felt a bitter sense of bereavement for their country and Temple. They wept as they remembered Zion (see Psa. 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 (ch. 13), and Jeremiah (ch. 51). The signs of Ezekiel and the faith and courage of Daniel and his companions strengthened their dependence upon Yahweh. They were chastened by this captivity and returned a vigorously monotheistic people.

The Jewish exiles were distributed into different settlements throughout Babylonia, where they formed small communities with a certain degree of organisation and freedom of worship (see also Jer. 29:4-7).

One such colony was at Tel-Abib (Ezek. 3:15), where the prophet-priest Ezekiel and his wife lived (24:18). They had been deported in the third group of exiles with Jehoiachin (1:2).

### **EZEKIEL: MAN OF SIGN.**

Ezekiel endeavoured to show by word and sign that the Jewish exiles had to face up to the fact of a 70-year-long captivity. This was made all the more difficult by lies dreamed up by false prophets and their supporters, who claimed that Jerusalem would not fall and that those left in Jerusalem would not be removed (Ezek. 11:15; 33:24). Those already in captivity were excited about the notion of a speedy return (Ezek. 13:16, 19). A false prophet in Jerusalem, Hananiah, predicted that they would return in two years with the vessels of the Temple (Jer. 28). But the arrivals of more deportees, the death of Hananiah, the warnings of Jeremiah, the ministry of Ezekiel and the fall of Jerusalem soon abolished all hopes for an early return to their beloved city. It was Ezekiel's task to inculcate into their minds a repentant acknowledgement of their sins. The recurring statement of Ezekiel's prophecy is: "they shall know that I am the LORD". That realisation had to be driven home into the minds of the Jewish exiles.

We have the message of Ezekiel, together with the rest of Scripture, appealing to us to acknowledge Yahweh and place our confidence in His declared purpose to restore the throne of David under the administration of David's greater son.

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

Another prophet who played an important role in the re-education of God's exiled people was Daniel, whose life was almost completely taken up in the preparation for the Return. Daniel is supposed to have been about 17 or 18 years of age when taken into the royal court of Nebuchadnezzar. He out-lived the 70 year captivity (Dan. 1:21) and therefore his long and faithful service is a very important contributing factor in the vastly improved spiritual condition of the returning Jews.

Presuming that Daniel was 17 when deported, then by back-dating we find that he was born about the year of Josiah's reformation (2 Chron. 34:8, 29-33) and therefore brought up in the environment of reform and zeal for Yahweh's covenants and law. Daniel's faith in his teenage years must have been largely attributable to this valuable early tuition. How important then is our remembrance of the Creator in the days of our youth when confronted with the distracting temptations of our times.

### **HEATHEN WISDOM JUDGED (Daniel 1).**

Nebuchadnezzar's seizure of the Temple vessels and the young captives was an attempt to show the superiority of his god, Bel, over the God of Israel. He intended to seduce Daniel and his companions away from anything associated with Yahweh and to integrate them into the Babylonish culture, which was the most advanced of the then known

world. The requirement was simple — CONFORM! With their exceptional academic abilities they were asked to absorb and be proficient in the religions and sciences of the times. But there was the very real danger of assimilation into paganism, for Jeremiah warned that “it is the land of graven images, and they are mad upon their idols” (Jer. 50:38).

Daniel purposed that he would not in any way appear to countenance idolatry (v.18). He sought discreetly to prove the validity of his decision (v.12), for to flagrantly reject the King’s provisions would only invoke wrath upon himself and his people. His faith was vindicated when his undefiled diet was proven to be more than satisfactory, and God gave him and his friends success in their studies far surpassing the other scholars.

Daniel’s uncompromising stand on principle, plus discretion, received a ready response from Yahweh. We, too, are tested in the daily demands made upon our conscience and we are assured that if we acknowledge Yahweh in all our ways, He shall direct and prosper our paths (Prov. 3:1-7).

### **HEATHEN WORSHIP JUDGED (Daniel 3).**

When Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold and commanded his subjects to worship it or face the penalty of death, the three friends of Daniel (Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah) were placed in a difficult position. The natural reaction to the decree would be obedience out of respect to the King and Babylon’s strength, and to forget any restraining influence of Israel’s past. The attitude of these three Jews was, however, one of obedience to Yahweh’s commands, despite their dislocation from the Temple and the Land. They did not believe in the perpetual existence of Babylon, the greatest metropolis on earth. To worship the image, which represented Babylon and its empire, was to worship the glory of the flesh.

Nebuchadnezzar had erected the image because of his desire for Babylon and himself to be glorified (see his attitude in Isa. 14:4, 13-16; Jer. 51:53). Babylon in his mind must live for ever. He therefore challenged the declared purpose of Yahweh as had graphically been revealed to him in the dream of Daniel 2. In the image of the dream, gold (representing the Babylonian empire) was only used for the head, for that empire would soon fall. But Nebuchadnezzar made the image of Daniel 3 entirely of gold!

In fact the original Babylonians exhibited the very same spirit in the building of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:2-4), only to be confounded by Yahweh.

### **COURAGE AND CONVICTION (Daniel 3:8-18).**

The three Jews went to the dedication, submitting to the ordinance of the King to attend (cf. 1 Pet. 2:13-15). But, when commanded to worship the image, they obeyed 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 when we too must not flinch from our convictions despite the reproach it may bring. Let us be emboldened in our faith by this example of courage in the face of adversity.

Their adversaries, showing the age-old spirit of anti-semitism, reported the refusal of the Jews to worship the image as an insult and an act of treason against the King and his gods (vv.8-12). Nebuchadnezzar was enraged. His sense of power and confidence in the flesh asserted itself and he challenged, not them, but their God. Blindly following the course of proud yet ignorant men such as Goliath, Rabshakeh and Sennacherib, he claimed, "who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" (v.15). In the face of an apparently invincible power they stood their ground, showing a tremendous courage in their convictions. Deliverance appeared to be very remote. Yet Daniel's friends were prepared to commit their lives unto Yahweh as unto a faithful Creator (see 1 Pet. 4:12-19). Theirs was more than a refusal, it was a forthright testimony, a fearless defence of THE faith.

### **MIRACULOUS DELIVERANCE (Daniel 3:19-30).**

The fire was heated seven times more than normal, thus signifying the full fury of Gentile opposition to God's people.

The three friends were flung into the fire, while those who manhandled them were themselves slain by the intense heat of the fire. "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of my eye", God had said. Their fate was typical of the fate of all who persecute God's people (cf. Joel 3:9-16). Israel at Armageddon will also be purged as by fire, for God has said that He "will bring the third part through the fire" (Zech. 13:9).

The three courageous friends were miraculously saved (vv.24-27). But what astonished Nebuchadnezzar most was the appearance of another person, an angel, beside the captives. The angel (v.28) had "encamped round about them that fear Him and delivered them" (Psa. 34:7); God had showed Himself strong on the behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward Him (2 Chron. 16:9). Their faith had "quenched the violence of fire" (Heb. 11:34).

With such a dramatic sign of the supremacy of "the most high God", Nebuchadnezzar was compelled to acknowledge his folly and insignificance before Yahweh (vv.26-30). He recognised that the Jews were servants of a greater Monarch than himself and that their faith had been rewarded despite his persecution. He therefore made a decree to be respected throughout his farflung empire, that the God of the Hebrews is to be honoured, "because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort" (v.30).

### **THE DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON AND ROME.**

Babylon was suddenly brought to ruin in the midst of revelry and debauchery (Dan. 5). During a feast of Belshazzar, a grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, a hand was seen writing on the wall. Daniel interpreted

the writing that the kingdom was finished (vv.25-28), and that night Darius the Median marched into the city along the dried-up bed of the Euphrates and through the unlocked gates. Belshazzar was slain and the kingdom overthrown. It paid the penalty for its blasphemous destruction of David's throne. (Its contempt for the God of Israel was well epitomised by Belshazzar's use, on his last night of revelry, of the holy vessels brought from Yahweh's Temple in Jerusalem many years before, vv.2-4).

The Roman Catholic system is called "Babylon the Great" and its iniquities have exceeded those of Babylon of old (Rev. 17:5). Therefore her future punishment is to be more extensive (Jer. 51:51-64).

Revelation 18 describes the violent overthrow of Rome because of her spiritual fornication, false doctrines, merchandise in the souls of men and ruthless persecution of the ecclesia. Rome will suffer the calamity of a great earthquake, both politically and physically. "Come out of her, my people" (v.4) is the call of separateness to the ecclesia in the times of Babylon, in the times of Rome and especially in our times.

#### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- The 70 year captivity chastened and purged the Jewish exiles. From a proud attitude of trusting in the arm of the flesh they were brought to a dependence upon Yahweh.
- The work of the prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel encouraged the Jews to faithfully prepare for the Return.
- We should live as strangers, sojourners and pilgrims, prepared by the prophets for our "return" to Zion.
- We are disciplined by trials of our faith.
- We are encouraged by the Scriptures to maintain our separateness from the ungodly world about us and to look to the dramatic advent of the greater than Cyrus who shall destroy Rome and all opponents of God's people.

#### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

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

"The Apocalypse Epitomised" (H.P. Mansfield)

"Exposition of Daniel" (J. Thomas) — Section 1

"The Prophet Ezekiel" (W.H. Boulton)

#### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What effect did the captivity in Babylon have upon the Jewish captives?*
2. *Briefly outline the incidents when Daniel's three friends showed their faith in the God of Israel.*
3. *Daniel's three friends refused to worship the image Nebuchadnezzar had set up. In what matters does this principle of conscientious objection to the "king's command" apply today?*
4. *How does the Roman Catholic system compare with Babylon? Comment on the fall of each.*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *What role did Ezekiel play with the Jewish exiles?*
2. (a) *What was the challenge that Daniel overcame, as recorded in Dan. 1?*  
(b) *What similar challenges do we face today and how might we overcome them?*
3. *Show how, through faith, Daniel's three friends "quenched the violence of fire" (Heb. 11:34).*
4. *Describe some of the ways in which the captivity of the Jews in Babylon and Persia brought about a rebirth of faith in God.*

## 20. 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 well illustrated in the dream which God gave Nebuchadnezzar and the interpretation thereof. As Nebuchadnezzar mused upon his bed about the future, he was shown that human kingdoms with all their might would be judged and made subservient to God's kingdom.*

*Human glory was thus shown to be transient. Though Nebuchadnezzar imagined himself to be the arbiter of his own destiny, he was made to realise that he was but an instrument in the hand of Yahweh.*

*Our aim in this lesson is to see that God knows everything from the beginning, and, being in control of the affairs of this world, He is bringing to pass His purpose.*

### Daniel 2

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

Nebuchadnezzar was concerned about “what should come to pass hereafter” (v.29), and God through a dream revealed “what shall be in the latter days” (v.28). The dream left the King in a state of shock, and in consternation he called his advisers together. He had made up his mind how to solve the mystery. To be certain that the solution was correct, he demanded a description of the dream as well as its meaning.!

The so-called wise of this world were thrown into confusion and pleaded for information about the dream. But the King was adamant — “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.). Threatened with death for failure, the advisers faced a real crisis. The King knew that if the gods could give them power to predict the future, they could just as easily recall the past, in this case the King's dream. They were indignant that the King should make such an unreasonable request, but by this they only admitted to their own quackery (vv.10, 11).

This divinely contrived crisis served to emphasise that “the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God” (1 Cor. 3:19; 1:19-29; Isa. 29:14; 44:20, 25; Job 4:17-21). The future advent of Christ and the education of Truth will cause many to admit that their “fathers have inherited lies and vanity” (Jer. 16:19; Zech. 10:2).

#### DESTRUCTION OF WISE MEN DECREED (Daniel 2:10-16).

This reaction to his request enraged Nebuchadnezzar 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-year training, they were counted in the number (cf. 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. 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 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 our pleas (Matt. 7:7), and to grant wisdom (Psa. 25:14; Jas. 1:5). They prayed that they might “not perish with the rest of the wise men” (v.8).

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 Kingdoms of men. Let us take a closer look at this outstanding prayer.

v.20 **“Blessed be the Name of God”**—Daniel acknowledges the glorious character of God as revealed in His name (Ex. 34:6-7).

**“Wisdom and might are his”**—Yahweh has the wisdom to design His purposes and the might to implement His purpose (cf. Jer. 32:15).

v.21 **“He changeth the times and the seasons”**—Cf. “in faith we perceive that the ages have been so thoroughly adjusted by God’s command . . .” (Heb. 11:3 Diag.). He alters the course of history to conform to His purpose (Acts 17:26; Psa. 75:2 mg.). There are “set times” (Psa. 102:13), not chance coincidences, in God’s timetable of world events.

**“He removeth kings and setteth up kings”**—Yahweh raises nations and humbles them, guiding their destinies as a Supreme Controller, e.g. Nebuchadnezzar “My servant” (Jer. 27:5-7), and Cyrus “My shepherd . . . shall perform all My pleasure” (Isa. 44:28-45:1 see also 1 Sam. 2:7-8; Job 12:16-21; Psa. 75:6-7; 113:7-8; Lk. 1:51-52).

**“He giveth wisdom to the wise”**—Not to the worldly wise, e.g. the Chaldeans, but to seekers of divine wisdom such as Solomon (1 Kgs. 4:29; Prov. 2:6-7; Deut. 17:18-21).

**“Knowledge to them that know understanding”**—“Understanding” has the idea of “to separate” or “distinguish”. Knowledge will be given to such as can distinguish truth from error (cf. Heb. 5:14).

v.22 **“He revealeth deep and secret things”**—These are unknown to the world, but revealed to men like Joseph (Gen. 41:16, 25, 28, 39) and the Prophets (Amos 3:7).

**“He knoweth what is in the darkness, and light dwelleth with him”**—He is omnipresent (Psa. 139:11-12; Jer. 23:24); a revealer of secret actions (Ezek. 8:12; Lk. 12:2-3; Heb. 4:13); and in His light is life (Psa. 36:9; 104:2; 1 Tim. 6:16; Jas. 1:17; 1 Jn. 1:5).



Daniel felt a deep sense of gratitude when God answered him. 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.

#### **BEFORE THE MIGHTY KING (Daniel 2:24-30).**

Daniel was ushered into the presence of the King, but before describing the dream and its interpretation he was careful to attribute his knowledge to the God of heaven (v.28). This knowledge was in contrast to the ignorance of the King's advisers (v.27; cf. Isa. 41:21-24). Daniel confidently explained that the dream centred around events "hereafter". In fact the limitation of the Babylonian dynasty had been already prophesied (Isa. 13:19; Jer. 51:37, 43, 58), and the most significant feature now revealed was the fall of the composite image "in the latter days" (v.28).

#### **THE DREAM (Daniel 2:31-35).**

Daniel described the object of the dream as a colossal human statue of awesome, majestic appearance. It was composed of metals successively inferior from head to toes. An unhewn stone cut out without human agency, struck the image at its feet causing it to collapse. The metals were broken together and reduced to dust, but the stone grew into a great mountain and filled the earth.

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

##### **1. THE BABYLONIAN EMPIRE.**

Although Nebuchadnezzar vainly imagined that he personally was responsible for his power, Daniel revealed to him that "the God of heaven had given him a kingdom, power, strength and glory" (v.37). God had made him a ruler over all nations (v.38; Jer. 27:4-5), and as the impersonation of that golden city (Isa. 13:19; 14:4), he was appropriately described as the "head of gold". Later he was described as a lion (7:4).

##### **2. THE PERSIAN EMPIRE.**

Babylon was taken by Darius the Mede in conjunction with Cyrus the Persian in the year 539 B.C. The river Euphrates was diverted and the forces of Darius entered via its course through the city and Babylon fell (Dan. 5; Isa. 45:1-3). Thus the Babylonian dynasty was succeeded by the breast and arms of silver, the inferior Kingdom of the Medes and Persians, also symbolically described as a bear (7:5) and a ram (8:3). Its glory was inferior to the Babylonian empire, but it lasted some 200 years.

##### **3. THE GRECIAN EMPIRE.**

This 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" are synonymous with the "leopard"

of 7:6 and the “he-goat” of 8:5, and 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. The added detail of this empire bearing “rule over all the earth” is descriptive of Alexander and his “brazen-coated Greeks”, triumphing over all opposition until, as legend has it, “he wept because there were no more worlds to conquer”. After the sudden death of Alexander, four generals of his army divided his empire: Seleucus (Syria), Ptolemy (Egypt), Lysimachus (Pergamum) and Cassander (Macedonia and Greece).

#### 4. THE ROMAN EMPIRE.

Pergamum was bequeathed to Rome in B.C. 133 by Philometer. Rome took advantage and came into Pergamum. Thus they moved eastwards. In B.C. 65 Pompey moved south and conquered Syria for Rome. 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. The Jews too were under the dominance of Rome at the time of Christ (Deut. 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 surpassing the power of Rome.

Up to A.D. 324 the empire had its centre in Rome, but between then and A.D. 476 (when the western empire fell), the power was divided between Rome and Constantinople. Christianity also fell into apostasy and became superimposed upon the imperial system, thus forming the Holy Roman Empire, while the orthodox churches continued in the Eastern or Byzantine Empire centred in Constantinople.

This political and later ecclesiastical division answers to the two legs of the image.

It is interesting to note that no world-empire conquered Rome. The empire disintegrated: it became divided into tribal factions, until 10 small nations became the foundations of the community of nations in modern Europe.

The 10 kingdoms answer to the 10 toes of the image. Some of these nations are weak, others strong, and this is indicated by the composition of the feet and toes, iron and clay (v.42). The fact that iron and clay do not mix is made, in the prophecy, to symbolise the fact that though these nations would cleave one to another, there would be no true union between them (v.43). This is illustrated today by the divided state of Europe and the prevailing nationalism, despite attempts at unification.

## 5. THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

In addition to this outline of world history, we are shown the image standing up on its feet, only to be broken to pieces together by the stone. There is yet to be therefore a latter day confederation of nations under the control of one autocratic power, gaining ascendancy over all the territories hitherto known as the Babylonian, Persian, Grecian and Roman empires. Prophecies such as Ezek. 38; Dan. 11; Joel 3; Zech. 14, etc., together with Dan. 2, all demonstrate Yahweh's determined purpose to sanctify Himself in the eyes of all nations at the overthrow of the kingdoms of men and, in particular, the destruction of the Russian confederacy (Ezek. 38:2-7).

This fearsome colossus led by Russia will seem invincible. But despite its lion-like power, its bear-like fierceness, its leopard-like swiftness, and its ambition for world dominion, 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" (Dan. 8:25 R.S.V.).

Who is the stone-power? None other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Note carefully Daniel 2:44 where the interpretation is given. Compare the following "stone" prophecies fulfilled in Jesus Christ:

- The shepherd, the STONE of Israel made strong by the hand of God (Gen. 49:24).
- The precious corner and foundation STONE of Zion (Isa. 28:16).
- A STONE of stumbling and a rock of offence to both houses of Israel (Isa. 8:14).
- The STONE rejected by men, but chosen of God (Psa. 118:22; Matt. 21:42; Mk. 12:10-11; Acts 4:11-12).
- The corner STONE of his ecclesia (1 Pet. 2:4-8; Eph. 2:20-22).
- The smiting STONE of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 21:43-44; cf. Dan. 2:34).

The stone cut out of parent rock by divine operation identifies the destroyer of the image with the Son of God who was "the only begotten of the Father" (Jn. 1:14; Lk. 1:35; cf. Ex. 20:25; Deut. 27:5; Heb. 13:10). Though of humble aspect (cf. Isa. 53:2) the stone would nevertheless triumph over the powerful form of the image. The stone power represents Christ and the saints as the nucleus of the Kingdom of God by whom the nations will be subjugated (2 Thess. 1:8; Acts 17:31; Rev. 11:15). The threshingfloor of the dream (v.35) appropriately describes Armageddon where the nations shall be, as the name signifies, "a heap of sheaves in a valley for judgment" (see Mic. 4:11-13; Joel 3:9-14; Rev. 16:16; Isa. 41:16). This judgment will give way to the extension throughout the world of the righteous laws emanating from Zion (Isa. 2:2-4).

### LESSONS FOR US:

- As Daniel concluded, "the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure" (v.45). Let us acknowledge with Nebuchadnezzar that

our God is a God of gods, and a Lord of Kings, and a revealer of secrets (v.47).

- Daniel 2 gives us a key to the understanding of prophecy. We are living in the closing days of the Gentiles, when current events vividly demonstrate the accuracy of the prophetic Word.
- God will soon consummate the times of the Gentiles with the dramatic advent of His Son. Our participation is invited.
- We should 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” (Dan. 7:27).

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

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

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

“Elpis Israel” (J. Thomas)—Part Third, Ch. 1

“Daniel” (M. Stewart)

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What lessons do we learn from Daniel’s example when the lives of the wise men were threatened by Nebuchadnezzar?*
2. *Outline the historical significance of the feet and toes made of clay and iron in Nebuchadnezzar’s image of Daniel 2.*
3. *How does Daniel 2 show that God rules in the kingdom of men?*
4. *Identify the stone power in Daniel 2 and describe its mission.*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

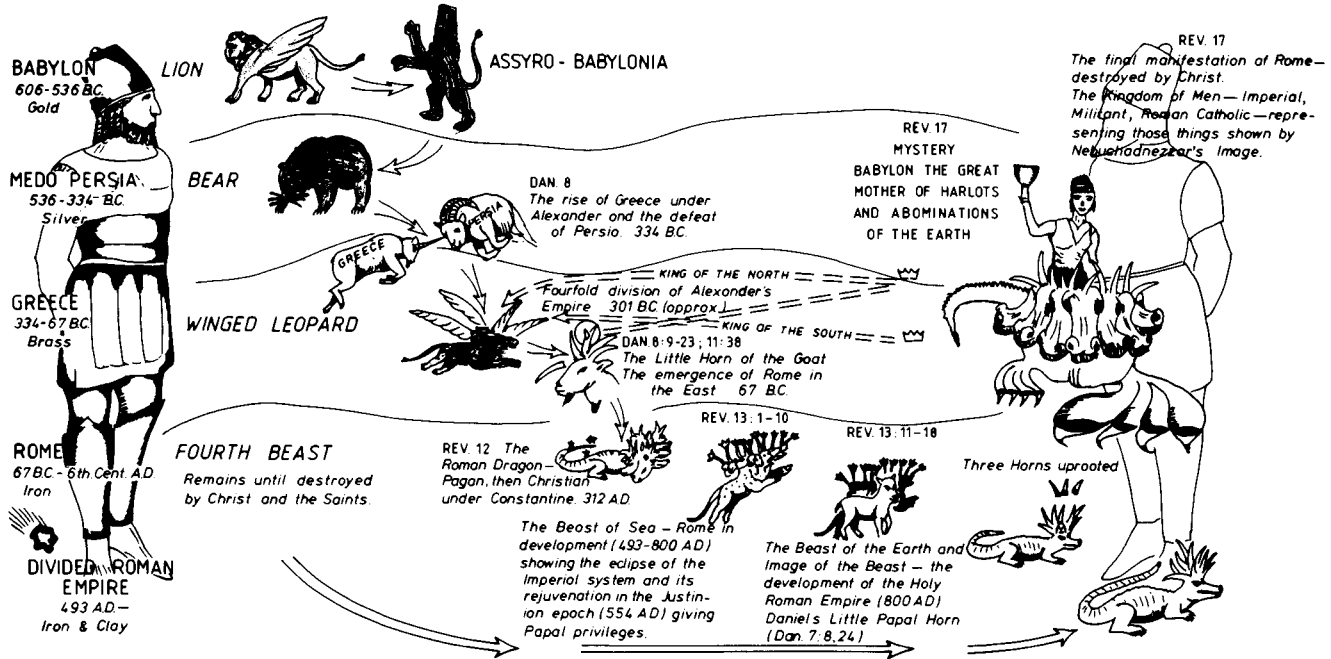
1. *Demonstrate from the story in Daniel 2 how “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).*
2. *Sketch a picture of the image of Daniel 2, with brief notes explaining the interpretation of the parts of the image.*
3. *Show how the image of Daniel 2 is an outline of world history.*

Ans 2 : 28 + 30

# THE KINGDOM OF MEN

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## **21. RESTORATION UNDER CYRUS**

**“The latter splendour of this house shall be greater than the former”**

*Judah had been led into captivity to Babylon because they had forsaken Yahweh. the first invasion of Nebuchadnezzar took place in the year 606 B.C., in the 3rd and 4th years of the reign of Jehoiakim, King of Judah (2 Kgs. 24:1; Jer. 25:1). Daniel and many others were carried into servitude at this time (Dan. 1:1). During the long years of slavery the faithful exiles were encouraged by the prophecies of Ezekiel and Jeremiah which assured them of a return and restoration. Jeremiah had boldly proclaimed the fall of Babylon and the concurrent redemption of Israel (Jer. 50:17-20). He had stipulated that the captivity would last seventy years only (606-536 B.C.). Daniel lived through this period and witnessed the fall of Babylon to Darius the Mede (Dan. 5:30-31). Daniel realised that God’s Word demanded an end to the captivity and desolation of Judah. Accordingly he besought Yahweh to make His face to shine upon His Sanctuary that was desolate (Dan. 9:2, 17).*

*Our aim in this lesson is to see that God blesses those who arise and work in His service and who are not discouraged by opposition.*

### **Ezra 1-6; Haggai**

#### **THE DECREE OF CYRUS (Ezra 1).**

Cyrus had reigned conjointly with his uncle, Darius the Mede, for two years. When Darius died, Cyrus the Persian reigned over Babylon alone and it was in the first year of his sole reign that he made the important proclamation calling upon the Jewish exiles to return and build the Temple. History records that Cyrus’ policy was to foster nationalism among the countries of his empire, and so keep the peace. He rightly claimed to have been charged by the God of heaven to build Him a house in Jerusalem. Accordingly he summoned the Jewish exiles and encouraged them to return. He recovered the vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had removed, and required that they be restored to the Temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1). About 50,000 were involved in this first restoration (2:64-65). Zerubbabel was appointed governor and Joshua, the high priest (3:2). The details of the rebuilding of the Temple, which will comprise the remainder of this lesson, are found in Ezra 3-6. Later there was a second restoration under Ezra, the priest, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7-10) and thirteen years later Nehemiah returned (Neh. 1:1).

#### **THE ALTAR SET UP AND FOUNDATIONS LAID (Ezra 3).**

It was in the important seventh month, when the Day of Atonement (10th day) and Feast of Tabernacles (15th-22nd days) were held (Lev. 23:27-43), that the people came together in Jerusalem. No time was wasted in re-establishing the sacrificial code of the Law of Moses. The “altar of the God of Israel” was built and the appropriate sacrifice made (vv.3-5). The Feast of Tabernacles would have taken on a new

significance. In the first place it celebrated Yahweh's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. But now redemption from Babylon would add to its meaning. In the Age to come this feast will again be joyfully celebrated from year to year to commemorate the deliverance of all nations from the rule of men (Zech. 14:16).

In the second month of the second year work on the foundation commenced. When the foundation was laid, the priests with trumpets and the sons of Asaph with cymbals praised Yahweh for His mercy. But the people were not all of one mind. While the young men shouted for joy, the old men compared the foundations with Solomon's magnificent Temple and wept. It was not clear on that day whether there was sorrow or joy and the prophet Zechariah later rebuked those who made comparisons with the words, "who hath despised the day of small things!" (Zech. 4:10; Hag. 2:3). The same might apply of the work of God in the earth today. When the heart is devoted and dedicated to the service of Christ, the blessings of the Father will abound though the faithful be few in the earth. Who hath despised the day of small things?

#### **OPPOSITION — THE WORK CEASES (Ezra 4).**

News of the building progress reached the surrounding peoples. They were descendants of various nationalities who had been brought there by the Assyrian kings (v.2; 2 Kgs. 17:24-41). Their worship was a mixture of a little truth with much error. They came to the builders and offered to assist, pleading "we seek your God"! But Joshua and Zerubbabel knew that such an unwholesome alliance would lead to the Truth being compromised, and in any case they were forbidden to mix with idolators. So they refused: "Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia had commanded us" (v.3).

This reply sparked opposition which eventually led to the work stopping. The adversaries of Judah discouraged and hindered the people. They even hired counsellors to divide them and break their will. They wrote letters full of accusations to Ahasuerus (Cambyses, the son of Cyrus), but failed to obtain a royal decree to bring the work to a halt. Later, another letter was sent to Artaxerxes, a heathen priest who had usurped the throne and was a Jew-hater. He yielded to their demands and made a proclamation calling for an end to the building (vv.17-22). As soon as the adversaries of Judah received the reply, they made haste to the building site and compelled the Jews to cease work.

#### **THE PROPHETS TO THE RESCUE (Ezra 5).**

The people were discouraged and, soon growing apathetic towards the work, they turned to their own interests. The blessings of God were withdrawn and there was suffering. This is the background of the prophecy of Haggai. It was to this situation that the prophets Haggai and Zechariah addressed their words. It appears that the people exempted themselves from the responsibility of the work, because the time had not

come when the house of Yahweh had to be built! Besides prophesying seventy years of servitude (606-536 B.C.), Jeremiah had also declared that there would be seventy years of desolations, commencing with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (2 Kgs. 25; Jer. 25:11). Haggai spoke to the people in the second year of Darius (B.C. 520), when there remained four more years for the seventy years of desolations to elapse (Ezra 4:24). Thus they excused themselves, but their attitude was wrong. They occupied themselves with their own personal pursuits and interests. So, too, might we fail if we become engrossed in the material prizes this world has to offer and say within our hearts, "Our Lord delayeth his coming" (Matt. 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, blessings would take the place of cursings (Hag. 1:7-11; 2:15-19). They were aroused to action. Despite the renewed hostilities on the part of Tatnai 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 vision of Zech. 3 is based on this incident. Joshua, as High Priest, represents the nation of Israel; "Satan" is the adversary; and the "angel of Yahweh" is the "eye of their God". The angel justifies Joshua but condemns the adversaries with the words, "The LORD rebuke thee". In Jude 9 the incident is again referred to. The "body of Moses" is the returned remnant of Judah, "baptised into Moses" (1 Cor. 10:2). The "devil" represents the adversaries, and "Michael", the arch-angel, is identified as the angel of Yahweh, present on that occasion.

The adversaries asked the question, "Who hath commanded you to build this house?" 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. They implied that the Jews were about to rebel because they were hastening the rebuilding and would not reveal the names of the chief men directing the building. Doubting that Cyrus had ever made a decree at all, they suggested that Darius search out the matter (5:6-17).

#### **THE TEMPLE IS FINISHED (Ezra 6).**

Darius received the letter and commissioned a search to be made to see if Cyrus had ever made a decree to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. By the grace of God, the exact record was found in which Cyrus gave the project his unreserved blessing (vv.1-6). Darius seemed to be seized with the same zeal as Cyrus. He addressed a remarkable letter to Judah's "Satan", rebuking them. Yahweh Himself was blessing His zealous remnant who were busy about His House. In this way the words of Zech. 3:2, "The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan", were fulfilled.

Darius told Tatnai and his companions to cease hindering the building and to start helping it forward! He told them that expenses for the Tem-



ple should be provided from the Samaritan tribute! Moreover, they should supply all the sacrifices required by the Levites — day by day! He threatened with death any that might seek to alter his decree and invoked the vengeance of the God of Jerusalem upon any who destroyed the Temple! (vv.6-12).

When this letter was received, the cowardly Samaritans were full of fear and hastened to comply with the king's commands. Materials, expenses and provisions were soon forthcoming and the work proceeded to its completion in the sixth year of Darius (vv.13-15). Four years were occupied with building (cf. 4:24).

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 near to him, he will draw near unto us". He is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think" (Jas. 4:8; Eph. 3:20).

### **THE GREATER TEMPLE TO COME.**

The building of this temple in Jerusalem became the basis of far-reaching prophecies. Joshua, because he was the High Priest, and Zerubbabel, because he was Governor, are types of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Zech. 3 and 4 respectively). "He shall build the temple of the LORD" and "be a priest upon his throne". In him the offices of kingship and priesthood will combine and there will be harmony between them for the first time in history. Zechariah and Haggai, the two prophets, were moved by the Spirit of God to write things which could only fully apply to Messiah's day. In fact the Jews were encouraged to labour because they were doing, in type, Messiah's work — even if on a smaller scale. God told them through the prophet that the house they had built for Him would be destroyed (cf. Hag. 2:6-7; Heb. 12:26-27), but assured them that, nevertheless, He would "fill THIS house with glory". Messiah's Temple would be the same house, His house, even though it would be a different building. "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the LORD of hosts. The latter splendour of this house shall be greater than the former" (Hag. 2:8-9 R.S.V.). The magnificence of Messiah's temple is related in Ezekiel 40-48. There are numerous references to the great temple which shall be "an house of prayer for all nations" (e.g. Zech. 14:16; Mk. 11:17; Isa. 56:7; 2:1-5; Psa. 122).

But God is not interested in houses of stone and mortar. His real interest lies in the human heart. It is there only that His word can take root and He be honoured by faith and loving obedience (Isa. 57:15; 66:1-2; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 3:17). We can be temples of God if we allow the Truth to sanctify us and govern our thoughts, words and deeds. We can even now do a greater work than the building of Zerubbabel's Temple.

### LESSONS FOR US:

- God controls the purposes of kings and so the seventy year prophecies were fulfilled.
- God will curse us if we “despise” the work of the Truth because it is small today — but bless us if we arise and labour in His service.
- The adversaries were unable to stop the work of rebuilding and God made them pay for the work!
- We must sanctify our hearts by clearing away the rubbish of evil desires and building into our lives the qualities which show that God dwells in us. “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?”

### 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. Describe how Jeremiah’s prophecies of the seventy years of desolation were fulfilled.
2. Zechariah said, “Who hath despised the day of small things?” When did he say this? How can his words apply today?
3. How can we build the “temple of God” today?

### ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. What lessons can be taken from the attitude of the Jews during the rebuilding of the Temple?
  2. What part did Zechariah and Haggai play in the rebuilding of the Temple? What lessons can we learn from their work?
  3. What were the three great proclamations by Persian kings which affected the rebuilding of the Temple?
-  Briefly recount the work of rebuilding the temple under Joshua and Zerubbabel. How did they overcome the difficulties confronting them?

## 22. NEHEMIAH — MAN OF FAITH AND ACTION

“Let us rise up and build”

*After the first return of the Jews to the Land under Joshua and Zerubabel, there was a further restoration under Ezra the scribe. Thirteen 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.*

*Our aim in this lesson is to see how Nehemiah's great faith and sense of purpose inspired his brethren and enabled him to overcome the many and varied problems which confronted him.*

### Nehemiah 1 & 2

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

Nehemiah held the honoured position of cupbearer to Artaxerxes, the King of Persia. His brother, Hanani, and others, had just come back from Judea and he asked how the new state was faring. It was his first question! Though he worked in Shushan the palace his heart was in Jerusalem. He was deeply grieved by the report, “The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire” (1:3).

#### **PROBLEM 1: HOW COULD NEHEMIAH OBTAIN LEAVE AND JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM TO HELP HIS PEOPLE?**

**Answer:** That he should have contemplated so great a task is a mark of the greatness of Nehemiah's character, for he was comfortable and well off in the palace of Persia. There was little he could do physically and so he turned to the Father. He “wept and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of Heaven”. Here was sincerity. The prayer he uttered reveals a mind disciplined by the fear of God and vibrant with the hope of Israel. Captivity had only served to ignite and strengthen his zeal. He addresses God in terms of His covenant mercy (v.5), pleads for His attention, and acknowledges His righteousness and the nation's guilt (vv.6-7). He then appeals to the promises of the past which guaranteed restoration upon reform (vv.8-9).

The prayer is tintured with citations from the Pentateuch, showing how closely Nehemiah had kept the Word in his mind. Note the cross references in the margin and see how many direct allusions you can find. Next, he appeals to the Fatherhood of God in the birth of the nation (v.10). He concludes with a moving plea for an answer to his desires. Implicit in his prayer was his willingness to go back and serve. But the great obstacle was his employment and so he prayed, “grant me mercy in the sight of this man”, i.e. the king.

Four long months went by (cf. 1:1, 2:1) and there had been no

response. The king noticed his sad countenance, for normally he was cheerful. Nehemiah was "very sore afraid" that the king should thus rebuke him. Opportunity was nevertheless provided to explain, ". . . why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste?" Then the king said, "For what dost thou make request?" Nehemiah could scarcely believe his ears. Was not Yahweh answering his prayer? Ever mindful of God watching over his words and actions, he offered up a silent prayer before making his petition known to the king. He had obviously impressed the king and also, it would appear, "the queen sitting by him" (v.6). If she indeed was Esther, as the chronology of those times allows, no doubt she would have added her support for his request. So the king granted leave and sent him away with letters securing his protection and authorising him to obtain building materials of the king's forest. What an incredible response this was!

It is important to note the impact of this favourable reply upon Nehemiah. He perceived that it was of God, "And the king granted me, according to the GOOD HAND OF MY GOD upon me" (2:8). It was this assurance that impelled him upon a work fraught with opposition and difficulty, but which he did not relinquish until completed. There is a lesson in this. Most give up when they are on the point of success. With God on our side, the Truth will prosper despite reverses and opposition, until at length the "earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD" (Num. 14:21; Isa. 50:7-8).

When Nehemiah arrived in Judea he showed to the "governors beyond the river" his letters of authority. But, alas, the Samaritans, headed by Sanballat and Tobiah, "were grieved exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel (2:10). Theirs was a typical display of anti-semitism which was to grow stronger as Nehemiah forged ahead with his plans. Nehemiah inspected the broken-down walls and gates by night. He had not at this stage informed the Jews what "God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem" (2:11-16).

## **PROBLEM 2: HOW COULD HE AROUSE AND ENTHUSE THE DEJECTED, DISINTERESTED REMNANT FOR THE WORK OF REBUILDING?**

**Answer:** He identified himself completely with their problems, "Ye see the distress that WE are in". He pointed out that they were the subjects of shame and that they were responsible and had a duty to remove the cause of it. Actions must replace indifference and apathy: "Come and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem that we be no more a reproach", he said (2:17). When he related the divinely controlled circumstances that enabled him to be there, and how the king had authorised him, they responded, "Let us rise up and build".

Thus the example of Nehemiah's enthusiasm inspired the people. Enthusiasm is contagious. If we show it in our discipleship, we, like

Nehemiah, will be blessed and others will be encouraged as well (cp. Phil. 1:14; Rom. 12:11).

But the zeal of the remnant of Israel aroused an unfavourable reaction in their enemies. Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem “heard it” and laughed them to scorn and insinuated that the Jews were about to rebel against Artaxerxes (2:19).

**PROBLEM 3: HOW TO COPE WITH RIDICULE?  
(Nehemiah 2:19, 20; 4:1-9).**

**Answer:** Ridicule can either discourage or stiffen determination. Nehemiah was a great leader. His mind was active and constantly he meditated upon the issues, and therefore had a ready answer. Because his conviction was strong, he was able to meet this challenge with an answer which showed his determination. Thereby he 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” (2:20).

Nehemiah 3 records the names of those who rose to the challenge and gives the portions of the wall they were responsible for building.

As the work got underway, and words became actions, the ire of their adversaries intensified. Besides mocking, Sanballat took reports of the activity back to Samaria and told his brethren and the “army of Samaria”. Their disdain for the project was summarised in the words of bitter Tobiah, “Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall” (4:3). News of this resistance and the threat which it contained found its way back. But Nehemiah was undeterred and he countered with prayer and action. He united the people in prayer and sought that the adversary might instead be the victim of his own intentions: “Hear, O our God, for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head” (4:4). The Jews were encouraged and set their minds on the work which thereby proceeded apace (4:6).

The sight of the strengthened walls again generated a conspiracy of hatred among the mixed peoples of Samaria, and this time they resolved to fight. But united prayer, coupled with the practical measures of setting a watch, ensured that the work progressed (4:5-9).

**PROBLEM 4: HOW TO OVERCOME PESSIMISM BROUGHT  
ABOUT BY OPPRESSION AND HARD WORK? (Nehemiah 4:10-23).**

**Answer:** The opposition and hard work began to take its toll. Those of weaker faith began to complain and they dampened the spirits of others. Complaining, like enthusiasm, is infectious! Some lost heart because all their work had made little impression on the rubbish and rubble and they were getting weary (4:10). Others had heard rumours about the enemy’s plans for attack and “ten times” repeated them: “From all places where they live they will come up against us” (4:12 R.S.V.). How could Nehemiah answer this challenge — a challenge this time from within?

The first measures he took were practical. He placed families with their weapons at strategic points (4:13). Men will fight when their families are involved and so the borders are secured! Jews today follow the same idea with the Kibbutzim. Then he reminded them that the LORD, “which is great and terrible”, was on their side and would fight with them. They must be more conscious of God than of men. When the enemies saw that their plans were known and thwarted they were discouraged. The people, on the other hand, returned to the task of rebuilding!

From that time onward the builders worked with their swords at their sides. Because they were spread out over a considerable distance it was not possible for the whole work to be effectively guarded. A trumpeter was with Nehemiah and when he sounded an alarm they were to come and give assistance. Thus the ecclesia was united in the work and their courageous leader was both in the midst of the work and at the forefront of attack, encouraging them. The watchword was, “our God shall fight for us” (4:20). Those who lived outside Jerusalem were asked to remain inside the city at night. Thus they provided labour by day and protection by night. So busy were they that there was no time for changing into bed clothes! All the while they were inspired by the lofty example of Nehemiah, who put into practice himself the things which he spoke to the people.

#### **PROBLEM 5: HOW TO COPE WITH SUBTLETY AND FALSEHOOD? (Nehemiah 6:1-14).**

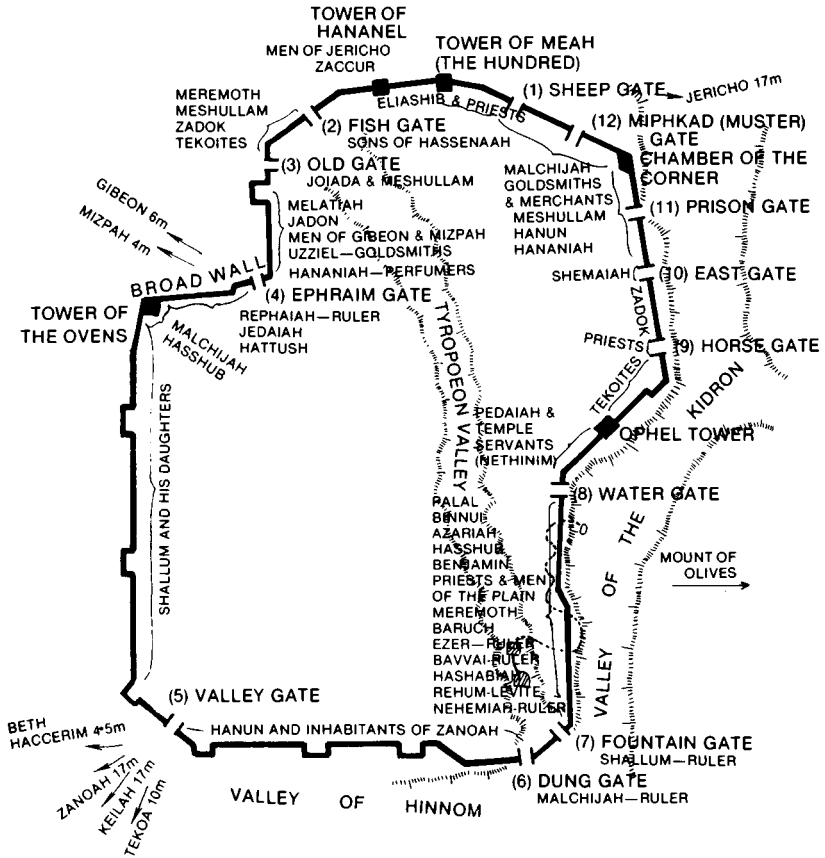
**Answer:** The enemies outside had tried to bring the work to a standstill by ridicule, intimidation and violence. Failing in this they became frustrated and tried more cunning means. They sought a conference with Nehemiah, but their real intention was to harm him. They knew that he was the mainstay behind the work, and that if they could destroy him it would cease. But he quickly perceived their objectives and gave a classic answer to any who would interfere with the work of building up, “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?” (4:3). On four occasions they sent to Nehemiah, but each time they received the same answer.

Sanballat thought hard and then concocted a letter which he thought might finally entice Nehemiah to the conference table. He sent his servant to him with 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 king! This could have serious consequences, so he had best come and confer with them! But Nehemiah understood their intentions and lies and told them so, “There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart”.

Tobiah and Sanballat then sought by cunning means to destroy Nehemiah’s reputation by showing that he was fearful and afraid. They commissioned Shemaiah to meet Nehemiah in the Temple with the doors

# 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”

Available as a Bible Insert from the  
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locked. He was to tell Nehemiah that they must be barred because his enemies were going to slay him in the night. Now Nehemiah had always displayed fearlessness and thereby encouraged the people. Had he yielded to this request his honour would have been soiled. Thus he replied, "Should such a man as I flee?" Thus he stood by his principles in the face of a very subtle challenge. Moreover, Shemaiah had posed as a friend and claimed to have been sent by God (6:10-14)! How important it was for Nehemiah to be perceptive — cunning as a serpent but harmless as a dove, as the Lord was later to say.

### **THE WALL COMPLETED (Nehemiah 6:15, 16).**

Despite all attempts to the contrary, the work was completed. There is a note of triumph in the words, "So the work was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days!" (v.15). This was a remarkable feat. It was clear that God's blessing had been upon them throughout. Nehemiah made no secret of this fact and even their enemies perceived it and were disheartened. Of Nehemiah it might truly be said, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all" (Psa. 34:19).

### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- Nehemiah was sincere when he desired to return to Judah and so Yahweh answered his prayer.
- He was a great leader because he did not give up in the face of problems, but sought God and personally involved himself in the work with the people.
- He was a man of prayer AND ACTION. Actions are more sincere than words. So too today, faith must be practised as well as professed — for by our works shall we be judged.
- Enthusiasm and pessimism are contagious. We can inspire others in the Master's service only if we are keen and dedicated ourselves.
- Nehemiah was a man of quick perception. There is a need for us to be instructed in the principles of the Truth so that we can discern and reject the subtle philosophies of our day e.g. evolution, liberalism and permissiveness.

### **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. *Make a list of the problems Nehemiah had to overcome.*
2. *Nehemiah prayed to God when he heard that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and that the remnant there were in affliction. What did he say?*
3. *Recount the incident in the palace of Artaxerxes in which Nehemiah obtained permission to return to Judea.*
4. *List the characteristics of Nehemiah which made him a great leader.*



**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Write a character study of Nehemiah.*
2. *Explain how Nehemiah coped with the problems which confronted him when he undertook the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.*
3. *In what ways was Nehemiah a great leader? Give examples of his leadership.*
4. *What lessons do you learn from the example of Nehemiah?*

## 23. MALACHI

“Who may abide the day of his coming?”

*The work of rebuilding the Temple had received impetus 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 (Neh. 13:6). While he was away spiritual decay set in and on his return he commenced a series of reforms (Neh. 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.*

*Our aim in this lesson is to see that:—*

- 1. God detests apathetic worship*
- 2. Marriage outside the Truth is a sin*
- 3. Judgment upon the wicked is often delayed but never forgotten.*

### **Malachi 3**

#### **MALACHI'S METHOD OF WRITING.**

Malachi was interesting and different in his approach to prophecy as he endeavoured to arouse his people to their responsibilities. The prophet first makes a declaration; this is countered by an objection from the people; then the prophet exposes their sins.

For example, in 1:6-7 we have:

- 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 the LORD of hosts unto you, O ye priests”.
- 2. The priest's objection:** “And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?”
- 3. The prophet's exposure of their sin:** “Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar”.

There are eight such queries and answers. Read through the prophecy and locate them all; this will help your understanding. The prophet used the method of dialogue because it graphically brought home to Israel their deficiencies. An incredible situation had arisen in which they were oblivious of the grossness of their sins. Like Laodicea, they “knew not” that they were “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev. 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 comparing ourselves with the standards laid down in the enlightening Word, that we can avoid falling into the same trap.

#### **FIVE MESSENGERS.**

The meaning of Malachi is “My Messenger”. As with many of the other prophets, his prophecy is woven around the meaning of his name.

Five messengers of Yahweh are referred to in the prophecy.

1. The prophet himself (1:1).
2. The priests, who were appointed to teach the law of Yahweh (2:7).
3. John the Baptist, who was to prepare the way before the Lord Jesus Christ at his first coming (3:1).
4. The Lord Jesus Christ, the “messenger of the covenant” (3:1).
5. Elijah, who will prepare the hearts of Israel at the second coming (4:5-6).

### **CORRUPTION OF THE PRIESTHOOD.**

When Nehemiah returned from Babylon he was angered because Eliashib the High Priest was allied to Tobiah the Ammonite and had given him lodging in a chamber of the house of God (Neh. 2:10; 13:4, 7)! Not only this, but one of his sons was married to a daughter of Sanballat the Horonite. These two men were enemies of Nehemiah and the Truth. With such perversion in high places the whole administration of the Law lapsed. The tithes were not given to the Levites (Neh. 13:10; cf. Mal. 3:8), trading was permitted on the Sabbath (Neh. 13:15-22), and alien marriages were tolerated (Neh. 13:23-30; Mal. 2:14-16).

### **THE PRIESTHOOD REBUKED (Malachi 2:1-9).**

In Malachi 2 the priesthood is directly addressed, “And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you” (v.1). Thus, for the last time for 400 years, the priests were warned of their duties and responsibilities. God required them to take seriously His words of rebuke and so He commenced with mention of judgment if they did not. He threatened to turn the blessing of the priesthood into a curse (v.2; Ex. 32:29; Deut. 33:8-11). His judgment would bring shame upon them—the “dung of THEIR (not His) solemn feasts being spread on their faces”, and ultimately they would be “taken away with it”. So the terrible destruction of Jerusalem which took place in A.D. 70 is threatened (v.3). But this was not the purpose of Yahweh’s rebuke. He desired rather that His covenant would continue to be with Levi (v.4). God reminds the Levites of the circumstances which had led to them being chosen for the great honour of priesthood (v.5). On two occasions their faith had exceeded the faith of the other tribes and their zeal was rewarded with the high office:

1. At Sinai when they “feared before” Yahweh and refused to worship the golden calf (Ex. 32:26-29).
2. At Shittim when Phinehas the son of Eleazer, the priest, reacted against the whoredoms of Israel at Baal-Peor, so receiving a covenant of peace and an everlasting priesthood (Num. 25:10-13).

Throughout their history the tribe of Levi had been outstanding for loyalty and many of the foremost leaders had come from that tribe (e.g. Samuel, Jeremiah, Ezra). As God’s mouthpiece they had instructed

many "For the priest's lips should keep ("guard" R.S.V.) knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth" (v.7). But while they could exert a powerful influence for good, they could also do the opposite. This was the tragedy of the day. "Ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law (by your instruction, R.S.V.), ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi" (v.8).

There is a grim lesson in this. Virtue had won for Levi a great privilege. Privilege in turn had brought responsibility to God, but subsequent generations had failed to live up to the example of the forefathers. The same applies today. No-one will enter the kingdom of God because their parents were Christadelphians. A great responsibility rests on the children to learn the Truth, be separate from the world and "guard knowledge". Terrible judgments came upon Levi because the warnings were not heeded, and they will fall upon the heads of those who fail to realise their privileges today.

### **MARRIAGE WITH ALIENS DENOUNCED (Malachi 2:10-16).**

God, in His wisdom, made a law that Israel must not marry those of other nations. "They will turn away thy sons and daughters from following me, that they may serve other gods", He had warned (Deut. 7:3-4). In Malachi's day even the priests had broken this law and mixed marriages were rife. The children born could not even speak the language of the Law and apostasy was the inevitable result (Neh. 13:24)! "Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD . . . and hath married the daughter of a strange god" (v.11). Those who worshipped idols were regarded as the sons and daughters of the idols. All who were involved, "the master and scholar", would be cut off despite the offering of sacrifice (v.12).

Ezra had previously compelled the people to reform and put away their strange wives (Ezra 10:10-13). Now the same problem had arisen "again" in Nehemiah's time (v.13). The tears of the destitute wives filled Yahweh's altar, so that He could not accept the sacrifice of the husbands. This intimation provoked an objection from the husbands, "Wherefore?" (v.14). So far had they strayed that they could see no wrong in their deeds. Yahweh had witnessed their marriage vows and acceptable worship was impossible where the vows were lightly esteemed.

No less importance can be put on both the choice of a marriage partner and the sanctity of marriage today. Marriage should be "only in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39). To choose otherwise is to "profane the holiness of the LORD." The purpose of marriage in Christ is that a "godly seed" might be preserved (v.15). Inter-marriage has ever been fruitful of apostasy. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers . . . What part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" (2 Cor. 6:14). The strong implication is "None". Further, Malachi reveals plainly the attitude of God to divorce: "For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away" (v.16).

### **COMING JUDGMENT (Malachi 2:17-3:6; 3:14-4:3).**

Because God's judgment had not come upon those who did wickedly,

the people of Malachi's day thought that all their efforts for righteousness were to no avail. In fact those who were unconcerned about God and His righteous ways did not seem to be handicapped as they were. They prospered because they had time to devote to their interests. Hence they said, "Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them" (2:17). The complete absence of immediate judgment or restraint upon the wicked led them to question whether there was a righteous God at all—"Where is the God of judgment?" Thus they had virtually denied the existence of God and said that if there was one, then His moral values were upside down! This was a very serious charge and God gives a swift answer (3:1-6).

Even though God did not visibly intervene in judgment upon evil doers in the prophet's day, this did not mean that He had set it aside in the ultimate. His purpose envisaged a day in which the righteous and wicked would be dealt with according to their ways. Wickedness would not then be seen to be profitable (3:14). The "messenger of the covenant", whom they professed to seek, would "suddenly" come into his temple, his way being prepared by another messenger, John the Baptist (3:1; Mk. 1:2-4). Of his coming there could be no doubt. Its certainty is expressed twice. The important question was, would they be ready?—"But who shall abide the day of his coming?" He would purge like a refiner's fire and cleanse like fuller's soap, and all, including the Levites, would be tested in that day. In him (Jesus), Yahweh would "come near to judgment" and be "a swift witness" against all who do wickedly (3:5). In fact they are reminded that it is only because of His covenant Name that they were preserved (3:6; Ezek. 36:20-24).

The extent of their sin can be gauged by their words recorded in 3:14-15. These defiant words are again answered by God in the remaining words of the prophecy. The faithful remnant "who spake often one to another" about the Truth would be taken by Yahweh as His "special treasure" (3:17 mg.; cp. 1 Pet. 2:9) and "spared as a man spareth his own son". But the proud (4:1; cf. 3:15) and those who do wickedly "shall be stubble" and "the day that cometh shall burn them up . . . it shall leave them neither root nor branch".

Today we might easily make the same wrong assessment as the people of Malachi's day did. We might think that God has forsaken the earth and cares little if we do right or wrong. We might think this because the wicked appear to prosper and there is no immediate divine judgment. But when the Lord Jesus did come, they were unprepared for him, and in A.D. 70 the priests and the nation were judged. The signs of the times tell us that "the day of the Lord is at hand" and he has warned us that "as a snare shall it come upon all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth". We shall only be able to "stand before the Son of Man" if we "watch and pray always" (Lk. 21:35).

### **NO OPEN VISION.**

With the death of Malachi the voice of the prophets fell silent for 400 years. Micah had threatened that continued wickedness would bring

the “night” upon them, and that they should “not have a vision” (Mic. 3:6; cf. Amos 8:11). In this period, the land was subject to the prevailing world empires. The Persians were defeated by the Greeks, who were led by Alexander the Great. The Greeks imposed their religion, culture and language upon the world they conquered. This explains why the Greek language was widely spoken in New Testament times. Prior to those times the Old Testament Scriptures were translated into Greek and today this version is known as the Septuagint. Along with the universally spoken Greek language, this translation was to facilitate the spread of the gospel into all the world.

The repression of the worship of Yahweh by the Greeks, especially by Antiochus Epiphanes, led directly to a revolt by the Jews led by the Maccabees. In 165 B.C. Judas Maccabeus recaptured Jerusalem, cleansed the temple and rededicated it. (The feast in Jn. 10:22 recalled this event.) Independence was enjoyed for about 100 years as successive members of the Maccabean family governed. The Romans then moved into Palestine in B.C. 66 led by the brilliant general Pompey. Julius Caesar, a rival Roman general, was victorious over Pompey and he was assisted by Antipater, the Idumean. For his help Antipater was rewarded with the procuratorship of Judea. Next the Parthians took Jerusalem and placed Antigonus, a Maccabee, on the throne. Later Herod the Great, with Roman aid, took Jerusalem and was made “King of the Jews”. He slew Antigonus, and married ten wives including Mariamne, a Maccabean. He was suspicious and bitterly cruel and slew Mariamne and her sons. He began building the Temple and also Caesarea, in honour of Caesar Augustus (Lk. 2:1). At the birth of Christ it was he who slew the Bethlehem babies. Later his kingdom was divided among his three sons, Archelaus receiving the tetrarchy of Judea. It was upon his death that Jesus and his parents returned from Egypt (Matt. 2:1, 16, 22).

#### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- Malachi denounced the priests for their lack of knowledge and failure to teach and uphold the Truth. Indifference and apathy on the part of young Christadelphians will bring the same judgments.
- Marriage out of Christ is a breach of the commandments and frustrates God’s purpose of preserving a “holy seed”.
- Marriage vows are to be kept, whether for better or for worse. God “hates” divorce.
- Our marriage partner must therefore be chosen with care and with due consideration over a period of time.
- Though the wicked may prosper, it is only for a time. God has not overlooked judgment but only postponed it. The messenger of the covenant will come suddenly and we must watch and pray always that we may be accounted worthy to escape the judgments upon the wicked (Psa. 37:1-3; Psa. 73; Lk. 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. *Mixed marriages were rife in the days of Nehemiah. Why is it important for us to choose partners in the Truth?*
  2. *Why were the Levites chosen to be the Priests? What responsibilities did they have?*
  3. *List the successive powers that ruled over Palestine from the days of Nehemiah to the birth of Christ.*
- In the times of Malachi the people said, "Where is the God of judgment?" What did they mean? What was Malachi's reply?*

### ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *What five messengers are mentioned in the prophecy of Malachi? List their particular duties.*
2. *What sins of the people does Malachi reprove? What lessons can we learn from his rebukes?*
3. *How was apathy manifested when Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem? What did he do to change the situation?*
4. *What did Malachi say about the marriages of the Jews of his day? What lessons do we learn from Malachi that are appropriate to marriage today?*

CH 3 1-2

## **Section 4**

# **THE MESSIAH ARRIVES**

With the passing of Malachi, the sun had gone down on the prophets. A long 400 years of darkness came over the world, but God was not inactive. Providence was preparing the world for the greatest event in its history.

Rome had conquered far and wide. Roman law guaranteed the peace and well-made roads made travel possible. Greek culture and language had made their impact and translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek gave a wider audience to God's Word. To all but a few students of God's Word, the world unknowingly waited for the coming of the true Light whose work would send his followers unto the darkest corners of the earth to reveal the light of the knowledge of God's glory.

Then the angel Gabriel appeared — first to Zacharias in the Temple, then to Mary in a city of Galilee named Nazareth. Then an angel revealed to some shepherds of Bethlehem: "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord". A new age had begun. The hope of the prophets was here. The Messiah had arrived!



## 24. JOHN THE BAPTIST

**“Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist”**

*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 decadent state, it would be necessary for God to send another messenger first, to “prepare the way” (Mal. 3:1). Four hundred years of silence on God’s part led to the spiritual poverty foretold. 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.*

*Our aim in this lesson is to see how God moved at the appointed time to prepare men for the coming of His Son.*

### **Luke 1:1-27, 57-80**

#### **CONDITIONS IN ISRAEL WHEN JOHN WAS BORN.**

When the Romans came into Judea and conquered Jerusalem, they crushed Israel’s spirit of pride and nationalism which had developed during the hundred years of Maccabean rule. Now they groaned under the iron heel of ROME and longed for a Deliverer. Their bondage to Rome was emblematic of their bondage to sin. The worship of the nation had degenerated into heartless formalism and sectarianism. There was corruption in high places, as the rich and influential retained their domination, either by pandering to their Roman overlords or by deceptive hypocrisy. HEROD THE GREAT, an Edomite converted to Judaism, was cruel and despotic and enjoyed the exercise of power because of his abasement to Rome. The priesthood was in the hands of the SADDUCEES. They were enriched by the temple treasury, were materialistic, and lived for the present. Just how poorly qualified they were to be the “messengers of Yahweh of hosts” can be seen from their acceptance of only the first five books of Moses as inspired, and their disbelief in life after death — they said “that there was no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit” (Acts 23:8). The PHARISEES, unlike the Sadducees, accepted the Law, the Psalms and the Prophets. They gave equal importance to the Oral Law, or the “tradition of elders”, which was an elaboration of the Law of Moses made by such learned Scribes, or Lawyers as Hillel and Shammai (Matt. 15:2).

In their beginnings, the remnant of Israel which had returned from captivity separated themselves from the Greek influences among the nation and were nationalistic. But as time went by they embraced the Greek philosophy of the immortality of the soul. Also their attention to the details and letter of the law led them to miss its spirit. In their view

righteousness consisted in a rigid adherence to the letter of the Law. Thus the “weightier matters”, “justice, mercy and faith” received less attention. Hypocrisy and heartless formalism are the results of worship where men are more conscious of their fellows than of God (Jn. 5:44).

There were also political groups such as the HERODIANS (who followed the family of Herod) and ZEALOTS (who were seditious and rankled under Rome’s oppression)—and yet, in the midst of these conflicting movements, there were individuals like Zacharias and his wife, Elisabeth, who longed for Israel’s salvation through the coming of its Messiah.

### **GABRIEL VISITS ZACHARIAS IN THE TEMPLE (Luke 1:5-25).**

Zacharias belonged to the course of Abia, which was one of the twenty-four orders of the sons of Aaron established by David to take their turn in the service of the house of the Lord (v.5; 1 Chron. 24:10). He and his wife were dedicated servants of Yahweh, walking in the commandments.

Life had brought one great disappointment—they had no children, even though they had often prayed for them (v.13). Unknown to them, God had reserved them to be the parents of the greatest of the prophets who should prepare the way for His Son.

Each of the twenty-four courses of the family of Aaron attended Jerusalem in its week. Each course was divided into seven and each division served its day in the Temple—individual priests being allotted tasks in the service. Zacharias’ “lot was to burn incense”. This was done in the morning and evening, and when the priest entered the Holy Place a bell rang and 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 are rendered (cf. Psa. 141:2; Rev. 5:8; 8:3). The Jews had perceived the spiritual significance of the fragrant incense, for we read that they were “praying without at the time of incense” (1:10).

While in the midst of his solemn duties, Zacharias became aware of the presence of someone else. Standing at the right hand of the incense altar was an angel of the Lord, illuminated by the dim reflection of the seven-branched candlestick. 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 (Rom. 2:4; Jn. 1:17).

Gabriel proceeded to relate John’s special mission as prophet and forerunner of the Highest. His mission was to convert the nation’s heart in readiness for Messiah, in the spirit of Elijah (whose future work, John foreshadowed (vv. 15-17; 1 Kgs. 18:37; Mal. 4:6).

What a son! What a mission! No wonder 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 prerogative and importance that he "stood in the presence of God"! Zacharias was given a sign, which by its very nature, constituted a rebuke for his unbelief. He would be dumb until the words of promise were fulfilled (v.19-20).

Outside the people grew anxious lest something had befallen 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 ignorance, wondering about the unfamiliar happening.

Zacharias departed home after his ministrations were over. In accordance with Gabriel's words, Elisabeth conceived. Friends and relatives would learn with wonder and joy that they were expecting a son. Gabriel had said that they would have joy and gladness and that many would rejoice at his birth (v.14). As time passed by Elisabeth prepared herself for the happy event and at length the child arrived.

#### **THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST (Luke 1:57-66).**

The word of God was verified again when Elisabeth brought forth a son. 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 wishes had come true.

On the eighth day neighbours and cousins gathered to witness the circumcision and naming of the child. Circumcision formally inducted Israelitish males into the covenant and signified the cutting off of fleshly ways. How completely this babe would cut off the flesh with the affections and lusts (Gen. 17:13-14; Gal. 5:24)! Moreover he would lead others on the path of repentance, confession and baptism — the true significance of circumcision (Col. 2:11-12; Rom. 2:29).

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! He was unaware of the arguing and could not speak his mind. They felt sure that he would confirm their choice and when, quite independently, he obtained a slate and wrote down "John", they were amazed. In apparent confirmation of his decision, at that instant his mouth was opened and he spoke and praised God (v.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" (vv. 65-66).

## **THE MISSION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST (Luke 1:15-17, 76-80).**

Samuel and Elijah had wrought spiritual reform in Israel and their work was typical of John's. Samuel was the last of the Judges and he "prepared the way" for kings to rule instead. Elijah also ran before Ahab after his reformation on Carmel (1 Kgs. 18:46). In other ways both of these great prophets foreshadowed John, as reference to previous lessons will show (Stage 2, Lesson 15 and Stage 3, Lesson 10).

Isaiah was the first prophet to speak specifically about the wilderness prophet, "the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD" (40:3-8). He went on to portray in graphic language how this would be brought about. Men's crooked ways would have to be straightened and the "mountains" of human pride would have to be levelled in the face of the divine glory about to be revealed. "All flesh", regardless of social standing, was grass and could not abide the Spirit of Yahweh blowing upon it. Those who lived "by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD" alone "would stand forever". The wilderness prophet would be no respecter of persons. Rich and poor, pious and profane alike, would be exhorted to baptism after confession of their sins, if they desired to receive remission of them.

Malachi, using the same words as Isaiah, declared that the "messenger of the covenant", must be preceded by one who would "prepare the way" (3:1). How else could they abide the day of his coming? The gospel writers make reference to Isaiah 40 and Malachi 3 when they set forth the identity and mission of John (e.g. Mk. 1:2, 3).

When Gabriel came to Zacharias he alluded to both prophecies and provided some added details. He declared that John the Baptist would be great in God's eyes because of his devotion to God alone. Like the Nazarite, no wine or strong drink must dull his senses. Moreover his mission was so holy that even from the womb the Holy Spirit would fill him. Thus endowed he would go forth with the same determination as Elijah, and convert all who would attend to the message of their God. That his mission runs a close parallel with Elijah's is seen from the fact that the very words used of Elijah's coming role at Christ's return, are used of John (cf. Lk. 1:16-17; Mal. 4:6). Indeed, he would be "Elijah" to that generation (Matt. 17:12).

After Zacharias had spoken by the Spirit of Messiah's work (vv.67-75), he addressed his own son (vv.76-80). He spoke of him as the "prophet of the Highest" who would "go before the face of the Lord" and bring the "knowledge of salvation" to His people. What love and wonder must have been his as Zacharias looked upon his own dearly beloved son. Then in words which recall the meaning of his name, he declared that such salvation would come through forgiveness, because of God's mercy in visiting man.

"The child grew and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel" (v.80). In solitude, living on locusts

and wild honey, he grew to manhood. Far away from the corruption of contemporary thought, 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.

#### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- At the appointed time God broke the silence of 400 years to prepare men for the coming of His Son.
- God wants us to love Him with all our heart, soul and mind. But Israel's worship had degenerated into cold formalism. Thus instead of being humble they became proud, self-righteous and hypocritical.
- Elisabeth and Zacharias were old and Elisabeth past the age of childbearing. Nevertheless God's purpose, though unknown to them, required that they should have a son in their old age who should prepare the way of the Lord.
- Far away from the comforts of life and worldly pleasures, John was educated for the difficult task of preparing a people for the Lord. In such an environment he learned to depend on Yahweh and there was developed that intense devotion that enabled him to fulfil his mission.

#### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

- “The Ministry of the Prophets” (C.C. Walker)—Chapter 40
- “Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Chapters 4 - 5
- “The Story of the Bible” (H.P. Mansfield) — Vol. 8, No. 1

#### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *Recount the incident in which John the Baptist was named.*
2. *What did Gabriel tell Zacharias about his son John when he was in the Temple?*
3. *What do you know about the upbringing of John the Baptist? What kind of a man was he?*
4. *Make a list of the similarities between John the Baptist and Elijah?*

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Describe the conditions existing in Israel when John the Baptist was born. Who were the rulers and what religious groups were there?*
2. *Relate the circumstances of John the Baptist's birth.*
3. *Outline the mission John the Baptist was called to perform.*
4. *How would you compare the work done by Elijah and John the Baptist?*
5. *What steps did God take to prepare the world for the coming of His Son?*

## 25. THE BIRTH OF JESUS

“That holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God”

*This lesson records the most momentous event in history thus far. The birth of the Son of God brought to a climax the promises made 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.*

*Our aim in this lesson is to see how prophecy was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, and to ponder the humble circumstances surrounding his birth.*

### Matthew 1; Luke 1:26-38; 2:1-10

#### THE WORD MADE FLESH.

God’s design from the beginning was to fill the earth with His honour and glory. This was stated at the outset when He promised men dominion over all things. Sin marred these initial intentions and brought death into the world (Rom. 5:12). But God purposed to destroy sin and provide fallen man with a saviour. This was made known in the condemnation of the serpent — the seed of the woman “shall bruise thy head” (Gen. 3:15). Also, the provision of “coats of skins” as a covering for sin was in itself a prophecy of Jesus — “the lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Gen. 3:21; Rev. 13:8).

The Old Testament is filled with the message of Messiah and the New Testament confirms this promise. Thus the whole of Scripture unites in him.

From the earliest times we find that particular men’s lives are so adapted by God that they are in themselves parables of Messiah (e.g. Joseph). Moses gave the Law, which in its enactments and ritual declared that a Saviour was coming. And so much was his life like Jesus’, that God declared that He would raise up a prophet like unto Moses (Deut. 18:18; Acts 3:23).

Prior to the Law, Jesus’ coming was contained in the promises made to the fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were told that in their seed all nations would be blessed and their seed would inherit the land forever (Gen. 13:15-16). Later David was promised a son, who would also be Son of God. Not only was he to be the **Saviour**, but **King**, ruling upon the David’s throne in Jerusalem forever (2 Sam. 7:12-16). The Psalms and the Prophets elaborate the promises and provide more details of the life and mission of Messiah. (See Lesson 3.) The gospels record the good news or gospel of the Saviour-King, but, in order to identify him at his birth, reference is made to his descent from Abraham and David (Matt. 1:1; Lk. 1:32-33, 54-55, 69-73).

## **GABRIEL VISITS MARY (Luke 1:26-38).**

Six months after Gabriel had appeared to Zacharias, he was sent by God to Nazareth to Mary. Nazareth was situated in despised Galilee on the edge of a steep cliff that rose precipitously above the plain Esdraelon. Mary was a virgin espoused to Joseph, of the tribe of Judah. Scripture had plainly stated that Messiah would be both the Son of God and Son of David (2 Sam. 7:12-16). Moreover, the child would be conceived of God, for Isaiah had prophesied that a virgin should conceive and bear a son, whose name should therefore be "Immanuel", or "God with us" (Isa. 7:14). Later in the Prophecy of Immanuel (Isa. 7-12) significant words of promise are found: "For unto us a son is born, unto us a child is given" (9:6). In this way God provided one who would have the capacity to completely overcome the power of sin. Divine Sonship, therefore, made sinlessness possible but not inevitable. God would thus be the saviour of man and glory and honour would redound to Him.

Faithful women in Israel knew that Messiah would be "born of a woman" and hoped that they would be chosen for the honour. Gabriel appeared to Mary alone and saluted her, "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women" (v.28). But Mary was perplexed and wondered in what way she was blessed above other women. As she wondered, the angel explained why: "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus".

In order to further identify her honour as the "handmaid of the Lord" (v.38) and mother of Messiah, Gabriel revealed the future mission of her son. He would be son of God and son of David and would rule over the tribes of Jacob from Jerusalem (vv.32-33). These were familiar words and they made it quite clear that she would be the mother of Messiah. But she still did not understand how this could be, seeing she was not a married woman. She did not realise how literally Messiah would be "the Son of the Highest". Gabriel explained that the special power of God, the Holy Spirit, would come upon her, and in this miraculous way she would conceive and hence the holy child would be the Son of God (v.35).

Imagine how Mary's mind would have reeled as she strove to appreciate the magnitude of her honour. Prophecies would pass through her mind as she came to the realisation that she was to play a most important role in the divine purpose. To provide her with reason for belief, Gabriel made mention of Elisabeth's conception in her old age and then declared that, "with God nothing shall be impossible" (v.37). These were significant words, for they were first spoken by an angel to Sarah when she doubted whether she would conceive according to the promise (Gen. 18:14)! Mary replied, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word". This statement of acceptance, following the Angel's explanation that the child should be conceived out of wedlock, seems to show that she appreciated that she would have to bear the taunt of unfaithfulness.

Gabriel left her alone with tumultuous thoughts. With the growing realisation of the honour and responsibility had come an intense desire to place herself in the hand of God. It also awakened a desire to confide in some understanding heart. But to whom could she go? Elisabeth, her elderly cousin, was rejoicing in the prospect of bearing a son. So Mary departed hastily for the hill country of Judea and there the two enlightened women of Israel spoke of the power of God, and meditated upon the great work God was about to do through the messenger and the Saviour (vv.39-55). After three months Mary returned home. Joseph was confronted with the dilemma of the situation. He was torn between his own self-honour that could not bear further association, and his love for her; and he decided to put her away secretly to avoid public disgrace (Matt. 1:19). His troubled sleep was invaded by an heavenly visitor: "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit". The divine message would do more than restore harmony and love, it would call forth from Joseph a profound reverence and bring out all the manly instincts to help and protect her in the difficult days ahead.

#### **NAME AND MISSION (Matthew 1:21).**

Joseph was also told that the child's name would be "Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins". Jesus is compounded of two words, "Yahweh" and "salvation". "Jesus" is the Greek equivalent of "Joshua" (cf. Acts 7:45; Heb. 4:8), or "Jehoshua" (Num. 13:16). Thus he was to have the name of that illustrious Israelite, whose mission nonetheless but typified his! Joshua caused the people to inherit the land. Similarly, God was in Christ, enabling him to destroy the enemy of sin. Thus the way to an eternal inheritance in the Lord has been opened to those who believe in him (Isa. 49:6; 2 Cor. 5:19-21; Acts 2:38).

#### **THE SAVIOUR IS BORN (Luke 2:1-7).**

The decree of Caesar Augustus that a census should be taken in Israel with a view to future taxation had set the whole countryside in motion. The decree required that everyone should go to his ancestral home for registration. Thus Joseph and Mary were faced with a long and perilous journey at a critical time. Mary would almost certainly know, as the scribes knew, that Messiah was to be born at Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2; Jn. 7:42). How would the prophecy be fulfilled? The explanation came in a wonderful way — she must go to Bethlehem at the precise time that she should give birth to her son in compliance with what appeared to be a legal necessity of purely human origin! How profound are the ways of God. Truly He rules in the Kingdom of men. How sure is the Word.

The long journey south was slow and arduous. Mary was conscious of the nearness of the great event which had occupied her thoughts and prayers constantly during the past months. But, alas, when they arrived at Bethlehem accommodation could not be found and the time when she



should bring forth drew near. There was no room in the inn. Mary's condition must have been obvious to many of the residents of Bethlehem. Yet none provided a home to receive her. It was a symbol of the advent of Messiah who "came to his own and his own received him not" (Jn. 1:11). A stable with its musty animal odours was all that was forthcoming. There Mary brought forth her firstborn son.

There in the darkness of the night a tiny cry mingled with the noises of the asses and camels. In the city in which God had chosen to anoint David king of Israel, David's greater Son was born!

Mary laid him in a manger. There in the humblest of circumstances, a rude stable, Jesus, now glorified and exalted, commenced his life — "He hath . . . exalted them of low degree" (Lk. 1:52). "God has chosen the weak things to confound the things that are mighty, and the base things of the world, and the things which are despised, to bring to nought the things that are" (1 Cor. 1:27). Even so, today, the Truth, and those who adhere to it, are despised. But the day shall soon come when they shall be exalted! "Who hath despised the day of small things?" (Zech. 4:10). This is the lesson of the stable.

#### **THE SHEPHERDS IN THE FIELD (Luke 2:8-20).**

That night the angel of the Lord appeared in glory to shepherds in the fields nearby. Their fears were unwarranted, especially in view of the joyous news for men that the angel had come to announce. The angel said, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (v.10-11). In these words the essence of some important Messianic prophecies is contained.

- The words "is born" come from Isaiah 9:6.
- "Saviour" fulfils God's declarations of His intention to provide salvation through his servant (Isa.45:21; 49:6; 53:11-12).
- "which is Christ" or Messiah seems to hearken back to Psa. 2:2-7, where God states that His begotten Son will be the Anointed.
- "The Lord" echoes Psa. 110:1, in which David acknowledges that his son is also his Lord.

Later, following the Lord's resurrection, Peter pieced together from the Psalms the new name of salvation into which men must be baptised for the remission of sin — the **Lord Jesus Christ** (Acts 2:34-38).

As a sign of the truth of his words, the angel told the shepherds that they would find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. It was then that the heavens lit up with the glory of an angelic host and rang with praise to God. The significance of the birth of the Son of the Highest was revealed in their words, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and goodwill toward men". In these words is contained instruction. Man must first glorify God, if he would receive "peace and goodwill". God is glorified when we submit to His will in repen-

tance, confession and baptism. Then He grants peace and joy, through the remission of sins (cf. Rom. 4:20; 5:1). The shepherds went to Bethlehem and found things exactly as the angels had said. They repeated the words of the angels to the wonder of all present and returned to their flocks with the praises of God on their lips.

#### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- The Scriptural prophecies of Christ's first coming were all fulfilled literally, and so we can place confidence in those relating to his second coming.
- God chose Mary for the honour of being the mother of His Son. From early youth she had acquired a love of God and developed a faith which enabled her to guide her son in all God's ways.
- By a wondrous control of the highest human institutions God enabled Micah's prophecy regarding the Messiah's birth at Bethlehem to be fulfilled.
- Jesus, the highest, was born in the humblest of places. The lesson for us is that the proud ways of flesh matter nothing. If we humble ourselves, God will be pleased to show mercy to us.

#### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

"Life of Jesus" (M. Purkis)—Chapter 1

"Nazareth Revisited" (R. Roberts)—Chapters 6, 7, 8

"The Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 8, Nos. 1, 2

#### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What lessons can be learned from the circumstances of the birth of Jesus?*
2. *What was said by the angels to the shepherds when Jesus was born? What is the significance of these words?*
3. *What is the significance of the name, "Lord Jesus Christ"?*
4. *Micah declared that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. How was this remarkable prophecy fulfilled?*
5. *What was Mary's reaction to the words of Gabriel?*

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *In what way did the birth of Jesus confirm the Old Testament?*
2. *Briefly outline the events surrounding the birth of Jesus.*
3. *Write an essay on the characters of Mary and Joseph as revealed up to the birth of Jesus.*