

April 22 : Scriptures 1 Chronicles 25-27

SUMMARY

See? Chronicles pays a lot of attention to the kind of things a priest would be interested in, mainly if it would pertain to arrangements needed after rebuilding the Temple and restarting the Temple's services. The Chronicler also records how King David organized his administration, likely to preserve the "org chart" for future generations should a kingship be reestablished after the Babylonian exile.

Chapter 25 starts with a curious introduction, "David and the officers of the army also set apart..." (25:1). That means the Temple crew – priests and Levites who ministered to the Lord and ran the Temple functions were in direct line under David's administration, and those who served the Lord were as vital to the kingdom's function and health as the "secular" administration and army. I also find the Chronicler's focus fascinating. The list of appointments and duties doesn't start with the High Priest or the priests performing the sacrifices, and it begins with the musicians!

Focus: Musicians.

Leaders: Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun (You've seen those names before, remember?).

Duties: Prophesying, accompanied by musical instruments (25:1). What is this prophesying on instruments? To prophesy is to speak under the inspiration of Yehovah's

Holy Spirit.

Anointing with oil is an outward sign of an inward event – the Holy Spirit resting upon a person (Hebrew scriptures, subject to come and go) vs. the Holy Spirit living in a person (New Covenant scriptures, continuous). As the priests and Levites were anointed with oil before installation into the Lord's work, the Holy Spirit is upon them and working through them. The Holy Spirit would be their musical and lyrical inspiration as they played their instruments and sang. The Holy Spirit's inspiration is why some of those songs were captured and written down, becoming a part of our Holy Spirit-inspired Bible. Just read the headings of several psalms, and you'll see the names of the inspired men from this team of musical priests. Example: Asaph wrote Psalms 73-83.

One of the leaders, Heman, had quite the inspired musical family. The Lord prophesied and delivered many sons to him, fourteen to be exact (25:5). It's also interesting to note that these 288 musicians were both trained and skillful in music (25:7), and young and

old, teachers and their pupils ministered together (25:8). Also, note the number of men serving on behalf of each family division – 12. Twelve is a governmental, organizational, complete number. In other words, each division had everything “covered.” The number twelve also represents all of Israel, the twelve tribes.

And now, in chapter 26, we turn from the musicians to the Temple facilities crew, drawn from the two Levite family lines of Kohath and Merari. Why not the third Levite family line of Gershom? Because Asaph was a Gershomite (6:39-43), his relatives mainly served in music. The focus here is on:

Gatekeepers (the “protectors” of the House of the Lord). Hey! Do you recognize the name, Obed-Edom (26:4)? Yes, this is the *same person* as the Obed-Edom, whose family housed the Ark for three months (2 Samuel 6:11) and helped move the Ark to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 15:18). Now that the Ark resided in Jerusalem, Obed-edom and his family served as gatekeepers for the Ark. As a reward for Obed-edom’s service, the Lord blessed him with eight sons (26:5)! The divisions were split according to family line and required young and old to be capable of the work (26:13, 7-8).

Storehouse guards. Guards were required for the gates and the storehouses and the roads leading to the Temple. That way, the priests could screen those who were able to enter the Temple and determine whether their sacrifice was acceptable or not (26:17-18).

Temple Treasurers. These duties fell to the Gershonites (26:20-21), descendants of Moses’ son, Gershom. These men guarded the Temple treasures that included items dedicated to the Lord by worshippers for daily operations, and some supplies were more long-term, which included the plunder the army brought to the Lord. Some of the battle plunder (going back to the prophet/judge Samuel and King Saul) was used to repair the Lord’s temple (26:27). Keep in mind that the Temple had not been built yet. The Chronicler talks about what King David planned to build for the Temple and how to run its operation. But the Chronicler is also writing “after the fact,” after the Temple was destroyed and needed rebuilding. Yes, it gets a little confusing but hang in there.

In chapter 27, we move to the officials’ and justices’ records. The focus is on:

Officials. “This is the list of the Israelites, the family heads, the commanders of thousands and the commanders of hundreds, and their officers who served the king in every matter to do with the divisions that were on rotated military duty each month throughout the year” (27:1). In brief, there are twelve divisions of 24,000 men who served on a one-month rotation. All forces are called up as required in wartime, and the divisions are the monthly

standing army. You'll notice some familiar names from King David's Mighty Men: Benaiah – who led the Mighty Men, and Asahel – Joab's brother.

Tribal heads: These were the primary leaders of each tribe. There is no primary leader listed for Gad and Asher if you look closely. It could be that those tribes were under another leader's supervision, or for the sake of keeping the tribal list at the number twelve, the leaders were left out to include the Levites (typically excluded from specific lists, but included here) and both of Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.

David didn't count the men who were 20 years of age and under due to the census issue (27:23-24. See 1 Chronicles 21).

Storehouse guard: These men supervised the fields and vineyards and the production and storage of vineyard products, olives/sycamore produce, olive oil, herds of cattle, donkeys, camels, flocks of sheep, and goats.

And finally, the primary palace staff:

- Jonathan, David's uncle – counselor.
- Jehiel – stewarded David's sons.
- Ahithophel – King's counselor, then Jehoiada, then Abiathar (All known names that came to the fore during David's flight from Absalom in 1 Samuel).
- Hushai the Archite – King's friend.

Joab – David's general of his army.

INSIGHT

It's impressive how the Chronicler focuses on the things of worshipping God before he writes about the administrative duties of the kingdom. Sadly, we often spend more time and effort in the administrative stuff of our lives before times of worship during our day. I think it's a good reminder to start our day with a time of focusing on God with worship and prayer and then weave those "focus-only-on-God" times throughout our day. Just sayin'.

April 23 : Scriptures 1 Chronicles 28-29

SUMMARY

And now, after we've seen the staff and supply preparations for the Temple (in retrospect), the Chronicler turns his eye toward King David's public Temple commissioning service. In chapter 28, David calls *all* of Israel's leaders to Jerusalem for the momentous occasion (28:1). David explains that it was on his heart to build Yehovah a Temple, but because of all the killing he had done over his lifetime as Israel's army commander and God-given king, the Lord wouldn't allow it. Instead, the Lord declared by His word that David's son, Solomon, would serve as king and would complete the task after David's death (28:5-7). Furthermore, Yehovah's main requirement is that Solomon learns and obeys His commands entirely.

Side note: "...for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father" is not a "lovey-dovey" family thing (28:6). It's covenant language that means Yehovah will be Solomon's sovereign king, and King Solomon will serve as Yehovah's vassal king. A vassal king must obey everything in his covenant terms with his sovereign king and master. Since vassal to sovereign obedience is a strict requirement between two human kings, how much more between God and His chosen king over His people, Israel? David also calls all the Israelite leaders to the same high standard of obedience since every Israelite is under the Lord's Sinai/Mosaic covenant from birth (28:8).

Next, the king turns to his son and commissions Solomon to build the Temple when the time comes (28:9-10). That's a tremendous responsibility if you ask me!

David completes the ceremony by handing over the blueprints, job descriptions, assignments, and materials list for everything needed for the Temple project. And we also get a crucial piece of information. David didn't come up with the Temple project plans and processes on his own. *Yehovah gave King David the entire plan just as the Lord gave Moses the Tabernacle plans on Mount Sinai!* Check this out:

Moses/Tabernacle – "You are to set up the tabernacle according to the plan for it that you have been shown on the mountain" (Exodus 23:30).

David/Temple – "David concluded, 'By the Lord's hand on me, he enabled me to understand everything in writing, all the details of the plan'" (28:19).

Gee, maybe the Lord has a purpose for making sure the Tabernacle and Temple are designed according to His plan? Of course! According to Hebrews, both designs are laid out to reflect the Lord's throne room in the spiritual realm, a type of heaven on earth

where God's throne sits among His beloved people. "These serve *as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things*, as Moses was warned when he was about to complete the Tabernacle. For God said, Be careful that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown to you on the mountain" (Hebrews 8:5). God has always intended for us to live in His presence. What was lost in Eden – intimate fellowship with Him – was partially restored in the Tabernacle/Temple with God's *Shekinah* (God's physical presence) dwelling in the Holy Place. God's physical presence on earth is why Moses and David had to take great care in transmitting the blueprints of God's throne room on earth with such care and precise detail!

At the end of chapter 28, King David leaves us with his encouragement to Solomon.

Chapter 29 opens with the finale of King David's life. Unlike the end of David's life in 1 Kings 1-2, which is filled with political intrigue (typical of the books of 1 & 2 Kings), 1 Chronicles views David's end through a priestly lens. It's all about the Temple preparations, David's prayer of gratitude to Yehovah for being so wonderful to him, his family, and all Israel, Solomon's God-ordained enthronement, and a summary of King David's life.

David reminds the people that the task is immense. Because Solomon is young and inexperienced (David is 70 years old, and Solomon is approximately 20-30 years old, likely closer to 20), he will need help. And because the Temple is for the Lord, it requires everyone's best efforts, including donations for the materials. As King David is not a man who asks others to pay for his gifts to God (2 Samuel 24:24, 1 Chronicles 21:24), he sets the bar for personal giving. Over his lifetime, King David has amassed over 100 tons of gold and 250 tons of silver (among the other every day and precious supplies), and he gives it *all* for the Temple's construction. The gold and silver (in short tons at this writing) would be worth \$ 5,723,958,975! *Yes, 5.7 BILLION DOLLARS!* How's that for a church building program budget? The leaders follow suit and contribute an additional "185 tons of gold and 10,000 gold coins, 375 tons of silver, 675 tons of bronze, and 4,000 tons of iron" (29:7). And now you know why the Babylonians wanted to capture Jerusalem! The amount of treasure built into the Temple, even after Judah's wicked kings had lost or given away some of it, was still astronomical! But hey! Only the best for Yehovah!

Let's move on to David's prayer. It breaks down very simply – God is great and has done great things (29:11-13), and "who are we to claim any virtue for what we've given to You. We're just temporary residents on earth, and everything we have comes from You anyway. Test our hearts to know that we've done this willingly and joyfully. Keep all of our hearts committed and obedient to You, especially my son, Solomon" (29:14-19). And

then the whole company of leaders and Israelites holds an excellent worship service with whole burnt offerings (wholly given to the Lord), drink offerings (wholly given to the Lord), and sacrifices (likely fellowship offerings for a feast in the Lord's presence) followed by Solomon's public enthronement ceremony. But if you remember, Solomon was already crowned as Israel's king after a nearly successful coup by his brother, Adonijah, in 1 Kings 1. This coronation is a second ceremony to confirm Solomon as king (29:22) when David is very old and about to die.

Chapter 29 concludes with a customary summary of King David's life and reign. And now we'll pick up where 1 Kings 1 begins – the long line of Israel's kings from Solomon's reign through the division of the kingdom into north and south and the dual exiles by the Assyrian and Babylonian armies.

INSIGHT

So often, we see political leaders demand that the people of their nation make personal sacrifices while they do little at all. Leaders need to set the bar of obedience, as we see in (1 Chronicles 28:8). The sacrificial giving began with the highest leader in the land, David, inspiring the other leaders to join in. But does sacrificial giving exclude us if we're not "leaders"? Absolutely not! Even if our leaders fail to live up to their words or standards, our God is our ultimate leader. By surrendering His Son for us, He made the most significant sacrifice of all. As the Christian song lyrics say, "He died for me, I'll live for Him" and "I Surrender All!" Therefore, we should be inspired and follow His example, ready to give all to Him.

April 24 : Scriptures 2 Chronicles 1-3

SUMMARY

I like how 2 Chronicles 1 begins, "Solomon son of David strengthened his hold on his kingdom. The Lord his God was with him and highly exalted him." First, it's a natural flow from the previous chapter, 1 Chronicles 29, that affirms Chronicles was once a single scroll. But I *love* that Solomon's success is attributed firmly to God. Period.

We begin as Solomon goes to Moses' Tabernacle at the high place in Gibeon to seek the Lord (1:3). The Chronicler points out that the Bronze altar is the original one, which Bezalel built for Moses (1:5). *That means the Bronze Altar and the rest of the Tabernacle furnishings were around 470 years old and still in service!* That's amazing when you think of the United States as just over 225 years old.

So, King Solomon offers *one thousand* sacrifices to the Lord on the Altar and waits for the Lord's response (1:5-6). Why? Because it's the place where people received communication from the Lord via Yehovah's High Priest. If you've already read through 1 Kings 1-3, you know that Solomon has solidified his power by removing persons who created problems for his father, David, and who would create problems for him as well – Solomon's brother Adonijah and David's general, Joab. Now Solomon needs the Lord's help to run the kingdom. 1 Kings 3 is the same account we find here. It might be fun for you, dear reader, to go back and read these two accounts side by side to see the similarities and differences that would give you insight. As we go through 2 Chronicles, read the similar stories in Kings to see how the perspective is different and how the two authors view the same events.

The Lord responds to Solomon and asks him what he wants. Solomon wisely asks for wisdom, which would actually be for more divinely-granted wisdom. The Lord is pleased with Solomon's request and grants it and everything else that any other king would typically ask. You know, things like scads of money, glory, and the death of his enemies. God's blessing was so great (in keeping with the opening verse of the Lord exalting Solomon) that "God gave Solomon wisdom, very great insight, and understanding as vast as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone—wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, sons of Mahol. His reputation extended to all the surrounding nations," as 1 Kings 3:29-31 says.

God blessed King Solomon with unbelievable wealth! His army had “1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen” (1:14), and Solomon wisely stationed them throughout his realm for quick deployment. The Holman Christian Standard Bible puts this into perspective. Pharaoh’s army only had 600 chariots during the Exodus, and Sisera of Hazor (Judges 4) had 900 chariots. To say that King Solomon’s army was formidable is an understatement. His large army was necessary since Solomon expanded Israel’s kingdom to its greatest extent.

Precious metals were so abundant in Jerusalem that they were as common as stones, and valuable cedar was as common as sycamore in Judea.

Solomon bought horses and chariots from Egypt and Kue (an area in modern Turkey) and flipped them by trading them to the Hittites and Arameans (1:16-17). Yes, King Solomon was a horse-trader. This horse-trading increased his wealth and improved trade relations with Israel’s neighbors. There’s also a problem with this horsing around because it begins to show cracks in Solomon’s character and spiritual armor. The Torah an Israelite king from amassing three things in abundance – horses, women, and wealth (Deuteronomy 17:16-17). As a reminder of how he was to live and rule, Israel’s king was to write a copy of God’s Torah (His commands, guidelines, and instructions) and read from it every day (Deuteronomy 17:18). Horses? Strike 1. Precious metals? Strike 2. Amazingly, given the Yehovah-focused, spiritual nature of 1 & 2 Chronicles, the third strike is not detailed here. Solomon’s accumulation of wives led his heart away from the Lord and caused the Lord to tear the Israelite kingdom in half. Strike 3. All we read about is how King Solomon’s son drove the split and not Solomon’s responsibility for provoking the Lord.

Chapter 2 is the time when Solomon initiates the Temple’s construction along with his palace (2:1). Solomon will build the Temple to do all that the Tabernacle does and finally reunite the Ark with the rest of God’s furnishings (2:4). Because the Temple project will be so grand, the king requests help from Hiram, king of Tyre, in the form of additional artisans, woodcutters, and valuable wood products in exchange for vast amounts of food, wine, and oil (2:10).

Hiram is impressed! He praises Israel’s God for Solomon and agrees to his request. Hiram sends the perfect craftsman who is not only very skillful, but Hiram’s mother was a Danite from Israel, and his father was from Tyre. What excellent international cooperation! So, Solomon sets to work gathering his crew of 153,600 men from among the foreigners within his kingdom (2:17-18). Again, Solomon does things in a *big* way!

And now, the Temple begins to rise on Mount Moriah, where Abraham almost sacrificed his son, Isaac, and where the threshing floor of Araunah (Ornan) was located that David purchased for a sacrificial altar (3:1). The dimensions of the Temple alone were 90' x 30' with a 30' x 30' entryway. The interior decorating scheme of cypress wood paneling with all of the interior overlaid with gold is mind-blowing (3:7)! Solomon then subdivides the interior room of the Temple into two sections, the Holy of Holies (30' x 30') leaving the Holy Place (60' x 30'). The gold for the Holy of Holies alone was 45,000 pounds, affixed to the wood on the ceiling and walls with gold nails (likely gold-plated iron nails because gold nails would smash down when hammered in).

Solomon adds an interesting touch to the Temple that the Tabernacle didn't have – two gold cherubim standing guard side by side, facing out toward the Holy Place. Each cherubim's wings stretched to the sides with a span of 15'. Their wingtips touching in the middle over where the Ark would be placed. In the words of Darth Vader, "Impressive! Most impressive!" Next, Solomon's artisans create the Parochet (the curtain that separates the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place) and install it so no one can see into the Holy of Holies and get struck dead. It would be like someone peeking into God's throne room, to put it lightly. And finally, the team forges and installs two massive bronze pillars on either side of the Temple building. Why does Solomon name them *Boaz* and *Jachin*, you ask? The names mean "He will establish" and "Strength is in Him" and are a declaration of faith in the Lord (3:17).

INSIGHT

Mount Moriah is where Yehovah told Abraham to sacrifice his son and then prevented the determined parent from following through. This incredible act of faith set the Lord's covenant with Abraham in stone. It was also where the Lord stopped His angel from punishing Israel for their sin via the plague brought on by David's census. In this location on Mount Moriah, death was averted twice from God's people. Now it was to be the place where God would continually deal with sin and death through His ordained Temple sacrificial system, which foreshadowed the Ultimate Sacrifice to destroy death's power through a death – God's Son, Jesus. From one of the earliest places in scripture, chapter 21, God chose Mount Moriah to be ground zero of His plans to deal with our sin problem, eradicate death and its effects on humanity, and restore our relationship with Him. What God does, He does in a *big* way!

April 25 : Scriptures 2 Chronicles 4-6

SUMMARY

Solomon continues the work! In chapter 4, Solomon and his team create the Temple furnishings – the Bronze Altar, the Bronze Laver (the colossal water reservoir shaped like a bowl), and the bronze washbasins on wheeled carts. Again, I'm struck by the immensity of the Temple furnishings. The Tabernacle Bronze Altar was 7.5' square and 4.5' tall (Exodus 27:1), and yes, that was supposed to handle all the sacrifices of the Israelites in the wilderness for forty years. But Solomon's Bronze altar was 30' square and 15' tall, and the priests needed a ramp to ascend the altar to lay on the fuel and the sacrifices. Think of the heat that such an enormous altar would create!

On the other hand, the Bronze Laver was the same size (7.5' high and 45' in circumference) as the one Bezalel built for Moses. Like Bezalel's Laver, the Temple Laver also rested on the backs of twelve oxen bronze statues, facing outward, three to a side (4:2-5). This bad boy held 11,000 gallons of water which is not surprising due to so much washing of sacrificial parts and priests' hands.

But wait! Solomon adds another change to the Temple furnishings. Whereas Moses' Tabernacle had one Gold Menorah and no other tables besides the Table of Showbread, Solomon's built ten gold Menorahs to light the Holy Place (5 on each side) and ten tables placed five on each side.

Then Solomon's team construct the wall surrounding the Temple itself, creating the Temple Courtyard encompassing the Bronze Altar and Laver. Since this wall had gates outside the Temple, the doors were bronze, not plated with gold.

The remaining bronze articles, utensils, and decorations were cast in clay molds in the Jordan River valley (4:17). The amount of bronze was so large that it was immeasurable.

Finally, Solomon's team creates the remaining gold furnishings, utensils, and decorations. King Solomon has the Temple's entry and inner doors overlaid with the purest gold as a finishing touch. About 40 years after Jesus' day, a famous priest named Josephus wrote that the east-facing gold entry doors of the Temple were so polished that the rising sun would nearly blind those looking at the Temple in the morning. *C'est Magnifique'!*

Chapter 5 details the completion of the Temple and its dedication. Solomon stores his father's "consecrated things" in the Temple treasuries, and the celebration begins!

As King David called the Grand Assembly at the end of his life to commission the leaders of Israel to build the Temple and affirm Solomon's kingship, so Solomon calls another assembly to dedicate the Temple to Yehovah (5:2-3). Even though the Temple is ready, all that is lacking is the Ark of the Covenant that had remained in David's tent during the construction. Again, like his father, Solomon precedes the Ark as the priests carry it from the lower levels of David's City to the heights of Mount Moriah, where the Temple stood ready to receive God's presence. The number of livestock sacrificed is uncountable, and the blood must have covered the path to the Temple.

I want to point out a couple of remarkable details. 1) When the priests set the Ark in the Holy of Holies, the poles were left in the rings. With the two large cherubim on either side of the Ark, it was impossible to set it down with the poles pointing side to side. Therefore, they turned the Ark. The poles stuck out through the curtain (5:9) but weren't visible from the Holy Place. 2) The Chronicler notes that the only things in the Ark were the tablets of the Law that Yehovah had carved *with His finger* for Moses (5:10). That makes me wonder where Aaron's rod and the jar of manna went. Sadly, the Bible is silent about that.

And now, the climax! Everything is set in place, the attendant priests leave the Temple's interior, and the worship team commenced with the music and trumpet blowing. All the priests and Levites are on duty for the glorious occasion. As the Levites sing and the intensity grows, a cloud manifests – Yehovah's Shekinah, His physical presence – and fills the Temple. The intensity of God's presence is so overpowering that the Levites can't stand up to continue ministering to the Lord in song (5:16). Could that possibly happen if our worship services were wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord, our hearts and hands were clean, and we worshipped with all our might? Would God's presence manifest so much that we fall flat on our faces? Oh, that it would happen and spread across the United States and the whole world!

King Solomon begins his dedication with a declaration of what the Lord promised, a place for His house and a king over His people, which He has now fulfilled (6:1-6). Solomon declares the work completed (6:10-11). Then the king begins his dedication prayer while standing on a bronze platform with the exact dimensions of the original Bronze Altar. He kneels before the Lord and begins (summarized):

(14) Lord, you are the only God, and You keep covenant with your faithful people.
(15-17) Yehovah, you promised my father a son and a lineage that will always hold the throne. Now that there is such a king, please establish his reign.

(18-20) Yehovah, we built You this Temple, but you don't inhabit Temples. The entire creation is Your Temple. This Temple is just where we meet with You and pray to You.

(21) When we pray, please hear us and forgive us.

(22-23) Yehovah, let justice prevail when a man is forced to take a false oath. Don't let a man's words twist justice. Judge the guilty and acquit the innocent.

(24-25) Yehovah, if an enemy defeats Your people because of their sin (a covenant curse for unfaithfulness) and they repent, forgive them, and restore their land to them. (Sadly, this is a problem throughout the book of 2 Chronicles)

(26-27) Yehovah, if You cause the rain to stop because of covenant unfaithfulness and Your people repent, forgive them, teach them how to live the right way, and send the rains.

(28-31) Yehovah, if any of these things happen and we're suffering, forgive each person whatever needs forgiving when they pray to You.

(32-33) Yehovah, if a foreigner who doesn't know You comes here to pray to You because of Your great fame, listen to them and grant their request so that *all* will know You are the only God and fear You as the children of Israel do.

(34-35) When You send us to war, Yehovah, hear our prayer for victory.

(36-39) Yehovah, if we sin so severely that you exile us from our land as a covenant punishment and discipline, hear us when we turn toward this place. Forgive us and bring us home to this land, this city, and this Temple.

(40-42) Yehovah, please heed my prayer. Take Your place amid Your people. Bless Your priests, bless Your people, and bless the king.

Amen!

INSIGHT

There's a beautiful picture in this section, even if the scene is shocking. The blood of the multitude of sacrifices creates the path for the Lord's throne to come to His Temple. Once inside, Yehovah's presence fills the Temple and rests in His holy place.

Jesus' bloody self-sacrifice created the path of salvation by which God's throne is set up within the believer. Then the Lord takes up residence within us through His indwelling Holy Spirit. It doesn't take a multitude of sacrifices for the people. It only takes one sacrifice for a multitude of people. "But this man, after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God. ...For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:12, 14).

April 26 : Scriptures 2 Chronicles 7-10

SUMMARY

What a blowout! I mean, King Solomon's celebration was *off the hook!* Chapter 7 opens with Solomon's Temple dedication in full swing. Chapters 5 and 6 show us the completion of the Temple and the beginning of the ceremony. By the end of chapter 5, God's glory has filled the Temple's interior, and in chapter 6, Solomon dedicates the Temple to make it a House of P for all nations, not just the Israelites.

Now we see Solomon's Temple in full operation. God responds to Solomon's prayer by sending fire down from heaven to light the Bronze Altar and begin the temple services (7:3). With the sacrificial altar lit, Solomon offers up a multitude of sacrifices for dedication. The number of sacrifices is so immense that Solomon and the priests must consecrate an additional area next to the bronze altar to handle the load (7:7).

The reason King Solomon built the Temple on this location (Mount Moriah) goes back to King David and the event at Ornan's threshing floor. After a three-day plague swept through Israel, the Plague Angel stood above Mount Moriah, ready to strike Jerusalem. David prayed to the Lord to stop the angel's hand, and the Lord commanded David to build an altar on the spot, which the king did (1 Chronicles 21:18). Amazingly, King David didn't have to start the altar fire. God sent fire from heaven to consume his sacrifice (1 Chronicles 21:26). Now, not many years later, Solomon's Temple and its Altar stand on the same spot, and again God sends down fire to start the Temple service. Gee, almost like God had a plan?

So, when did all this celebration take place? I'll try to make it simple, and all it takes is a little math and detective work.

The 7th month on the Hebrew calendar is Tishri (*Tih'-shree*). The 7th month occurs in Autumn and would place Solomon's Temple dedication sometime from late September to early October. The dedication lasted for seven days, followed by a "festival" for seven days, and ended with a solemn observance on the 8th day (7:9). If you've learned about the Feasts of the Lord in Leviticus 23 (and other places in the Torah), you know which one this is. Since the people are sent home on the 23rd day of the 7th month (7:10), then starting with the 23rd day and counting backward, here are the calendar days of the whole celebration:

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- Tishri 8-14 – Solomon's Temple Dedication (Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, would have been celebrated on the 10th day per the Lord's command, Leviticus 23:26-32).
 - Tishri 15-21 – the annual Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:33-36. Israel's harvest festival celebrates Israel's 40 years with Yehovah in the wilderness).
 - Tishri 22 – the 8th day of the feast, a time of rest and reflection (Leviticus 23:36).

So, the Temple was fully dedicated to the Lord with Yehovah's affirmation by His presence and by consuming the offerings. King Solomon goes to his palace, and that night the Lord appears to him with some encouraging and very solemn words. Yehovah will answer Solomon's prayer. He will listen to His people's prayers and forgive them if they're repentant. Why? "My eyes will now be open and my ears attentive to prayer from this place. And I have now chosen and consecrated this temple so that my name may be there forever; my eyes and my heart will be there at all times" (7:15-16). While the Lord affirms to Solomon His covenant that David will always have a man on Judah's throne, whether Israel is in the land or the temple remains standing depends on the king's and the peoples' faithfulness to Him. Yes, that's a grave responsibility that King Solomon and the Israelites have taken upon themselves.

In chapter 8, we got a look at King Solomon's building projects and labor force. Note that King Solomon conscripted laborers only from the Canaanites that remained after Israel conquered the land. Solomon did not conscript laborers from the Israelites themselves. It's also interesting to note that Solomon built a separate house for the Pharaoh's daughter. After all, his marriage was a political alliance, and Pharaoh's daughter came from an idolatrous family. She was not to live in the king's palace who served Yehovah alone, for the palace grounds were holy, dedicated to the Lord (8:11). Chapter 8 notes that Solomon was very faithful in the sacrificial worship service, including celebrating the feasts of the Lord. He also built a fleet of ships that sailed around the Middle East and beyond, bringing in vast amounts of treasures from various countries, like the seventeen tons of gold in verse 18. Wowsers! That's one rich dude!

Chapter 9 recaps the queen of Sheba's visit. Compared to the one in 1 Kings 10, this account is similar. But what strikes me about this reading is that she asked him about whatever came to mind, and he had an answer for her! Imagine what it'll be like sitting at Jesus' feet, asking him every question on your mind or your heart, and him being able to explain it all clearly. Not only will we be able to understand the universe much better, but we'll see clearly why certain things have happened in our lives, even the difficult and tragic things. We'll see how they all work together for good because that's what God's

word says. "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). We'll just have to wait for a while for Jesus' insights.

The chapter concludes with an overwhelming list of Solomon's wealth. His influence spread throughout the Middle East and further. Sadly, Solomon's reign came to an end after 40 years. But look closely at the standard obituary for Israel's kings. Something is missing about the end of Solomon's life. The Chronicler says nothing about how Solomon's heart was led astray by his pagan wives, women he had wed to make alliances with other kingdoms. 1 Kings points that out because it has to do with making unholy alliances and how his women led Solomon off track from Yehovah. The kingdom split and the growing idolatry ultimately led to Israel's exile. The Chronicler leaves all that out. However, I like what my study Bible says about this, "even though the Chronicler did not dwell on Solomon's shortcomings as the writer of first kings did, he was certainly aware of them. He chose to focus on Solomon the temple builder rather than on Solomon the man. The temple that he built was of greater significance than the king himself" (HCSB commentary). That's a great explanation.

The kingdom split occurs in chapter 10. As with 1 Kings, Solomon's son, Rehoboam, takes the throne, and the people find an opportunity to ask for relief from King Solomon's taxes and mandatory service. Rehoboam has a choice – lighten the load or not, and Rehoboam does neither. The prideful son refuses the elders' advice, the ones who served his father, and instead follows the advice of his peers. They foolishly advise King Rehoboam to show the people who the boss is by making their burden even more heavy and harsh. Well, we all know that people don't like being pushed around, and eventually, the breaking point comes. Israel may have been a single nation, but the tribes still held onto their twelve tribal identities. The rest of the tribes saw this as Judah trying to dominate them. And so the kingdom fragments into the northern Kingdom of Israel and the southern Kingdom of Judah.

I must admit, given the political polarity of today, I wonder how close the United States is doing the same thing? Will we have leaders who will be magnanimous and gracious and pull us together? Or will we have leaders who will be foolish like King Rehoboam, whose goal is to show everyone who's boss, stomp on the people, and dominate the nation to the breaking point? It's something to think about.

This event was ultimately from God because of Solomon's idolatry. That's the beauty of reading the book of Kings and the book of Chronicles together. You get a much fuller picture.

Chapter 10 ends with the ten northern tribes pulling away from Judah. King Rehoboam sends the man in charge of forced labor to negotiate or drive the other tribes back into the union, but they kill him. And so begins Judah's decline.

INSIGHT

The Lord started the Tabernacle (Leviticus 9:24) and Temple's Bronze Altar fires (2 Chronicles 7:1, 3) to inaugurate their service to Him. Jesus often brings new opportunities to us throughout our lives. We have our part to play to prepare for what He wants us to do, but He has His part to play. Before we start the new direction, it is a good practice to take some time to ask the Lord for a fresh anointing (empowering) of His Holy Spirit to begin our God-given task. It could be a new job, relationship, project, or any new life event. The key is to let Him "send the fire," showing that He's with us, blessing our way forward.

April 27 : Scriptures 2 Chronicles 11-14

SUMMARY

Before we go further into the book of 2 Chronicles, please notice that we don't get much information about the kings of the northern kingdom, Israel. The Chronicler focuses on the Temple and the restoration of God's royal line through David's family. The writer mentions Israel's kings only so far as they impact the account of Judah's kings. Understand? And on we go!

Chapter 11 picks up with King Rehoboam. After the rebelling tribes kill his head of forced labor, Rehoboam gathers Judah's army to teach the rebellious Israelites a lesson. You can tell he's a young, inexperienced leader who thinks good leadership uses force rather than cooperation and mutual benefit as a "wise man" would do. Thankfully, Yehovah tells Rehoboam to back off via His prophet Shemaiah (11:2-3). The national schism is not an accident, and it's from the Lord as punishment against Judah's royal house for their idolatry.

What the book of Kings points out that Chronicles doesn't is God's intent is to reunify the two kingdoms into one. However, (spoiler alert!) this was and still is God's plan, "tell them, 'This is what the Lord God says: I am going to take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them into their own land. *I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel, and one king will rule over all of them. They will no longer be two nations and will no longer be divided into two kingdoms*" (Ezekiel 37:21-22). Seeing that the Lord has begun regathering Israel since the late 1800s and especially after World War II, you're watching the fulfillment of prophecy.

And now, back to King Rehoboam. You can't say he didn't learn anything from his father. Like Solomon, King Rehoboam was also good at strengthening Judah's cities and fortifications. Also, we learn that many Levites fled from the northern kingdom to Judah because of Jeroboam's idolatry and his refusal to have Yehovah's priests serve in his places of idol worship (Dan and Bethel). Understandably, like-minded people separate according to their spiritual beliefs. Those committed to Yehovah left the northern pagan territory and went south to Judah, where Yehovah's Temple was located. The Chronicler lets the reader know who is on the right side and who isn't! Things go well for King Rehoboam for three years. Why? "Because they walked in the ways of David and Solomon for three years" (11:17).

Unfortunately, King Rehoboam also learned "family life" from his father. Yup, he has multiple wives and many children (11:21). Of those children, he chooses Abijah to be his

successor and wisely disperses his other sons throughout Judah, gives them wives to appease them, and makes sure the line of succession is established as he desires.

But after three years, King Rehoboam falters (12:1). He foolishly abandons Yehovah and the covenant terms, leading the rest of the people to do so as well. Let's see. What did Yehovah say He would do if His people abandoned Him? Oh, yeah! He would give them over to their enemies (Deuteronomy 28:25). And that's what happens in chapter 12 when the Egyptians attack! Pharaoh Shishak moves against Judah in King Rehoboam's 5th year, capturing Rehoboam's fortified cities even up to the edge of Jerusalem (12:4). Thankfully, Yehovah gives King Rehoboam a heads up about why the Shishak Attack and Judah repents. Seeing their repentance, the Lord gives Judah a reprieve, although He does something interesting to teach Rehoboam and the people a lesson. He allows Shishak to rule over them so they can see what it's like to serve a human king rather than the Divine King. The Lord doesn't let the Egyptians trash Jerusalem; they just raid it for its treasures which they take away in abundance (12:9). Rehoboam is left with simple bronze shields to replace the gold ones his father and grandfather had placed in the Temple treasury. What a trade-off for unfaithfulness! The things Rehoboam had tried to do to follow in his father's footsteps came to nothing because he refused to follow the Lord. Although his people repented, Judah and his kingship were tarnished and humiliated.

With King Rehoboam's death, we see the Chronicler's standard obituary for each king that reveals whether they had followed the Lord or not, "Rehoboam did what was evil, because he did not determine in his heart to seek the Lord." (12:14). After 17 years, Rehoboam dies, and his son, Abijah, takes his place.

In chapter 13, Jeroboam I, the Israelite king, is mentioned concerning his war with Abijah (13:2). For clarity's sake, Abijah is known as Abijam in 1 Kings 15. Yes, the names are different, but they're the same person. Using alternate names isn't uncommon in the Bible's history, and it takes some study to keep people straight. Just roll with it. Here in Chronicles 13, we get a more detailed look at King Abijah and what he did. He only ruled for three years, and according to Kings, he did not walk with God, similar to his father, Rehoboam. Chronicles tells us about the war he had with Israel's Jeroboam I. In short, the two sides draw up battle lines, and King Abijah tells Israel to back down because God is with them and not Israel. Israel has abandoned Yehovah and substituted idols (the golden calves at Bethel and Dan), a pagan priesthood, and new worship locations rather than God's ordained place. Therefore, they're toast! While King Rehoboam tries to persuade Israel to back down, King Jeroboam flanks King Abijah's army. But Judah's army cries to the Lord, and Yehovah helps them defeat Israel (13:15). The Chronicler points out Yehovah's central part in Judah's victory to show that reliance on the Lord is all-

important. It's not Judah's army's strength but the Lord who won the day. Afterward, King Abijah launches a counter-attack and takes some of Israel's southern border cities. Because of this battle, Israel's Jeroboam loses power, and although Jeroboam I dies a natural death, the Chronicler clarifies that the Lord struck him down. Again, Israel bad, Judah good.

Next comes Judah's King Asa in chapter 14. Here's the scorecard: David was a good king. Solomon started well but ended badly because he succumbed to idolatry. Rehoboam began well, then ended badly. King Abijah wasn't good because he followed his father's sinful ways and wasn't "devoted to the Lord his God as his ancestor David had been" (1 Kings 15:4). But for David's sake, Yehovah kept his dynasty in power. However, as dawn follows the night, King Asa follows his unfaithful predecessors.

According to the Chronicler, King Asa's first act was to tear down the pagan altars and high places that competed with the Temple and enabled the Judahites to sin. He calls the people to turn back to God, and faithful to the covenant, Yehovah grants them peace from their enemies. King Asa uses this time of peace to refortify Judah's cities and villages while giving full credit to the Lord for their peace and security (14:7). Again, did you notice how each king is evaluated by how faithful they are to the Lord? That's typically Chronicles.

But peace doesn't mean there were no threats, and what a threat it was! Zerah the Cushite (Ethiopian) marches into the land with an immense army of *one million soldiers* and 300 chariots (14:9). Judah faces a fighting force twice their size. So, what does King Asa do? He marches out to meet Zerah. However, before the battle begins, he prays. If ever there was a prayer for help, this is one of the best, "Lord, there is no one besides you to help the mighty and those without strength. Help us, Lord our God, for we depend on you, and in your name we have come against this large army. Lord, you are our God. Do not let a mere mortal hinder you" (14:12 HCSB). Talk about throwing yourself on the Lord's mercy for help! And help from Yehovah comes.

Again, it's good to read Kings and Chronicles in parallel. Asa's account in I Kings 15 doesn't include this fight with the Ethiopians. Kings emphasizes Asa's treaty only and Chronicles emphasizes his dependence on the Lord as an example to us. For the Chronicler, the Lord won the war, not Asa. Judah was merely what the Lord used to smash the Cushites utterly. The text says, "The Cushites fell until they had *no survivors*, for they were crushed before the Lord and his army" (14:13). After King Asa's God-given success, he moves against Gerar and a region of herders to carry off a lot of loot. But that's not the end of King Asa's history.

INSIGHT

Throughout the scriptures, the Lord gives us examples of His willingness to help His children when they're in need. All we need to do is call out to Him, trusting that He will hear and respond to our cry. But what helps is not waiting until we're in trouble before we draw close to Him. Yehovah helped King Asa because King Asa was already living right with God as he was supposed to do. And when help from the Lord does come, let's never take credit for what the Lord has done for us. Yes, He may use us as His instruments to battle our problems, but I never saw a battle where the gun took the credit for the win. It was the hand behind the gun that pulled the trigger.

April 28 : Scriptures 2 Chronicles 15-18

SUMMARY

King Asa's account just keeps getting better and better! The king not only starts well by eliminating pagan worship in Judah, but he prevails with the Lord's help against a horde of Ethiopians threatening the land. How did King Asa do it? By calling out to the Lord. Afterward, does he take credit for the win? Nope. He gives all the credit to Yehovah. Now in chapter 15, King Asa goes all out for the Lord after a prophet sparks a revival via God's word. The essence of the prophet's words is, "God is with you when you're with Him." The prophet confirms to King Asa that his successes came because of his devotion to the Lord. To drive the point home, all Asa has to do is remember what it was like under his father's rule when Judah abandoned the Lord and suffered.

Encouraged by these words, King Asa strikes out to purge the land of as much idolatry as possible and care for the Temple by renovating the Bronze Altar (15:8). Then he gathers as many Israelites as he can to rededicate themselves to their covenant with Yehovah under penalty of death (15:12-14). I don't know about you, but when I read the accounts of the national split, I tend to think that *all* the people from the Ten Tribes stayed in the north, and only a few (plus the Levites) remained faithful to Judah. When we read 15:9, it seems there were a lot more people from more of the tribes that defected than I thought.

The result of Judah's rededication to the Lord is a manifestation of Yehovah's covenant blessing – peace (15:15). King Asa is on such a roll that he dares to depose his *grandmother* for her idolatry! He then takes her idol and burns it to ashes. Wow! He stands up to his grandma. Now *that* takes guts.

Although some idolatry was scattered in the countryside, King Asa did the best he could. But at this point, the king gets high marks for his devotion to the Lord.

However, no one is perfect. People make mistakes, especially long-reigning kings. They make royal ones. In chapter 16, King Asa makes a big mistake in his thirty-sixth year of ruling Judah. Israel's King Baasha threatens Judah by cutting off a major supply route to the kingdom from the north. Baasha also allies himself with the Aramean king, Ben-hadad, reinforcing the blockade. With no supplies coming in, Jerusalem would be easier to defeat. King Asa comes up with the plan to bribe Ben-hadad to break his treaty with Baasha. Ben-hadad does just that and turns to attack Israel. When Baasha leaves Ramah to confront the approaching enemy, King Asa and crew run north and dismantle Baasha's fortification at Ramah. Very clever, right? *Wrong*.

The treaty with Ben-hadad was King Asa's solution, not the Lord's. Hanani, the seer, brings a word from the Lord that rebukes King Asa for depending on a human king for deliverance rather than Him. That was the opposite of King Asa's approach against the Ethiopians, *who had a much bigger army*. Maybe in his old age, King Asa found more security in people than the Lord. It seems Yehovah was setting up the situation to use King Asa to battle and overcome the Arameans (16:7). Instead, the king of Aram escapes and will soon become a thorn in Israel's side.

Furthermore, King Asa's refusal to trust God for relief from his enemies will only bring enemies non-stop to King Asa's door (16:9). *Trust is the issue!* I love the words in verse 9, "For the eyes of the Lord roam throughout the earth to show himself strong for those who are wholeheartedly devoted to him." Now there's a great verse to hold close to our hearts!

Does King Asa humble himself and learn from his mistake? No. Instead, he jails the Lord's servant. Plus, he begins to mistreat some of the citizens. Could this signal the king is relying on his power in his old age rather than the Lord's to keep things in line?

King Asa's final years approach. He develops a foot disease that lasts until his death (16:12). Perhaps this is a picture of how his walk with the Lord is deteriorating? Although the Lord could quickly heal his servant, King Asa refuses to seek Him. According to his Chronicles obituary, the good king dies in his forty-first year, and the people bury him with great honor.

Judah's next king (the 4th one) is the great King Jehoshaphat (chapter 17). Jehoshaphat strengthens his realm like a wise king, but the Chronicler quickly points out his dependence on the Lord and commitment to walk his way as his strong suit (17:3). The Chronicler's spiritual lens zooms in on Jehoshaphat's devotion to God and his rejection of the Baals ("lords," as in gods). I love how the Holman Bible says it, "His mind rejoiced in the Lord's ways" (17:6). The Christian Standard Bible (HCSB updated) says, "He took great pride in the Lord's ways." Either way, it's great. We Jesus-followers should all be like that!

While the book of Kings looks only at Jehoshaphat's alliance with King Ahab against the king of Aram (1 Kings 22) and with King Joram against Moab (2 Kings 3) and gives Jehoshaphat a brief obituary (1 Kings 22), 2 Chronicles 17 fills out the king's resume. In this chapter, Jehoshaphat begins a Bible education program in his third year as king (17:7). He sends out his Torah-teachers with their scrolls "throughout the towns of Judah and taught the people." The result is remarkable. The terror of the Lord falls upon the

nations surrounding Judah, with some of the leaders bringing tribute to King Jehoshaphat. It sounds like Proverbs 16:7, "When a person's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." And having a God-given strong army doesn't hurt either (17:12-9).

Speaking of Jehoshaphat's alliance with King Ahab against Aram, we come to the Chronicler's version of the event. In the book of Chronicles, chapter 18, the writer notes Jehoshaphat's terrible mistake of trying to reunite the two kingdoms through marriage. He gives his son, the Crown Prince Jehoram, to Ahab and Jezebel's daughter, Athaliah, in marriage. Big mistake! As you already know, this arrangement almost wipes out King David's family line. It's remarkable when you think about it. The enemy gets into God's work through foolish human plans and almost destroys it.

After some years, the two in-laws meet in Samaria, Israel's capital. King Ahab honors King Jehoshaphat greatly and begins to persuade him to join him in a war against Aram. Wisely, King Jehoshaphat asks for one of Yehovah's prophets to give him the Lord's guidance (18:8). Obviously, the plethora of Ahab's wild pagan prophets isn't convincing enough for Judah's king. Sadly, only one of Yehovah's prophets left in the northern kingdom, Micaiah. King Ahab sends a messenger to fetch the prophet. The messenger cautions Micaiah to agree with the rest of King Ahab's prophets, likely to avoid controversy and not embarrass the wayward king. But like all true prophets, Micaiah affirms that he can only say what the Lord gives him to say. I can just see the messenger shake his head and mumble, "Okay. It's your head. Let's go."

Once he's before the two kings, Micaiah makes an astounding declaration, "March up and succeed, for they will be handed over to you" (18:14)! But King Ahab isn't buying it. He knows Micaiah is going to contradict his pagan prophets. Gee, shouldn't that be a clue who's on the right side and who isn't? So he commands Micaiah to speak what Yehovah has given him. "Fine," the prophet says, "Israel may have a king, but there's no leader. They're sheep without a shepherd. Forget this whole thing and stay home" (18:16). Ahab leans over to Jehoshaphat and says, "See? I told you. What a Debbie-downer!" Then Micaiah drops the prophetic bomb. "Your prophets are all lying to you because my God made them lie. Why? To convince you to go into battle *so you'll die!* How do you like them apples?" One of Ahab's pagan prophets, Zedekiah, slaps Micaiah and says God's prophet is lying, but that doesn't shake Micaiah. King Ahab condemns Micaiah to prison with a bread and water diet until the king returns. "Sure," replies the prophet. "If you return, then the Lord hasn't spoken to me," which, by the way, is the sign of a true prophet of Yehovah (Deuteronomy 18:21-22). And so the two kings go off to war.

It doesn't turn out so well for Ahab, just like Micaiah prophesied. Even though he disguises King Jehoshaphat as himself, King Ahab still gets gunned down by a random shot. Random? Really? Not when Yehovah's prophet prophesied it. That "random" arrow had King Ahab's name all over it. Ahab's prophets lied, and Ahab died. Annnnd, he's done.

INSIGHT

Listen to the prophets' words. They weren't just for King Asa. They're just as valuable for us today. "The Lord is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you abandon him, he will abandon you" (15:2) and "For the eyes of the Lord roam throughout the earth to show himself strong for those who are wholeheartedly devoted to him" (16:9). Our life with the Lord boils down to faithful trust.