

You do not judge for man but for the LORD

Jehoshaphat had already sent his leaders, with the priests and Levites, throughout the land to teach people the Word of God (17:7–9). He appointed a network of judges to enforce God’s law (cp. Deuteronomy 16:18–20) and told them, ‘*You do not judge for man but for the LORD*’ (6). They were to do their work in the fear of the Lord, being scrupulously fair and never taking bribes (7). We may think it inconceivable that judges would allow themselves to be influenced by bribes, but it still happens in some countries today.

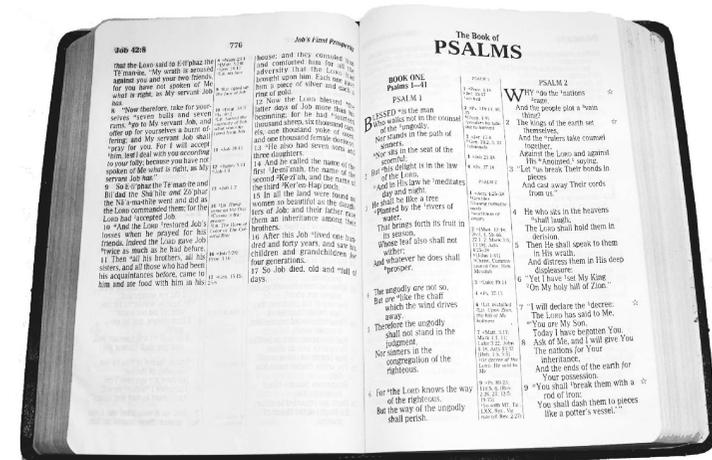
There was a court of appeal in Jerusalem to deal with the more difficult cases, including bloodshed, which the local judges referred to them. Jehoshaphat appointed some of the Levites, priests and national leaders were to adjudicate in this court (8). He told them, ‘*Thus you shall act in the fear of the LORD, faithfully and with a loyal heart*’ (9). They were given the solemn responsibility to judge and to warn the people against sinning: ‘*You shall warn them, lest they trespass against the LORD and wrath come upon you and your brethren*’ (10). Amariah the chief priest supervised cases dealing with religious law and Zebadiah with those concerning civil matters (‘*all the king’s matters*’). They were to behave courageously in doing their work (11).

The principles given by Jehoshaphat are essential in all ages and in all nations but the western world has generally lost sight of them. This has been seen in the emphasis on the rehabilitation of criminals rather than just punishment. The victims of crime are often the last to be considered in our judicial system. A God-honouring system of justice is more just to men!

We must also be prayerful and thoughtful before we vote for parliamentary candidates or for those who will represent us in local government. **Let us pray for our land, that God will be pleased to bring spiritual renewal in the churches and that he will raise up in government those who will seek to honour him.**

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God’s holy Word simply explained and applied



August 2019

Nahum, Philemon

2 Chronicles chapters 1 to 19

NAHUM

30 AUGUST

2 Chronicles 19:1–4

Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD?

Nahum prophesied against the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, over one hundred years after its people had repented at the preaching of Jonah. We cannot be sure of the date of Nahum's prophecy, but it lies somewhere between the destruction of Thebes (No Amon, 3:8) in 661 BC and the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC. Nahum whose name means 'consolation' had a message of comfort for the people of Judah and there is an absence of any warning of judgment against them. The Lord assured them that he would destroy their cruel enemies, the Assyrians (1:15). The name of the Galilean town of Capernaum means 'city of Nahum' and the Lord Jesus warned its people of divine judgment because they failed to repent, though they had seen many of his mighty works (Matthew 11:20–24).

This book is one that Jonah would have desired to write! Nineveh was ripe for judgment because her repentance was short-lived and this later generation was vile and cruel (1:14; 3:1).

Outline of Nahum

1. God's judgment on Nineveh (chapter 1)
 - The Great Judge – 1:1–7
 - The judgment of God on Nineveh – 1:8–15
2. A description of God's judgment on Nineveh (chapter 2)
 - The siege and fall of Nineveh – 2:1–10.
 - The end of the 'lions den' – 2:11–13
3. The reason for God's judgment on Nineveh (chapter 3)
 - The wickedness of Nineveh – 3:1–7
 - Nineveh reminded of the fate of
 - Thebes (No Amon) – 3:8–11
 - Nineveh's perpetual desolation – 3:12–19

The Lord preserved Jehoshaphat from death in the ill-conceived campaign against the Syrians but he gave him a stern rebuke. On his return to Jerusalem, the king was met by Jehu, son of the prophet Hanani. Jehu rebuked him saying, '*Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Therefore the wrath of the LORD is upon you*' (1–2). Jehoshaphat had helped Ahab, who had supported his wicked wife Jezebel in her relentless persecution of those who worshipped the Lord. This wicked pair were also responsible for the murder of Naboth whose only offence was to refuse to sell his vineyard to Ahab (1 Kings chapter 21). We must never identify with the wicked nor help them in their godless schemes.

The Lord is absolutely just in his dealings with us and he recognised that Jehoshaphat had sought him and had removed idols from the land. Jehoshaphat responded to godly rebuke in a different manner to his father Asa, who had imprisoned Jehu's father, Hanani (16:7–10). Asa nursed his injured pride and then refused to seek the Lord in his illness. He died, a foolish and stubborn man refusing to listen to a timely word of rebuke! Jehoshaphat responded to rebuke by encouraging people throughout the land (from Beersheba in the south to the mountains of Ephraim in the north) to follow the Lord. He took the rebuke to heart and was a better man for it!

Many a person has left their church in a huff because of injured pride. They refused to accept a necessary rebuke from their pastor or from some other godly person. Paul asked the Galatians, '*Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?*' (Galatians 4:16). Those whom the Lord has set over us in the church will have to give an account to God for the way they have cared for our souls (Hebrews 13:7,17). They will admonish us for our own good if they love us! **How do you respond to rebuke? This is often a better measure of your spiritual condition than your ability to quote Scripture or to pray eloquently.**

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Now a certain man drew a bow at random

Micaiah's warning against going into battle and the way in which Ahab treated the faithful prophet of God should have been enough to deter Jehoshaphat from going into battle with the wicked King of Israel. The foolish man ignored that warning, however.

Ahab knew that he would be a marked man on the battlefield so he put off his royal robes and disguised himself. It was surprising that Jehoshaphat agreed to place himself in great danger by agreeing to Ahab's scheme (28–29). The king of Syria ordered his commanders to fight only with the king of Israel but Ahab's disguise deceived them. The Lord was very gracious and merciful to foolish Jehoshaphat! When the Syrians saw him in royal robes, they thought that he was the king of Israel and surrounded him to kill him. *Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him*, causing the Syrians to turn away from him when they realised that he was not the king of Israel (30–32).

Throughout his life, Ahab had stubbornly refused to obey God's Word and he was foolish to imagine that he could overturn Micaiah's prophecy by disguising himself. *Now a certain man drew a bow at random* and the arrow went through a chink in Ahab's armour. **There are no random happenings with God! The random arrow that hit Ahab was planned by the Lord to fulfil his Word.** What the man of the world views as a coincidence, the godly person sees as the intervention of God. The wicked king was mortally wounded and bled to death in his chariot, fulfilling the prophecy of Micaiah and the earlier prophecy of Elijah (33–34; cp 1 Kings 21:19; 22:35–38).

Ahab had a religion (idol worship) but this had no effect on his lifestyle. He wanted to listen to soothing words rather than the rebuke of godly men. He wanted and obtained a religion that made no demands for holiness and which by-passed the Word of God. If you have any doubts about your own spiritual state, do seek the Lord and turn away from anything in your life that is sinful and offensive to God.

The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble

Assyria was arrogant, brutal and cruel in its repression of its neighbouring nations at the time when Nahum prophesied. There are similar regimes in the world at the present time. Michael Haykin writes, 'Where is God in all of this? Is he sovereign or not? Does he really punish the wicked or do they perpetrate their crimes and escape justice? These are very disturbing questions. But they are the questions that Scripture tackles head on and answers. Consider, for instance the Old Testament book of Nahum. This minor prophet has one major theme: God will be the destroyer of evil and wrong; he is the enemy of all who defy his lordship and he will judge them. Ultimately, Nahum tells us, that it is he, the Sovereign Lord – and not humans – who will execute vengeance on the wicked and bring justice to the earth.' (THE BANNER OF TRUTH, page 9, April 2002).

Listen to the message of the prophet Nahum. He tells us truths about God that are rarely heard from the pulpits of our churches: *God is jealous, and the LORD avenges; The LORD avenges and is furious. The LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserves wrath for his enemies* (2). God delays the time of judgment because he is slow to anger but he *will not at all acquit the wicked* (3). He allows the wicked time to repent. Sinners are foolish to despise God for his goodness in delaying to judge them (cp. Romans 2:4).

The jealousy of God (2) is of great comfort to his people! He is fiercely protective of those who belong to him and any who seek to harm them as Nineveh harmed his people of old, will surely come to grief (cp. 2 Kings 19:32–34). God does avenge his elect (cp. Luke 18:7). The great and awesome power of God is described in verses 3 to 6. Though God is severe in his judgment on unrepentant sinners (6, 8), he is good to those who trust him and obey him (cp. Romans 11:22). **Christian, are you going through a time of trouble? Are problems and difficulties mounting up? Memorise verse 7 and rejoice in it: *The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knows those who trust in him.***

Keep your appointed feasts, perform your vows

The Lord is a mighty stronghold for those who trust in him but those who conspire against him are very foolish. God warned through Nahum that the Assyrians would not be able to escape his judgment upon Ninevah. This proud nation despised Jehovah and refused to believe that he was able to smite them. An example of their disdain of the Lord is found in 2 Chronicles 32:11–15. They imagined that they could outmanoeuvre the Lord but their punishment would be so severe that he would not need to strike them a second time (9).

The Assyrians would be gathered together as thorns and burned as the dry straw which is left after the harvest (10). The metaphor of the burning up of stubble is often used in Scripture to describe divine judgment (cp. Isaiah 5:24; Joel 2:5; Matthew 13:30). The wicked plotter against the Lord (11) was probably the Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal who reigned from 669 to 626 BC. The Lord warned that he would destroy the gods of this vile person and would dig his grave (14).

God promised Judah that he would break the yoke of Assyria (12–13; cp. Psalm 2:9). He would no longer afflict his people through this nation. Verse 15 pictures a messenger coming over the mountain roads to Jerusalem to announce the good news of deliverance. What should the people do in response to God's goodness towards them? — *O Judah, keep your appointed feasts, perform your vows* (15). They were to follow God and to serve him! Judah failed to respond to the goodness and mercy of the Lord, however, and was to suffer later at the hand of the Babylonians.

Gospel preachers are also described as messengers who bring glad tidings (Romans 10:15). They proclaim deliverance from the power of the great tyrant Satan through the Lord Jesus Christ. **If we refuse to take notice of their message and reject Christ we are just as foolish as Judah.**

Whatever my God says, that I will speak

Jehoshaphat agreed to join Ahab in his military venture against the Syrians but he wanted a word from the Lord to confirm that this was the right thing to do. He knew that this alliance was wrong and needed no direct word from the Lord to tell him so. Ahab summoned his own prophets who were quite ready to speak in the name of the Lord and to tell the king just what he wanted to hear. Jehoshaphat had his misgivings and asked for a genuine prophet of the Lord to be consulted. Ahab hated faithful Micaiah and was reluctant to send for him but did so at the insistence of Jehoshaphat (5–12). Ahab's messenger begged Micaiah to encourage the king by saying the same thing as the other prophets but Micaiah replied, *'Whatever my God says, that I will speak'* (12–13).

When Micaiah promised Ahab success it was obvious that the prophet was taunting him. The king then asked for *nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD* (14–15). Micaiah told him that Israel would be left without their king in the coming battle (16 – *as sheep that have no shepherd*). Ahab told Jehoshaphat that he knew that Micaiah would not prophesy good concerning him, but evil (17). He refused to listen to God's faithful servant preferring to listen to his own prophets who spoke by a lying spirit (18–22). Zedekiah, one of Ahab's leading prophets struck Micaiah who was then imprisoned at Ahab's command. He was to be treated harshly until Ahab returned in peace but Micaiah told all present that if Ahab returned in peace, they would know that the Lord had not spoken by him (23–27). It reflects very badly on Jehoshaphat that he did not offer any practical support for the persecuted servant of God.

We live at a time when many professing Christian leaders reject the Word of God. They refuse to speak of judgment and hell or of the death and resurrection of Christ to save sinners. **Our attitude must be like that of Micaiah, 'Whatever my God says (through the Bible), that I will speak.'**

By marriage he allied himself with Ahab

Jehoshaphat was one of the most godly kings to rule over Judah and Ahab was probably the most wicked king to reign over the kingdom of Israel. There had been hostilities between the two nations when Asa was king of Judah, but Jehoshaphat made the disastrous mistake of cultivating the friendship of Ahab who gave a great feast in his honour when he visited him in Samaria. Ahab persuaded him to commit his army to fight with the troops of Israel to recover the town of Ramoth Gilead from the Syrians. It is almost beyond belief that this good king should say to wicked Ahab, *‘I am as you are, and my people as your people; we will be with you in war’* (3). Jehoshaphat showed his misgivings when he insisted that they seek God’s direction in the matter and listen to a prophet of the Lord. Ahab showed his hostility towards the true prophet, Micaiah, and this alone should have been enough to make Jehoshaphat see sense (4–7).

The first verse of this chapter explains the reason behind Jehoshaphat’s friendship with Ahab: *By marriage he allied himself with Ahab*. This marriage was to have the most horrendous consequences for himself and his descendants. His son Jehoram was influenced by his wicked wife, Athaliah (daughter of Ahab and Jezebel). Jehoram murdered all his brothers after Jehoshaphat’s death (21:4–6). Athaliah mothered a very wicked son, Ahaziah of Judah. Following the death of Jehoram and the short reign of Ahaziah, she murdered all the royal princes (her own grandsons) with the exception of Joash who was hidden from her (see chapter 22:10–12).

Jehoshaphat failed to shield his son from the wicked influence of Ahab and Jezebel and allowed him to marry into that dreadful family. **Those of us who are parents have a solemn responsibility to instruct and to guide our children according to the Word of the Lord and where possible to guard them from malign influences by carefully choosing OUR friends.** — *Evil company corrupts good habits* (1 Corinthians 15:33).

‘Behold, I am against you,’ says the LORD of hosts

This chapter gives us a vivid prophecy (fulfilled in 612 BC) of the siege and overthrow of Nineveh. Nahum mockingly calls on the people of Nineveh to take defensive measures against the invaders (an alliance of Medes, Babylonians and Scythians): *‘Man the fort! Watch the road! Strengthen your flanks! Fortify your power mightily’* (1–2). Scarlet was a favourite colour of the Medes, whose shields and cloaks were in that colour (3). Their chariots prepare to attack the city in the early morning darkness with torches burning. There are so many of these chariots, that they jostle each other as they break into Nineveh. They then capture the sluice gates controlling the river and open them to flood the city. The foundations of the buildings are loosened so that the palace is dissolved (6).

The Hebrew translated, *‘It is decreed’* (7) is ‘Huzzab.’ Some commentators believe that this refers to the Queen of Nineveh who is seen being led away with her attendants beating their breasts in lamentation. Terror takes hold of the people and they flee away. They are deaf to the cries of the few who call upon them to defend their city, saying, *“Halt! Halt!”* The city is plundered and left like a wasteland. The few survivors survey the desolate scene with great anguish (8–10). The Assyrian army had been like a lion, ruthlessly preying on the nations, plundering and destroying. Now the den of the lions is destroyed (11–13). The Assyrian empire had been built on force and cruelty, but now is destroyed by a superior power.

Why did this catastrophe befall Nineveh? Because of her wickedness and disregard of God who said, *‘Behold, I am against you’* (13). When nations set themselves against God, their ruin will surely come! We see this principle demonstrated throughout history and it is a warning to the western world which has turned its back upon God and trampled upon the teaching of his holy Word. **Happy are those who have the sovereign almighty God for them (Romans 8:31)! If you refuse to follow Christ, God is against you! — How is it with you?**

Your injury has no healing

Nineveh was a splendid and prosperous city but she was also full of wickedness! Like a prostitute, she seduced many others into an evil way of life (1,4). Nahum again paints a vivid picture of the plight of Nineveh and of the slaughter of her people at the hand of the invading armies (2–3). The Lord repeats his assertion that he is against her (5; cp. 2:13). Verses 5 to 7 remind us of the destruction of the harlot Babylon described in Revelation chapter 18.

All this was unthinkable to the Assyrians but the prophet reminds them of the fate of Thebes (No Amon) in Upper Egypt. That city appeared to be impregnable with her great walls and towers and the added protection of the river and surrounding moats. She also had strong military allies but the Assyrians had overcome all these obstacles to take this great city in approximately 663 BC (8–11). Nineveh would surely suffer the same fate as Thebes when the enemy would take her strongholds as a man shakes fig trees to gather their fruit. Her people would not have the determination to repel the invaders (12–13). Nahum called on the city in an ironic manner to prepare for the battle and for her own defeat when the enemy would devour her gates as locusts devour crops (14–15).

Nineveh's army officers were like a cloud of locusts but they would flee away to leave the people like sheep scattered on the mountains without a shepherd (a king) (17–18). God's message for Nineveh was that she would never rise from the ruins. He said, '*Your injury has no healing*' (19). Nahum's prophecy was fulfilled in 612 BC and it was only in the 19th Century that the ruins of the city were discovered and excavated. What lesson is there here for us? **If we despise God's Word and refuse his offers of mercy, we will eventually come to the point of no return when there will be no more offers of healing! It is very foolish to trifle with the things of God!**

His heart took delight in the ways of the LORD

Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he succeeded Asa as king of Judah (20:31). He was one of the best kings to reign over Judah and the Lord prospered him. As a young man he would have been influenced by the godly reforms initiated by his father in the land. We read that *his heart took delight in the ways of the LORD* (6). A more literal translation of the Hebrew is found in the Authorised Version of the Bible which reads, *His heart was lifted up in the ways of the LORD*. When the Bible describes the heart as being lifted up, it generally indicates pride (eg. 26:16; 32:26) but that is not true in this verse.

How did this *delight in the ways of the LORD* show in the life of Jehoshaphat?

- He shunned all that displeased God, refusing to be influenced by the godless ways of Israel and he stamped out the remains of idolatry in his country (3–6).
- He sought the Lord (4); this means that he prayerfully depended upon God for guidance and direction in his life. We saw yesterday, that his father Asa, failed to do this in his latter years.
- He sent his leaders, priests and Levites throughout all the cities of Judah to teach the people from the Book of the Law of the Lord (Deuteronomy). Jehoshaphat rightly recognised that the people needed to be taught the Word of God if they were to follow the Lord (7–9).

Jehoshaphat's reforms also made their mark on Judah's neighbours. The fear of the Lord fell upon them so that they did not make war against him (10). He built fortresses and storage cities and had a dedicated group of military leaders. One of them, Amaziah *willingly offered himself to the LORD* (16).

Do you delight in the ways of the Lord or are you ashamed of Jesus and his Word? **If you delight in the things of God, it will show in your life! You will be seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, you will be a faithful and reliable Christian.**

Yet in his disease he did not seek the LORD

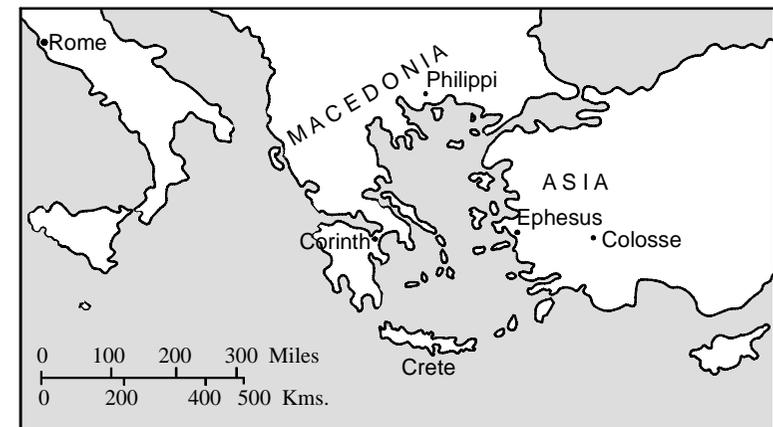
Asa began well but ended disastrously, failing to trust in God in the final years of his life. In the thirty-sixth year of his reign, Judah was attacked and blockaded by Baasha, king of Israel who built the city of Ramah within Judah's borders (see map, page 27). Asa did not seek the Lord for deliverance but formed an alliance with the king of Syria, giving him silver and gold from the Lord's house as payment for help. Asa's plan succeeded in driving Baasha back, but we must not judge by outward appearances (1–6).

Hanani the prophet admonished Asa for relying on the Syrians rather than trusting in the Lord. He reminded Asa that when the massive Ethiopian army had attacked Judah, he had *relied on the Lord* and had gained a great victory. The prophet told Asa that God sees those who are loyal to him and that he shows himself strong on their behalf. Asa had been foolish to rely on the Syrians whom God would also have delivered into his hands; he would now have wars for the remainder of his reign. The king was very angry with the bold prophet whom he put into prison (7–10). **Many a Christian has drifted from the Lord after refusing to listen to the spiritual admonition of their pastor or some other godly person. Are you humble enough to accept rebuke where it is necessary?**

Asa was very ill with diseased feet during the last two years of his life (Matthew Henry suggests that it may have been gout). *Yet in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but the physicians* (12). Seeking God had been one of the notable things in Asa's life (14:4,7; 15:12–13). If Asa had sought God towards the end of his life, he would have recognised that things were going wrong for him because he was no longer depending upon God. When we truly seek the Lord we will examine our own heart and our motives. We will gladly submit to the will of God as we come to him in prayer. Do you seek the Lord for direction in your life and in your decision-making?

PHILEMON

Paul wrote his letters to the Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon from prison in Rome between AD 61 and AD 63. They were taken to their destination by Tychicus and Onesimus on one trip (Ephesians 6:21–22; Colossians 4:7–9; Philemon 10–12). Philemon was converted under Paul's ministry (19). He was a wealthy Christian at Colosse (see map below) whose home was used for worship services (2). Apphia was probably his wife and Archippus his son (2). The latter was a leader in the Colossian church (Colossians 4:17). Paul wrote this letter to secure forgiveness for Onesimus, Philemon's runaway slave, and to ask Philemon to prepare a guest room for himself. He was expecting prayers for his release from prison to be answered. He then hoped to visit Colosse (8–16, 22).



The hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you

Though Paul wrote to Philemon from prison, he considered himself to be the prisoner not of Rome, but of Christ Jesus (1). Philemon may have assisted the apostle during his ministry in Ephesus and been involved in the planting of the church in Colosse which met in his house (2). He is described as Paul's 'fellow-labourer'. Paul had heard of Philemon's love and faith toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints. He gave thanks to God for Philemon and he prayed much for him (4–7). If we truly love the Lord Jesus, we will also love all his people (1 John 4:20–21).

Philemon was a rich man who was also generous. The Bible warns against the danger and snare of riches (1 Timothy 6:9–10), but it does not condemn a person on account of justly acquired wealth. A wealthy Christian has many avenues for service which are denied to others. Philemon's love for the Lord and his faith were expressed in love and benevolence to fellow-Christians ('all the saints'). He was a man who exemplified what it means to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful (Titus 3:14).

Philemon was a great encouragement to Paul. The apostle and his companions had great joy and consolation in the love of this brother. He wrote, 'The hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother' (7). Deeds of kindness from a heart full of compassion encourage God's people. Many a discouraged 'saint' who is passing through difficult times has been encouraged by such a ministry. We too may refresh 'the hearts of the saints' even if we are not wealthy like Philemon. A word of encouragement or some deed of kindness to a hard-pressed believer will be a blessing to them. **Let us seek to fulfil this vital ministry in our church.**

*Give me a faithful heart, likeness to thee,
That each departing day henceforth may see
Some work of love begun, some deed of kindness done,
Some wanderer sought and won — Something for thee.*

(Sylvanus D. Phelps)

The LORD is with you while you are with him

The prophet Azariah met Asa to encourage and warn him, stating an important principle, 'The LORD is with you while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will forsake you' (2). To have God with us is to know his presence and to enjoy his smile upon us. We must never expect the Lord's help and blessing in our own lives if we are not obeying his Word. He will chastise us if we walk in a pathway of sin. Azariah reminded the king of the time of the judges when Israel had *been without the true God, without a teaching priest and without law* (the Scriptures) for a long time (3–6). **When the teaching of God's Word is neglected, our churches will drift away from true religion just like Israel of old.** God is merciful, and *when in their trouble they turned to the LORD God of Israel, and sought him, he was found by them* (4).

Azariah encouraged Asa to be thorough in his work of reformation, promising that such work would be rewarded (7–8). God's blessing upon the king attracted many from the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon to migrate to Judah (9). A great religious feast was celebrated in Jerusalem in the fifteenth year of Asa's reign and the people *entered into a covenant* to seek God with all their heart and soul. What was the result? — *And he was found by them, and the LORD gave them rest all around* (10–15). When we are determined to seek the Lord, he will lead us to himself and give us his peace.

Obedience to God is often leads to costly choices which may have implications in our own family. Asa had to remove his grandmother, Maachah (cp. 11:20) from her position as queen mother because of her evil influence. He also destroyed the obscene image of the goddess Asherah which she had made (16). Asa knew that he had to do what was right though this may have caused tensions within his household. **Are you determined to honour God in your life, whatever the cost?** 'The LORD is with you while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you.'

We rest on you, and in your name we go against this multitude

Asa, succeeded his father Abijah to the throne of Judah and he enjoyed peace for the first ten years of his long reign (1). He was one of the better kings of Judah and he *did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD* (2). He destroyed all the altars and high places used in idol worship and he cut down the wooden images. He promoted true worship, commanding Judah to seek and to obey the Lord (3–5). Asa acknowledged that Judah owed her peace to the Lord and he built fortified cities during these years (6–7).

The reforms of Asa prepared Judah to face trouble. They were attacked by a great army led by Zerah the Ethiopian and were outnumbered by almost three to one. The two armies faced each other just outside the fortified city of Mareshah (8–10; cp. 11:8; see map in yesterday's notes). Asa cried out to God with a great affirmation of faith, '*LORD, it is nothing for you to help, whether with many or with those who have no power; help us, O LORD our God, for we rest on you, and in your name we go against this multitude*' (11). This prayer reminds us of the importance of resting (leaning) on God in our battles. Without his help we would surely fail. Asa saw the attack of the Ethiopians as an attack upon God and prayed, '*O LORD you are our God; do not let man prevail against you*' (11). Asa's army was the Lord's army and God gave him a great victory over the Ethiopians (13).

Every Christian is engaged in spiritual warfare and we have invincible weapons if we will but use them (2 Corinthians 10:4–5; Ephesians 6:10–18). When we seek to honour and serve God in our lives, the devil will not leave us alone. He hates us and will use all his malice and guile to pull us down. **Let us rest on the Lord, knowing that he is for us and that he will give us the victory!**

*We rest on thee our Shield and our Defender!
We go not forth alone against the foe;
Strong in thy strength, safe in thy keeping tender,
We rest on thee, and in thy name we go.* (Edith G. Cherry)

Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains

The grace of God and his ways in providence are truly wonderful! 'Onesimus' means 'profitable' but this slave had been unprofitable to Philemon. He had stolen money or property from his master and had run away, finding his way to Rome (18). While there he came into contact with the imprisoned Paul. He was wonderfully saved and the apostle described him as '*my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains*' (10). The unprofitable slave had, by the grace of God, become profitable (11). The restrictions of imprisonment did not bring an end to Paul's usefulness in Christian service (Philippians 1:12). He was able to preach the gospel to the palace soldiers who guarded him and he wrote the letters to the churches at Ephesus, Philippi and Colosse which are such a blessing to us. Adverse circumstances cannot prevent God from doing his sovereign work.

When runaway slaves were caught they were often severely beaten or put to death. Onesimus was now dear to Paul, but he had to return to his master (12–14). This was no easy matter, though he was accompanied by Tychicus, a highly respected servant of Christ (Colossians 4:7–9). Paul appealed to Philemon to forgive and to receive Onesimus, now his 'son' in the faith '*for love's sake*' and as the aged prisoner (9–11).

Philemon was known for his ministry of refreshing the saints (7) and Paul appealed, '*Refresh my heart in the Lord*' (20). He had been instrumental in Philemon's conversion and he reminded him of his indebtedness to him (Paul). He wanted Philemon to receive Onesimus as he would have received him. He asked his friend to put anything owed by the slave to his account (17–19). He was confident that Philemon would go beyond what was asked of him (20–21). We must not cling to grudges but rather be forgiving (Colossians 3:13). Such an attitude is refreshing and a great blessing in any church. **Let us persevere in prayer for those on our hearts who are not yet saved. Onesimus was not beyond the reach of God, neither are they!**

2 CHRONICLES

The second book of Chronicles covers the same period of history as the books of the Kings but it concentrates on the kings of Judah. It opens with the beginning of Solomon's reign following the death of his father, David. It then covers the subsequent history of Judah until the time of the captivity in Babylon. Solomon began well and built a magnificent temple for the worship of God. He was renowned for his God-given wisdom but was foolish in his personal life. He married many wives and succumbed to their heathen influence. He turned from the Lord and worshipped their gods, bringing divine displeasure and judgment upon himself (1 Kings 11). The lack of wisdom of Solomon's son, Rehoboam, brought about a great rebellion which divided the kingdom. The kings of Israel in the north are only mentioned when involved in Judah's history (eg. chapter 18).

All the northern kings were evil but Judah was blessed with some good kings. Most of the prophets exercised their ministry during this period. Among them were Elijah, Elisha, Joel, Amos, Jonah, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Jeremiah. Some of them prophesied to one kingdom, others to both. The Lord is merciful and slow to anger and he sent the prophets to warn his erring people. Persistent and repeated disobedience inevitably brought the judgment of God upon them. Israel went into Assyrian captivity in 722 BC, and Judah to captivity in Babylon in 586 BC.

There were three great periods of reformation in Judah led by godly kings:

- Jehoshaphat (19:4 to 20:30).
- Hezekiah (29:1 to 31:21).
- Josiah (34:1 to 35:19).

Andrew Stewart points out that 2 Chronicles has a distinctive focus on the place of the temple in the life of the nation of Israel (and later the southern kingdom of Judah). He writes, '2 Chronicles commences with the building of the temple during the reign of King Solomon and in its

22 AUGUST

2 Chronicles 13:1–22

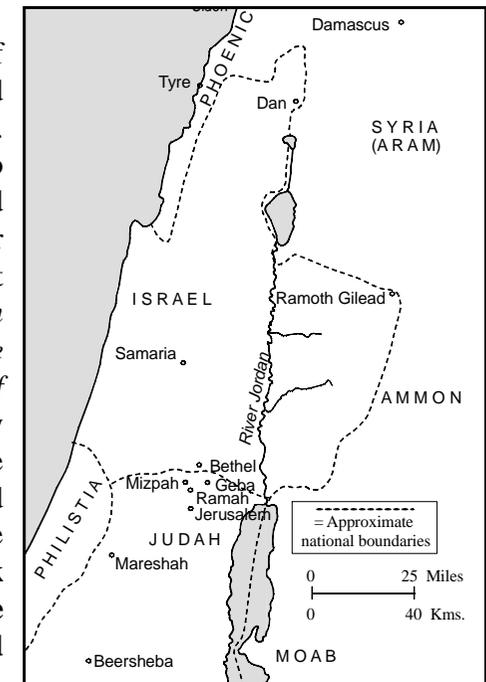
Because they relied on the LORD God of their fathers

Rehoboam and Jeroboam were continually at war (12:15) and the conflict carried over into the reign of Abijah (called Abijam – 1 Kings 15:3). Abijah only reigned for three years; he began well but he did not remain loyal to God (1 Kings 15:3).

Jeroboam's army was twice the size of that of Judah (3). He may have thought that it was an opportune time to attack Judah as it was early in the reign of a new king. Abijah called on Jeroboam and his troops to cease their rebellion against the God-appointed dynasty of Solomon (1–5). He pointed out that Jeroboam had led them in rebellion against the Lord and he urged them not to fight against the Lord because they had no chance of success (8–12).

Abijah's appeal fell on deaf ears and Jeroboam surprised them by setting an ambush. The men of Judah cried out to God and the priests sounded their trumpets. God heard their cry and gave Abijah a great victory (13–17). *The children of Judah prevailed, because they relied on the LORD God of their fathers* (18). Every Christian has battles and we are often tempted and tried and we need always to rely on the Lord. **Our faith may be weak but the One in whom we trust is the almighty God and he will never fail us!**

The kingdoms of Judah and Israel after Solomon's death



In their place King Rehoboam made bronze shields

Rehoboam was forty one years old when he became king of Judah and he reigned for seventeen years (13). He inherited a dreadful spiritual legacy because of Solomon's idolatry. He honoured God during the first three years of his reign but he then *forsook the law of the LORD* taking all Israel along with him (1; cp. 11:17). When national leaders disregard God's Word, there is inevitably a drift into all kinds of wickedness (1 Kings 14:22–24). We have seen this in the western world with sexual perverts having large rallies to proclaim their pride in their wickedness. These things are an abomination in the sight of God. Homosexuality is unnatural and is an abomination in the sight of God (Romans 1:27). These sins are not beyond forgiveness, however, when there is true repentance (1 Corinthians 6:9–11).

The Lord did not overlook the sins of Rehoboam. Though he had fortified his cities south of Judah, they were taken by the Egyptians who attacked Jerusalem and plundered the treasures of the temple. The king of Egypt *carried away the gold shields which Solomon had made. In their place King Rehoboam made bronze shields* (9–10). The devalued shields speak volumes! If we forsake God's Word, we will devalue spiritual things. To exchange spiritual 'gold' for the pleasures of sin, which bring no lasting satisfaction and which lead to death, is the height of folly.

God had his faithful witness in Judah in those evil days – Shemaiah the prophet. He told the king and leaders of Judah that they had suffered at the hands of the Egyptians because they had forsaken the Lord. They admitted that God was righteous and humbled themselves before him (2–12). Greater judgment was averted but the Lord left them under the yoke of Egypt so that they would learn that his service was far more preferable to that of serving other nations (8). Rehoboam *did evil, because he did not prepare his heart to seek the LORD* (14). **If we neglect prayer and our own walk with God, we will soon be in peril of drifting away from the Lord.**

closing verses, it envisages the rebuilding of the temple after the return of the exiles to Judah in the time of Zerubbabel. Much of the action described in 2 Chronicles — apostasy as well as reformation — took place within the temple precincts. The temple was a place where God had placed his name; it was a place towards which God's people would pray; it provided a geographical forum for God's redemptive actions during the period of the Israelite monarchy.' — (A HOUSE OF PRAYER – THE MESSAGE OF 2 CHRONICLES; page 9).

Malachi prophesied that the promised Messiah would come to his temple (Malachi 3:1). Solomon's temple and the magnificent temple built by Herod the Great are no more. The first temple was destroyed because of the apostasy of the Jews (2 Chronicles 36:15–21). The latter temple was destroyed 40 years after the Jews had rejected and crucified the Lord Jesus (Matthew 23:34 to 24:2). The Christian fixes his attention on the risen Lord Jesus rather than an earthly building (John 4:21; Colossians 1:18). He is the Head of the church which is the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:19–22).

Outline of 2 Chronicles

1. The reign of Solomon over Israel (chapters 1 to 9)
 - a. God gives Solomon wisdom and wealth – 1:1–17
 - b. The building of the temple – 2:1 to 5:1
 - c. The dedication of the temple – 5:2 to 7:22
 - d. Solomon's greatness – 8:1 to 9:31
2. The kings of Judah (chapters 10 to 36)
 - a. Rehoboam and a divided kingdom – 10:1 to 12:16.
 - b. Abijah to Zedekiah – 13:1 to 36:14
 - c. Captivity and restoration – 36:15–23

For further reading: I recommend 'A House of Prayer – the message of 2 Chronicles' by Andrew Stewart (Welwyn Commentary, published by Evangelical Press).

‘Ask! What shall I give you?’

2 Chronicles begins with Israel at the height of her greatness and power. God was with Solomon *and exalted him exceedingly* (1). His wealth and power is described in verses 13 to 17. The young king gathered all the leaders of the nation to worship God at the tabernacle of the Lord in Gibeon (3–6). The bronze altar where sacrifices were offered remained at Gibeon but the ark of the covenant was now at Jerusalem, in the tabernacle that David had erected for it (1 Chronicles 15:1; 16:1). That very night the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream and said to him, *‘Ask! What shall I give you?’* (7). How did Solomon respond to this amazing offer?

- He acknowledged the goodness of God to his father David and to himself in making him king over Israel and prayed that God would fulfill his promise to David (8–9). Do you remember to thank God for all his mercies to you when you come to him in prayer? When did you last thank the Lord for saving your soul and for giving his beloved Son to die on the cross for your salvation?
- He was aware of his lack of experience and acknowledged his dependence on God. He asked the Lord to give him wisdom and knowledge to enable him to wisely rule the nation. God was pleased with his unselfish request and gave him not only the wisdom and knowledge for which he had asked, but also riches and honour (11–17).

We must never forget that we too depend on the Lord. We need to pray each day for grace to enable us to lead a life worthy of our Christian profession. We need to seek the help of God so that we will be able to resist the attacks of the devil, the enticements of the world and to overcome temptation to sin. We need to pray for help to share the gospel with others, and that God will enable us to grow more in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If God promised to give you anything you desired, for what would you ask? Are your prayers self-centred or do you honour God in your praying as Solomon did on this occasion?

So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah

Rehoboam reacted to the rebellion by raising a great army to attack the rebels in order to bring them to submit to his rule. The Lord sent the prophet Shemaiah with a message for Rehoboam and those with him. They were not to go to war against the rebels who were their brethren; this rebellion was from the Lord. They obeyed the word of the Lord and abandoned their plan to attack the rebels (1–4).

Judah was now vulnerable to attack and Rehoboam strengthened the defences of his cities (5–12). He followed his father’s sinful ways in taking for himself many wives (18–21). He chose Abijah, the eldest son of his favourite wife to succeed him as king. In a very astute move, he dispersed his other sons throughout the land to govern the fortified cities (22–23).

There was a migration of Levites from Israel to Judah. Others joined them who were described as those *such as set their heart to seek the LORD God of Israel ... so they strengthened the kingdom of Judah* (16–17). Jeroboam’s loss was Rehoboam’s gain! Over three hundred thousand Huguenots fled from persecution in France under the reign of Louis XIV. Among them were the most skilful craftsmen of their country and their godliness, skills and enterprise brought great blessing to the nations that gave them refuge, including England.

Jeroboam knew that God had given him the northern kingdom (1 Kings 11:29–39) and he had no need to resort to devious plans to keep his kingdom intact. He appointed non-levitical priests to sacrifice at idol shrines where goats (translated *‘demons’*) and calves were worshipped (15). His two golden calves, one for the north of the kingdom in Dan, the other at Bethel in the south, and other idol shrines throughout the land were designed to keep his people from returning to worship at Jerusalem and so be influenced to serve Rehoboam (15; cp. 1 Kings 12:25–33). **He set the northern kingdom on a path of rebellion against God from which it never recovered!**

The turn of affairs was from God

Israel had prospered during the forty year reign of Solomon, but the people were burdened with heavy taxes to pay for his extravagant and luxurious lifestyle. The ten tribes had been wary of the tribe of Judah before David's reign. He had reigned over Judah for seven years before they accepted him as their king (2 Samuel 5:1–5). Sheba, a trouble maker, had instigated a rebellion against David using words similar to those found in verse 16 (2 Samuel 20:1–2). Jeroboam had rebelled against Solomon and fled to Egypt (1 Kings 11:26–40). After Solomon's death, he returned from exile in Egypt with a delegation to appeal to the new king for an easing of the heavy burden that Solomon had put upon them, promising to serve him if he did so (1–4).

Rehoboam sent them away for three days so that he could seek counsel from those around him. He rejected the wise advice of the elders and listened to the young men with whom he had grown up (10). He dealt with Jeroboam and his companions in a very rough manner and told them that his regime would be far more severe than that of his father (5–15). Rehoboam's unreasonable attitude led to the break up of his kingdom and he soon had a major rebellion on his hands (16–19). *Haduram, who was in charge of revenue* (translated '*the taskmaster over the forced labour*' in the ESV) was assassinated.

Why didn't Rehoboam take the more sensible advice of his elder statesmen (6–8)? Why did he refuse to listen with some sympathy to the complaints of the people? The answer is found in verse 15: *For the turn of affairs was from God, that the LORD might fulfil his word.* God had warned Solomon that he would tear most of the kingdom from him because of his idolatry (1 Kings 11:10–13). **We must remember in our troubled times when wickedness abounds and Christians are persecuted, that God is in absolute control of all kings and of all political leaders.** *The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; he turns it wherever he wishes* (Proverbs 21:1). God's purposes cannot be overturned (Psalm 2).

Our God is greater than all gods

Solomon's father David had enjoyed a very friendly relationship with king Hiram of Tyre and Solomon now sought to enlist his help to build the house of God (3). He needed the skilled labour and cedar wood that Hiram was able to provide. Solomon wrote to Hiram outlining his building plans and promised to repay his workers with wheat, barley, wine and oil (4–10).

Solomon also told Hiram why he wanted to build the temple and why it should excel as a building. He said, '*The temple which I build will be great, for our God is greater than all gods*' (5). Hiram may have been an idol worshipper but Solomon was not embarrassed to declare to him, the surpassing greatness of the Lord. He did what is urged in Psalm 96:3–4: *Declare his glory among the nations, his wonders among all peoples. For the LORD is great and greatly to be praised*

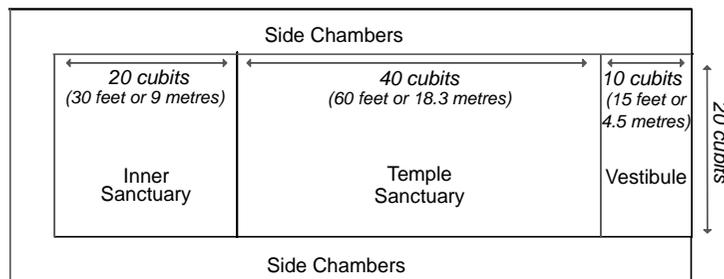
Hiram readily agreed to help Solomon. He acknowledged the hand of the Lord in Solomon's life and sent his most skilled craftsman to assist him (11–14). A great workforce was also enlisted to quarry stone and to move it (2, 17–18). Aholiab, a key craftsman in the building of the tabernacle was from the tribe of Dan (Exodus 31:6). It is interesting to note that Hiram, the master craftsman, sent by Hiram to assist in the work, was the son of a woman from the same tribe (14).

Solomon had a high view of God and because of this he was determined that only the best was good enough for the house of the Lord (7–8). **When we remember the sovereign might of the Lord, we will view all that we do for him in a different light.** We will give him our very best because he is very great and we will not be ashamed to share the glorious message of the gospel with others! — *Our God is greater than all gods.*

Mount Moriah where the LORD had appeared to ... David

The temple was built on *Mount Moriah where the LORD had appeared to ... David* (1). The angel of the LORD had stood still on Ornan's threshing floor and refrained from further judgment on Israel following David's sin (1 Chronicles 21:22–28). David purchased the threshing floor from Ornan to build an altar to the Lord. He then offered sacrifices and called upon the Lord (1 Chronicles 21:22–28). Several centuries earlier, Abraham had also built an altar in the land of Moriah, where in a great display of faith and obedience to God, he showed that he was willing to offer his beloved son Isaac. God did not allow him to kill Isaac (Genesis chapter 22) but he did not spare his own Son (Romans 8:32) to save sinners.

Solomon's temple was twice the size of the tabernacle in length and in width (3; cp. Exodus chapter 26). It was not a large building compared with others in ancient times, but it was very beautiful. It does not appear that the bronze pillars supported any part of the building (15–17). These pillars were given the names '*Jachin*' (meaning 'he will establish') and '*Boaz*' ('in him is strength'). As the priests entered the temple, these names reminded them of their need to rely on the Lord in their ministry.

Plan of temple building

We no longer need magnificent buildings with altars to worship God. The church which is made up of every Christian is described as *a holy temple in the Lord* (Ephesians 2:19–22). **God now meets with us when we come together to worship with his people.**

His wisdom which God had put in his heart

Today's Bible reading has an account of the splendour of Solomon's reign and the wealth that he had accumulated: *So King Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom* (22). The five hundred gold shields and his huge ivory throne overlaid with gold are an indication of his great wealth (15–19). Silver was considered of little worth at this time (20,27).

The spiritual decline of Solomon and its disastrous consequences is passed over (see 1 Kings chapter 11). God blessed and prospered Israel during the early part of Solomon's reign, because they had honoured him. The principle stated in Proverbs 14:34 still stands: *Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.*

Britain and the western world have departed from the Christian standards that they once upheld and wickedness is more evident than righteousness. Governments of different political persuasions have passed wicked laws in defiance of God's Word. The permissive society has not brought freedom but misery and instability. There has been a massive breakdown in family life and increasing lawlessness. The Lord's Day is desecrated with impunity, the lives and rights of unborn children are not valued, there is an epidemic of gambling, murders and violent crime. How we need to pray that God will be gracious to us and revive his churches and turn many people to himself!

Kings sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart (23). His God-given wisdom was obvious to all who came into contact with him. God has given every Christian great spiritual riches, including redemption through the blood of Christ and the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7–8; 2:7). He also bestows wisdom on those who seek him. This wisdom is *first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy* (James 3:17). **Does this wisdom show in your life?**

I did not believe and indeed the half ... was not told me

People came to Jerusalem from far and wide to hear the wisdom of Solomon (23) and one such person was the queen of Sheba, probably the Yemen of today (1). The north of the country contained rich gold mines. The queen was not disappointed as Solomon answered all her questions. She was so overwhelmed by the magnificence of Solomon's court and the greatness of his wisdom *that there was no more spirit in her* (4). She confessed, *'It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. However I did not believe their words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed, the half of the greatness of your wisdom was not told me'* (5–6). She acknowledged the hand of God upon Solomon and Israel and went away with far more than she had brought to the king (7–8,12).

There was a time when we did not believe in God as he is revealed in the Bible. We were ignorant, without God and without hope (Ephesians 2:12). Then the Lord opened our eyes to see the wonder of his greatness and his grace. We 'saw' that we were under condemnation, but that the Lord Jesus died on the cross to save sinners. We were born again through the mighty working of the Holy Spirit in our lives and found forgiveness and peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. The risen Lord Jesus is more wonderful than we had ever imagined. We are able to rejoice and echo the words of the Queen of Sheba, *'I did not believe ... the half was not told me.'* Wonder of wonders, the best is yet to be; heaven and glory await us!

Christian reader, ponder the greatness of your salvation and worship and praise God. Your Saviour and Friend is far, far greater than Solomon (8; cp. Matthew 12:42). **If you are not a Christian, I urge you to seek the Lord and his free forgiveness for your sin. Turn from your sin and trust in the Lord Jesus. You will not find the Christian life to be easy, but will know the blessing of God upon your life as you follow and obey the teaching of the Bible.**

The things which his father David had dedicated

The furnishings of the temple are described in this chapter:

- The bronze altar for burnt offerings (1) was twenty cubits long and wide and ten cubits high (29 feet × 29 feet × 14.5 feet). *
- The Sea was supported by twelve oxen (2–5). It was called 'the Sea' because of its size and it contained eighteen thousand gallons of water; (one 'bath' - 6 gallons or 22 litres).
- Ten lavers from which the priests took water to use in their ritual cleansing (6); this cleansing is no longer necessary. We are cleansed from sin through the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 6:11; 1 John 1:7).
- The ten lampstands of gold, ten tables and one hundred bowls of gold; various items of gold for use in the Holy Place (7–8; 19–22). The ten tables were used for the shewbread (or 'Bread of the Presence').
- Pots, shovels, bowls and forks (11,16).

Solomon took seven years to build the temple (1 Kings 6:38) but there had been years of preparation by his father David. When the work was completed, *Solomon brought in all the things which his father David had dedicated* (5:1). David wanted to build the temple but God did not allow him to do so (1 Chronicles 17:1–15). He played a vital role in the work, however, by setting aside silver and gold to furnish it.

We should always remember that our work for God has far-reaching effects even after the end of our life on earth. A godly upbringing of children will continue to bear fruit in their lives long after we have gone. We may be discouraged because we enjoy little success in faithful evangelistic work, but who knows what foundation we are laying for the next generation of Christians. We may do the planting and they may water a growing work with prayerful labour after we have died, but God gives the increase and we will all have our reward (1 Corinthians 3:7–8). **Let us persevere in the work that the Lord has given us to do; we do not labour in vain!**

* One cubit is the equivalent of 17.5 inches (44.45 centimetres).

He is good, for his mercy endures forever

When the building of the temple was completed, the ark of the covenant was carried from the tent which David had made (cp. 2 Samuel 6:17) to the Most Holy Place in the temple. The ark was a wooden box, overlaid with gold, measuring 2½ cubits in length × 1½ cubits in width × 1½ cubits in height (Exodus 25:10–11). It contained the two tablets of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments (10; Exodus 34:28). All the elders and tribal heads of Israel gathered for this great occasion and numerous sacrifices were offered to God (2–6).

After the ark had been placed in the Most Holy Place (7), the musicians played and the singers lifted up their voice in praise to God saying, '*He is good, for his mercy endures forever*' (13; cp. 7:3). As they were singing, *the glory of the LORD filled the house of God* (13–14). The priests were so overwhelmed by God's glory that they could not continue ministering. The cloud indicated God's presence with his people (Exodus 40:34–38).

When David brought the ark to Jerusalem to the tent that he had made for it, he wrote a psalm calling upon the people to '*give thanks to the LORD, for he is good! for his mercy endures forever*' (1 Chronicles 16:1,34). This refrain was used much in Israel's worship (eg. Psalm 106:1; 136:1). We should always remind ourselves of the goodness and mercy of God. He is altogether good and perfect! There is no trace of blemish or fault in God. When Moses asked God to show him his glory, he replied, '*I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you*' (Exodus 33:19).

God's goodness was displayed in an amazing manner when he gave his only begotten Son to die on the cross for us sinners. We experience his goodness every day, receiving from him, spiritual and temporal blessings. **The Lord is worthy of our devotion and love because he is good! Let us come to God in prayer with confidence because he is good and let us praise him, for his mercy endures forever.**

My wife shall not dwell in the house of David

This chapter gives us a glimpse of Solomon's building and commercial enterprises. Thousands of workers were needed for all of this activity and he put the Canaanites who remained in the land into forced labour (1–9). Solomon also established a merchant fleet at Ezion Geber and Elath at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba, with skills learned from the servants of Hiram, king of Tyre (17–18; cp. 1 Kings 9:26–28). They traded with Ophir (India according to Jewish historian, Josephus). Solomon also established the worship of God in the temple and the observance of the three annual feasts which God had appointed for Israel to keep (12–15).

The work the Solomon did relating to the temple was well-ordered (16) but all was not well in Israel. Solomon built a house for his Egyptian wife outside of Jerusalem. He reasoned, '*My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places to which the ark of the LORD has come are holy*' (11). His union to the Egyptian princess was a marriage of political convenience. Solomon did not want his heathen wife to dwell in Jerusalem because the temple of God was there. He acknowledged that there was a problem of incompatibility. His wife may not have been comfortable with the continual reminders of Jehovah, the only true God, and of his commands as worshippers came to the temple. Solomon should not have married a woman who did not know the Lord. This marriage marked the beginning of Solomon's spiritual decline. He went on to marry other heathen women and his own life and that of the nation were blighted (see 1 Kings chapter 11).

Many a professing Christian has cultivated a friendship with an unbeliever which has led to marriage. **This is wrong and sinful! A believer must not choose to share his life with an unbeliever (see 2 Corinthians 6:14–18).** If you are single, be determined that you will obey God if you marry. Pray for, and seek a partner who loves the Lord and who will help advance your Christian life rather than hinder it!

If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves

The Lord again appeared to Solomon to confirm that he had heard his prayer and that he had chosen the temple the a place of sacrifice and worship (12,16). The Lord then warned that if they were unfaithful to him, he would send drought, locusts to consume the crops, and plagues; these would be sent to punish them so that they would return to him (13; cp. Joel, chapter 1). The Lord is very gracious and merciful! He will receive us and restore us and hear our prayer when we truly repent (14–15). He said, *‘If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and forgive their sin and heal their land’* (14). How we need to take this verse to heart! It reveals what is involved in repentance for sin:

- We must humble ourselves before God.
- We must pray and seek the face of God.
- We must turn from our sin (our wicked ways). Do you see sin as wickedness in the sight of God?

God again promised to establish Solomon’s throne as long as he and his descendants remained faithful to him and obeyed his commandments (17–18). He again warned against disobedience and unfaithfulness. The magnificent temple would lie in ruins (this would have been unthinkable at the time) and those who passed by would be appalled and ask, *‘Why has the LORD done thus to this land and this house?’* (21; cp. similar warnings in Deuteronomy 29:24–25; Jeremiah 22:8–9). Why would God do such a thing? Because he is holy and he cannot tolerate sin. Whatever blessing we may presently enjoy, we must remember that God will bring judgment upon us if we are unfaithful to him. Countries where the gospel flourished in the first and second centuries AD (eg. North Africa and Turkey) are now in much darkness. Their early churches drifted into unfaithfulness and died.

We are all prone to wander away from the Lord. Let us be watchful and prayerful at all times!

The king ... blessed the whole congregation of Israel

The coming into the temple of the cloud and the glory of God inspired a sense of reverence and awe in Solomon (1–2; cp. Exodus 20:21). If reverence is missing from our worship, we are not truly worshipping the Lord!

Solomon then *turned around and blessed the whole congregation of Israel* (3). This was more than just a form of words; he was pronouncing God’s blessing on the people, calling upon him to do them good (cp. Numbers 6:23–27). To know God’s blessing on our lives is to have true happiness (the meaning of ‘blessed’ in the Beatitudes – Matthew 5:3–12). The king then blessed God which carries a different meaning to his blessing the people (4). When we bless God, we speak well of him, adoring him for his greatness and praising him for all the blessings he bestows upon us Ephesians 1:3–6; 1 Peter 1:3–5). God takes great pleasure in receiving the blessing, the worship and the praises of his people (cp. John 4:23–24). **It is wonderful that the almighty Creator of the universe should desire our worship. Do you bless the Lord every day?**

Solomon recalled his father’s desire to build a temple and God’s promise that he, Solomon, would be the man to undertake this great work. The Lord had fulfilled his word and Solomon had made a place for the ark (7–11). God’s glory and blessing came when a place was made for the ark which contained the tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written (5:10).

We are all in great need of God’s blessing in our churches today. Some have resorted to all kinds of worldly and unworthy expedients in their pursuit for success and what they perceive as blessing. That is not the way! When the ministry of God’s Word is central in the life of the church and when we submit to its teaching, then and only then will there be real blessing.

I pray, let your eyes be open and let your ears be attentive

After addressing the people, Solomon came to God in prayer, concluding with words found in Psalm 132:8–10. Solomon’s prayer is one of the greatest recorded in the Bible. These verses point us to some of the essentials of prayer. How should we pray?

- We must be reverent (18). Solomon was on his knees before God with his hands spread out toward heaven (13). He knelt in humility before his Maker (Psalm 95:6). It is quite scriptural to raise the hands in prayer (cp. 1 Timothy 2:8), but this must not be confused with waving or clapping hands. We may find it helpful to raise our hands in private prayer because it is all too easy when on our knees to slouch and to become drowsy.
- We should begin with worship and adoration (14,18).
- We should praise God for answered prayer (15).
- The Bible has many precious promises for us which we should use in prayer. Solomon prayed that God would fulfil his promise to David (16–17).
- We must confess our sin to the Lord (36–39). Christians do have the remains of sin within. *There is no one who does not sin* (36; cp. 1 John 1:8–9). We must grieve over our sin and repent.
- We should bring our requests to God. Solomon prayed for the people of God (19–42) and for the Gentiles, that they too would come to a knowledge of God (32–33). We should pray not only for those in our own church, but also for God’s people and his work around the world. We need to pray for the progress of the gospel among those who are lost. To do this, we need to be informed, we need to read missionary magazines and prayer letters.
- We should come with confidence, knowing that God will hear us because we belong to him. Solomon prayed, *‘Now my God, I pray, let your eyes be open and let your ears be attentive to the prayer made in this place’* (40) We come to a throne of grace (Hebrews 4:14–16)!

It is a great privilege to be able to come to our heavenly Father in prayer. Do you appreciate and make good use of this privilege?

He sent the people away to their tents, joyful and glad of heart

When Solomon finished praying, the Lord sent down fire from heaven to consume the burnt offering. The temple was filled with the cloud of God’s glory (1–2; cp. 5:14). The people who had witnessed the fire falling from heaven and had seen the glory of the Lord coming upon the temple, bowed their faces to the ground and worshipped and praised the Lord (3). God’s glory is truly awesome, and one day, every Christian will see that glory in heaven. Let me remind you again, that true worship inspires a sense of reverence and adoration.

Thousands of bulls and sheep were sacrificed over the course of a week and the temple was dedicated and the Levites praised God with a refrain that had been penned by David, *‘For he is good, for his mercy endures for ever.’* Their singing was accompanied by musical instruments (3–6). Solomon consecrated the middle of the court as an additional place to offer the sacrifices, because the bronze altar was not able to receive all the sacrifices (7).

You may wonder why so many animals were sacrificed? The sheep were probably peace offerings in which only certain parts of the animal were burnt as a sacrifice, the remainder being retained by the person bringing the offering (see Leviticus 3:1–17; 7:11–21). The festivities lasted a week and there were so many people present that a large provision was necessary to feed them. In the following week they observed the Feast of Tabernacles (8–10; cp. Numbers 29:12–40).

At the end of the festivities, Solomon *sent the people away to their tents, joyful and glad of heart* for the Lord’s goodness to them (10). The people were filled with great joy. Reverence in worship does not mean that we should be miserable (cp. Psalm 100). Spiritual joy is linked with a sense of God’s holy presence. **The joy of the Lord is not worked up, but comes down from God as we thankfully and reverently worship him.**