

To fulfil the word of the LORD

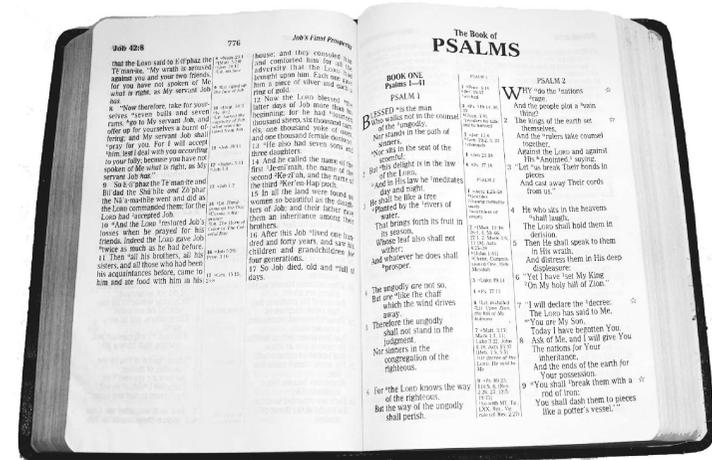
Jeremiah had repeatedly warned Judah and the wicked kings who came after Josiah that they were heading for divine judgment and disaster, but he was treated with contempt (cp. Jeremiah 18:15-18; 21:10). Jerusalem and the temple now lay in ruins, many people had been slaughtered and most of the population had been taken into captivity (17-20), to fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land enjoyed her Sabbaths (21).

You may wonder what is the meaning of the second part of verse 21? It takes us back to a warning found in Leviticus 26:31-35 that pre-dated Jeremiah by seven hundred years. One of the things that marked out Israel from other nations was its observance of the Sabbath day (Exodus 20:8-11; Leviticus 26:2). Crops were rotated and fields were given a sabbath every seven years when they lay fallow. The fourth commandment had been ignored during much of Judah's history and especially during the reign of wicked kings. The fields of Judah were now to have ten Sabbath years (seventy years in all, verse 21) in a sparsely populated land.

2 Chronicles closes on a note of mercy. God had warned of judgment by the mouth of Jeremiah (21) but he also spoke of mercy through the same prophet (22; cp. Jeremiah 25:9-12; 29:10-13). The captivity of seventy years began with exile of Jehoiachin and other notable people in 597 BC, eleven years before the destruction of Jerusalem (9-10; Ezekiel 1:1-2). The LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia to encourage the people to return to Judah (22-23). This heathen king was very kind to the Jews because God had put it into his heart. God sovereignly works in the lives of all kinds of people, including leaders of nations (Proverbs 21:1). This should encourage us to pray for them (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Who knows what wonderful things the Lord may be pleased to do?

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



September 2019

2 Chronicles chapters 20 to 36

No remedy

After Josiah's death, three of his sons and a grandson reigned over Judah during a period of twenty-three years:–

- Jehoahaz reigned only three months before the Egyptians removed him from the throne, replacing him with his brother, Jehoiakim (1–4; cp. 2 Kings 23:32–34).
- Jehoiakim reigned for eleven years, and Jehoiachin his son for three months (5–10).
- Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim followed his father as king, reigning just three months before the Babylonians took him captive to Babylon with the best craftsmen and soldiers of Judah (9–10; cp. 2 Kings 24:8–16). Ezekiel was among these captives. This captivity in 597 BC was the precursor of the captivity of Judah that was to follow eleven years later.
- The king of Babylon appointed Zedekiah, brother of Jehoiakim, to rule over Judah. His eleven year reign was cut short when he rebelled against the Babylonians (11–20).

All these kings *did evil in the sight of the LORD* (1–14; cp. 2 Kings 23:32,37). Jeremiah prophesied through these reigns but he was much persecuted (eg. Jeremiah 38:1–6). The Lord repeatedly warned the people and their leaders that he would judge them for their wickedness but they mocked his messengers and despised them *till there was no remedy* (16). God brought the Chaldeans (Babylonians) against Judah to judge the wicked nation (cp. 2 Kings 25:1–21). Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed and the people were taken to Babylon, where they languished in captivity just as Jeremiah had prophesied (15–21).

No remedy. – What fearsome words! A man or woman may become so stubborn in their rebellion against God, that he gives them up to their sin (Romans 1:24,26,28). **Those who despise God's Word and mock the gospel, do so at their peril!** Britain and the western world are guilty of this very sin and we see the terrible consequences around us. *He who is often reproved and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy* (Proverbs 29:1).

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Josiah ... did not heed the words of Necho

Good men sometimes act rashly and an act of folly was to cost Josiah his life and put an end to his great work of reformation in Judah. The Egyptian king sought to lead his army through Judah to fight the Assyrians who were enemies of Judah. Josiah's refusal to allow Pharaoh Necho passage through Judah and his determination to fight the Egyptians defied common sense. The Egyptian king told him that God had commanded him to fight the Assyrians and that Josiah should refrain from meddling, lest God destroy him (20–21). *Nevertheless Josiah ... did not heed the words of Necho from the mouth of God* (22). Josiah was mortally wounded in battle and the prophet Jeremiah and all Judah lamented for him (23–25).

Heathen adversaries could claim that God was with them when he was not (cp. 2 Kings 18:25). Josiah may have doubted Necho's claim but we do not read that he enquired of the Lord before engaging in this hazardous venture or that he consulted the prophet Jeremiah (21–22). Why did Josiah disguise himself when he went into battle if he was so sure that God was with him? The death of Josiah was to bring in a period of great instability in Judah which led to the captivity in Babylon some twenty-three years later.

Josiah was engaged in spiritual warfare when he brought reformation to the religious life of Judah. He foolishly engaged in an unnecessary earthly war which cost him his life. **Satan will wait his time to bring down God's servants and we must always be on our guard so that he cannot take advantage of us.** Are you prepared to listen to the advice of godly friends or even non-Christians when you may be planning some doubtful course of action? The Lord may use even unbelievers to urge caution upon us just as he used Necho to warn Josiah. *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour* (1 Peter 5:8).

Nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon you

When Judah was faced with an invasion, Jehoshaphat reacted in a very different manner to his father. Asa had sought help from the Syrians (16:1–5) but Jehoshaphat sought the Lord. A great army from Moab, Ammon and Edom (Mount Seir) were in Hazazon Tamar poised to invade Judah (1–3,22). Jehoshaphat was afraid but he *set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah* (3). People from cities throughout Judah came to the temple, where Jehoshaphat led them in prayer, expressing his confidence in God:

- He acknowledged the sovereign power of almighty God (6).
- He remembered how God had chosen Israel and had driven out the Canaanites (7).
- He recalled the promise of God to hear and to deliver the people when they cried out to him in the temple (8–9; 6:28–30).
- He confessed Judah's inability to conquer this great army saying, *'We have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do'* (12).
- He affirmed their trust in God: *'but our eyes are upon you'* (12).

Whole families were gathered together to seek the Lord (13). We must never exclude children from our services and we should encourage them to attend the prayer meetings. God's dealings with us and answers to prayer will do much to impress upon their young minds that we serve the living God and that he does hear and answer prayer.

Christian, are you perplexed or fearful? Are you beset by anxiety and hardly know what to do next? **Set yourself to seek the Lord and turn your eyes to the Lord Jesus (cp. Hebrews 12:1–2). He did not fail Jehoshaphat and he will never fail you. To him be all the glory!**

*Christian, seek not yet repose;
Cast thy dreams of ease away;
Thou art in the midst of foes:
Watch and pray.*

(Charlotte Elliott)

Stand still and see the salvation of the LORD

The Holy Spirit came upon Jahaziel, a Levite, to bring a word of encouragement and instruction to Jehoshaphat and the people concerning the battle. He said, *‘Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God’s ... You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD’* (15,17). These words echo those given by God to the Israelites when they were being pursued by the mighty Egyptian army (Exodus 14:13–14). Some people use the promises in these verses to support a passive view of the Christian warfare. They suggest that we must ‘let go and let God’ fight for us in our battles to overcome temptation and the attacks of Satan. The Bible does not teach this. We wrestle against the forces of evil and we have to *take up the whole armour of God* to wage the Christian warfare (Ephesians 6:10–18). The Lord is our helper, he is with us, and he strengthens us in our battles, but we have to fight! (1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 2:3–4).

After hearing these wonderful promises, Jehoshaphat and the people bowed in worship and certain Levites stood up to praise God (18–19). The people rose up early the next day and Jehoshaphat encouraged them as they prepared to face their enemies. They were led by singers who praised God for his everlasting mercy (20–21). As they began to sing, the Lord brought confusion upon their enemies who began to destroy one another. All that Jehoshaphat had to do was to claim the spoils of the battle which took three days for the people to gather. On the fourth day, they blessed the Lord in the valley of Berachah (this means ‘valley of blessing’). They returned to Jerusalem with great rejoicing and the fear of God came upon the surrounding nations (22–30).

Christian, are you being troubled or facing some great battle? You are not alone. Do not try to struggle through in your own strength. The Lord is with you and he will not fail you. **Trust in him and you will find that your valley of trial will become a valley of blessing!**

He ... encouraged them for the service of the house of the LORD

When Judah departed from the Lord, the great feasts such as the Passover were not kept or they were not properly observed. When a good king sought to reform the religious life of the nation, he also made certain that the Passover was kept (cp. 30:1). Josiah was no exception! It was in the eighteenth year of his reign after the Book of the Law was discovered, Josiah ordered the observance of the Passover (19). *He set the priests in their duties and encouraged them for the service of the house of the LORD* (2). The service here refers to the keeping of the Passover (10–11,16). He encouraged them to *serve according to the word of the LORD* (6). Zeal for God is commendable, but unless it is directed by Scripture, it can do great harm. The Christian life is not easy and we all have spiritual battles. Let us seek always to encourage one another.

Josiah set a great example of generosity towards those who could not afford a Passover offering and the leaders followed him in giving willingly to the people (7–8). An evidence of God’s blessing upon any church is that its members are aware of each others needs and have a practical concern for each other (cp. Acts 4:32–37).

There is another practical challenge in these verses for every believer. We no longer keep the Passover because the Lord Jesus Christ is our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7). He does command, however, that every believer be baptised. This is a vital part of our discipleship (Matthew 28:19). He also commanded that we remember his death at the Lord’s table (1 Corinthians 11:23–32). If we love our Saviour and want to please him, we will obey his commandments (John 14:15). **If you have not followed the Lord in baptism, why not? If you are careless about coming to the Lord’s Table, what excuse do you have before the Lord?** It is not good enough to pay lip-service to God’s Word; we must obey it! (Matthew 7:24; James 1:22).

Because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself

During the renovation work in the temple, Hilkiah the priest found ‘*the Book of the Law of the LORD given by Moses*’ (14). This was the book of Deuteronomy which designates itself as the ‘*Book of the Law*’ (Deuteronomy 29:21; 30:10). Shaphan the scribe read the book before the king, and this had a profound effect upon Josiah. He realised that divine judgment was hanging over Judah because of the wickedness of its rulers and people in the past. He tore his clothes as a sign of sorrow and mourning over the sins of the nation (14–21; cp. Deuteronomy 28:15–68).

The Lord gave Josiah a reassuring message through Huldah the prophetess (23–28). The Lord said, ‘*because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before God ... I also have heard you*’ (27). God promised Josiah that though he would bring calamity on Judah, it would not be during his lifetime. **What kind of effect does the reading or preaching of God’s Word have on you? Is your heart tender or hard? Do you obey the Word or do you rebel against it? Have you ever humbled yourself before the Lord or wept over your sin?** If your heart is tender, God will hear your prayers.

*O give me, Lord, the tender heart
That trembles at the approach of sin;
A godly fear of sin impart,
Implant and root it deep within.*

(Charles Wesley)

Josiah gathered the elders of Judah and the people of Jerusalem to hear the words of the book of the covenant. He *made a covenant before the LORD, to follow the LORD and to keep his commandments ... with all his heart and all his soul*. He led the nation in a godly manner throughout his life (29–33). Do you seek to obey God with all your heart and all your soul (31)?

The high places were not taken away

The reign of Jehoshaphat is described in the last verses of this chapter. It was a good reign, but it was also marred by certain flaws:

- *The high places were not taken away* (33). The high places associated with idol worship had been removed (17:6) but this verse may indicate that some had escaped the purge that had taken place earlier. They had not been removed because *the people had not directed their hearts to the God of their fathers*. Andrew Stewart writes, ‘Jehoshaphat discovered what many others have proved: that while it is possible and desirable to suppress ungodly behaviour by instruction and legislation, these means alone cannot compel a change of heart. Jehoshaphat’s actions had removed some of the high places from the land, but they had not removed idolatry from the hearts of the people.’ (A HOUSE OF PRAYER – THE MESSAGE OF 2 CHRONICLES; page 230).

- Jehoshaphat had allowed his son to marry the daughter of Ahab and he continued to have close ties with this wicked dynasty. He had not learned from his shameful compromise when he had foolishly joined Ahab in an ill-fated military venture (chapter 18). The Lord sent Eliezer to prophesy against him because he set up a joint merchant shipping enterprise with wicked Ahaziah (son of Ahab). Jehoshaphat may have dreamed of a return to the prosperity of Solomon whose merchant fleet had brought much wealth to Israel through its trading (8:17–18; 9:21–22). The Lord warned Jehoshaphat that he would destroy what he had made. The ships were wrecked bringing an end to this scheme (35–37).

Many a Christian has spoiled his Christian witness and evangelistic effectiveness because he has not dealt with certain traits in his behaviour which dishonour God. Let us examine our own hearts and be grateful to friends who have the courage to point out such things and who seek to help us.

He had the daughter of Ahab as a wife

Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram was a very wicked man who reigned over Judah for eight years. He killed all his brothers after he became king and led Judah into idolatry (4,11). The dynasty of the house of David deserved to be cut off because of this wicked man, but God had made a covenant with David that his descendants would rule over his people for ever (the human descent of the Lord Jesus came from the line of David). **No one can defy God and escape his judgment!** The Edomites and Libnah successfully threw off the rule of Judah and Jehoram was troubled by other nations (7–11, 16).

Elijah had been taken to heaven by the time of Jehoram's reign and the prophet would have penned the letter under divine inspiration before he was taken up to heaven (just as Isaiah was later to speak of Cyrus, who came on the scene about 150 years after the death of the prophet — Isaiah 44:28). We are not told who delivered the letter to Jehoram but its message was one of awesome judgment upon the wicked king (12–15). The Lord later struck him with an incurable disease (as had been prophesied) which led to a very painful, gruesome and unlamented death (4,18–20).

Jehoram *had the daughter of Ahab as a wife* (6). His life was marred by Athaliah whose influence was far greater than that of his father Jehoshaphat. We have already seen that he would hardly have known Athaliah but for the foolish friendship of Jehoshaphat with Ahab (see notes on 2 Chronicles 18:1–7). Jehoshaphat could not have been unaware of Jehoram's wicked lifestyle and would have been wise to appoint the most suitable of his sons to succeed him. This would have prevented the murder of those sons by Jehoram.

I plead with those of my readers who are single. Be very careful and prayerful in your choice of a marriage partner. Many a professing Christian who once appeared to be keen to serve the Lord, has drifted into spiritual apathy and worldliness after marrying an unbeliever. Satan wants to ruin your Christian life; beware!

He began to seek the God of his father David

Josiah was the last good king to reign over Judah before the people were taken into Babylonian captivity. He was just eight years old when he became king and *while he was still young he began to seek the God of his father David* (before he was sixteen years old; 1–3). The expression '*his father David*' means 'his ancestor David'. Notice that David is held up as the example for kings to follow (cp. 28:1; 29:2). When we seek God, we must get rid of any spiritual hindrances that get in the way of our communion with the Lord. King Josiah had an awesome responsibility for his nation and he could not seek the Lord and tolerate wickedness in Judah. He thoroughly purged the land of idolatry and in the eighteenth year of his reign, he commanded that the house of the Lord be repaired (4–8).

The Lord will bless us when we seek him and obey his Word; this was seen in several ways when the temple was repaired:

- The northern kingdom had by this time been taken into Assyrian captivity, but some of its remnant helped support the work of repairing the temple (9).
- The craftsmen and the builders *did the work faithfully* (12).
- *The Book of the Law of the LORD* was found during the renovation work (14).

This was a wonderful period in the history of Judah and we may wonder what influenced the young king to seek the Lord. His father was a very wicked man, but this was a time of much prophetic activity. The ministry of Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum and Habakkuk would have made their mark on Josiah (though his sons rejected the message of Jeremiah). Surely this is a great encouragement to pastors, Bible study leaders, Sunday school teachers and others who teach the Word of God. We may feel oppressed by the prevailing wickedness in the world around us, but let us persevere in seeking the Lord in prayer and in working for him. **We know from the history of the church, that in the darkest and most depressing circumstances, God often works in remarkable ways.**

And he did not humble himself before the LORD

Manasseh repented of his sin towards the end of his life and God forgave him, but the consequences of his reckless orgy of wickedness were to remain with Judah (cp. 2 Kings 23:26; 24:3; Jeremiah 15:4). Even though we repent of our sin and find mercy from God, we cannot blot out the harm done to others through past sins. The rot had set in as far as Amon was concerned! He had so imbibed the wicked ways of Manasseh, that his father's repentance did not motivate him to amend his sinful lifestyle. Our children will find it easier to follow a bad example than a godly one. Christian parents have a great responsibility to train their children in godliness.

The new king hardened himself in his wicked ways: *And he did not humble himself before the LORD, as his father Manasseh had humbled himself: but Amon trespassed more and more* (23). This verse indicates that Amon was aware that his evil ways were highly offensive to God but that he stubbornly refused to turn away from his sin. The Lord brought Amon's two year reign to an end when he was assassinated (21–25).

Verse 23 also tells us something about the nature of repentance for sin. *Amon did not humble himself before the LORD. We cannot truly repent unless God causes us to see the evil of our own hearts and feel ashamed of our sin (Cp. Luke 15:17–19). We will then humble ourselves before the Lord and seek his forgiveness.*

*Before thee, God, who knowest all
With grief and shame I prostrate fall.
I see my sins against thee, Lord,
The sins of thought, of deed and word.
They press me sure; I cry to thee:
O God, be merciful to me!*

(Magnus B. Landstad, translated by Carl Doving)

God's occasion for Ahaziah's downfall

Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he became king of Judah (Hebrew scholars point out that there is a scribal error in verse 2; see 2 Kings 8:26). He is called Jehoahaz in the previous chapter (21:17); this is a different form of the same name; 'Jehoahaz' = Jah + Ahaz; — 'Ahaziah' = Ahaz + Jah). Both names mean 'Jehovah has grasped.' He was Jehoram's youngest son and came to the throne because his older brothers had been killed by Philistine and Arabian invaders (21:16–17).

Ahaziah was an evil king *for his mother counselled him to do wickedly and the house of Ahab were his counsellors after the death of his father* (3–4). His mother, Athaliah, was obviously the power behind the throne and the evil counsel that he received led to his destruction (4)! **The Lord never ignores human wickedness!** He had anointed Jehu to destroy the remaining descendants of Ahab and Jehu did this with great zeal (see 2 Kings, chapters 9 and 10). Joram, king of Israel (also known as Jehoram) had been wounded in battle with the Syrians. Ahaziah visited him while he was recovering in Jezreel and this was *God's occasion for Ahaziah's downfall* (7). Jehu came to Jezreel where he killed Joram and pursued and killed a fleeing Ahaziah (cp. 2 Kings 9:14–29). Jezebel had Naboth murdered in Jezreel and Joram's death further fulfilled the prophecy of Elijah (1 Kings 21:17–24).

On hearing of her son's death, Athaliah seized the throne after killing the members of the royal family, except for baby Joash. He was rescued by his aunt, Jehoshabeath, who was married to Jehoiada the priest, hid him in the house of God for six years (10–12). Satan has opposed the Lord from the beginning and Athaliah was his willing tool. God had purposed and promised that his Messiah (anointed One) would come through the royal line of David (2 Samuel 7:16; Acts 2:29–30), hence Jesus is sometimes called, '*the Son of David*' (Matthew 21:9). Had Athaliah murdered Joash, God's purposes would have been thwarted and his promise broken, **but such a thing is impossible (Psalm 33:11; Isaiah 14:24,27).**

A covenant ... that they should be the LORD'S people

Jehoram had established Baal worship in Judah and his sons had desecrated the temple (21:11; 24:7). Athaliah's evil reign brought increasing spiritual darkness to the land, but there were some who remained faithful to the Lord. One of these was Jehoiada the priest, whom God used to bring spiritual reformation in Judah. He put his own life at great risk when he and his wife sheltered the young prince in the house of the Lord and when he enlisted support for the overthrow Athaliah (1–2). She was a Baal worshipper and was unlikely to visit the temple where Joash was hidden. He made careful plans for the protection of Joash and for the coronation of the boy king (3–11).

When Athaliah heard the noise of the celebrations, she went to the temple to find the people rejoicing and hailing Joash as their king. The wicked queen cried out, *'Treason! Treason!'* before she was taken from the temple and slain (14–15) but she had herself been guilty of treason, treachery and mass-murder. When all seemed lost, God had Joash safely hidden away. **We must never lose heart when Satan appears to have the upper hand. The Lord is always in control!**

Jehoiada lost no time in removing Baal worship from the land after the death of Athaliah (17). He *made a covenant between himself, the people, and the king, that they should be the LORD'S people* (16). This was a commitment to follow God and to obey him. Every Christian has also been brought into a covenant relationship with God through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 22:19; Hebrews 8:6–13). We are not our own but have been purchased at great cost and we must always seek to glorify God in our lives (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).

There is spiritual and moral chaos around us worse than in Judah during Athaliah's reign. Let us not sink in despair but look to God who is sovereign, praying much and working to make the gospel known.

*From cowardice defend us, from lethargy awake!
Forth on thine errands send us to labour for thy sake.*

(Frank Houghton)

In affliction, he humbled himself greatly ... and prayed

Manasseh was born during the years of extended life which the Lord had given to Hezekiah. He may have been adversely influenced through the spiritual decline of his father during those years. He was only twelve years of age when he came to the throne and his fifty-five year reign was the longest in Judah's history. Manasseh plunged the land into the most appalling wickedness during his long reign of terror. He was a zealous idol worshipper and he rebuilt the high places his father had destroyed. He desecrated the house of the Lord by placing pagan altars in its courts and an idol within its walls. He offered his children as sacrifices to the god Molech, in the valley of the Son of Hinnom. He practised witchcraft and consulted spiritist mediums (1–7). Manasseh seduced Judah to do more evil than the nations whom God had driven out of Canaan (9). He was a mass murderer who *shed very much innocent blood* (2 Kings 21:16).

Manasseh refused to listen to God and the Lord used the Assyrians to punish him. They took him captive to Babylon (then under Assyrian rule) in chains and with a hook through his nose (10). The Lord worked in Manasseh's heart while he was imprisoned in Babylon: When he was *in affliction, he implored the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly ... and prayed to him* (12–13). You may be surprised that such a vile man was found seeking God. Even more amazing, God heard him and restored to him his kingdom. **The grace of God is very wonderful! No one is beyond the reach of his mercy and love!** Manasseh began to undo the evil that he had done, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord (15–16).

If you are praying for someone who shows no sign of turning to God, **remember Manasseh**, and persevere in your prayers. If you think that you are too sinful for God to save you, **remember Manasseh**, humble yourself and seek God.

*Who is a pardoning God like thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?*

(Samuel Davies)

But Hezekiah did not repay according to the favour shown him

In a time of crisis, Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah did what we should all do in such circumstances, they *prayed and cried out to heaven* (20). The Lord heard them and sent an angel to destroy the mighty Assyrian army. Sennacherib was later assassinated in the temple of his god. He paid dearly for scorning the living God. The news of the defeat of the Assyrians spread far and wide and many who now felt much safer brought gifts for the temple and gave presents to Hezekiah (21–23).

Hezekiah's illness pre-dates Jerusalem's deliverance from the Assyrians (see notes of 18 August 2017 on 2 Kings 20:1–11). Isaiah brought him a message from God telling him that he was going to die. The distressed king sought the face of God in prayer (2 Kings 20:1–3) and the Lord healed Hezekiah and promised to extend his life by fifteen years. God gave him a miraculous sign to confirm his promise, causing the shadow of the sun-dial to go back ten degrees (2 Kings 20:5–11).

The added years were a disaster for Hezekiah who fell into the sin of pride: *But Hezekiah did not repay according to the favour shown him, for his heart was lifted up* (25). The proud king showed all his treasures to a visiting delegation of Babylonians and there is no evidence that he acknowledged the goodness of God to him for his recovery during the visit of the Babylonians (31). The Lord sent Isaiah to warn him that a day would come when all the treasures that he had so proudly displayed would be plundered by the Babylonians and his descendants carried off captive (2 Kings 20:14–19; Isaiah chapters 38 and 39).

Hezekiah's life was marred by pride. We will soon fall into the same sin if we do not acknowledge that we have no strength of our own in the Christian life. We must humbly depend on God at all times and an evidence of this is that we seek his help in prayer each day. If you think that you can stand in your own strength, beware (1 Corinthians 10:12)! **How do you repay God for all that he has done for you?**

Joash set his heart on repairing the house of the LORD

Jehoiada exerted a godly influence over Joash who later *set his heart on repairing the house of the LORD* (1–4). The godly priest made a great spiritual impact in Judah. The history of the church tells a similar story. Men such as Athanasius, Augustine, Luther and Calvin were used by God to change the course of history. We desperately need such men today!

The temple of the Lord would have had a special place in the affection of Joash. It was there that he had been hidden from wicked Athaliah who had desecrated it. He called the priests and other Levites together and urged them to gather in contributions for the repair of the temple. He may have had in mind the half-shekel tax which was levied on every male above twenty years of age (Exodus 30:11–16). It was paid annually, for the upkeep of the tabernacle, and afterwards used for the upkeep of the temple. Joash said, *'See that you do it quickly.'* *However the Levites did not do it quickly* (5). In the twenty-third year of his reign, the funds had not been raised (2 Kings 12:6). Joash summoned Jehoiada who was the chief priest and asked him why there was such a delay? The repair work was soon completed after the people had given generously and joyfully (8–14).

Is there a work that you can do, but which is not being done? Are there jobs that you have promised to do for the Lord which still wait to be completed? **Satan will encourage you to believe that there is plenty of time, but you cannot afford to have a laid-back attitude in the work of God! Get up and get going!**

*Give me the faith which can remove
And sink the mountain to a plain;
Give me the childlike praying love
Which longs to build thy house again;
Thy love, let it my heart o'erpower
And fill me from this very hour.*

(Charles Wesley)

Joash the king did not remember the kindness ... done to him

Jehoiada lived to a ripe old age. He was faithful to the Lord, having *done good in Israel, both toward God and his house* (15–16). He was a restraining influence on the ungodly leaders in Judah. After his death, these leaders came to the king who *listened to them* (17). It is obvious that they were demanding to be free from the restraint of God's laws. Joash agreed to their demands and idol-worship soon flourished (18).

God is gracious and he sent prophets to warn them about their wicked ways and to bring them back to himself *but they would not listen* (19). The Spirit of God then came upon Jehoiada's son, Zechariah, who pleaded with them to consider their ways. The people plotted against him and at the command of Joash, they stoned him in the court of the temple (20–21). Joash had been hidden in the temple by Jehoiada and his wife (22:10–12) to preserve his life and he had been crowned there by the Jehoiada (23:10–11). Joash ordered the murder of Jehoiada's son and he was stoned to death in the courtyard of the temple. *Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but killed his son.* The last words of dying Zechariah were, *'The LORD look on it, and repay!'* (21–22).

God did repay the treacherous king! Soon afterwards, the Syrians came against Jerusalem with a small detachment of troops *but the LORD delivered a very great army into their hand* (24). The Syrians killed the wicked leaders of the city and left Joash severely wounded. The king was assassinated by two of his servants as he lay on his bed (25–26). **He reaped the evil that he had sown! No one can despise God or harm his servants and escape divine judgment!**

How do you repay the kindness that other people show towards you? Do you remember their kindness? Do you thank God for such people? Do you show your appreciation by seeking to help them when they are in need? *Be kind to one another* (Ephesians 4:32).

With us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles

When we seek to honour God, the devil will stir up trouble for us. After Hezekiah's acts of faithfulness to the Lord, Sennacherib, the Assyrian king invaded Judah with a huge army (1). Satan was determined to destroy God's faithful people, hence the invasion, but God was determined to make them stronger through this trial. The book of Acts shows again and again that when God is working, there is generally a sharp reaction from the devil. If you are seeking to be faithful to God, do not be surprised when Satan attacks you, but remember that your Saviour is stronger than the wicked one.

Hezekiah summoned his leaders and army commanders to plan their course of action. They deprived the invaders of a plentiful water supply and strengthened the fortifications of Jerusalem (3–5). Hezekiah was encouraged by the prophet Isaiah and he urged the people to be strong and courageous and not to be afraid, saying, *'for there are more with us than with him. With him is the arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles.'* The people were strengthened by these words (6–8). We often fail in testing times because we do not encourage ourselves in the Word of God.

The Assyrians used psychological warfare in an attempt to undermine the people's confidence in God. They tried to scare Jerusalem into submission and spoke in Hebrew to make certain that everyone understood their threats (18). They misrepresented Hezekiah who had not destroyed God's altars but idol shrines (12). They were right to despise the useless gods that were worshipped by the nations they had conquered. They blasphemed God however, by putting him on the same level as those gods and by scorning Hezekiah's counsel to trust in the Lord (13–19). Those who scorn God are on a perilous path as the Assyrians were soon to discover.

Always remember when you are tried and when your faith in God is under attack, that he is with you and that he will help you to fight all your battles. Trust in him; he will never fail you!

He did what was good and right and true before the LORD

The purge of idolatry in the land continued and extended into parts of the northern kingdom (1). Hezekiah restored the pattern of worship and sacrifices *as it is written in the Law of the LORD* (2–3). He supplied the animals needed for the burnt offerings which were sacrificed each day and at the appointed feasts (3). He commanded the people to provide for the support of the priests and the Levites, *that they might devote themselves to the Law of the LORD* (4). Hezekiah recognised that God's servants must be supported by his people. This principle is also taught in the New Testament: *The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel* (1 Corinthians 9:13–14; 1 Timothy 5:17–18). **We have a solemn obligation to support those who faithfully pastor our churches.**

There is now a great shortage of suitable pastors and we should also pray that the Lord will raise up many faithful men to fill the gaps. We face great challenges as many churches are small and have elderly congregations. Churches who are without pastors should earnestly seek the Lord to send a faithful man to lead them and they should be prepared to give sacrificially to support such a man.

There was such an overwhelming response to Hezekiah's command that the people contribute to the support of the priests and the Levites, that they had more than enough to spare. The chief priest told him that *'the LORD has blessed his people; and what is left is this great abundance'* (10). What a transformation in such a short time after the Lord had brought Judah to such a low and miserable condition during the wicked reign of Ahaz (28:19)!

The remainder of the chapter gives the names of the priests and Levites who were involved in Hezekiah's reforming work. We are again reminded of the secret of Hezekiah's prosperous reign in verses 20 and 21: *He did what was good and right and true before the LORD his God ... in every work ... to seek his God, he did it with all his heart.* **Could the same be said of you?**

But not with a loyal heart

There are three striking similarities between the reign of Amaziah and his father, Joash:

- Both began well, professing zeal for the Lord, but later fell into idol worship.
- Both ignored the warnings of faithful prophets.
- Both, having forsaken God, died at the hands of assassins.

Amaziah *did what was right in the sight of the LORD, but not with a loyal heart* (2). The word translated 'loyal' means 'whole'; in other words, he was not whole-hearted in his obedience to God. He was a half-and-half follower of God. Once established on his throne, he avenged the death of his father by having the assassins executed. It was common in those times for those seeking revenge to kill not only murderers but also their children. God's law prohibited this practice and Amaziah did obey this law (3–4).

He went to war against the Edomites and hired a hundred thousand mercenaries from Israel at a cost of a hundred talents of silver. A man of God warned him of the folly of this action because the Lord was not with Israel. Amaziah obeyed the word of the Lord and sent the mercenaries home although he had already paid a small fortune to hire them. God gave him a great victory over the Edomites, but then things began to go wrong because he was half-hearted in his commitment to God. The troops from Israel whom he had discharged were very angry. They had their wages, but were denied the spoils of war (eg. a share of the plunder when victory was gained). They made up for this in raiding and plundering certain cities of Judah (5–13).

Amaziah came back to Judah with the idols worshipped by the Edomites. He should have destroyed them but he set them up as his own gods and worshipped them (14). How stupid of him when he had seen that they were useless! **What a warning there is here! If we are not whole-hearted in our devotion to God we will more easily fall into sin. Are you following God with all your heart?**

God's ... which could not rescue their own people

The Lord was angry with unfaithful Amaziah and sent a prophet to rebuke him (this may have been the man of God referred to in verse 7). The logic of his words was clear: *'Why have you sought the gods of the people, which could not rescue their own people from your hand?'* (15). The king interrupted the prophet and told him to cease or to be killed. The prophet gave him a dire warning for refusing to heed his counsel (16).

Amaziah's success over the Edomites encouraged him to take advice to challenge Joash the king of Israel to battle. Joash recognised the foolish pride of Amaziah and sent him a message urging him not to meddle with trouble, but he would not listen because God was to punish him for his trust in the gods of Edom. Amaziah may have recalled the words of the man of God, who on an earlier occasion had indicated that the Lord was not with Israel (17–20; cp. verse 7). He had turned away from God, however, and could no longer expect divine help against Israel. He was defeated and taken captive by Joash. Jerusalem was plundered and hostages were taken (24). After the death of Joash, Amaziah was returned to Judah. He was assassinated fifteen years later following a rebellion against him (25–28). He trusted in useless idols and paid the penalty!

Many of us have not learned the lesson of the folly of turning away from God. **It is possible to make an idol of the world and to covet material things which will fail us in the hour of crisis or death.** Scripture is quite clear in teaching that covetousness is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). We cannot love the world or be moulded by its thinking and at the same time love God (Romans 12:2; 1 John 2:15–17).

*Their prayer came up to his holy dwelling-place, to heaven*

A great congregation assembled at Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (the Passover). The feast was not kept in the first month as commanded in the law of Moses, but these were exceptional circumstances (2–3). Hezekiah was not guilty of disregarding the Word of God by proclaiming that the feast be held in the second month; there was provision for this in the law of Moses (Numbers 9:1–11).

The priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves (15). The hand of God on Judah made the people feel their own sinfulness, hence the shame of the priests and Levites. Many of those from the northern kingdom had not observed the ritual cleansing before eating the Passover. Hezekiah recognised that this was wrong but these people had much to learn since true religion had not been taught in Israel in their time. He prayed for them and the Lord listened to him (17–20). There is a lesson here for those of us who consider ourselves to be mature Christians. Those who are new to the faith and are ignorant of the Bible will do things that are not quite right or in order. Remember, they have much to learn and need our prayers and our loving encouragement and instruction from the Word of God..

Hezekiah also encouraged the Levites in their work for the Lord (22). The king saw that their service was of vital importance for the spiritual well-being of the nation. The work of those who preach and teach the Word of God is still essential. When there is an ignorance of the Bible, there is confusion in the church and a terrible drift into wickedness. Pray for your pastor and for all who teach the Word of God.

The Passover was marked by the greatest joy seen at a feast in Jerusalem since the time of Solomon (26). The chapter ends with an encouraging statement — *and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, to heaven* (27). **When we seek to please God and to obey his Word, he will hear us and he will answer our prayers.**

The hand of God was on Judah

The Jews remember their great deliverance by God from bondage in Egypt when they keep the Feast of the Passover (Exodus 12:1–28). The Passover was not observed during the wicked reign of Ahaz, and Hezekiah was eager that Judah should again keep the feast. He also wanted those in the northern kingdom who had escaped captivity at the hands of the Assyrians to come to Jerusalem for the feast. He sent messengers throughout Israel and Judah proclaiming that the Passover was to be kept in Jerusalem. In letters given to the messengers to read to the people of the northern kingdom, Hezekiah urged them to return to the Lord, reminding them that he is gracious and merciful and that he would receive them (1–9).

Spiritual reformation not only brings a purging of all that is wrong among God's people, it also gives us a concern for those who have drifted from God or who do not know him. Hezekiah's messengers were treated with contempt by the people of the northern kingdom who *laughed them to scorn and mocked them*. God had visited them with judgment but they persisted in their wickedness. Some however, did humble themselves and came to Jerusalem for the Passover (10). We will always meet those who scoff at the gospel but we must not give in to discouragement. There will also be those whose hearts the Lord will open so that they will respond to our message. Let us persevere because we do not labour in vain for the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).

The hand of God was on Judah to give them singleness of heart to do the commandment of the king and the leaders, at the word of the LORD (12). 'The hand of God' is an expression which denotes his power. When the hand of God is upon us we know his blessing and power in our lives. An evidence of this blessing of God is a love of his Word and a determination to obey it. We do not have to wait for revival to know God's hand upon us. Let us examine our own hearts and seek forgiveness and cleansing for any sin that is lurking within us. Let us seek God earnestly in prayer and as we obey him, we will see tokens of his hand upon us in our home, in the church and in our place of work.

As long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper

Uzziah (called Azariah in 2 Kings 15:1) reigned over Judah for fifty-two years, one of the longest reigns in the history of Judah. It was also the most prosperous since the time of Solomon. God gave him military success (6–8) and he built fortifications to enhance the defence of the nation (9). He reorganised his army into a very efficient, well-equipped and powerful fighting force (11–15). Uzziah took a great interest in farming and dug many wells to provide for his livestock and to irrigate the land (10).

What was the secret of Uzziah's prosperous reign? — *As long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper (5)*. He was influenced by a godly man named Zechariah (5; not to be confused with the man slain by Joash or with the prophet Zechariah, whose book is near to the end of the Old Testament). If you want to enjoy spiritual success and know the blessing of God upon your life, you too must seek the Lord! Our seeking of God is not confined to seeking him for salvation. The whole of the Christian life involves seeking the Lord and discovering more about him. We do this through a disciplined devotional life in which we have fellowship with God through reading the Bible and prayer. We seek God when we go to worship him and to hear his Word read and preached each Lord's Day. We seek God when we meet together at the prayer meetings of the church. We must seek God when we sin, confess our sins to him and repent, if we are to find him. We must also seek the Lord when we pass through perplexing and trying circumstances.

Many professing Christians have a boring and unimpressive kind of life because they are not walking with the Lord. **It is a glorious and priceless privilege it is to have fellowship with the Lord Jesus but there is no slick or easy way to spiritual blessing. We must be whole-hearted in seeking the Lord and this also involves obedience to his Word (4; cp. Psalm 119:10).** We will not seek God unless we hunger and thirst after him. Do you have a soul thirst for God (see Psalm 42:1–2)? *He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him (Hebrews 11:6).* Are you seeking God?

But when he was strong his heart was lifted up

Like his father, Uzziah fell into the sin of pride: *He was marvellously helped* (by God) *till he became strong. But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction* (15–16). He usurped the sacred office of the priesthood by seeking to burn incense in the temple. The brave priests confronted him on account of his sinful intrusion into their priestly office and told him to get out of the sanctuary (17–18). As the proud king raged at them, leprosy broke out on his forehead. To be struck with leprosy in such a manner was a sign of divine judgment (cp. Miriam, Numbers 12:10; Gehazi, 2 Kings 5:27). Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death, never allowed again into the temple to worship with his subjects and his son Jotham ruled as co-regent (21).

Uzziah was yet another man who served God faithfully for many years, only to go wrong towards the end of his life. He may have appeared very religious in wishing to burn incense to the Lord but he was motivated by pride and he knew that his religious act violated God's Word. There is a solemn warning here for us all. It was when Uzziah was strong that he fell into sin. **Many a believer has come to grief when they have felt strong because they did not guard themselves against the wiles of the devil. They thus gave Satan an opportunity to seduce them.** Oh, do not be deceived by the lies of the devil. When we flirt with temptation to sin, we do not stop to think of the dreadful consequences of falling. Think about this! Uzziah's life was blighted by one act of sin and he could not undo the harm that he had done.

We must also beware of pride in our Christian lives. Pride may be seen in a number of ways; We may boast of our spiritual achievements but where would we be without the help of God? We may despise other believers who are not as well taught as ourselves or we may refuse to be reconciled to someone who has offended us. *He who glories, let him glory in the LORD* (1 Corinthians 1:31).

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ my God.*

(Isaac Watts)

The events took place so suddenly

These verses describe the restoration of worship in the temple after it had been cleansed. Once the temple was cleansed, sacrifices were offered according to the instructions given to Moses (see the book of Leviticus). The first sacrifices made were for a sin offering to make atonement for the sin of the people (20–24). These were followed by the burnt offering (27) and the thank offering (31). There were many animals to sacrifice for the burnt offering *but the priests were too few* to cope with the work and needed the help of the Levites. Why was this? *The Levites were more diligent in sanctifying themselves than the priests* (34). Is the work of God suffering in your church for lack of workers? Are you willing to give your time and money to support the work of your church?

The Levites led the singing and worship as commanded by God through David and the prophets (25). *So they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped* (25). There can only be real joy when God is given his rightful place in our lives and in the church. *The service of the house of the LORD was set in order* (35)

The chapter closes with a very interesting comment: *Then Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced that God had prepared the people, since the events took place so suddenly* (36). Who would have believed that such a wonderful transformation could come about in such a short time? God had been preparing Hezekiah and others during the dark and evil days of Ahaz, however! There was also the faithful ministry of Isaiah the prophet to the nation. God is sovereign and he can do the seemingly impossible.

We live in desperate times with widespread hatred of the teaching of the Bible on marriage and the family. Christian values once upheld are under continuous attack. As we walk with the Lord, let us pray much and persevere in our Christian witness. **Who knows what the Lord may do among us suddenly – in revival or in judgment?**

Carry out the rubbish from the holy place

Though Ahaz was a wicked man, his son was one of the best kings to reign over Judah (1–2). Hezekiah had seen the appalling effect of idolatry in the life of his father and he waged war on all forms of idol worship in the land (31:1). He was determined from the outset of his reign to bring about a thorough reformation of religion in Judah. Ahaz had desecrated the temple and allowed it to be cluttered with rubbish. He had shut the doors of the house of God but Hezekiah opened them and repaired them (3; cp. 28:24).

The king summoned the priests and Levites to a meeting at which outlined his plans for restoring true worship in the temple. He told them, ‘*Now sanctify yourselves, sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry out the rubbish from the holy place*’ (5). He reminded them that this was necessary because the nation had forsaken God who was angry with Judah and Jerusalem and had brought disaster upon them because of their wickedness (6–9). He told them that it was in his heart to make a covenant with the Lord (10); this would commit himself and Judah to obey the law of God. He urged the priests and Levites not to be negligent in this great work of reformation because God had chosen them to serve him (11). They took Hezekiah’s words to heart and the temple was cleansed of all its debris and sanctified in sixteen days (12–19).

We live in desperately needy times and the church is in urgent need of reformation. The work must first begin on a personal level as it did with Hezekiah who made a covenant with the Lord. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19–20) and we must clear out the rubbish that spoils us. We must give time to seeking the Lord and be determined to lead holy lives. The church also is the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16) and there is rubbish that must be thrown out. Away with worship that seeks to entertain rather than to honour God! Away with every unbiblical practice! Let us worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:24).

He prepared his ways before the LORD his God

Jotham was good king who was faithful to God but he failed to take action against the wickedness and corruption that spiritually weakened the nation (1–2; cp. 2 Kings 15:35). Isaiah prophesied in Judah at this time and it is apparent from the Lord’s commission to him in the year of Uzziah’s death, that he was to preach a message of judgment to a people who were dull and lacking in spiritual perception (Isaiah 6:1,9–11). The prosperity of Uzziah’s reign with its material blessings had probably sapped the spiritual vitality of many. Jotham enjoyed military success against the Ammonites and he built cities in the hill country of Judah and strengthened the nation’s defences (3–5).

Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the LORD his God (6). This means that he disciplined himself to lead a godly life. He was determined not to fall into the same sin as his father and *he did not enter the temple of the LORD* (2). The judgment that God had inflicted upon proud Uzziah would have made a lasting impression on him. He realised that he could not trifle with sacred things. When we prepare our ways before the Lord, we will be more aware of the stumbling-blocks that the devil puts in our path.

To prepare our ways before the Lord will also mean that we will order our lives according to God’s Word and that we will also seek to please him in all that we do. It means that we will be prayerful look and to God in all of our decision-making. **If we do these things we will have a healthy Christian life.**

*Teach me thy way, O Lord,
Teach me thy way;
Thy gracious aid afford,
Teach me thy way;
Help me to walk aright,
More by faith, less by sight;
Lead me with heavenly light;
Teach me thy way.*

(Benjamin Mansell Ramsey)

For we already have offended the LORD

The next king of Judah, Ahaz, was a very wicked man who angered the Lord on account of his promotion of idol worship (1–4,25). *He did not do what was right in the sight of the LORD, as his father David had done* (1). We are here reminded of his father (ancestor) David who served the Lord. The whole of the land was soon overwhelmed with idolatry and Judah spiralled downwards into moral decline and turmoil. God punished Ahaz by bringing invasion and defeat at the hands of the northern kingdom and of Syria. Many thousands of Judah's finest soldiers were killed and thousands of women and children were taken into captivity to Damascus and to Samaria (5–8).

God is very merciful! The people of Judah deserved to be punished but he sent the prophet Oded to Samaria to speak on behalf of the captives. He warned them that their frenzied killing of the people of Judah was *in a rage that reaches up to heaven*. He pointed out that taking slaves from Judah would make matters worse and that they must return them to their people because the fierce wrath of the Lord was upon them (9–11). Some of the leaders of Israel told their army, *'You shall not bring the captives here, for we already have offended the LORD. You intend to add to our sins and to our guilt; for our guilt is great and there is fierce wrath against Israel.'* The leaders of Israel treated the captives with kindness and returned them to their own people (12–15).

We must always remember that sin offends the Lord and grieves the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30–31). Our sins sometimes lead to great personal suffering and other distressing consequences but God is gracious. **If we will repent and seek the Lord, he will freely heal our backsliding and restore to us the joy of our salvation.**

*Ah! give me, Lord, the tender heart,
That trembles at the approach of sin;
A godly fear of sin impart,
Implant, and root it deep within,
That I may dread thy gracious power,
And never dare to offend thee more.* (Charles Wesley)

Increasingly unfaithful to the LORD

Ahaz had been brought up under the godly influence of his father Jotham as well as having the prophetic ministry of Isaiah, but he spurned these priceless privileges. *The Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz for he had encouraged moral decline in Judah and had been continually unfaithful to the LORD* (19). He suffered invasions from the Syrians, from the Edomites and the Philistines. *Now in the time of his distress King Ahaz became increasingly unfaithful to the LORD. This is that King Ahaz* (22). This is terribly sad! He was in distress. but he refused to seek God, who alone could help him.

When Judah was under attack, Isaiah encouraged Ahaz to trust in the Lord but he refused to do this. He chose rather to trust in the Assyrian king for help and he plundered the house of the Lord to pay for that help (2 Kings 16:5–9; Isaiah 7:1–13). Ahaz desecrated the temple and sacrificed to the gods of Syria, reasoning, *'Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me.'* *But they were the ruin of him* (23–24). He was very perverse in his reasoning for he knew that these gods had not been able to save the Syrians from their enemies. Andrew Stewart comments, *'Religion flourished in Judah during the life of Ahaz. New ideas, new gods and new altars multiplied. Some may have thought that these innovations were a sign of progress. In fact they were evidence of spiritual decay.'* (A HOUSE OF PRAYER – THE MESSAGE OF 2 CHRONICLES, page 337).

Ahaz wanted a religion which would allow him to continue in his sin, a religion with plenty of ritual but lacking in righteousness. **There are still many people like Ahaz who want a benign god who makes no demands upon them. Such a god does not exist except in the fantasy of false religion.** The Lord demands our total allegiance and expects us to lead holy lives (Luke 9:23–25; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15). How is it with you? Is your religion a sham or a living reality? Do you seek the Lord in trouble and in joy?