

May

May 1

II Kings 1-3

The pattern of tracking the history of Israel against the history of Judah continues. It's obvious at this point that Israel is turning away from God more quickly than the nation of Judah, though even Judah is not following God's leadership very well.

Elijah, the prophet, is nearing the end of his career. King Ahab has died, and his son, Ahaziah, has become Israel's ruler. The king sends a messenger to the land of the Philistines to see what their god says about his present illness, but Elijah is called by God to intercept the envoy, and to reprimand Ahaziah for consulting a false religion. (Ahaziah didn't know his history! I Samuel 5 established the futility of worshipping Ekron's "god".) When Ahaziah tried to order Elijah to appear before him, 100 of his best men died.

God tests the tenacity of Elisha's faith in chapter 2. Will he stick with his teacher Elijah to the very end? Elisha does, and is rewarded with "a double portion" of Elijah's spirit. What does this look like? We immediately are given examples. Elisha parts the river Jordan with Elijah's rolled-up prophet's cloak, just as Elijah did. He purifies the city water supply at Jericho by throwing salt in it, in the name of the Lord. Youths that have no respect for the God of Elisha find themselves cursed by the prophet and mauled by bears.

Elisha has an incredible relationship with God. He seems to always know the mind and will of the Father. His actions seem to be an extension of God's hand; he doesn't have to "seek God's face", but seems 'one with God'.

Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, still is a man who seeks to be God's king, but he continues to be entangled with Israel, which has rebelled against God. The governments of the two countries have good relations at this point, and could probably reunite the people under one government, except for the differences in their respect for God. God uses Elisha, in I Kings 3, to proclaim military victory for a combined force from Israel, Edom, and Judah through an incredible miracle. It is obvious that God is blessing them all because of Judah.

May 2

II Kings 4-5

We take a break temporarily from tales of kings and wars, to expand on the character of Elisha, the prophet successor to Elijah.

Remember that Elisha had received a double portion of the Spirit that inhabited Elijah. What does this look like? As mentioned yesterday, Elisha always seems to have an open 'pipe line' of communication with God. Rarely is prayer mentioned---he just acts with the mind and will of God. He does astounding miracles! A widow is about to lose her two sons to slavery, because she can't pay her bills. By Elisha's word, she suddenly finds herself in possession of a vast supply of olive oil, and its sale provides all the money she needs. In another instance, poisonous gourds are accidentally included in a stew; by Elisha's word (and his addition of a handful of flour), the poison is made harmless.

The rare time we see Elisha pray is when he intercedes with God to bring back a boy from death. God hears his cry, and the boy's life returns. Don't miss the symbolism that represents Jesus! Elisha lies atop the dead boy, mouth to mouth and eye to eye and hand to hand, matching his life up with the dead boy's. In a similar way, Jesus took our place, dying on the cross in our stead. The death that we deserved, to pay the price for sin, was put on Jesus so that now we can live.

In chapter 5, Naaman was highly esteemed in Aram because God had worked through him to bring military victory to his country. Why was God helping a pagan country to victory? The victory was over Israel (I Kings 22:29-40), as punishment.

A servant girl captured from Israel spoke of a prophet who could cure Naaman of his leprosy. Naaman almost missed his healing when he went to visit Elisha, because his pride was hurt when the prophet would not appear personally to Naaman. The act needed for a cure was just sent by a messenger. There's a sermon for you! God desires to "heal" us, make us more like Jesus, but we're too proud to give any of our valuable time to such simple things as prayer, Bible reading, helping the needy, and such as that. Pride robs us of blessings. "Humble yourself before the Lord, and He will lift you up."

Gehazi, Elisha's servant, learns a tough lesson at the end of this chapter. Though God's servant deserves to be paid for devoting his life to God, it is not something to be pulled from God's hand. God may have a better 'pay' for us than money.

**May 3
II Kings 6-8**

Today's reading continues with miracle stories about Elisha, who inherited "a double portion" of the Spirit that drove his mentor, Elijah. The stories make a turn, from being about Elisha to being more about kings and countries.

What has happened to Naaman? The last we knew, he was commander of the Aramean army, and now, just one chapter later, Aram was back at war with Israel.

Is Naaman that ungrateful for the miracle done by Israel's God? I suppose it's just as likely that he has lost his position for being too "soft" on Israel. Regardless, the healing from leprosy of a prominent Aramean government official seems to have had no effect on the attitude of the Aramean king toward Israel.

We see even more about the attitude of Ben-Hadad, king of Aram. Through God's mighty miracle, the army that had sought to attack Israel finds itself trapped inside Israel's capital city, Samaria. The Israelites, instead of destroying the army of Ben-Hadad, serve them a great feast and release them. "Some time later," the warped king sends his troops back to lay siege to and capture Samaria. You and I are apt to be thinking, "God is not going to be pleased with this." It's ironic that lepers play a big part in the story of that army's defeat, 7:3-16.

God continues to bring the heavy hand of justice on Ben-Hadad. The king has the gall to send a messenger to Elisha, to ask if his present illness will be fatal. God has Elisha tell the messenger to lie to the king, that he'll recover. In fact, the messenger himself, Hazael, kills the king. (Ben-Hadad didn't recover, yet neither did he die *from the disease*.)

Remember Hazael? Back in I Kings 19:15-18, God calls Elijah to anoint Hazael king of Aram. Did he do it? Has Hazael had the royal anointing all this time and patiently waited? Scripture doesn't tell us. God also calls Elijah, at the same time, to anoint Jehu king of Judah, which Elisha actually does in chapter 9.

May 4
II Kings 9-10

Today's reading takes a strong stomach. The bloodshed is nonstop.

Ahab and his queen, Jezebel, led Israel in turning away from God. It was not forgetfulness of God, or running out of time for God. The royal couple made a decision to make Baal worship the religion of the land. The Bible tells us that our offerings of praise brought to God are like a sweet aroma in His nostrils; going with that analogy, the actions of Ahab and Jezebel smelled like skunk.

God always, always gives time for repentance and turning from our sinful ways, and never acts rashly. With extra time, though, some just add to their sin. The prophecies fulfilled in this chapter were given decades before to Elijah. God had all he could take of Ahab and Jezebel, and commissioned Jehu to destroy ALL their family. God was entirely justified.....but it sure made for sickening reading for us today.

Jehu served God's purposes well in the task, but was only a *pretty good* king. God gave him a chance, and he did many good things, but didn't destroy the golden

calves that Israel had worshiped since the time of Jeroboam. God did not specifically tell Jehu to destroy the idols; does God have to tell us *everything*?

At the beginning of today's reading, Elisha sends an apprentice prophet to give Jehu his anointing and orders from God. After his speech, the apprentice turns and runs! The friends of Jehu, sitting and watching, say, "Why did this madman come to you?" I guess it did look crazy. In a twist of irony, when Ahab's son asks the lookout who is coming in yonder chariot, he says, "The driving is like that of Jehu son of Nimshi---he drives like a madman." I reckon God chose Jehu for his zeal.

May 5
II Kings 11-13

Strange doings. The mother of the deceased king, Ahaziah, kills the whole royal line of heirs to the throne, including all brothers and children of the king, and seizes the throne for herself. (She may or may not have let the females live. It's not clear.) One of the sons, though, is hidden away and *brought up in the temple*, just as the high priest Samuel had been. Obviously, this will be one of Judah's most Godly kings.

Joash begins his reign at seven years old. This means that, actually, the priest Jehoida was running the country until Joash gradually could take on the full weight of that responsibility.

Since Joash had actually lived in the temple the first few years of his life, it's no surprise that it's important to him that repairs be made there. He knew every crack and breaking door in the building. Funds were available from the regular temple offerings, but 'administrative costs' had eaten into the collection, so that no repairs were being made. Were priests actually stealing from the treasury? Probably, because when better accounting procedures were instituted, it seems there was plenty of money for repairs. Of course, 12:13 suggests that money was wasted on pretty utensils instead of being used for structural repairs.

Just an aside: Were you as surprised as I was when, in 13:3, we find that King Hazael of Aram named his son after the previous king, whom Hazael had murdered?

The northern kingdom, Israel, is really sinking into a pit. King after king is evil, and we remember that Moses persistently prophesied in the book of Deuteronomy that turning from God would bring disaster. In fact, Moses specifically said that the Israelites would be conquered by another country and taken captive to a foreign land. Lord, how long? Mercy is great, but we know that your goodness will eventually demand justice. Any little act of turning toward God buys them a little more time, such as in 13:4-6 and 13:14.

May 6
II Kings 14-15

Amaziah was one of Judah's Godly kings. The southern kingdom of Judah doesn't pursue God with zeal, but at least they don't seem to completely turn away, like Israel seems to be doing. Their punishment will not be as severe or long as that of Israel.

Why did Amaziah request a meeting with the king of Israel, Jehoash? He probably wanted to sign a peace treaty, but he may have even wanted to reunite the two countries of Judah and Israel. Jehoash was not interested, because at this point in time Israel had superior military strength. He was completely given over to the standards of the world around him---*might makes right.*

God shows unbelievable mercy in 14:26-29. Jeroboam II was one of the most evil kings of Israel, but God's heart couldn't stand to see his people suffer any longer. He gave them a period of relief from their oppressors, using JEROBOAM II as his instrument! Sometimes, in our own lives, we can hardly believe God's mercy toward us when we are at our worst. God will bring us relief, and even uses us in His service. *Knowing your Bible will help you see that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

In chapter 15, Israel's evil reaches its highest peak. Men assassinate the king and claim the throne for themselves, only to be assassinated themselves after a very short time. It's political chaos. The empire of Assyria has been formed by this time, and can't help but notice that Israel would be easy prey. The country is easily defeated by Assyria, and the people become subjects to the Assyrian Empire.

At this time, however, their southern kinfolk in Judah have a succession of kings who do what is right in God's eyes. That country is not conquered at this time, though there is plenty of evil throughout the nation.

Take note that King Azariah, in 15:1, is the same as King Uzziah in 15:13. This is the same Uzziah mentioned in Isaiah 6:1.

May 7
II Kings 16-17

Ahaz was an evil king, and came along at a bad time. With the Assyrian Empire growing in strength, they needed to turn whole-heartedly toward GOD. Instead, Ahaz appealed to Assyria to protect Judah from the Arameans, giving the emperor piles of gold and saying, "We are your servants."

King Ahaz had no respect for the temple. The holy furnishings were just like any other furniture to him, and he moved things from their appointed places and

added an altar because he thought it was prettier than the previous one. In 16:12, he's saying, "God, I'll handle the daily affairs here. I'll call you if I need you."

Israel had been subjects of the Assyrian Empire, but were still allowed to have their own king. However, King Hoshea of Israel snuck around looking for help from Egypt to rebel against Assyria. Emperor Shalmaneser found out, and cracked down on Israel. He took the people out of Israel and scattered them to other countries within the empire. This is exactly what Moses had warned would happen if they turned away from God. This was about 712 BC, or about 700 years after Joshua led them into the Promised Land. God is patient, but justice must be served.

God's plan then (and now!) was for his people to enter a foreign land and convert it to following Him. He is the only true God, creator of all, merciful and loving, with a perfect plan for bringing us abundant life. Instead of being living witnesses and ambassadors for God's new life, the Israelites had instead been converted to the customs of the land they entered, a life of pain and sorrow. *That's a hard lesson for us to face: Are we a witness for God, or are we slipping into the customs of the culture around us?*

The emperor of Assyria moved foreigners into Samaria (Israel). A priest was brought in to show the new folks how to worship the God of Samaria. We know that this priest concentrated on the first five books of our Old Testament. (To include more would be to admit that the Israelites had purposely turned from God.)

May 8
II Kings 18-20

Hezekiah's grandfather was the priest Zechariah. When Hezekiah became king, he therefore was whole-heartedly turned to God and His ways. It's interesting that usually Judah's good kings are compared to David; Hezekiah is said to follow in David's ways, 18:3. It's amazing that, in verse 5, we read that Hezekiah surpassed *even David* in trusting God.

Judah shrinks dramatically when Assyria defeats all the fortified cities of Hezekiah's country fourteen years into his reign, except for the capital city of Jerusalem. Hezekiah comes up with a huge amount of money to pay the Assyrians to leave off further oppression. This never works! The powerful neighbor always returns for more.

When the Assyrian army returns, they lay siege to Jerusalem. Hezekiah calls on the prophet Isaiah to pray, and enters into dramatic and heartfelt prayer himself. God intercedes with an overnight slaughter of 185,000 Assyrian troops, without Hezekiah's army raising a hand against them. God makes a way where there is no way.

After this, Hezekiah gets a hideous boil, and God tells him through Isaiah that he will soon die. Hezekiah pleads for his life, and God actually gives him 15 more years! God gives him an incredible sign that his life has been extended---God turns the sundial back 10 hours!!!

In his hospitality, Hezekiah show visitors from Babylon everything in the palace, including every treasure. Didn't he know these visitors would tell everyone about it when they got home? I'm sure Hezekiah did mean to impress his visitors. Babylon never forgot about the great riches in the weak little country of Judah. Isaiah tells the king that the Babylonians will come back to conquer, but not in his lifetime. *Can you believe it?!?* Hezekiah says that's fine, since he'll be dead and gone when it happens.

May 9
II Kings 21- 23:20

Manasseh does a turnabout from the leadership of his father, Hezekiah. Though evil, God allows him to reign in Judah for fifty-five years.

Fathers pass on their values to their children as they spend time with them. In Deuteronomy 6, we are commanded to make spiritual instruction of our children part of our everyday lives. Kings often left the raising of the children to their many wives, often with disastrous results.

When the Israelites had entered the Promised Land many years before, the native inhabitants were doing great evil, though God had placed Abraham among them 450 years before as an example. Abraham had been greatly respected, as was his son Isaac and grandson Jacob. Yet God-worship was pushed aside when Jacob's family moved to Egypt. By the time Moses brought the Israelites back, the Canaanites had so thoroughly turned away from anything Godly that the Lord was willing to have them destroyed completely. Now, in II Kings 21:11, God tells the prophets that Manasseh has led the Israelites to greater evil than the Canaanites.

Though God tells the prophets that it's time for Judah to be defeated and the inhabitants taken away captive, Josiah buys them time. The priest Hilkiah brings Josiah a long-neglected scroll recently found in the temple, probably the book of Deuteronomy. It is read to the king, and cuts Josiah to the heart: 'God is about to destroy us, and we deserve every bit of it.' He humbled himself before God, and led the country to very extensive religious reform.

May 10
II Kings 23:20- 25

Not even David turned to the Lord like Josiah.

An abrupt cultural change- can it last? As soon as Josiah is dead, the people turn back to evil. It takes much longer to make such an abrupt change as Josiah made, unless people wholeheartedly turn to God. That's the only thing that would have saved Judah at this point: To fully rely on God.

Even a king that rules only three months, like Jehoichin, can do evil in God's sight. It's an attitude of turning toward or away.

The king of Babylon took out all the men of valor and all the skilled artisans, and the king. This lessened greatly the possibility of a successful revolt. Still, the uncle of Jehoichin, who was put in place as a puppet king, attempted an unsuccessful revolt against the Babylonians. The Israelites had a deep national pride, still thinking of themselves as "God's chosen people". The temple and all the significant buildings of Jerusalem were destroyed. This tore the very fabric of who they were.

**May 11
I Chronicles 1-2**

We've entered into a different kind of reading, haven't we? From stories of kings and battles, we've gone to a listing of names. Don't be discouraged! It'll take a day or two to make the transition. Look for names you recognize, as if you were looking through old Sunday School records or deed books. The original readers were part of a society that knew their own family tree well.

Verses 1:8-13 give us the origin of the original inhabitants of the Promised Land (Canaan). Noah's son Ham had a grandson named Nimrod, who seems to have been the first to expand his land holdings by warrior methods, taking what he wanted by force. His descendants occupied all of the Promised Land that God led the Israelites to about 1400 BC (except for the land of the Philistines).

The Philistines were also descendants of Ham, arriving in Canaan about the same century as the Israelites. They probably came from Crete, settling on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean.

In chapter 2, especially notice Caleb. We know Caleb! He was in the exodus from Egypt, most famous for being one of two faithful spies (Numbers 13) that trusted in God's ability to provide a Promised Land against seemingly impossible odds. He's listed here as being the great-grandson of Judah. Can this be right? Judah was among those Israelites that first settled in Egypt, and we know they came out over 400 years later! Did the Chronicler forget some generations? Maybe not. We can see that men fathered children in those days when they were well past 100 years old. Still...that's a mighty long stretch of years.

We are reminded that the Bible was never meant to be a history book, but a book of the *spiritual history* of a people. The Bible records the relationship between God and human beings, with its ups and downs, so that we might grow in our own

relationship to God. It does fairly well with history, so sometimes we are tempted to rely on it for an historical record.

May 12

I Chronicles 3-5

Who was David's second son? You'll find that names sometimes are listed differently in Chronicles, indicating that there were other sources for this writer than just those used by the writer of the Samuels and Kings. In II Samuel 3:3, the son of Abigail is listed as Kileab, but here he is listed as Daniel. In the same manner, in 3:12 we see the name Azariah (as in II Kings), but in II Chronicles 26 he's called Uzziah.

In 3:17, we see that Chronicles was written after the Samuels and the Kings, since they list descendants during the Exile (where II Kings stops). More years will alter the perspective of how Israel and Judah went wrong.

In 4:9, we see the reference to Jabez. This is the prayer made famous in best-selling books of the past few years: "Oh, that you would bless me...". It's not spelled out in verse 8, but because of the context, we can assume that Jabez was the son of Koz. As in Kings, one who wholeheartedly turns to God is blessed.

May 13

I Chronicles 6-7

Verse 6:27 surprised me. I knew, of course, that Samuel was the son of Elkanah. In I Samuel 1, Elkanah is said to be a member of the tribe of Ephraim, but here we are told that Samuel's father was a Levite. I thought Eli, Samuel's mentor, was a Levite, but he is not even listed here. What do you make of that? The author of Chronicles has different sources than the author of Samuel and of Kings (including those, since Chronicles was written later), and is known to 'romanticize' history now and then.

I and II Chronicles have the same object as I and II Samuel and I and II Kings. That is, both authors look back on Israel's history from a point past the Assyrian and Babylonian Exiles, and try to explain *what went wrong*. How did "God's chosen people" end up as captives in a foreign land, if God is truly the one and only, all-powerful and all-loving God? They both come to the same conclusion, that the people caused it themselves.

Notice the name Korah in 6:37 and Asaph in 6:39. Some of your Bibles, most notably the King James version, will name Asaph as the author of a few of the Psalms, and others are attributed "for the sons of Korah". Both were listed here as music ministers.

I'm especially intrigued by the listings of the number of fighting men in each tribe. Not all tribes give a total, but remember that in David's census at the end of his reign (II Samuel 24:9), a total of well over a million was given.

I reckon a lot of these names meant more to the original readers.

May 14
I Chronicles 8-10

The age of this book is indicated in 9:1, when it speaks of those who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon. I'm sure this was valuable literature to the Jews, as it listed names in families before and after the Exile.

Note the repetition in 8:33 and 9:39 of Saul's family line. Better to mention it twice than to take a chance of leaving it out, I guess! The mention in chapter 9 is a prelude to the story of Saul's death in chapter 10.

In 10:13-14, we get our first good look at the theology of the Chronicler. More than in I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings, the writer will very plainly tell you that blessings are a direct result of obedience to God, and bad results are a direct result of disobedience to God. We'll see many cases where the author may 'paint with too broad a stroke'.

For instance, 10:13 tells us, "Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord." Back in Samuel we read that *the kingship was taken from Saul* because he was not obedient to the Lord. You see that the author of Chronicles takes the results of disobedience to its logical conclusion.

May 15
I Chronicles 11-13

The author of Chronicles leaves out some stories that seemed important in I and II Samuel and the Kings. It reminds us of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), that told of the same life (Jesus) but had a different mix of how they told the facts.

The Chronicler leaves out the details of the transition of power from Saul to David. There is nothing of David's years of fleeing from Saul, nothing of David's close friendship with Jonathon, and no mention of the short reign of Ish-Bosheth over most of Israel. This author does, however, give us much more detail of the beginning of David's band of warriors who gathered to him at Ziklag (while he was "banished from the presence of Saul").

In 11:6 we find out how Joab became David's commander-in-chief. Joab took up the challenge of being the first to go up against Jebus (Jerusalem). This challenge sounds like something David would do, and it explains why David would choose Joab for his commander-in-chief, a man whom he didn't trust. Joab was inclined to take matters into his own hands, and was ready to murder for political gain.

There is no mention in I Chronicles of the role Abner played in uniting all Israel behind David (II Samuel 3). Why is this left out? We know that the Bible doesn't try to be an exact history, but a history of God's relationship to us. What is there about certain stories that doesn't fit into what the Chronicler is trying to say to us? Stay tuned.

**May 16
I Chronicles 14-16**

The Philistines decided to attack Israel when David first became king; Israel would probably be somewhat vulnerable, since new commanders and officials would not be settled in to their positions yet. It would seem to me that the Philistines should have taken the opportunity to befriend Israel, since David had spent several years living in their territory as a friend. However, the Philistines were holding a very small portion of seacoast land; their country's progress depended on getting more land.

The Philistine offensive against Israel, under David, failed miserably. The Philistine dreams of expansion were dashed.

We had read earlier, in II Samuel 6:6-7, that Uzzah was killed when the ark was being moved because he irreverently reached out to steady the ark when one of the oxen stumbled. In Chronicles 15:13, however, David says the Uzzah incident happened because Levites weren't doing the moving. The writer of Chronicles seems to be interpreting his information sources from a priestly perspective.

Notice the passage about David's wife Michal in 15:29. She disapproves of David's celebratory dance as the Ark is brought into the city. In II Samuel 6, the disapproval is because David exposed himself during his leaping around. However, in Chronicles she disapproves because it is celebration. Throughout history there has been conflict between those who believe that worship should celebrate and those who believe that worship should be reverent. We find it hard to do both.

**May 17
I Chronicles 17-20**

It amazes me that God makes this unconditional promise to David. David's descendants are bound to be unfaithful to God, but this promise does not say, "If your sons will walk in my ways, then...". David is more than a king; he symbolizes a new kind of covenant, backed by a never-ending love. Even when we turn away, God will not change His promise, though he may have to practice "tough love". So it is with the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Even when our love fails, God will keep loving us, and constantly seek ways to bring us back to Him.

David goes about the task of securing his borders, through wars with the countries around him. God blesses this. The Israelites will soon find themselves in an era of peace. (This would be an obvious time to turn wholeheartedly to God. They didn't.)

Notice something missing? When we read through the other history of Israel, in I and II Samuel and I and II Kings, this was the point at which David's sin with Bathsheba was mentioned, then David's rocky relationship with his older sons. Where is the story of Uriah's death, and the attempts by Absalom and Adonijah to take their father's throne? Evidently, those facts are not relevant to the point the author of Chronicles is trying to get through to us. Maybe they are too much about politics and not enough about our relationship with God. Let's get a little more perspective before we decide what the Chronicler's dominant theme is, and maybe his choice of what facts he included will make more sense.

**May 18
I Chronicles 21-23**

God was displeased with David for taking a census of the fighting men. It showed lack of trust in God's ability to lead the army to victory. After all, numbers wouldn't decide a battle when God was fighting for Israel. Would two million troops be too many? Would a handful be too few?

David was not allowed by God to build the temple, but he came as close as he could to it! He assembled all the building materials he thought would be needed, then left the job to Solomon. The countries bordering Israel had learned not to bother God's Chosen People, for the Lord fought for Israel. There would be peace while the temple was being built.

Before his death, David divided temple work among the families of Levites, with particular families having set jobs. In years to come, the families would grow beyond what was necessary to do the regular religious duties; the Levites would take their turns by a lottery system.

**May 19
I Chronicles 24-26**

The Levites were the 'other' tribe, not among the twelve to receive land in Israel (though they received some cities). They were set aside, consecrated for God's service.

David divided religious duties among the Levites, according to their families. As their numbers would increase, they would carry out their responsibilities by lot -- some would be "on" for that month while others would be "in reserve" until another month. All were technically under the supervision of the king (25:6). David felt it important to assure continuation of good music in worship. Also, the temple had to have good treasurers, accounting for all the gifts given to the Lord's house.

**May 20
I Chronicles 27-29**

God had given Israel peace all around, in contrast to most of David's reign. David wisely did not disband the army, but worked out a system for an army reserve. One twelfth of the army would be on active duty at all times, for one month of the year. How does this compare to our country's reserves? Our national guard is active one weekend per month, plus two weeks in the summer. Sounds pretty close to the same concept.

David did all he could to prepare for the temple, though God wanted Solomon, the next king and David's son, to do the actual building. Besides getting together the materials, David actually had the plans (straight from God). David took up a special offering, too.

Maybe the biggest thing David did to ensure the success of his son as king was the commissioning ceremony in chapters 28-29. Before a great assembly of all the people, David passed his authority on to Solomon. He gave him instructions on the work of the temple, on his duty to follow God, and then told the citizens their responsibilities in support of Solomon and God. Good start! David was well loved, and Solomon is his chosen successor (and God's). Solomon did not force himself on the country, as some of his brothers had tried to do.

**May 21
II Chronicles 1-3**

Solomon and the Israelite people still consider the tabernacle, that tent that was center for their worship as Moses led the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land, as a sacred place of worship. The ark of the covenant has been moved to Jerusalem and resides in a much less elaborate tent. Once the temple is built, we won't hear about the tabernacle any more.

By now, you can guess that the writer of Chronicles is a priest or Levite. He is really into the names and duties of those that care for and lead worship. He leaves out all those great political stories we read in I and II Kings and the Samuels. His biggest concern is the spiritual heritage of Israel. David could do no wrong.

Solomon has asked God for wisdom in leading the country. Since he didn't ask God for riches or honor or death of his enemies, God is quite pleased. God grants Solomon wisdom, but throws in riches and honor, too.

Notice that God grants wisdom for leading the country. Solomon will face a great test in also applying wisdom in handling the effects of incredible riches.

You and I would wonder about the wisdom of Solomon becoming an international dealer in chariots, which could be seen as weapons of war. I guess God gave Solomon the wisdom to not keep all the chariots for himself!

I've often wondered about Hiram, king of Tyre. Is he a believer in the God of Israel? He certainly has great respect for God. I think it most likely that he was pantheistic, believing in many gods

**May 22
II Chronicles 4-6**

Solomon had the temple built with the future in mind. The altar was huge, the basins for ceremonial washing were numerous, as were the tables and the sprinkling bowls. He had a stage put in courtyard, for big ceremonies and big crowds. The same is true in our churches today: We build with the idea that people will continue their devotion to God, and will draw others. Sadly, we have a lot of nearly empty churches, for the devotion to God has fallen below expectations.

Solomon knew that all of Israel needed to be represented when the ark of the covenant was put in place in the new temple. Elders from each tribe accompanied the move, but the king was careful that only the Levites did the carrying.

In his prayer of dedication, Solomon gets on his knees on stage before all the people. His prayer voices our understanding of a holy place: It's not that God is so small as to be able to reside in a man-made building. It's just that we have set aside this place for holy use and as a location to focus our devotion toward God. It's not as important to turn our bodies toward the holy place as it is to turn our soul and everything we have toward God and His ways. Worship recognizes God's rightful place ...and our own.

**May 23
II Chronicles 7-9**

God had also sent "fire from heaven" at the beginning of the use of the Tabernacle (Leviticus 0). You also remember "fire from heaven" when Elijah was having his contest with the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel (I Kings 18:38). The reaction of the people is always spontaneous exaltation of God, for this is not a chance bolt of lightning, but an expression of God's power at a precise time and place.

Solomon had hundreds of cattle and sheep sacrificed. It seems overdone! Each sacrificial animal was to be a representation of the worshiper giving him/herself completely in praise to God. Could the rich give themselves more completely to God?

The Chronicler writes of a familiar theme at the end of chapter 7: God promises blessings for obedience, but threatens that disobedience will bring destruction and exile from their land.

Solomon had incredible riches. From the description in chapter 9, it seems he was almost wasteful - some people just know how to be rich! I suspect the Chronicler is hinting that the riches could have been used more productively in helping the citizens of the kingdom.

May 24
II Chronicles 10-13

The account of the division of the kingdom of Israel into two countries, Israel and Judah, is nearly the same here as in I Kings 12. We don't, however, get told as much of Jeroboam's history. II Chronicles will emphasize the history of Judah.

Abijah was his dad's pick to succeed him as king, and this seems to be fine with his brothers. Rehoboam set his other sons up as district governors in fortified cities.

I Kings had not revealed any good in Rehoboam, portraying him as an ungodly leader. In Chronicles, though, Rehoboam is said to have led the people in following God for the first three years of his reign (11:17).

Rehoboam comes very close to leading Judah to its final destruction. The king of Egypt attacks, and takes fortified cities throughout Judah, all the way up to Jerusalem---that is practically the whole country! Rehoboam turns penitently to the Lord, and the country is spared.

Was Abijah a good king or not? I Kings 15:3 claims he didn't follow God's ways, yet here in chapter 13, he is portrayed as a very Godly king. What's going on here? Looks like a case of Judah national pride (selective memory?). One historian

sorts through the acts of the king one way, another does it differently. Some facts that seem negligible to the one.

May 25

II Chronicles 14-17

We know that both Israel and her southern neighbor, Judah, were defeated and carried captive out of their homelands because of unfaithfulness to God. For Judah, this catastrophe happened 134 years after it happened to Israel. Were they that much better? Yes, according to II Chronicles.

In chapter 14, we see that King Asa commanded the people to seek the Lord, and they followed this leadership. In a battle 15 years into his reign, Judah defeated an army from Cush (Ethiopia) that was far greater in numbers and technology.

In 15:4, the prophet Azariah tells the people that if they seek the Lord, He will be found by them. Then, in 15:15, we see that they took him at his word. They sought the Lord eagerly and wholeheartedly, and God was found by them. They rejoiced greatly because of this. We do, too! When someone really seeks the Lord, and finds Him, the Bible tells us that even the angels rejoice.

Asa makes one grand error. Late in his reign, Israel aggressively attacks Judah's northern border. Asa pays the king of Aram to change his support from Israel to Judah's side, and that breaks Israel's will. Politically, it was a smart move. However, God was not pleased that Asa didn't turn to Him. The king's lack of faith is a bad example for his people. God punishes Asa with constant battles until his death.

May 26

II Chronicles 18-20

We rarely have any mention of the kings of the northern kingdom, Israel, in Chronicles; emphasis is always on the kings of Judah. In Chapter 18, Ahab is mentioned because of his close relation to Jehoshaphat in this story.

Ahab consulted his 400 prophets. Did that number sound familiar? Think back to the confrontation, in I Kings 18, between the prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal. All 450 prophets of Baal were killed at the end of that confrontation, but I Kings 18:19 had mentioned there also were *400 prophets of Asherah*, who were not killed at Mount Carmel. Though in II Chronicles 18 these prophets talk about God and the Lord, they are obviously not related to the same God that Micaiah hears from.

Jehoshaphat, though an earnest follower of God, almost loses his life from hanging around with the wrong crowd. Anybody ought to be able to see the application to our times.

I'm impressed with Jehoshaphat's system of judges. It's amazingly similar to the one Moses set up at the urging of his father-in-law, back in Exodus 18.

We see a great contrast between Jehoshaphat's reaction to invaders, in chapter 20, and Asa's reaction back in chapter 16. When up against bad odds, Jehoshaphat called on the Lord (Asa called on the king of Aram), and even called for a fast and a sacred assembly by all the people. God answered. The opposing army was destroyed without Judah's forces having to raise a hand, plus God gifted them with much plunder.

And yet....."the people still had not set their hearts on the God of their fathers."(20:33)

**May 27
II Chronicles 21-24**

You can tell immediately that Jehoram will not be a Godly king. In 21:4, he secures his kingship by the ways of the world - he kills all those that might compete for the throne. His dad had groomed him for the position, and had made his brothers wealthy, to minimize the threat of Jehoram's brothers. Reliance on God would have given more security than murderous acts!

God did not work on Jehoram's behalf for peace; the nations all around Judah continually were in an assault mode.

Jehoram's son succeeds him, Ahaziah. At his death, Ahaziah's *mother* takes control of the government, by killing all the relatives.

Judah's history takes a turn for the worse because of the influence of blood relatives from the family of Israel's evil king Ahab. What could turn the tide back? Jehosheba, daughter of Jehoram, is one of the great unsung heroes of the Bible. She hides little Joash, son of Ahaziah, while Athaliah is on her murderous rampage, and raises him secretly in the temple. When Joash was seven, he was declared king, as the Levites murdered Athaliah. (You can imagine that his advisors, the priests, did most of the governing for the first years.)

Joash was a Godly king; Judah was back on track because of the heroism of one woman, Jehosheba.

It's sad that when Jehosheba's husband and the king's mentor, Jehoida, died, the king listened to the wrong crowd and turned from the Lord. His son, Amaziah, "righted the ship".

May 28
II Chronicles 25-27

As the author of Chronicles sees it, the kings of Judah are a step above the kings of Israel, in that a bad king in Judah serves the Lord but not completely, while a bad king in Israel is one who turns his back completely on God.

Amaziah's greatest disobedience was in hiring mercenary troops from Israel, a country steadily and quickly becoming more heathen. The king was obedient in dismissing them, but the hired Israelite troops were insulted and worked toward Amaziah's eventual downfall.

Uzziah, his son, reigned during the days of the prophet Isaiah. The fortifications destroyed by an invasion of the army of Israel during his father's reign were rebuilt by Uzziah, and the shields and weaponry taken were replaced. Uzziah spent much of his time building up Judah's defense; he should have spent more time building up his country's *spiritual* strength. At this point, Judah needs a king who will make dramatic religious reforms, getting rid of idol worship all together, and seeking to make God their *first line of defense*. Uzziah's son and successor, Jotham, was a good king but not a reformer.

May 29
II Chronicles 28-30

Ahaz becomes king of Judah. He leads his people in idolatry, and thus leads Judah into a period of great turmoil and disaster. Without God's hand to stave off evil forces all around, there is anything but peace.

There is a parallel in our time. Many of us pray for peace in the Middle East, though the Bible indicates there can never be a lasting peace there. The peace we pray for, though, is not one where every country loves all the other countries. Rather, we pray that God will keep the forces of destabilization at bay. Without God, this dynamic balance of powers in Israel and the surrounding countries can be lost in an instant. We pray for times in which people can go about their daily lives with the ability to worship, teach their children God's ways, and evangelize without fear of reprisals of any kind.

Hezekiah becomes king after Ahaz, and it's like a breath of fresh air. Ahaz had eventually closed the temple, after allowing all kinds of idol worship in it. It took days of diligent labor, but in a couple weeks the Levites had the temple purified and ready for resumed usage. Many Levites and priests went back into the Lord's service, after being consecrated.

Hezekiah calls for a renewed observance of the Passover. He even sends messengers all over the neighboring country of Israel, inviting them to the Passover. Most in Israel ignored the invitation, but not all. The Passover celebration was so meaningful that Hezekiah declared a one-week extension, supplying the extra sacrificial animals needed from his own flocks. Passover is a great celebration of the mercy of God.....and that's what they really needed at this point.

**May 30
II Chronicles 31-33**

Chapter 31 begins by telling us that the visitors who had come from Israel to Judah for the Passover were greatly moved, so much so that they tore down Asherah poles and sacred stones all along the way as they returned home. Too little, too late! Within only two or three years, God allows Assyria to invade and conquer the northern kingdom of Israel, taking all the people away captive to other locations in the Assyrian empire, and bringing other conquered peoples in.

Hezekiah reinstates regular offerings in the temple. Slowly but surely, he is leading religious reform. The reforms are put on hold when the Assyrians seek to include Judah in their onslaught on conquest. Hezekiah, with encouragement from the prophet Isaiah, fights the onslaught by encouraging the citizens to put their trust in God at this time of crises. The army of Judah never has to lift a hand in battle, as God destroys for them the invading army.

If not for the time and prayer effort diverted to standing against the Assyrian army, Hezekiah would have likely been that great reformer for God that the country of Judah so desperately needed at this point.

Hezekiah is succeeded by his son, Manasseh. It's sickening to see that this son covered over every bit of religious reform that his father had instituted, and then some. Not only did Manasseh equal the evil of all the worst of the kings of Israel (now an exiled people), but he led the people to practice all those things that had gotten the previous Canaanite dwellers of this Promised Land total destruction from God.

Though Manasseh had a change of heart in his final years and turned back to God, neither the people, nor the next two kings after him, took him seriously and followed.

May 31

II Chronicles 34-36

Josiah came to reign 57 years after the end of Hezekiah's reign, with 2 evil kings between them. He could not build on the good done by Hezekiah, but had to discover God's ways all over again.

It's remarkable that Josiah went throughout a foreign country, Israel, tearing down idolatrous shrines. Remember that Israel was now part of the Assyrian Empire!

The book found during temple repair was most likely the book of Deuteronomy. Remember, in that book, that Moses repeatedly warns of the consequences of turning to idolatry and away from God's laws. Josiah is sobered by the scenario now unfolding, and calls on the whole country to renew their covenant with God immediately! God calls off the consequences during Josiah's lifetime --- and surely would have continued that mercy for future like-minded kings. It was not to be.

Note 36:21. The exile lasted 70 years, and each of these years repaid God for a Sabbath year missed. The people of God were supposed to have let the land rest every seventh year, plus every 50th year for the year of Jubilee. That would indicate that Sabbath years hadn't been observed for the last 443 years (if my math is right), or since the days of --- Israel's first king, Saul.

are important to the other. I could sarcastically say that, thank God that doesn't happen in our time---we just report the facts!