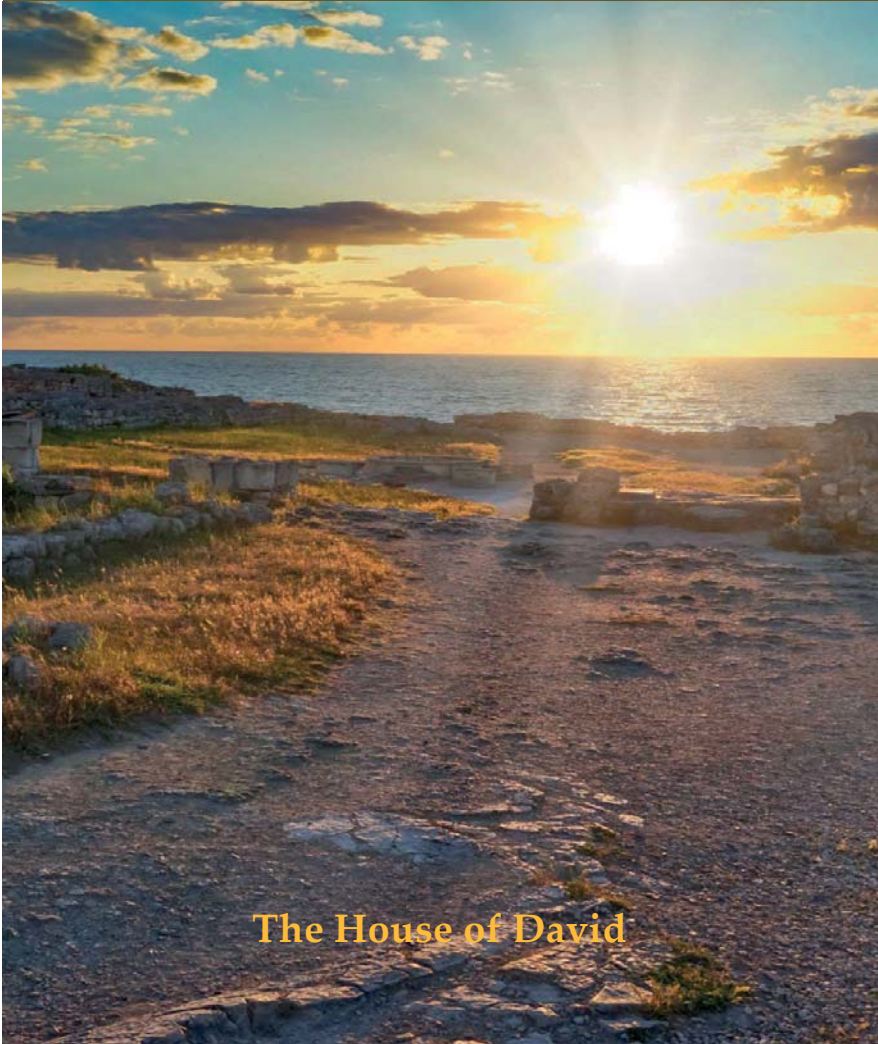


2 Chronicles Explained & Applied 14

Ger de Koning



The House of David

2 Chronicles

Explained & Applied

2 CHRONICLES

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The House of David

Ger de Koning

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Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

Old Testament

Gen Genesis
Exo Exodus
Lev Leviticus
Num Numbers
Deu Deuteronomy
2Ko 2 Korinthiërs
Jos Joshua
Jdg Judges
Rth Ruth
1Sam First Samuel
2Sam Second Samuel
1Kgs First Kings
2Kgs Second Kings
1Chr First Chronicles
2Chr Second Chronicles
Ezra Ezra
Neh Nehemiah
Est Esther
Job Job
Psa Psalms
Pro Proverbs
Ecc Ecclesiastes
Song Song of Songs
Isa Isaiah
Jer Jeremiah
Lam Lamentations
Eze Ezekiel
Dan Daniël
Hos Hosea
Joel Joel
Amos Amos
Oba Obadiah
Jona Jonah
Mic Micah
Nah Nahum
Hab Habakkuk
Zep Zephaniah
Hag Haggai
Zec Zechariah
Mal Malachi

New Testament

Mt Gospel of Matthew
Mk Gospel of Mark
Lk Gospel of Luke
Jn Gospel of John
Acts Acts of the Apostles
Rom Letter to the Romans
1Cor First Letter to the Corinthians
2Cor Second Letter to the Corinthians
Gal Letter to the Galatians
Eph Letter to the Ephesians
Phil Letter to the Philippians
Col Letter to the Colossians
1Thes First Letter to the Thessalonians
2Thes Second Letter to the Thessalonians
1Tim First Letter to Timothy
2Tim Second Letter to Timothy
Tit Letter tot Titus
Phlm Letter to Philemon
Heb Letter of the Hebrews
Jam Letter of James
1Pet First Letter of Peter
2Pet Second Letter of Peter
1Jn First Letter of John
2Jn Second Letter of John
3Jn Third Letter of John
Jude Letter of Jude
Rev Revelation

Explanation of general format

PERSONAL PRONOUNS are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

BRACKETS [] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

SHARP BRACKETS < > are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When **ASTERISKS** * are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

ALL CAPS in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

The Second Book of Chronicles

Introduction

The contents of the second book of Chronicles immediately connects to the first book of Chronicles. Both books form a whole. The history of David, who is mainly mentioned in the first book, and that of Solomon, with whom the second book begins, also form a whole.

The fact that the two books form a whole can also be seen from the overall layout of the two books:

1. Genealogies from Adam to David (1 Chronicles 1-9)
2. The rise and reign of David (1 Chronicles 10-29)
3. The reign of Solomon (2 Chronicles 1-9)
4. The kings of Judah (2 Chronicles 10-36)

The second book of Chronicles begins with the reign of Solomon and the building of the temple. Then follow the stories of the kings of Judah from the house of David and its decay. The book ends with the exile of the people and the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar.

However, the last two verses of the book also give a new beginning. In these verses we see the work of the Spirit in the Persian king Cyrus, who sends a proclamation throughout his kingdom that anyone who want to return to Jerusalem to build the house of the LORD is admitted to do so (2Chr 36:22-23).

2 Chronicles 1

Verses 1-6 | Solomon Offers At Gibeon

1 Now Solomon the son of David established himself securely over his kingdom, and the LORD his God [was] with him and exalted him greatly. 2 Solomon spoke to all Israel, to the commanders of thousands and of hundreds and to the judges and to every leader in all Israel, the heads of the fathers' [households]. 3 Then Solomon and all the assembly with him went to the high place which was at Gibeon, for God's tent of meeting was there, which Moses the servant of the LORD had made in the wilderness. 4 However, David had brought up the ark of God from Kiriath-jearim to the place he had prepared for it, for he had pitched a tent for it in Jerusalem. 5 Now the bronze altar, which Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made, was there before the tabernacle of the LORD, and Solomon and the assembly sought it out. 6 Solomon went up there before the LORD to the bronze altar which [was] at the tent of meeting, and offered a thousand burnt offerings on it.

In this chapter the beginning of Solomon's reign – he reigned from 970-930 BC – is described. He is about nineteen years old. It is a new beginning, but at the same time a continuation of the David reign. We see this in the first words "Solomon the son of David". The blessing of the LORD for David is continued under his son Solomon. The LORD fulfills His promises which He has made to David by "exalting" Solomon "greatly" (verse 1).

There is no mention of a struggle in the acquisition of his kingship, which we find in the first book of Kings. We can suppose that struggle in the words "established himself securely". The words that follow, however, make it clear that the establishing of his position is not due to the exercise of his power and authority, but that he owes it to the fact that God is "with him and exalted him greatly" (verse 1). God's presence will also be our strength. Solomon is here a picture of Christ in His glory.

Solomon is at the beginning of a new era. For David the ark is the central place. For Solomon it is the altar at Gibeon, located in the area of the tribe of Benjamin, where the "tent of meeting" is. As long as there is no new

altar and no temple, people comes together there. It is an interim solution. Solomon uses his authority to order all of Israel, through all those who have a responsible position among the people, to seek and honor God. It is also important for us to lead and encourage those entrusted to us and on whom we can exert influence in the search for the things of the Lord.

Solomon and all the assembly with him go to Gibeon to worship the LORD and ask Him for wisdom in a pitiful tent left over from the tabernacle. He offers a large number of animals on the bronze altar. Despite the imperfect situation, which the separation between the ark and the altar anyway is, the LORD connects His presence to that place. For there is talk of “the tabernacle of the LORD” and that Solomon offers there “before the LORD”.

He will have inherited the thousand animals which he brings as a burnt offering from his father who had a great herd (1Chr 27:29,31). He does not keep what he has received for himself, but offers it to the LORD. He acknowledges that he has received everything from him, as his father David has acknowledged (1Chr 29:14).

Verses 7-13 | Solomon Asks Wisdom and Knowledge

7 In that night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, “Ask what I shall give you.” 8 Solomon said to God, “You have dealt with my father David with great lovingkindness, and have made me king in his place. 9 Now, O LORD God, Your promise to my father David is fulfilled, for You have made me king over a people as numerous as the dust of the earth. 10 Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people, for who can rule this great people of Yours?” 11 God said to Solomon, “Because you had this in mind, and did not ask for riches, wealth or honor, or the life of those who hate you, nor have you even asked for long life, but you have asked for yourself wisdom and knowledge that you may rule My people over whom I have made you king, 12 wisdom and knowledge have been granted to you. And I will give you riches and wealth and honor, such as none of the kings who were before you has possessed nor those who will come after you.” 13 So Solomon went from the high place which was at Gibeon, from the tent of meeting, to Jerusalem, and he reigned over Israel.

Solomon receives an apparition of the LORD. The LORD says to him that he may ask what he wants. That is an inviting question, with no restrictions. This question also comes to us when the Lord Jesus says: "Ask, and it will be given to you; ... For everyone who asks receives" (Mt 7:7-8). What do we answer to the Lord's question?

Solomon prays for wisdom and knowledge (Pro 2:6). That is the measure by which to build. Both can be found in Christ (Col 2:3). The standard for church building is Christ. There are many forms of church building that arise from our ideas about how it seems best to us, but the only standard for the church and the coming together of the church is Christ.

There must, so to speak, first be reflection at Gibeon, in order to see what the standard is to come together as a church, to be a 'temple'. Solomon here is not only a picture of Christ, but also a picture of the Spirit of Christ in the believer. This Spirit characterizes Paul when he prays for the Ephesians for the "a spirit of wisdom ... in the knowledge of Him" (Eph 1:17).

The answer from Solomon's mouth is beautiful. He gives the people of Israel a special value, not because they are *his* people, but because they are *God's* people. That he sees the people not as his people, but as God's people, is of great importance, also in our days. The church is not the possession of people, but of God. Whoever is aware of this will treat the other members of that people with great care, while acknowledging that each member belongs to the Lord and has his own unique task.

God praises Solomon for his request. Kings of the nations ask their gods for everything Solomon does not ask for. Solomon gets it because he only has God's interests in mind in his prayer. We can learn a lot from the content of this prayer. Solomon does not start by asking anything, but he first reminds God of what He has done in the past and what He does the present.

Whatever task we get to do, we can always be confident that God's support is there for us as it was for those who served Him before us. We may appeal to the "great lovingkindness" that has been proven to them, as Solomon does in relation to his father David, whose task he now gets (verse 8). Then Solomon appeals to all the promises given by God. There is no better plea in prayer than to refer to God's promises (verse 9).

The best way to achieve what we wish is to ask for wisdom and knowledge for our task (verse 10). Just like Moses (Exo 3:11), David (1Sam 18:18) and Jeremiah (Jer 1:6), also Solomon recognizes his incompetence for this great task and asks for “wisdom and knowledge”. “Wisdom” refers to the right assessment at the right time in distinguishing between good and evil. ‘Knowledge’ (or ‘understanding’) relates to the knowledge and understanding of the circumstances to make the right choice for the way to go.

Solomon speaks about his ‘going out and coming in’ for the people. This may involve going out to the gate to speak justice there and going in to the LORD to seek advice from Him on the trials. In a broader sense, ‘going out and coming in’ refers to Solomon’s entire life’s walk in order to devote himself as king to his people.

God gives him what he has asked for, *because* he has asked for it. He gives him what he did not ask for, *because* he did *not* ask for it (verses 11-12). God explains in detail why Solomon gets what he has asked for and why he gets what he has not asked for. God gives according to the riches of His grace what is in His heart. It is an illustration of Paul’s word that God “is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think” (Eph 3:20; cf. Mt 6:33).

After his meeting and conversation with God, Solomon can start reigning (verse 13). This is the correct order: first the tabernacle and the altar and then the throne.

Verses 14-17 | Possessions of Solomon

14 Solomon amassed chariots and horsemen. He had 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen, and he stationed them in the chariot cities and with the king at Jerusalem. 15 The king made silver and gold as plentiful in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedars as plentiful as sycamores in the lowland. 16 Solomon’s horses were imported from Egypt and from Kue; the king’s traders procured them from Kue for a price. 17 They imported chariots from Egypt for 600 [shekels] of silver apiece and horses for 150 apiece, and by the same means they exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Aram.

Now that he has gained wisdom, he does not bury his talent, but goes to work with it. He gathers all that is needed for his reign, a reign in glory.

He buys 1,400 chariots and ensures 12,000 horsemen. This army is partly stationed in chariot cities, i.e. in strategic locations in the country. Another part he keeps under his direct control in Jerusalem.

The riches and treasures of silver and gold he collects do not mean his fall, as in the first book of Kings, but increase his power and glory. They are symbols of the riches of the church of God with which it is built, such as “gold, silver and precious stones” (1Cor 3:12a) of which Paul speaks as the precious metals built on the foundation.

2 Chronicles 2

Introduction

Six of the nine chapters which the chronicler in this book devotes to Solomon refer to the temple:

- 2 Chronicles 2 is about the preparation for the building of the temple;
- 2 Chronicles 3-4 describe the building of the temple;
- 2 Chronicles 5-7 deal with the dedication of the temple.

The preparations for the temple building by Solomon are preceded by all the other extensive preparations his father David did. David made the design or plan for the entire complex and took care of staff and materials (1 Chronicles 28-29). It is now Solomon's turn. He must organize the work by assigning his task to each worker (verses 2,17,18).

Another aspect of the preparations is that the young king requires technical support from Hiram, the king of Tyre. In this way Solomon assures himself of experienced supervisors and also in this way he can make use of the cedars of the Lebanon (verses 3-10). For the help he calls in from Hiram, a contract is drawn up (verses 11-16).

There are some remarkable similarities between the building of the tabernacle and that of the temple. These agreements contribute to the testimony of the inspiration of God's Spirit by Whom the chronicler wrote.

1. Both Bezaleel and Solomon have been specifically appointed by God for the building project of the tabernacle and the temple respectively (Exo 35:30; 1Chr 28:6).
2. Both Bezaleel and Solomon are from the tribe Juda.
3. Both Bezaleel and Solomon are endowed by God for the task for which he is chosen.
4. Both build the bronze altar for the LORD (2Chr 1:5; 4:1).
5. Bezaleel prepares the tools for the tabernacle and Solomon prepares the tools for the temple (Exo 31:15; 2Chr 4:19-22).

6. Both the tabernacle and the temple have a design that comes from God (Exo 25:9; 1Chr 28:11-13).
7. Both for the building of the tabernacle and for the building of the temple the people give voluntarily and generously (Exo 35:20-29; 1Chr 29:6-9).
8. When both buildings are finished, the glory of God fills the building (Exo 40:34-35; 2Chr 7:1-3).

Verses 1-2 | The Intention of Solomon

1 Now Solomon decided to build a house for the name of the LORD and a royal palace for himself. 2 So Solomon assigned 70,000 men to carry loads and 80,000 men to quarry [stone] in the mountains and 3,600 to supervise them.

For Solomon the importance of the LORD's house is paramount (verse 1). It is for him first the house of the LORD, and then his own house. The two houses are symbolic for priestly service (the temple) and reign (palace). It is always good, especially when we are young, to give the things of the Lord first place. It is proof that we are aware that we are on earth for Him, to serve Him, and not for ourselves.

The tasks mentioned (verse 2) can be translated to our time. We see the "men to carry loads" in the teachers in the church. They teach persons, who are stones carved out of the rock by the evangelists, represented by "men to quarry [stone]", about their place in the church, the house of God. Those who "supervise them" are the overseers, who lead the church. They ensure that everything is done in the right way. There must be good cooperation between these workers. It is not possible to work on your own (Eph 4:11-16).

Verses 3-10 | The Request to Hiram to Help

3 Then Solomon sent [word] to Hiram the king of Tyre, saying, "As you dealt with David my father and sent him cedars to build him a house to dwell in, so do for me. 4 Behold, I am about to build a house for the name of the LORD my God, dedicating it to Him, to burn fragrant incense before Him and [to set out] the showbread continually, and to offer burnt offerings morning and evening, on sabbaths and on new moons and on the appointed feasts of the LORD our

God, this [being required] forever in Israel. 5 The house which I am about to build [will be] great, for greater is our God than all the gods. 6 But who is able to build a house for Him, for the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain Him? So who am I, that I should build a house for Him, except to burn [in-cense] before Him? 7 Now send me a skilled man to work in gold, silver, brass and iron, and in purple, crimson and violet [fabrics], and who knows how to make engravings, to [work] with the skilled men whom I have in Judah and Jerusalem, whom David my father provided. 8 Send me also cedar, cypress and algum timber from Lebanon, for I know that your servants know how to cut timber of Lebanon; and indeed my servants [will work] with your servants, 9 to prepare timber in abundance for me, for the house which I am about to build [will be] great and wonderful. 10 Now behold, I will give to your servants, the woodsmen who cut the timber, 20,000 kors of crushed wheat and 20,000 kors of barley, and 20,000 baths of wine and 20,000 baths of oil.”

For the building of the temple Solomon appeals to foreigners and not to Israelites. Both prophetically and spiritually, this is not remarkable. Prophetically we see that later, in the realm of peace, also strangers will help to build the temple (Zec 6:15a; Isa 60:10a). Spiritually we see that the mystery of the church is found among the nations (Col 1:27). [Note: This is not the same as Ephesians 2. There the truth is unfolded that the believers from the Jews and the believers from the Gentiles are one. In Colossians 1, the Jews are not involved and only the peoples are involved.]

The new thing in the current dispensation, that is the time since the Pentecost of Acts 2, is that salvation is also for the nations. The Jew Paul offers a message to the believers among the nations that they belong to the church and that they are saints who understand the mystery of the church. That is, in picture, the way in which Solomon appeals to the people.

Solomon reminds Hiram that he sent his father David cedars at the time to build a house for himself (1Chr 14:1). Because of his benevolence then, Solomon asks him to help him build God's house now. Before he specifically asks Hiram for help, he first talks about the impressiveness of the LORD's house.

The first thing mentioned in connection with the temple is that it is a house that is dedicated to the LORD. The house belongs to Him alone and is only

for Him. So too is the church, the house of God now, only of and for Him. The local church is not for people, believers or disbelievers, to entertain them.

That the house is dedicated to the LORD, and there is to sanctify Him, is manifested in what happens there. Solomon begins his list of activities in the house of the LORD with “to burn fragrant incense before Him” (verse 4). He repeats that as the great reason for the building of the house (verse 6). Fragrant incense represents the sweetness before God of prayer and worship (Psa 141:2; cf. Rev 5:8; 8:3). The life of the Lord Jesus on earth was complete prayer, He was “prayer” (Psa 109:4) and therefore completely a pleasant fragrance for God.

“The showbread continually” set out suggests that the whole people, seen in the twelve breads, are in God’s presence and constantly before His attention. The bread also represents the life of the Lord Jesus. God’s people have Him as their life. Only through Him His people is pleasing to God. There are also the “burnt offerings” that are made at different times. In the burnt offerings we see the perfection of the work of the Lord Jesus in His complete surrender to God.

Solomon testifies to the greatness of God against the heathen Hiram (verse 5). The house bears the feature of Him Who dwells in it. The temple is the dwelling place of God and therefore it is a grand building (verses 5,9). At the same time he speaks about the fact that Hiram should not think that the house can contain God (cf. Acts 17:24). Solomon asks himself out loud, who is able to do these things. Yet, despite this feeling of powerlessness and at the same time in this feeling of powerlessness, he is prepared to go to work. He knows that this is the task of the LORD and that He will give him what is needed to carry out this task.

Solomon asks for someone who can work with what his father David has prepared. There is no urge for Solomon to work with other materials than those provided by David (verse 7). The metals and colors speak of what is seen of Christ in His own. Gold represents glory, silver redemption, brass righteousness, iron power, purple, crimson and violet royal dignity. This is the “material” with which the church is now built “into a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (Eph 2:22).

In the following verses we see an example of fellowship in the service (verses 8-9). The servants of Solomon work together with the servants of Hiram. We see an example of this in the men who accompany Paul (Acts 20:4). The building of such a great work as the house of God requires co-operation between reliable and skilled workers. It is a house that is “great and wonderful”. It is about more than the formation of a local church. We must remember that the church includes all the children of God, “all the saints” (Eph 3:18), from the coming into being of the church on Pentecost until its rapture. We can contribute to its building, although it is taking shape locally.

In exchange for what Hiram delivers, Solomon gives food (verse 10). This food comes from the land of God. It speaks for us of the blessings given to us in the heavenly places. Those who help to build, even if they come from the Gentiles, receive a wonderful supply of the heavenly land.

Wheat and barley (corn) and wine and oil are a summary of the blessing of the land (Deu 11:14; 12:17; 14:23).

1. “Wheat” and “barley” both speak of the Lord Jesus Who became the life of every child of God. He is the bread that descended from heaven and gives life to the world (Jn 6:33). To participate in it one must believe that He is the grain of wheat that has fallen into the earth and died and therefore bears much fruit (Jn 12:24).
2. “Wine” speaks of the joy of fellowship with the Father and the Son (Jdg 9:13; 1Jn 1:3-4).
3. The “oil” is a picture of the Holy Spirit (1Jn 2:20,27) through Whom we can enjoy all blessings.

Verses 11-16 | Hiram Promises to Help

11 Then Hiram, king of Tyre, answered in a letter sent to Solomon: “Because the LORD loves His people, He has made you king over them.” 12 Then Hiram continued, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who has made heaven and earth, who has given King David a wise son, endowed with discretion and understanding, who will build a house for the LORD and a royal palace for himself. 13 “Now I am sending Hiram-abi, a skilled man, endowed with understanding, 14 the son of a Danite woman and a Tyrian father, who knows

how to work in gold, silver, bronze, iron, stone and wood, [and] in purple, violet, linen and crimson fabrics, and [who knows how] to make all kinds of engravings and to execute any design which may be assigned to him, [to work] with your skilled men and with those of my lord David your father. 15 Now then, let my lord send to his servants wheat and barley, oil and wine, of which he has spoken. 16 We will cut whatever timber you need from Lebanon and bring it to you on rafts by sea to Joppa, so that you may carry it up to Jerusalem."

Huram responds by letter. His answer is beautiful. He recognizes the love of the LORD for His people in His making Solomon king over His people. He also praises the LORD as the God of Israel and then as the Creator of heaven and earth. He seems to say that the LORD is in connection with the earth through Israel. That will in any case be the case in the realm of peace. Then Israel will be the means by which God has blessing for all the earth. That blessing will be given to Israel by the true Solomon, the wise Son of David, Who will then reign.

Huram's letter is also a kind of 'letter of commendation' (cf. 2Cor 3:1; Acts 9:27). In the letter he testifies of the man he will send and the qualities he has (verses 13-14). We can learn from this the lesson that we can give a testimony of a good spiritual development we see in others, where and when it is necessary.

Besides being skilled in the work, Hiram Abi is also creative "to execute any design which may be assigned to him". However, he does not execute on his own initiative, he does not listen to his own ideas, but executes designs "which may be assigned to him". We may be creative in building God's house, but it must be done according to the guidelines that are given to us in God's Word.

The qualities of the man who is send by Hiram show many similarities with the qualities of Bezalel, the maker of the tabernacle (Exo 31:3-5). These qualities are spiritually reflected in Paul's service in the church in Colossae. His efforts are aimed at forming the believers in Colossae through teaching and warnings (Col 1:28). Just as Hiram-abi cooperates with the sages of Hiram and the sages of David (verse 14), Paul also cooperates with others (Col 4:7-13).

Huram is also mindful of the welfare of his workers (verse 15) and asks Solomon to send the promised food for them. By the power of this good food the work can be started.

The trees needed for building are transported in rafts across the sea to Joppa and from there to Jerusalem (verse 16). We can apply this as follows. All those who have just been converted, the babies in Christ, must be helped on their way to their right place in the sanctuary. This first happens by sea, a picture of the difficulties they have to go through (cf. 1Thes 3:3-4). Then they must be carried up to the sanctuary. This is done by 'load bearers', more mature believers who care for young converts. They tell them about the church and the place they have in it.

Verses 17-18 | Solomon Distributes the Functions

17 Solomon numbered all the aliens who [were] in the land of Israel, following the census which his father David had taken; and 153,600 were found. 18 He appointed 70,000 of them to carry loads and 80,000 to quarry [stones] in the mountains and 3,600 supervisors to make the people work.

These verses are a further explanation of what the chronicler has already noticed (verse 2). We read here that Solomon counts "all the aliens" in Israel for the work to be done. David has previously gathered foreigners to help with the building of the temple (1Chr 22:2). How many there are is not mentioned. Solomon counts a total number of "153,600". From this he appoints three groups of workers: "70,000 of them to carry loads and 80,000 to quarry [stones] ... and 3,600 supervisors".

Those who quarry stones have to cut the stones "in the mountains". These must have been large stones, according to investigations up to eight meters long. These stones must not only be cut out, but also made ready to fit, because they are simply placed on and next to each other during building.

The Lord Jesus counts His workers as well. He has His twelve servants whom He sends out (Lk 9:1). He then appoints another seventy whom He sends out (Lk 10:1). Just like the aliens that Solomon puts to work, all the Lord's workers today are "aliens" (1Pet 1:1; 2:11; Heb 11:13) who perform a heavenly service in a foreign country. This service is performed by teachers (those who carry loads), evangelists (those who quarry [stones]) and

shepherds or overseers or elders (supervisors). The last category, as in the days of Solomon, must teach the people of God how to serve Him in their daily lives.

2 Chronicles 3

Introduction

The building and dedication of the temple play an important role in the life of Solomon. The building is described in 2 Chronicles 3-4. In 2 Chronicles 3:1 Solomon starts to build. The description of the building runs until 2 Chronicles 4:10. He is seen as the builder, although others have actually built. The same goes for the Messiah who will build the temple by others.

There are seven temples in Scripture:

1. the temple of Solomon (destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar);
2. the temple of Zerubbabel (after the exile; this temple was changed and expanded by Herod and destroyed in the year 70 by the Roman armies led by Titus);
3. the temple in which the antichrist will show up;
4. the temple of Ezekiel, built in Jerusalem in the kingdom of peace.

These are all material temples.

There are also three spiritual temples, temples in which the Spirit of God dwells:

1. the physical body of the Lord Jesus (Jn 2:21);
2. the church of God, the spiritual body of Christ and the spiritual house of God (1Cor 3:16; 1Tim 3:15);
3. the body of the individual believer (1Cor 6:19).

For us, the deeper meaning of the temple of Solomon is its spiritual meaning. In the temple, just like in the tabernacle, we have in the picture a revelation of God's glory in Christ. Of Him we read "and dwelt among us", which is literally "and tabernacled among us" (Jn 1:14). Everything in the temple refers to Him.

There is a significant difference between the description of the temple in the first book of Kings and that in the second book of Chronicles. In the first book of Kings the description is longer and gives much more details. In the second book of Chronicles, written after the exile, the description

may be more concise because the description of the first book of Kings already exists. In the second book of Chronicles we have a description of the altar and the veil. This is not in the first book of Kings, while that book describes the dwellings of the priests and we do not find these in the second book of Chronicles.

We can say that the main differences in description are seen in the following aspects:

1. The temple is the dwelling place of God. That's more what comes out in the first book of Kings. There we also find priestly dwellings connected to the temple. That underlines the main idea of dwelling. This has a spiritual application. Just as God bodily dwelt in Christ when He was on earth and also dwells in Him now He is heaven (Col 1:19; 2:9), so He dwells in the church as a temple.
2. The temple is a place of worship, where man can approach God on the basis of sacrifice. That is more the side of the description in the second book of Chronicles. There we find the altar to sacrifice and the veil that speaks of approaching.

There are some other differences between the tabernacle and the temple.

1. The tabernacle is a movable tent, while the temple is a permanent building.
2. Therefore, as a next difference, everything in the temple can be bigger and more numerous.
3. The temple has priestly dwellings, you can dwell there. In the tabernacle there are only 'pitches'.
4. The temple has its singers.
5. There are also the huge cherubim.

Everything in the temple is much larger and more than in and around the tabernacle. This is in accordance with the extent to which God is known and served in the land.

The only thing that stands in its original size and as the only sample both in the tabernacle and in the temple is the ark with the mercy seat and the cherubim.

The tabernacle is found in the letter to the Hebrews, which we can call a 'wilderness letter'. This letter speaks about the life of the believer on earth. Israel has travelled through a literal wilderness, believers travel through a world that is compared to a wilderness. The Hebrews live in the country. They have never seen the tabernacle and are only familiar with the temple. Yet the letter to them does not refer to the temple, but to the tabernacle, for the previously mentioned reason that they are seen as living in the wilderness of this world. The letter to the Ephesians places us spiritually in the promised land and in that letter we hear about the temple (Eph 2:21-22). There the believers of the church are in the heavenly places in possession of all the blessings of the land (Eph 1:3).

An Israelite comes to the temple on three special occasions: on the occasion of the Passover, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Booths (Deu 16:1-15). We find these three feasts also in Leviticus 23 among the seven feasts mentioned there (Lev 23:1-36). Several of the seven feasts of the LORD are harvest feasts, which also include Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Booths. In a way, this also applies to the Passover with which the Feast of the First fruits is connected. On the occasion of the various harvests in Israel, the Israelite then goes to the temple with the fruit of the harvest, the blessing of the land, and brings it before God. This fruit is not in the wilderness. To have fruit, the people must live in the promised land.

God has a temple in the promised land, that the fruit of the land may be brought there. For us this has a spiritual meaning. Everything that has to do with Christ as the blessing of the land, we may bring to God. That is, we can tell God what we have all seen from the Lord Jesus and what heavenly blessings we have received from Him.

Verses 1-2 | Building the Temple

1 Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where [the LORD] had appeared to his father David, at the place that David had prepared on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. 2 He began to build on the second [day] in the second month of the fourth year of his reign.

The place where Solomon starts to build the house of the LORD is indicated in connection with several names. It is "in Jerusalem", that is the city God has chosen for it. It is the city of His election. It is "on Mount Moriah".

The threshing floor of Ornan (1Chr 21:18-30; 22:1) appears to be here on Mount Moriah. It is the mountain where Abraham offered his son (Gen 22:2). Moriah is reminiscent of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. We do not see a God who demands a sacrifice, but a God who gives a sacrifice. The sacrifice that God has given in His Son forms the basis for the building of God's temple now, which is the church.

The next name is that of David to whom the LORD has appeared. In the first book of Chronicles there is talk of "the angel of the LORD" who appears to David (1Chr 21:16), while here it is said that the LORD himself appears to David. This is a clear indication that by the angel of the LORD the LORD himself is meant. God the Son appears before He becomes Man as the Angel of the LORD.

The LORD appears to David the moment He stretches out the sword over Jerusalem. However, the verdict is not carried out. The place designated for the temple has to do with the judgment that has raged and been brought to an end (1Chr 21:15-18). This is "the place David had prepared" to build the temple there. The threshing floor is from the heathen, the Jebusite Ornan, but was taken from him – and thus from the Canaanites – and made into a place where God can have His house built. In the time of the New Testament, which is the time after the cross and since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, God has also conquered a place from the Gentiles and built His temple there.

After the indication of the *place* where Solomon starts building the temple, we are informed *when* building starts (verse 2). The chronicler only mentions that Solomon starts building in the fourth year of his government. If we compare this with the dating in the first book of Kings it is striking that the chronicler does not make a relation with the exodus from Egypt (1Kgs 6:1). He will have omitted that mention because he is more focused on those who have left Babylon to come and live in Israel again.

Verse 3 | The Foundation

3 Now these are the foundations which Solomon laid for building the house of God. The length in cubits, according to the old standard [was] sixty cubits, and the width twenty cubits.

Verses 3-17 give the description of the building. Solomon builds according to the plan his father David showed him (1Chr 28:11). In this way we must also be busy building the church according to the plan God has laid down in His Word.

First the foundation is mentioned, the basis on which to build. The foundation for the church is the confession of Peter: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16). Peter can say that, as the Lord Jesus then declares, because the Father has revealed it to him (Mt 16:17). Then the Lord adds a new revelation to the Father's revelation to Peter. That is the revelation that the confession of Peter is the rock upon which the church will be built (Mt 16:18a).

The confession of Peter – that Christ is the Son of the living God – means that life is in the Lord Jesus. It is also connected with this that He has life-giving power. That He is the Son of the living God means that He has this life in Himself. What is built on it has that life and cannot be affected by death or anything connected to it. The life of God cannot be nullified. The church is founded on His Person. He is the rock, the unshakeable foundation.

For the revelation of the foundation of the church, the Lord Jesus uses the meaning of the name of Peter. By saying to him 'you are Peter' (Peter means 'stone') the Lord indicates that Peter is one of the stones that will be built on the rock (in Greek 'petra'), that is He Himself. That Peter has understood the allusion of the Lord to his name, we see in his first letter. In it he writes about the believers as living stones that together form a spiritual house (1Pet 2:5a). The believers are living stones because they have come to Him Who is the living stone and therefore are connected to Him (1Pet 2:4).

The apostles and prophets in their teaching have pointed to that foundation, to that rock, and built upon it in God's way (Eph 2:20). Paul is well aware of the responsibility not to build on any other foundation and to do so with the right material: "According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus

Christ" (1Cor 3:10-11). In a spiritual sense, Solomon also works in this way by keeping to what his father told him.

The sizes are given. No new sizes are used. The original specifications, "the old standard", are maintained. Nothing is added to it and nothing is taken from it (cf. Ecc 3:14). As calculated by David using the old measure, Solomon performs it. He doesn't dare to use the sizes that have become common in his time. He does not work according to his own ideas.

Verses 4-7 | The Front Porch and the Holy Place

4 The porch which was in front of the house was as long as the width of the house, twenty cubits, and the height 120; and inside he overlaid it with pure gold. 5 He overlaid the main room with cypress wood and overlaid it with fine gold, and ornamented it with palm trees and chains. 6 Further, he adorned the house with precious stones; and the gold was gold from Parvaim. 7 He also overlaid the house with gold—the beams, the thresholds and its walls and its doors; and he carved cherubim on the walls.

These verses describe the building of the porch which was in front and the holy place, that is "the main room" (verse 5). We can see the following spiritual meaning in the materials used. The "pure gold" and "fine gold" represent the glory of God in Christ. The "cypress wood" represents the true Manhood of the Lord Jesus. The "palm trees" speak of victory. Christ is the Victor. The "chains" are a symbol of the bonds of love through which the believers are connected. The "precious stones" represent the believers in whom Christ becomes visible (Col 3:12).

Verses 8-9 | The Holy of Holies

8 Now he made the room of the holy of holies: its length across the width of the house [was] twenty cubits, and its width [was] twenty cubits; and he overlaid it with fine gold, [amounting] to 600 talents. 9 The weight of the nails was fifty shekels of gold. He also overlaid the upper rooms with gold.

The holy of holies has the form of a cube. This refers to "the breadth and length and height and depth" of Christ's love, which in its true meaning transcends knowledge (Eph 3:18-19). The love of Christ is perfect on all sides. In Him we see Who God is in His perfection, without ever being able to fully understand Who God is.

The golden “nails” serve to keep the golden wallcovering in place. This speaks of what serves to uphold the testimony of the Godhead of Christ. We use such ‘nails’ when we quote words from God’s Word in which the Godhead of Christ is expressed. An example is: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn 1:1). Here we find unambiguously that Christ is the eternal God (Jn 5:17-18; Rom 9:5; Heb 1:8; 1Jn 5:20).

In his book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon also speaks of nails: “The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of [these] collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd” (Ecc 12:11). They are nails that are given by the Lord Jesus, the one Shepherd, in His care for His own. The Christian must be a master in collecting these ‘nails’. They must first be well driven [literally: planted] deep into himself to then occasionally use them to plant them deep into others.

Verses 10-13 | The Cherubim

10 Then he made two sculptured cherubim in the room of the holy of holies and overlaid them with gold. 11 The wingspan of the cherubim [was] twenty cubits; the wing of one, of five cubits, touched the wall of the house, and [its] other wing, of five cubits, touched the wing of the other cherub. 12 The wing of the other cherub, of five cubits, touched the wall of the house; and [its] other wing of five cubits was attached to the wing of the first cherub. 13 The wings of these cherubim extended twenty cubits, and they stood on their feet facing the [main] room.

The two cherubim are given extensive attention. They fill the entire room and have a view of the house. They watch, as it were, how people behave. They are symbolic expressions of God’s judgmental and reigning power (Gen 3:24). They close the way to blessing for the fallen man. But in the tabernacle and the temple the way is opened by virtue of the sacrifice. Blood was sprinkled on and in front of the ark. Yet God’s holiness must also be maintained, even if it concerns a redeemed people.

There are four cherubim. On the ark are two small cherubim. They stand with their wings down and with their faces they look down, on the mercy seat. They form a whole with the mercy seat. There are also these two big cherubim, which cover everything and face the main room.

The cherubim watch and protect. They ensure that God's glory is maintained and they protect God's people. The fact that they fill the entire room with their wings indicates the all-encompassing character of the protection of the dwelling place of God Who dwells among the cherubim on the ark.

The cherubim that form a whole with the mercy seat on the ark, look down, on the law in the ark, the holy demands of God. But first they see the blood on the mercy seat. The large, covering cherubim face the main room, in the direction of the holy place, that is to the east (verse 13). They see, as it were, everything that happens in the house of God. They keep watch over the service. Their presence and impressive size make it clear: here lives in truth the holy God!

Verse 14 | The Veil

14 He made the veil of violet, purple, crimson and fine linen, and he worked cherubim on it.

The veil is another means of guarding the holiness of the holy of the saints. The cherubim attached to the veil ensure that no unauthorized person enters the holy of the saints. The colors speak of Christ. In the violet or blue purple we see Him as the heavenly Man. In [red] purple and crimson we see His royal dignity. In the fine linen we see His perfect life.

The veil represents the flesh of the Lord Jesus, that is, His Person as He walked on earth. The moment the Lord Jesus dies, the veil tears "in two from top to bottom" (Mt 27:50-51a; Lk 23:45). Perhaps we could say that the veil in the Gospel according to Matthew tears so that man may enter, and that in Gospel according to Luke it tears because God comes out to man, for He is kind towards him. For us the veil is no longer an obstacle, but an entrance by grace, by the blood of Christ (Heb 10:19-20).

Verses 15-17 | The Two Pillars

15 He also made two pillars for the front of the house, thirty-five cubits high, and the capital on the top of each [was] five cubits. 16 He made chains in the inner sanctuary and placed [them] on the tops of the pillars; and he made one hundred pomegranates and placed [them] on the chains. 17 He erected the pillars in front of the temple, one on the right and the other on the left, and named the one on the right Jachin and the one on the left Boaz.

The two pillars, each seventeen and a half meters high, are also not present in the tabernacle. The pillars are in front of the house, Jachin on the right, that is on the north side, and Boaz on the left, that is on the south side. The names indicate on which God's building rests. Jachin means 'God confirms' and Boaz means 'in Him is strength'. The two pillars illustrate that the building of God is a fixed building, well attached, unshakeable and supported by the power of God.

The church is "the pillar and support of the truth" (1Tim 3:15). In the house of God believers experience what these pillars mean. In this house believers are established in their connection with the Lord. They also receive power from the Lord there. Coming to the church means being confirmed and receiving strength. Believers can become pillars in God's temple if they faithfully hold fast to God's Word (Rev 3:12a; cf. Gal 2:9a).

2 Chronicles 4

Introduction

In this chapter we have the different objects that belong to the temple:

1. The bronze altar (verse 1).
2. The cast sea (verses 2-5).
3. The ten basins (verse 6).
4. The ten lampstands (verse 7).
5. The ten tables (verse 8).
6. The court for priests (verses 9-10).

Then the work of Hiram (verses 11-17) and the work of Solomon (verses 18-22) are described.

Verse 1 | The Bronze Altar

1 Then he made a bronze altar, twenty cubits in length and twenty cubits in width and ten cubits in height.

All dimensions of the temple and the objects inside are larger than those of the tabernacle and the objects in it. The bronze altar in the temple has four times the length and width and three times the height of the tabernacle. In the application this suggests that in the land there is a greater appreciation of Christ – of Whom the altar speaks – than in the wilderness, where much can distract us from Him. We should bear in mind that the borders of the land are at their widest under the reign of King Solomon. This also means that the land has more inhabitants and therefore more worshipers. Therefore there is also a larger altar.

The dimensions of the altar are, in terms of its length and width, that of the holy of holies. This shows the special meaning of the altar. It brings the service at this altar into direct connection with the holy of holies, where God dwells. It is the burnt offering altar on which the daily burnt offering is brought. On the basis of the burnt offering God can dwell with His people and His people can worship Him in the sanctuary.

Verses 2-5 | The Cast Sea

2 Also he made the cast [metal] sea, ten cubits from brim to brim, circular in form, and its height [was] five cubits and its circumference thirty cubits. 3 Now figures like oxen [were] under it [and] all around it, ten cubits, entirely encircling the sea. The oxen [were] in two rows, cast in one piece. 4 It stood on twelve oxen, three facing the north, three facing west, three facing south and three facing east; and the sea [was set] on top of them and all their hindquarters turned inwards. 5 It was a handbreadth thick, and its brim was made like the brim of a cup, [like] a lily blossom; it could hold 3,000 baths.

Not only is worship (the altar) greater or wider in the temple than in the tabernacle, but cleansing is also greater. This is not, as with the tabernacle, a bronze *laver*, but a *sea* cast of bronze, with a capacity of no less than 66,000 liters, assuming that one bath is twenty-two liters. It determines us that in such an exalted service at such a large altar, the purification must also be more thorough.

No dimensions are given for the laver of the tabernacle. The size of this depends on the mirrors that the women have given (Exo 38:8). The dimensions of the sea are given. These are dimensions that indicate that the cast sea contains an enormous amount of water. The immense volume of 66,000 liters speaks of God being a God who “abundantly” pardons (Isa 55:7). It emphasizes that cleansing of the greatest sins is possible.

The unlimited grace in cleansing is also represented by the *four* wind directions of the four times three cattle. The number four is the number of the whole earth. Everyone can be cleansed of any sin.

The twelve oxen on which the sea stands are also compared to the twelve apostles. Oxen are, among other things, a picture of servants (cf. 1Cor 9:9-10). The twelve apostles have been instructed to preach in the name of the Lord Jesus “repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed ... to all the nations”, “to the remotest part of the earth” (Lk 24:47; Acts 1:8).

In the book of Revelation the sea is crystal, because the redeemed there no longer need cleansing (Rev 4:6a). They are there in a state of perfect holiness and purity.

Verse 6 | The Ten Basins

6 He also made ten basins in which to wash, and he set five on the right side and five on the left to rinse things for the burnt offering; but the sea [was] for the priests to wash in.

The ten small basins in which to wash serve to clean the materials and sacrifices. Not only the offerors, the priests, must be clean. Also everything that is used to prepare the sacrifices and the sacrifices themselves must be clean. It speaks symbolically of our appreciation of the Sacrifice, a valuation that must be in accordance with what the Word says about the Lord Jesus. Our sacrifices are only pleasing to God if we offer them up through Jesus Christ (1Pet 2:5b; Heb 13:15), that is, in the awareness that God accepts our sacrifices because they speak of Christ and He sees us in Him.

No sacrifices or sacrificial material should be washed in the great sea. The great sea is only for priests to wash themselves in. This does not mean that they went into the sea, but that they washed themselves with the water of the sea.

Verse 7 | The Ten Lampstands

7 Then he made the ten golden lampstands in the way prescribed for them and he set them in the temple, five on the right side and five on the left.

Instead of the one lampstand in the tabernacle here are ten lampstands. That indicates that more light is needed in the land about heavenly things than in the wilderness. It takes more education from the Spirit to understand, for example, the letter to the Ephesians than the letter to the Corinthians.

Verse 8 | Ten Tables and One Hundred Golden Bowls

8 He also made ten tables and placed them in the temple, five on the right side and five on the left. And he made one hundred golden bowls.

The “ten tables” are tables for the showbreads. It makes us aware of the fact that it is important to feed on the food of the temple. We can think of the Lord’s teaching in the temple (Lk 21:37a). That must have been food for the hearers. Such a place of education with food for the believers must today be the local church.

The “golden bowls” are sacrificial scales from which is “sprinkled”. They are also mentioned in the list of the consecrated offerings given by the princes for the tabernacle (Numbers 7). It is most likely that blood is sprinkled from these golden bowls. It speaks of the application of the blood of Jesus Christ with which we are sprinkled as believers.

Peter speaks in his letter about the being “sprinkled with His blood” (1Pet 1:2; cf. Heb 12:24b). It means the believer is brought under the power of the blood. The blood gives the perfect assurance that everything is in order for God. It places the believer in perfect purity before the face of God. Through the blood of Christ there is peace with God (Eph 2:13-14; Col 1:20).

The bread of the tables shows us Christ in His life on earth and the blood of the golden bowls reminds us of His atonement death on the cross. We need His life and His death to get life, and that is something that happens once. When we have received life, it is then necessary to live that life as well.

The Lord Jesus speaks about both these aspects in John 6. He says with regard to obtaining life: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves” (Jn 6:53). Then He points out that we need to constantly feed on His life and death. That is what he says: “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him” (Jn 6:56).

Verses 9-10 | The Court and the Sea

9 Then he made the court of the priests and the great court and doors for the court, and overlaid their doors with bronze. 10 He set the sea on the right side [of the house] toward the southeast.

There is a “court of the priests” and a “great court”, which shows that there is a separation between the priests and the common people (cf. Eze 10:3,5). This separation is not there for the believer of the church. The believer is now both a priest and an ordinary member of the people. That he is a priest indicates the privilege of drawing near to God with sacrifices. That he is an ordinary member of the people points to his every day life that he should live in accordance with his high calling as a child of God to be a testimony in the world. His life in the “great court” takes place in the

immediate presence of God, even though his earthly obligations do not allow him to think about it in concrete terms.

The doors of the court are covered with bronze. Bronze is a picture of righteousness. The bronze doors tell us that they are doors through which only the righteous enter and exit (Psa 118:19-20). What does not belong inside, may not enter or must be removed (cf. 1Cor 5:13b).

After the description of the court and the doors, the place where the sea is placed is mentioned. We may wonder why this is only said here and not in the description of the sea in verses 2-5. It is not a mistake, for God's Spirit doesn't make mistakes, but has a purpose. It points out that whoever goes through the door into the court, that is whoever wants to come into the presence of God, must be cleansed.

The description of the place shows which aspects are related to the cleansing. "The right side" speaks of power. The cleansing is powerful. The goal of the cleansing we see in the "southeast". The south speaks of beneficent warmth. That's what cleansing does. Another consequence is connected to the east. The east speaks among other things of the future, the coming of the Lord Jesus. Cleansing also brings about a look forward to His coming, the longing for the encounter with Him in the air.

Verses 11-17 | The Work of Hiram

11 Hiram also made the pails, the shovels and the bowls. So Hiram finished doing the work which he performed for King Solomon in the house of God: 12 the two pillars, the bowls and the two capitals on top of the pillars, and the two networks to cover the two bowls of the capitals which were on top of the pillars, 13 and the four hundred pomegranates for the two networks, two rows of pomegranates for each network to cover the two bowls of the capitals which were on the pillars. 14 He also made the stands and he made the basins on the stands, 15 [and] the one sea with the twelve oxen under it. 16 The pails, the shovels, the forks and all its utensils, Hiram-abi made of polished bronze for King Solomon for the house of the LORD. 17 On the plain of the Jordan the king cast them in the clay ground between Succoth and Zeredah.

"The pails (verse 11) are cooking pots in which the sacrificial meat is cooked (cf. 1Sam 2:13-14). "The shovels" are for cleaning the altar. The

remainders are thus shoveled away after the sacrifice has been burnt. We have already spoken about “the bowls” (verse 8).

Huram completes his work (verse 11b) by making the aforementioned objects. He finishes his work. It’s good to start a work, it’s also good to finish that work. Paul did this (2Tim 4:7) and we must do it, otherwise we are not good disciples of the Lord Jesus (Lk 14:27-33). The Lord Jesus says to the Father: “I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do” (Jn 17:4).

In verses 12-16, a summary is given of what Hiram made. It also mentions some objects that have not been mentioned before. The two pillars (verses 12-13) that one passes when one goes to the sanctuary are from above, in the height, covered with four hundred pomegranates. This presupposes one has to enter the sanctuary to see the rich fruit of Christ’s work in the high.

The stands for the basins and the oxen as stand for the sea (verses 14-15) make it easier to use the water. The stands lift up the water and bring it to the level of the priests. We can also apply it this way that the stands lift the basins and the sea, as it were, above the pollution of the soil. Cleansing is not of the earth, but of heaven. The Lord Jesus washed the feet of His disciples also in the *upper* room (Jn 13:2-10).

Of the tools used in the sacrifices (verse 16), we have already had “the pails” and “the shovels” before us (verse 11). Now “the forks” are added. “The forks” are used to remove the cooked meat from the cooking pots. The wicked priest sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, have used the forks to take the meat out of the pot for themselves (1Sam 2:13-14). As an application to us, we can ask the question how we ‘treat’ our sacrifices of praise, how we deal with them. Is it only for ourselves, for our own feeling, or is it really for the Father and the Lord Jesus?

The bronze objects are cast in the plain of the Jordan (verse 17). The Jordan is a picture of the death and resurrection of Christ and our identification with Him. This shows us the origin of the way we bring the sacrifices. It should all be in connection with the death and resurrection of Christ. We must not follow our own ideas and views in offering up sacrifices of praise.

Verses 18-22 | The Work of Solomon

18 Thus Solomon made all these utensils in great quantities, for the weight of the bronze could not be found out. 19 Solomon also made all the things that [were] in the house of God: even the golden altar, the tables with the bread of the Presence on them, 20 the lampstands with their lamps of pure gold, to burn in front of the inner sanctuary in the way prescribed; 21 the flowers, the lamps, and the tongs of gold, of purest gold; 22 and the snuffers, the bowls, the spoons and the firepans of pure gold; and the entrance of the house, its inner doors for the holy of holies and the doors of the house, [that is], of the nave, of gold.

Solomon, as a type of Christ, is the final maker of all the bronze objects Hiram made (verse 18). He uses the hands of Hiram. He makes everything “in great quantities”. These are all objects that benefit the service in the temple, that is, the service to the LORD. Bronze represents the righteousness of God. The bronze objects show that everything in the temple service is focused on His honor and fits His holiness. That the weight of the bronze could not be found out means that we will not be able to understand the value of the righteousness of God which we have received in Christ (1Cor 1:30-31).

That the work is attributed to Solomon, while Hiram is the actual performer, can be compared to the service of worship in the church, for example on Sunday morning. We then come together as a church to praise and honor the Lord Jesus. What we bring to Him, however, is laid in our hearts by Himself. It is He who also sing the praises in the church, which He does through the hearts and mouths of His own (Heb 2:12). Our service of worship is His work in us through His Spirit.

The work of Hiram is of bronze (verse 16), that of Solomon is of gold (verses 19-20). Gold is a picture of Divine glory. What Solomon makes is in a special way a symbolic representation of the glory of the work of the Lord Jesus for God in the sanctuary. The gold objects are precious to God. They all speak of Christ.

The “golden altar” (verse 19) is the altar of fragrant incense. This represents Christ through Whom the fragrant incense of the worship we bring is pleasing to God. “The tables with the bread of the Presence on them”

represent Christ Who shows His people, represented in the bread of the Presence, to God in the glory that is peculiar to Him.

“The lampstands with their lamps of pure gold” (verse 20) are also a picture of Christ Who, through the Spirit, gives light in the sanctuary over heavenly things. The things of Christ can only be seen and admired in the light of the sanctuary. The world knows and sees nothing of this.

The light “burns in front of the inner sanctuary in the way prescribed”. This indicates that the service in the sanctuary is in direct connection with the holy of holies, where God dwells. For us, by the tearing the veil of the holy of holies, the two rooms have become one room.

Also “the flowers, the lamps, and the tongs” are “of gold” (verse 21). The flowers speak of life, the lamps of light and the tongs of taking away what prevents the light shining brightly. Human light is excluded. People cannot contribute anything to a deeper understanding of Who Christ is. It is all “of purest gold”.

The objects mentioned in verse 22a, “the snuffers, the bowls, the spoons and the firepans of pure gold”, are also connected to the lampstands and their lamps. These objects are also designed and made with a view to let the light shine brightly. The number of objects made in connection with the lampstands and the material they are made of show how important God considers it to be that only His light falls in perfect brightness on heavenly things.

The doors for “the entrance of the house”, “its inner doors” (verse 22b) refer to two entrances. There are doors from the court to the house, which are the doors that give access to the holy, and there are doors that give access from the holy to the holy of holies. It is possible that before the last doors the veil is hanging, through which the doors are hidden from view.

The Lord Jesus says of Himself: “I am the door” (Jn 10:7,9). In connection with the multiple doors in the temple we can say that He is the door towards ever-higher things.

2 Chronicles 5

Introduction

This chapter describes the dedication of the temple. From this we can learn important lessons regarding the church. The origin of the church has taken place through the outpouring of or baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4; 1Cor 12:13). Since then, the Lord Jesus has been building the church, seen as the house of God, with living stones. That house is still being built, it is not finished yet. It is only finished when the last stone is added and Christ comes to take His church to Himself.

However, the church is already the dwelling place of God in the Spirit on earth. Seen in this light, it is a building that is built on the day of Pentecost and on that day also fully completed to serve as the house of God.

Verse 1 | The Work Finished

1 Thus all the work that Solomon performed for the house of the LORD was finished. And Solomon brought in the things that David his father had dedicated, even the silver and the gold and all the utensils, [and] put [them] in the treasuries of the house of God.

The first thing Solomon does is to put all the dedicated objects of his father David in the treasuries of the temple. These are objects that David took away as war booty (1Chr 18:11) and objects from his private property (1Chr 29:3). Herewith Solomon shows his respect for what his father did for the temple.

We can also apply this to us. Do we appreciate what believers have 'prepared' for the church before us, what they have discovered and passed on in writings or addresses? We would do well to make use of this when we study Scripture. If as a result we understand more of God's house, will we also bring it into the present temple to worship God with it?

Verses 2-10 | The Ark Brought up Into the Temple

2 Then Solomon assembled to Jerusalem the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers' [households] of the sons of Israel, to bring

up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion. 3 All the men of Israel assembled themselves to the king at the feast, that is [in] the seventh month. 4 Then all the elders of Israel came, and the Levites took up the ark. 5 They brought up the ark and the tent of meeting and all the holy utensils which [were] in the tent; the Levitical priests brought them up. 6 And King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel who were assembled with him before the ark, were sacrificing so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted or numbered. 7 Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, into the inner sanctuary of the house, to the holy of holies, under the wings of the cherubim. 8 For the cherubim spread their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim made a covering over the ark and its poles. 9 The poles were so long that the ends of the poles of the ark could be seen in front of the inner sanctuary, but they could not be seen outside; and they are there to this day. 10 There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets which Moses put [there] at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the sons of Israel, when they came out of Egypt.

Then Solomon brings the ark to the temple (verse 2). That reminds of what David did when he brought the ark to Zion in the tent he had made for it. Everything in the temple is larger than in the tabernacle, except the ark. This reminds us that the Lord Jesus is always the same, in the glorious days of the church and also in the days of decay in which we now live. Whether two or three come together as a church or two hundred or three hundred, He is as Personally present as the one Center. In connection with this, in bringing the ark to the temple we can see a picture of forming a local church where the Lord Jesus is in the midst.

The dedication of the temple takes place at the same time with a feast. The feast, "that is [in] the seventh month" (verse 3), is the Feast of Booths. The tabernacle was erected at the time of the Passover (Exo 40:2); the church was formed at Pentecost (Acts 2:1). The Feast of Booths is celebrated when all the harvests have been collected, that is to say the harvests of corn, wine and olives. It is a feast of peace. The blessing of the land is enjoyed by a people who live in the land with the dwelling place of God in their midst. This is a beautiful picture of what the church is and what is experienced when the Lord Jesus gets His place in the church.

The ark is 'taken up' (verse 4), which means that the Levites will transport the ark correctly, namely on their shoulders (Num 7:9; Deu 10:8). The ark now gets its final place in the "house of rest" (1Chr 28:2). The ark is lost forever later, at the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 3:16). It is replaced by the Lord Jesus, of Whom the ark is a picture, when He comes on earth. The ark is a place of rest, it is "the footstool of our God" (1Chr 28:2). That is the Lord Jesus for God and also for us. Christ Himself finds peace in the midst of the church.

Not only the ark, but also "the tent of meeting and all the holy utensils which [were] in the tent" are brought up. Solomon has not received an order for this. The tent has been replaced by the temple. With that the tent has finished. Also the objects in the tent are not necessary for the temple, because everything is in it.

Everything is accompanied by many sacrifices (verse 6) that are made at the altar that Solomon made. Ark and altar are closely connected. They have been separated for a while, but are being reunited here again. It points out that the place of worship (altar) is the place where the Lord Jesus is (ark).

The ark goes "into the inner sanctuary of the house, to the holy of holies, under the wings of the cherubim" (verses 7-8). This indicates the complete protection of the ark. The ark cannot be affected by any outside evil influence. Then the poles (verse 9) are mentioned. They are not needed any longer, because the ark has found its resting place. This is the place David coveted, sought and found for it (Psa 132:3-5). The poles remain attached to it and are therefore a constant reminder of the journey through the wilderness. So it is with the Lord Jesus. Although He is in heaven now, there will always be the memory of His walk on earth.

In the ark are the two stone tablets, a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded (Heb 9:4). Yet it says here that only the two stone tablets are in it (verse 10). All three together give a picture of the life and death of the Lord Jesus. The manna is Christ as He lived on earth and died. Manna is the food of Israel in the wilderness. Christ is the manna for us. However, we are no longer in the wilderness. Therefore, there is no longer a jar with manna here (cf. Jos 5:12). We also don't find a budding staff here. Christ not only died, He also rose up. He lives for us. We see

that in the service of Aaron. A nation in the land, however, does not need a priest like Aaron.

What remains are the stone tablets: that is the covenant of the LORD. They represent the relationship that exists between God and His people. This relationship will continue forever. The stone tablets are the expression of God's will, which always remains: "But the word of the Lord endures forever" (1Pet 1:25a).

Verses 11-14 | The Glory of the LORD

11 When the priests came forth from the holy place (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves, without regard to divisions), 12 and all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and kinsmen, clothed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps and lyres, standing east of the altar, and with them one hundred and twenty priests blowing trumpets 13 in unison when the trumpeters and the singers were to make themselves heard with one voice to praise and to glorify the LORD, and when they lifted up their voice accompanied by trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and when they praised the LORD [saying], "[He] indeed is good for His lovingkindness is everlasting," then the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, 14 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.

The priests come forth so that the rightful Inhabitant can take up residence there (verse 11). The importance of the case justifies not yet taking into account David's institutions with regard to divisions (1Chr 24:3-19). At this event, all priests from all divisions must be present. They all have to be eyewitnesses to the fact that the LORD takes His residence in the temple. They are able to do so because they have all sanctified themselves. We can only see the glory of the Lord when we are committed to Him.

The Levites and the priests stand on the east side of the altar (verse 12). The east side is the side where the sun rises. It is the side where the door of the tabernacle is, the closest to the people. When the carriers of the Levites have done their service, now the singers come forward. When the Lord Jesus has been given the central place in our lives, we become singers. This

also applies to the local church. If the Lord Jesus is central there, this will be reflected in the hymn of praise.

The singers are standing at the altar. The names "Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun" mean successively "one who gathers", "faithful" and "choir of praise". This is reminiscent of the church gathering around the altar (a picture of the Lord's Table) to faithfully praise the Lord as a choir of praise. The church does this as "sons" of God and "kinsmen" of each other and of the Lord Jesus. The "fine linen" indicates that they are made pleasant in the Beloved (Eph 1:6).

Besides the Levites there are also priests. The number of priests is one hundred and twenty. This number reminds of the one hundred and twenty disciples who are in the upper room after the ascension of the Lord Jesus (Acts 1:15), to wait there for the "promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4), which is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The priests blow "in unison" on the trumpets and "in unison" make their voices heard (verse 13). We also see this unanimity in Acts 2. After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the church there is also unanimous (cf. Rom 15:5-6). They do everything together (Acts 2:44,46).

In their praise we hear the reference to the kingdom of peace. It is a song of praise that will never cease: "His lovingkindness is everlasting." Then the house of the LORD is filled with the glory of the LORD. Not during sacrifice, but during singing about His lovingkindness, the answer comes from heaven in the form of the cloud. God's lovingkindness is seen in His glory, of which the cloud is the expression. God is enthroned upon the praises of His people (Psa 22:3b).

The cloud filling the house here led the people out of Egypt (Exo 13:21-22) and through the wilderness (Exo 40:36-38). We also see this cloud of God's glory with the Lord Jesus on the mountain of glorification (Mt 17:5), at the erection of the tabernacle (Exo 40:34-35), after the ordination of the priests (Lev 9:23), at the origination of the church (Acts 1:9; 2:2) and at the temple of Ezekiel (Eze 43:4). At the rebuilding of the temple by Zerubbabel after the return from exile we do not see this cloud of glory.

The priests cannot stand in the presence of God to serve (verse 14). They are overwhelmed by the presence of God's glory in the temple. That is

the situation in the Old Testament. For us it is a great privilege to behold the glory of the Lord with an uncovered face (2Cor 3:18). Under grace we are not driven out of the presence of God, but may we enter it and see the glory of the Lord Jesus there (Jn 17:24). In a way, we too cannot remain standing when we see the Lamb That has been slain standing “as if slain” (Rev 5:6,12): “And the elders fell down and worshiped” (Rev 5:14). Where He is, man and his service disappear.

2 Chronicles 6

Verses 1-11 | Solomon Praises the LORD for the Temple

1 Then Solomon said,

“The LORD has said that He would dwell in the thick cloud.

2 *“I have built You a lofty house,*

And a place for Your dwelling forever.”

3 Then the king faced about and blessed all the assembly of Israel, while all the assembly of Israel was standing. 4 He said, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who spoke with His mouth to my father David and has fulfilled [it] with His hands, saying, 5 ‘Since the day that I brought My people from the land of Egypt, I did not choose a city out of all the tribes of Israel [in which] to build a house that My name might be there, nor did I choose any man for a leader over My people Israel; 6 but I have chosen Jerusalem that My name might be there, and I have chosen David to be over My people Israel.’ 7 Now it was in the heart of my father David to build a house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. 8 But the LORD said to my father David, ‘Because it was in your heart to build a house for My name, you did well that it was in your heart. 9 Nevertheless you shall not build the house, but your son who will be born to you, he shall build the house for My name.’ 10 Now the LORD has fulfilled His word which He spoke; for I have risen in the place of my father David and sit on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built the house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. 11 There I have set the ark in which is the covenant of the LORD, which He made with the sons of Israel.”

Solomon addresses the LORD (verses 1-2). First he reminds the LORD where he has said He would dwell, “in the thick cloud”. It indicates that God is inaccessible to people. He “dwells in unapproachable light” (1Tim 6:16). Thus He comes to Moses “in a thick cloud”, “the thick cloud where God [was]” (Exo 19:9; 20:21). It is the great privilege of the believer today to approach that God. This is made possible through Christ.

It is as if Solomon is surprised that he has built a house as a dwelling place (verse 2) for the God, Who has said “that He would dwell in the thick cloud”. Later, in verse 18, he adds that God cannot dwell in a man-made

house (cf. Isa 66:1; Acts 7:48). Yet it is also true that the temple is “a lofty house” for the LORD and that “forever”. This will find its full fulfillment in the kingdom of peace.

Solomon is the mediator. He acts in this part as the king-priest: he is king and intercedes as a priest. This combination is the characteristic of the Messiah (Zec 6:13). Solomon, with his father David, is the only one who blessed the people as king (verse 3).

The first words Solomon speaks are “blessed be the LORD” (verse 4). Before he prays, he praises God for what He said with His mouth and also did with His hands. The building and completion of the temple was done by man’s hands, but Solomon attributes the entire building to the hands of “the LORD, the God of Israel”.

What we do and accomplish for the Lord ultimately comes from Him, and so all honor belongs to Him. Paulus and Barnabas realize that too. In the account of their missionary journey they report “all things that God had done with them” (Acts 14:27; 15:4; 1Cor 15:10).

In earlier days, when the people are in the wilderness, God did not choose a city to dwell in, nor did He choose a man whom He had made the leader over His people (verse 5). He has done that now (verse 6). He has chosen a city and He has chosen a man (Psa 78:68,70). The only important thing is the choice of God. That makes everything that people think up a lie, like the Bethel of Jeroboam (1Kgs 12:25-33).

The LORD has chosen Jerusalem, and there the LORD has his house. In this chapter the Name of the LORD is spoken about several times with reference to God’s house. There He lets His Name dwell. This reminds us of what the Lord Jesus says of the church: “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst” (Mt 18:20).

Solomon points to his father David as the man who had love in his heart for God’s house and who is its original planner (verse 7). What he was allowed to do himself is to continue working with what his father David has already prepared (verses 8-11).

Here we see an example of the saying of the Lord Jesus and what He associates with it: “For in this case the saying is true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have

labored and you have entered into their labor” (Jn 4:37-38). One may start a work and another may finish it. One generation starts something, the other goes on with it. We build on the foundation that others have laid.

We also see here that Solomon remembers what Divine directions his father had and that he clings to them. He does not seek renewal and does not make arbitrary adjustments. He also does not seek his own honor by wanting to be original.

From some people we read that their hearts went out to the house of God, that they longed for this house that it should be there. We see this with Moses (Exo 15:13,17), David (1Chr 17:1) and Cyrus (Ezra 1:2-3). All of them are herein a picture of the Lord Jesus. In the New Testament the heart of every believer should go out to God’s house (1Cor 3:10b).

Verses 12-21 | Question to Listen to His Prayer

12 Then he stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands. 13 Now Solomon had made a bronze platform, five cubits long, five cubits wide and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court; and he stood on it, knelt on his knees in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven. 14 He said, “O LORD, the God of Israel, there is no god like You in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant and [showing] lovingkindness to Your servants who walk before You with all their heart; 15 who has kept with Your servant David, my father, that which You have promised him; indeed You have spoken with Your mouth and have fulfilled it with Your hand, as it is this day. 16 Now therefore, O LORD, the God of Israel, keep with Your servant David, my father, that which You have promised him, saying, ‘You shall not lack a man to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your sons take heed to their way, to walk in My law as you have walked before Me.’ 17 Now therefore, O LORD, the God of Israel, let Your word be confirmed which You have spoken to Your servant David. 18 “But will God indeed dwell with mankind on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You; how much less this house which I have built. 19 Yet have regard to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to listen to the cry and to the prayer which Your servant prays before You; 20 that Your eye may be open toward this house day and night, toward the place of which You have said that [You would] put Your

name there, to listen to the prayer which Your servant shall pray toward this place. 21 Listen to the supplications of Your servant and of Your people Israel when they pray toward this place; hear from Your dwelling place, from heaven; hear and forgive.

Solomon prays before the altar (verse 12), on a bronze platform (verse 13). The platform is not intended to raise himself above the people, but so that all may see him kneel and hear him pray (cf. Neh 8:4-5). The measures of the platform are those of the old burnt offering altar in the tabernacle (Exo 27:1). A new and larger burnt offering altar has been made for the temple. Yet there is also a memory of the old, smaller burnt offering altar.

The altar of the burnt offering is the place of meeting between the holy God and a sinful people. The sacrifice on that altar is consumed and the people go free. Solomon's intercession is founded on the sacrifice that is made. The service of intercession of the Lord Jesus now in heaven is based on His sacrifice, which He brought on earth to God through His work on the cross.

Solomon's attitude is appropriate and respectful, in accordance with his prayer. He spreads "out his hands to heaven. He knows that there dwells the LORD. Later, in his prayer, he will point to praying toward the house (verses 26:29:34:38) as a location on earth. That is in accordance with God's will. Faith then looks upwards.

Verses 14-21 are a long introduction to the prayer Solomon prays for the people. He presumes the existence of other gods (verse 14; cf. Exo 15:11), but no one can be compared to God (Deu 4:35,39; 1Cor 8:6). He speaks of God's fulfillment of what He has spoken in the past (verse 15). This is the reason for him to ask whether God will continue to keep in the future to what He has proclaimed (verses 16-17).

When Solomon so appealed to God's faithfulness in the past and expressed his confidence in God's faithfulness for the future, he praises the immeasurable greatness of God (verse 18). God transcends everything. He is greater than all promises and than all places where one can live, both on earth and in the universe. God does not dwell in anything that man's hands have made (Isa 66:1; 6:1; Acts 7:48; 17:24).

At the same time, the greatness of God is for him the invitation to ask that great God to pay attention to his "prayer" and to his "supplication" and

to listen to his “cry” (verse 19). Solomon expresses himself increasingly stronger: praying, supplicating, crying. He desires intensely that God’s attention should be constantly focused on this house, because of His Name He has put there (verse 20).

He asks the LORD once again to listen to his prayer, but now he also involves Israel and asks the LORD to listen to their prayer (verse 21). Solomon calls heaven the house of God. He realizes that the house he built is only a shadow of this, because the help for the building of this house had to come from heaven.

Solomon speaks to the LORD in the awareness of his own smallness. He is no more than a servant who depends on His great Master in everything. In three successive verses, he speaks of himself as “Your servant” in each verse (verses 19,20,21). In the previous verses he always said this of his father David. We may certainly come to God as children, but we must never forget that we are servants. We may come with the boldness of a child, but also with the respect of a slave for his Lord.

Verses 22-23 | First Prayer

22 *“If a man sins against his neighbor and is made to take an oath, and he comes [and] takes an oath before Your altar in this house, 23 then hear from heaven and act and judge Your servants, punishing the wicked by bringing his way on his own head and justifying the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness.*

After the introduction to the prayer we hear in verses 22-39 what Solomon prays. It is a prayer consisting of seven parts or seven prayers. In these seven prayers we can make a subdivision. The first four prayers belong together and the last three.

The prayers one to four have to do with the relations of the people among themselves and the problem of sin. It concerns

- the personal relationship between two members of God’s people (prayer 1),
- the whole people (prayers 2 and 3) and
- the individual Israelite, who personally cares about the general state of decay and with this in mind tests himself (prayer 4).

The prayers five to seven are more outwardly directed and more about the peoples around them. It concerns

- the fate of the alien and the testimony which comes from the help he receives from the LORD (prayer 5),
- the struggle of the people and the support of the LORD which they experience (prayer 6),
- the people in exile because of their sins and their return to the land (prayer 7).

In these prayers, the confession of sin occupies a large place. We see that the prayers one through four and also the seventh prayer relate to sin. Much need in God's church is caused by sin. It is also worth noting that the various prayers do not say: 'If they ask for forgiveness', but: 'If they confess their sins, will You forgive' (cf. 1Jn 1:9).

We can learn from the prayers and make an application for the present time, the time when the kingdom of God exists as a mystery. This kingdom includes all those who place themselves under the authority of Lord Jesus, Who is now the praying King-Priest with God and there says His prayers for our benefit. His prayers are also echoed in His church, for the church is first and foremost a house of prayer (1Tim 2:1; Acts 2:42; Isa 56:7; Mt 21:13).

One more practical remark. Reading, or rather: prayerful reading, of this prayer takes about five minutes. That is not long. The value and content are therefore not in the length. It is to be hoped that we will learn to pray in this way, so deeply, without the fuss of words. This is a public prayer. In the inner room we can pray as long as we want.

The first prayer (verses 22-23) is about the sin of one against another, a case in which is asked for an oath. If someone is suspected of sin or if it is certain that someone has sinned, but there is no evidence, then the other can demand that the suspect takes an oath. The accused must then declare on oath that he is innocent. By virtue of this oath the judge hands him over, as it were, to the LORD. He even curses himself if he is guilty (Num 5:11-28). That curse can strike him in a direct government of God. The LORD shall deal with the consequences of the guilty person. Where people cannot come to clarity, God must provide clarity.

This situation can also be found today among God's people in the case of sin between two brothers. How difficult it can be to uncover the truth and make a correct judgment. The question is from what attitude the person in question deals with the sinning brother and how the church deals with it. It is important to pray that the Lord makes clear the true facts (Mt 18:15-20). The Lord, if the church asks Him unanimously for this, reveals where the matter is wrong and the church does not know.

Verses 24-25 | Second Prayer

24 "If Your people Israel are defeated before an enemy because they have sinned against You, and they return [to You] and confess Your name, and pray and make supplication before You in this house, 25 then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which You have given to them and to their fathers.

The second prayer concerns the case where the people are overwhelmed by the enemy because of a sin of the people as a whole (Lev 26:17). If there is sin, the enemies come. God sends them to discipline His people and bring them to confession and return to Him (Jdg 2:14-16). Confession of sin can count on a listening God in heaven and on forgiveness of sin.

The consequence of sin is that the people are driven out of the land or at least do not receive the blessing of the land. If there is true repentance over sin, the people get back what they have lost through their sin. This also applies to us. When we've sinned, we've come into the power of the enemy. The spiritual blessings are not enjoyed then. When we confess our sin, we also regain the joy of salvation (cf. Psa 51:14a).

The faithful suffer the consequences of general infidelity. It will lead them to live in a spirit of prayer and confession. By doing so, they will remain in possession and enjoyment of the blessings. Separation from evil may count on the Lord's blessing.

Verses 26-27 | Third Prayer

26 "When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against You, and they pray toward this place and confess Your name, and turn from their sin when You afflict them; 27 then hear in heaven and

forgive the sin of Your servants and Your people Israel, indeed, teach them the good way in which they should walk. And send rain on Your land which You have given to Your people for an inheritance.

The third plague are shut up heavens. The whole people are suffering from the same plague of drought. Unlike Egypt, which is humidified by the Nile and human effort, Israel depends on the rain of heaven (Deu 11:10-11). If the autumn rain fails, there is no harvest and famine is the result. Through the Word God makes clear “the good way in which they should walk”. He shows in His Word how His people can repent and thereby ensure the return of the blessing.

God teaches His people the right way by chastising them with drought when they deviate from Him. That is in the heart of Elijah when he prays “that it should not rain” (Jam 5:17; 1Kgs 17:1). God sometimes teaches us through bitter disappointments and pain. Then our roads are blocked with thorns, our hiding places are shut up, our wells are poisoned and all our pleasant things are destroyed. God teaches us the good by showing us evil. Then our soul will cry out: “I want to return!” (Hos 2:5-6).

Verses 28-31 | Fourth Prayer

28 “If there is famine in the land, if there is pestilence, if there is blight or mildew, if there is locust or grasshopper, if their enemies besiege them in the land of their cities, whatever plague or whatever sickness [there is], 29 whatever prayer or supplication is made by any man or by all Your people Israel, each knowing his own affliction and his own pain, and spreading his hands toward this house, 30 then hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart You know for You alone know the hearts of the sons of men, 31 that they may fear You, to walk in Your ways as long as they live in the land which You have given to our fathers.

Various plagues are the reason for the fourth prayer. Although it does not say that these plagues come because of sins committed, these plagues are the result of sin. We can derive that from the word “forgive” in verse 30. The whole people suffer from these plagues, but each one can escape them personally if he prays and supplicates and acknowledges his own affliction and his own pain.

In the words “and render to each according to all his ways”, is asked for the discipline of God. This discipline is necessary to keep the believer on the path of faithfulness to the Lord or to bring him back there. In doing so, the Lord sees in the heart of the believer to what he is inclined or why he goes a certain way that makes discipline necessary. It is the love of the Lord who brings this discipline upon his own (Heb 12:5-11).

We see an application of these plagues in the spiritual state of the believers in Corinth. They partake lightly in the Lord’s Supper. They deal lightly with its spiritual meaning. So God must punish them. Paul says to them: “For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep” (1Cor 11:30). This does not mean that all those affected by this discipline participate in that levity. It is quite possible that there are those who suffer because of what others do. We may suffer from the behavior of others or of ourselves. That robs us of our blessings.

God knows the hearts of every human being (verse 30b). “All things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13). Awareness of this should lead us to go in fear for God in the ways of the Lord (verse 31). Then we are preserved in the enjoyment of the blessings that have been given to us.

Verses 32-33 | Fifth Prayer

32 “Also concerning the foreigner who is not from Your people Israel, when he comes from a far country for Your great name’s sake and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm, when they come and pray toward this house, 33 then hear from heaven, from Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, and fear You as [do] Your people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Your name.

The reason for this prayer is not a particular sin. It is a prayer for the stranger who comes from a far country to God’s house to pray there. Here we see that the house of God is a house of prayer for all nations (Isa 56:7b). Already in the Old Testament it is indicated that God’s Name is made great not only by Israel, but also by the nations (Mal 1:11). An example is

the queen of Sheba (1Kgs 10:1-5), although it does not say that she came to pray.

The church is also a house of prayer and a refuge for the foreigner, the alien, that is to say for anyone who does not belong to God's people. If someone comes to seek God, he must be at the church, for that is the "pillar and support of the truth" (1Tim 3:15). The church is now there for anyone who is still outside the church, to be included by conversion.

An example of this is the eunuch who came to Jerusalem to seek God (Acts 8:26-40). He returns home unsatisfied, for the temple is no longer God's house. God, however, meets him. He fulfills his desire by showing him that there is a new house of God.

Prophetically, this prayer will be heard in the kingdom of peace, when the peoples of the end of the earth come to seek and worship the God of Israel (Psa 22:28; 67:3-6).

Verses 34-35 | Sixth Prayer

34 "When Your people go out to battle against their enemies, by whatever way You shall send them, and they pray to You toward this city which You have chosen and the house which I have built for Your name, 35 then hear from heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause.

This prayer does not happen because of a sin either. It is about dependence on God when His people, in obedience to Him, fight against their enemies. Here the people meet the enemy in a battle of faith by command of the LORD. It is a battle of which it can be said: "The battle is not yours but God's" (2Chr 20:15). This is not about sins, but about a people who are in their right. Yet prayer is needed to get this right against the enemy.

That also applies to us. God's Word calls us to fight "the good fight of faith" (1Tim 6:12; 2Tim 4:7). Before we fight, we must pray, and while we fight, we must pray. Then the Lord will maintain our cause, that is to say, He will make us stand firm in our battle for the truth of His Word. If we fight that battle with gentleness, opponents of the truth can be won for the truth (2Tim 2:25-26).

Verses 36-39 | Seventh Prayer

36 "When they sin against You (for there is no man who does not sin) and You are angry with them and deliver them to an enemy, so that they take them away captive to a land far off or near, 37 if they take thought in the land where they are taken captive, and repent and make supplication to You in the land of their captivity, saying, 'We have sinned, we have committed iniquity and have acted wickedly'; 38 if they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, where they have been taken captive, and pray toward their land which You have given to their fathers and the city which You have chosen, and toward the house which I have built for Your name, 39 then hear from heaven, from Your dwelling place, their prayer and supplications, and maintain their cause and forgive Your people who have sinned against You.

This prayer finds its cause again in sin. It is not about a specific sin, but about sin in general. Yet there is sin present that arouses God's anger. Sin is found in every human being, because "there is no man who does not sin" (verse 36; cf. Ecc 7:20). This is not a cheap remark from Solomon, as cheap as it is sometimes said: 'We are all sinners.' What he means by this is that it is not unthinkable that what he prays now will happen. This expresses knowledge of the human heart. It is important that we know our own heart.

Here Solomon observes that man has a sinful heart, which is also expressed in practice. Solomon foresees a sinful practice for all who are so great that God must surrender them in His wrath to the enemy who takes them away from the land of promise. This prayer turns out to be prophetic (cf. Deu 31:20,29) and in all seriousness it has become reality. The people are led into exile (2Kgs 17:6-23; 2Chr 36:17-21).

However, Solomon also assumes a repentance of them among the nations to which they are scattered. They reap what they sow, but God can bring a reversal for the better and restore. He does so when they repent with all their heart and with all their soul. The proof of this will be that they "pray toward their land" and toward God's city and house. That prayer shows that their hearts go out to the same things God's hearts go out to.

This work in their hearts takes place on the basis of the intercession of the Lord Jesus and God-fearing people. Daniel has prayed and also Ezra and

Nehemiah. They have confessed guilt (Dan 9:3-5,20; Ezra 9:1-6; Neh 1:1-7). Then, by God's standards, justice is provided. He acts righteously when there is confession of sin.

We see this also in the history of the Christian church, for example in the Reformation and the Revival. These revivals, like so many other revivals, are based on the intercession of the Lord Jesus and God-fearing people. That's how it still works today.

Verses 40-42 | Solomon Asks for His Prayer to Be Answered

40 "Now, O my God, I pray, let Your eyes be open and Your ears attentive to the prayer [offered] in this place. 41 "Now therefore arise, O LORD God, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your might; let Your priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation and let Your godly ones rejoice in what is good. 42 "O LORD God, do not turn away the face of Your anointed; remember [Your] lovingkindness to Your servant David."

The general thought of all seven prayers is that they are all done in or to the house of God. It is "the prayer [offered] in this place" (verse 40). The answer of God in the next chapter is connects to this (2Chr 7:15-16).

Solomon concludes his prayer (verses 41-42). He does so with a few words of David (Psa 132:8-10). Earlier the word "arise" (verse 41) is spoken to the ark of the covenant when the people of Israel began their journey through the wilderness (Num 10:35). Later David speaks these words when bringing up the ark from Kiriath-jearim to Zion (Psa 132:8). Here Solomon speaks these words when the ark gets its final resting place in the temple on Mount Moria.

The fact that the ark has been given its resting place is reason to speak about the priests and their garments. The priestly garments are "salvation". It indicates that the Lord Jesus has taken His place in the heavenly sanctuary. The believers as priests may now enter into the consciousness of full security of salvation. That salvation is not based on anything in themselves, but is entirely the result of God's acceptance of Christ and His work. We, as 'godly ones', as beneficiaries, may "rejoice in what is good". It indicates complete satisfaction as a result of all that God has given us in Christ.

Solomon mentions the plea (verse 42). He pleads on the ground of Whom the Anointed, that is Christ, is before God, for the people and the Anointed belong together. If the Anointed is heard, then the people are accepted. In ourselves there is no righteousness. Our righteousness can only be found in the Anointed.

2 Chronicles 7

Verses 1-3 | The Glory of the LORD

1 Now when Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the house. 2 The priests could not enter into the house of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled the LORD's house. 3 All the sons of Israel, seeing the fire come down and the glory of the LORD upon the house, bowed down on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave praise to the LORD, [saying], "Truly He is good, truly His lovingkindness is everlasting."

The coming down of the fire from heaven (verse 1) is an immediate and visible answer of the LORD to the prayer of Solomon. If we make room for God, He comes and fills the room.

God's answer is related to the value of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, as we see it in "the burnt offering and the sacrifices". These sacrifices are a picture of Christ in His life and His sacrifice on the cross (Heb 10:5-7) The fire that consumes the sacrifice is not lit by men, but comes from heaven. The fire shows that God has accepted the sacrifice, while the people can go free. A visible proof that God has accepted the sacrifice is that the glory of the LORD fills the house immediately after it.

A house that is filled with the glory of God does not offer room to anything of man (verse 2). That the priests because of the glory of the LORD cannot enter the house of the LORD, shows in picture that in true worship the worshipper does not think of himself. He is not occupied with himself, there is no room for that, but only with the Lord Jesus. Where everything is about the glory and honor of God and His Christ, all worshippers fall down and praise God and Christ (verse 3).

The whole people, "all the sons of Israelites", are a people of worshippers. Worship is expressed here in the great hymn of praise of the kingdom of peace: "Truly His lovingkindness is everlasting." It recalls the beginning of the church. No one withdraws from the fellowship, no group separates to have fellowship apart from others. "They were all together in one place"

(Acts 2:1b) and then the Holy Spirit is poured out Who will abide forever with and in the believers (Jn 14:16-17).

The glory of the LORD is *in* the house (verse 1), while the Israelites see that the glory of the LORD is *over* the house (verse 3). We can compare this to anointing and fulfillment with the Holy Spirit. The *anointing* with the Holy Spirit indicates the Holy Spirit *on* or *over* the believer, that is, in his life can be seen that he is walking and being led by the Spirit. *Fulfillment* with the Holy Spirit refers to the presence of the Spirit *in* the believer, through whom the new life has the power to express itself.

Verses 4-7 | Offers for the Dedication of the House

4 Then the king and all the people offered sacrifice before the LORD. 5 King Solomon offered a sacrifice of 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. Thus the king and all the people dedicated the house of God. 6 The priests stood at their posts, and the Levites also, with the instruments of music to the LORD, which King David had made for giving praise to the LORD—"for His lovingkindness is everlasting"—whenever he gave praise by their means, while the priests on the other side blew trumpets; and all Israel was standing. 7 Then Solomon consecrated the middle of the court that [was] before the house of the LORD, for there he offered the burnt offerings and the fat of the peace offerings because the bronze altar which Solomon had made was not able to contain the burnt offering, the grain offering and the fat.

The sacrificial service and the praise of the LORD belong together. For all who have returned from Babylon, there is no renewed fulfillment of the temple with the glory of the LORD. Yet there are the altar, the sacrifices and the temple. This is also what has been left to us in a time when the church has fallen into decay and the glory of God is no longer present in the church in the same way as in the beginning.

In bringing sacrifices there is no separation between the leader and the people (verse 4). In the New Testament, all believers are priests, regardless of their position in the church. The oldest and youngest believers come with their sacrifice. The huge peace offering that Solomon brings speaks of the great impression one has of the fellowship of God with His people and of the people among themselves. The house of God is first and foremost a house of prayer, but also of sacrifice and fellowship. If that is experienced,

the house is in truth dedicated, that is, the house is used in the way God has given it for.

Also now, in God's house, there can the glory of the Lord Jesus can be seen, both in His life on earth and now at God's right hand. Spiritual sacrifices can also be made now and there can be a fellowship meal where God gets His portion and the Lord Jesus and also the people. In particular, this is the case with the Lord's Supper at the Lord's Table.

When the house of God is dedicated, the priests stand on their posts and the Levies have musical instruments to praise the LORD. Each is in his own place, no one takes the place of another or does anything else than he has to do. This happens in accordance with what the LORD had previously arranged by Moses and David. Priests offer, Levites sing. These two services are now done by every believer.

Only the musical instruments are mentioned, not the singers. We all are now musical instruments. Just as David played the musical instruments through the mouth of the Levites, so the Lord Jesus does it now with us. He says to His God: "In the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise" (Heb 2:12b) and for this He uses us. We offer up a sacrifice of praise to God through Him (Heb 13:15). Christ is the great Singer.

What Solomon has to sacrifice is so much that the bronze burnt offering altar cannot contain it all. That is why he consecrates a part of the court and makes it also a place of sacrifice. 'Consecrate' means to separate something from ordinary use and to give it a special purpose. The consecrated part of the court is added to the altar, so that the altar is enlarged and can contain all the sacrifices that are made.

Verses 8-11 | The Feast of Booths Celebrated

8 So Solomon observed the feast at that time for seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great assembly [who came] from the entrance of Hamath to the brook of Egypt. 9 On the eighth day they held a solemn assembly, for the dedication of the altar they observed seven days and the feast seven days. 10 Then on the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people to their tents, rejoicing and happy of heart because of the goodness that the LORD had shown to David and to Solomon and to His people Israel. 11 Thus Solomon finished

the house of the LORD and the king's palace, and successfully completed all that he had planned on doing in the house of the LORD and in his palace.

"In that time" (verse 8), that is the time of consecration, sacrifice and praise, there is "observed the feast at that time for seven days" by Solomon "and all Israel with him". The feast of the dedication of the altar lasted seven days (verse 9). After those seven days, the Feast of Booths was also celebrated. This can be seen from the fact that there is talk of "the eighth day", when a special meeting takes place, and that the people go to their tents on the twenty-third day (Lk 23:33-43).

After the feast, the people go to their tents, "rejoicing and happy of heart" about the goodness of the LORD. They are all impressed by the consecration, sacrifice and worship. "The goodness" is all "that the LORD has shown to David and to Solomon and to His people Israel". Thus we may go home rejoicing and happy of heart when we have seen in the meeting of the church what God our Father has done for Christ and His church.

Then the description of the building of the house of the LORD and Solomon's house is finished (verse 11). Here again we see the close connection between the house of God and the house of the believer (cf. 1Tim 3:5). Activities in the church are not separate from activities at home.

Solomon has done everything that has come into his heart. That certainly does not mean that he has acted according to his own inspiration and insight. What has come into his heart is what has also been in the heart of his father David (1Chr 28:2). David gave him the plan for the temple, with the instruction to execute this plan and to execute it exactly as it is. Because Solomon kept to this, he "successfully completed all" what was in his heart.

Verses 12-22 | The LORD Appears to Solomon

12 Then the LORD appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. 13 If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, 14 and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land. 15 Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive

to the prayer [offered] in this place. 16 For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that My name may be there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually. 17 As for you, if you walk before Me as your father David walked, even to do according to all that I have commanded you, and will keep My statutes and My ordinances, 18 then I will establish your royal throne as I covenanted with your father David, saying, 'You shall not lack a man [to be] ruler in Israel.' 19 "But if you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, 20 then I will uproot you from My land which I have given you, and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight and I will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples. 21 As for this house, which was exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and say, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house?' 22 And they will say, 'Because they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers who brought them from the land of Egypt, and they adopted other gods and worshiped them and served them; therefore He has brought all this adversity on them.'"

In these verses the LORD gives an audible answer to Solomon. Solomon asked in the previous chapter: "Now, O my God, I pray, let Your eyes be open and Your ears attentive to the prayer [offered] in this place" (2Chr 6:40). Now the LORD answers: "Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to the prayer [offered] in this place" (verse 15). That He gives this answer means that Solomon's prayer is a prayer according to His will. The LORD has given all the instructions and Solomon has done nothing but execute them. Yet He presents it here as if everything is the answer to Solomon's prayer. This shows that God wants to be prayed to. He would like to give what He has in His heart, on the basis of prayer.

The LORD appears in the night to Solomon (verse 12), not in a dream, but visible and real. It is a second apparition (1Kgs 9:2), after the first apparition at Gibeon (2Chr 1:3,7). It happens at night, when the eye is not distracted by other things. He tells Solomon that He heard his prayer and chose the place of the house "as a house of sacrifice". This reflects the beautiful intention of the house. Sacrificing means offering. We may offer our prayers, but also our worship to God in the meetings of the church, now the house of God. He chose that house for that purpose.

The LORD repeats that His discipline must strike his people when they deviate from him. He mentions some of these means of punishment (verse 13). He uses those means to bring His people to repentance, what will be evident from their confession. This answer is about restoration after sin and confession. There can never be restoration from blessing regardless of the conditions He mentions (verse 14). When these conditions are met, blessing comes again from heaven.

There follows a wonderful impression of God's feelings for this house, *His* house (verses 15-16). God speaks of His eyes, His ears and His heart that go out to this house and of His Name that dwells there, and not just for a moment, but "forever". Wouldn't His house in this time, the church, also be worth all our attention and effort?

We see God's *counsel* on the one hand (verses 17-18) and God's *ways* on the other (verses 19-22). According to God's *counsel*, there shall not lack a man of David's descendants on the throne. In the *ways* of God, the line of the succession to the throne will be interrupted in case of unfaithfulness. Until God's counsel is finally fulfilled in the great Son of David, the Lord Jesus.

We can apply the warning (verses 19-22) to a local church. If a local church deviates from the Lord Jesus by ignoring His directions in His Word, He must remove the lampstand of testimony (Rev 2:5). It begins when the leaders become unfaithful and bind people to themselves rather than to the Lord. Then a form of idolatry arises. An idol is everything that takes the place of the Lord Jesus, that displaces Him from the first and only place in the church. Then He goes away, because He does not impose Himself. The result is that the lampstand is removed from a local church. The light is extinguished. In the end, there is nothing more to see of Christ.

The deeper cause is that "they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers who brought them from the land of Egypt" (verse 22). If we forget that the Lord Jesus "gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age" (Gal 1:4) to live for Him, other things will fill our lives and our testimony will be lost. If the Lord then disciplines us by bringing evil upon us, that is His love. He wants to bring us back to His heart and in the enjoyment of the blessing.

2 Chronicles 8

Introduction

In 2 Chronicles 8-9 we see the relations between Solomon and the Gentiles.

In 2 Chronicles 8 we see

1. which cities Solomon builds and fortifies (verses 1-6),
2. which workmen he uses (verses 7-10),
3. what provisions does he make for his Egyptian wife (verse 11),
4. how he keeps the temple service as it is arranged by Moses and his father David (verses 12-16) and
5. his trade with the nations (verses 17-18).

In Psalm 72 we read a prayer for the king and his son. In that psalm the rule of Solomon is described. With Psalm 72, the second book of Psalms (Psalms 42-72) closes. In Isaiah 60 we read a description of the glory of the coming kingdom of peace, where the power of the nations is brought to Him. Both sections can be connected to 2 Chronicles 8.

Verses 1-6 | Solomon's Building

1 Now it came about at the end of the twenty years in which Solomon had built the house of the LORD and his own house 2 that he built the cities which Hiram had given to him, and settled the sons of Israel there. 3 Then Solomon went to Hamath-zobah and captured it. 4 He built Tadmor in the wilderness and all the storage cities which he had built in Hamath. 5 He also built upper Beth-horon and lower Beth-horon, fortified cities [with] walls, gates and bars; 6 and Baalath and all the storage cities that Solomon had, and all the cities for his chariots and cities for his horsemen, and all that it pleased Solomon to build in Jerusalem, in Lebanon, and in all the land under his rule.

Solomon reigned for forty years. About the building of the house of the LORD he did seven years (1Kgs 6:38) and about his own house thirteen years (1Kgs 7:1), that is twenty years together (verse 1). Solomon is a builder. He builds the house of the LORD and his own house (verse 1); he builds the cities which Hiram gave him (verse 2); he builds Tadmor and builds in

Hamath (verse 4); he builds upper Beth-horon and lower Beth-horon and he fortifies cities (verse 5); he builds all he desires (verse 6).

We are also builders. The only question is whether we are good builders or bad builders. We must build upon the foundation, “that is Jesus Christ” (1Cor 3:11). It is also important that we build with good material, that is to say that we bring the biblical doctrine that is really for building up the church and that we live as the Bible tells us. If we learn wrong things or if we allow sins in our lives, we do not build up the church, but we break it down.

Solomon started building these houses in the fourth year of his reign (2Chr 3:2). That means that more than the first half of his reign is over and the second part of his reign has arrived. We are then in the year 946 BC. In this second part of his government the decline begins. This can be read in 1 Kings, because there the kingship is described from the point of view of the responsibility of the king. In 2 Chronicles it is about God’s counsel. Here the reign of Solomon ends with a painting of the glory, as the Lord Jesus will possess it in the kingdom of peace.

Solomon is a man of great learning, but he does not spend his time only studying. He is also active. His scholarship leads him to act wisely. Here he is working on fortifying his land. Building and fortifying in a time of peace is necessary because the enemy is always lurking.

We must protect ourselves against savage wolves who will come in among us, not sparing the flock (Acts 20:29), against people who cause who cause dissensions and occasions of stumbling (Rom 16:17), against sectarian people (Tit 3:10-11), against false brethren (Gal 2:4-5), against false teachers (2Pet 2:1), against people who like Diotrefes want to be the first (3Jn 1:9).

Verses 7-10 | The Workmen of Solomon

7 All of the people who were left of the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, who were not of Israel, 8 [namely], from their descendants who were left after them in the land whom the sons of Israel had not destroyed, them Solomon raised as forced laborers to this day. 9 But Solomon did not make slaves for his work from the sons of Israel; they were men of war, his chief captains and commanders of his chariots and his horsemen. 10 These

were the chief officers of King Solomon, two hundred and fifty who ruled over the people.

The power of Solomon is described both in the building of cities in the previous verses and in these verses in the enemies that become slaves. The Israelites are not slaves; they are the rulers and are given important posts. For all his buildings, Solomon needs a lot of people. They are taken from the remaining Canaanite peoples, who are explicitly said not to belong to Israel. That they are still alive is the result of Israel's unfaithfulness to the LORD's commandment to destroy them (Deu 7:1-6; 20:16-18).

Verse 11 | The House of Pharaoh's Daughter

11 Then Solomon brought Pharaoh's daughter up from the city of David to the house which he had built for her, for he said, "My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy where the ark of the LORD has entered."

The connection between Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter is also found in 1 Kings, especially at the beginning of Solomon's history (1Kgs 3:1). There his marriage with Pharaoh's daughter is mentioned so early in his history as a precursor of the many wrong marriages he will later enter into. Here in 2 Chronicles the emphasis is more on the spiritual mind of Solomon. He realizes that his pagan wife cannot be connected to the service to the LORD in which "the house of David king of Israel" is leading.

We can learn a practical lesson here. It is a bad thing when husband and wife have no common interest in what is most important: the things of God. How else can two men walk together (Amos 3:3)? The love for Christ in husband and wife gives the strongest bond in marriage. How bad it is when either the husband or the wife has to enter the sanctuary alone, because the other does not care. The same goes for friendships. It is also not correct that there is a separation between our own house and the house of God, as Solomon puts it here. The atmosphere of God's house must also be that of our own houses.

Verses 12-16 | The Temple According to the Ordinance of David

12 Then Solomon offered burnt offerings to the LORD on the altar of the LORD which he had built before the porch; 13 and [did so] according to the

daily rule, offering [them] up according to the commandment of Moses, for the sabbaths, the new moons and the three annual feasts—the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Booths. 14 Now according to the ordinance of his father David, he appointed the divisions of the priests for their service, and the Levites for their duties of praise and ministering before the priests according to the daily rule, and the gatekeepers by their divisions at every gate; for David the man of God had so commanded. 15 And they did not depart from the commandment of the king to the priests and Levites in any manner or concerning the storehouses. 16 Thus all the work of Solomon was carried out from the day of the foundation of the house of the LORD, and until it was finished. So the house of the LORD was completed.

This section begins with “then” (verse 12). It seems to say that after Solomon had let Pharaoh’s daughter leave Jerusalem, he was again able to sacrifice. Solomon is here again the king-priest, like Melchizedek. He is herein a picture of the Messiah (Zec 6:13). He acts according to “the commandment of Moses” (verse 13) and offers the various daily, weekly, monthly, and annual prescribed sacrifices.

Solomon is the offeror and also takes care of the priests and the Levites. He ensures that they act “according to the ordinance of his father David” (verse 14). This also applies to the gatekeepers who sit at the gates to ensure that no unauthorized persons enter. There is no departing from “the commandment of the king” (verse 15), because this commandment is completely in accordance with what was said earlier by Moses and David.

Solomon does not use his wisdom to invent new forms of worship, not even by changing or adding anything, but rather by remaining in what he has been taught (2Tim 3:14). He uses his authority to maintain the statutes of Moses and his father David. Everything is shown as it is described in Ezekiel 40-48, where everything is connected to the glory of the kingdom of peace.

If everything is in order and goes well, it can be said that “the house of the LORD was completed” (verse 16). Before the service in the temple takes place as prescribed, the temple is not completed. The goal is only then achieved when the house also functions according to the intention that the builder of it had in mind.

Verses 17-18 | The Gold of Solomon

17 Then Solomon went to Ezion-geber and to Eloth on the seashore in the land of Edom. 18 And Hiram by his servants sent him ships and servants who knew the sea; and they went with Solomon's servants to Ophir, and took from there four hundred and fifty talents of gold and brought them to King Solomon.

Solomon trades with the nations. The merchandise here is only gold, the gold of Ofir. When we think of Ofir, we have to think of areas or tribes that probably have been or lived in Arabia. Ofir is associated with Havilah, the land of good gold (Gen 10:29; 2:11-12).

Gold is a picture of glory; the radiance shows Divine glory. It has to do with paradise, a glory that has been lost by sin, but which here, as it were, is brought back by Solomon. He brings out the glory that is lost.

The glory that has shone in paradise, shines here in the hands of Solomon and will shine in the kingdom of peace the brightest and constantly. The line runs from the gold of paradise, via the gold here of Solomon, to the gold of the kingdom of peace (Isa 60:1-9).

Both the gold of paradise and that in the hands of Solomon is darkened by sin. With Solomon it is not a complete restoration of what has been lost in paradise by sin; it is only a temporary restoration. There has never been a restoration as in the days of Solomon, but that will also fade away with the glory that will come here with the coming of the great King.

2 Chronicles 9

Verses 1-12 | The Queen of Sheba

1 Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came to Jerusalem to test Solomon with difficult questions. She had a very large retinue, with camels carrying spices and a large amount of gold and precious stones; and when she came to Solomon, she spoke with him about all that was on her heart. 2 Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was hidden from Solomon which he did not explain to her. 3 When the queen of Sheba had seen the wisdom of Solomon, the house which he had built, 4 the food at his table, the seating of his servants, the attendance of his ministers and their attire, his cupbearers and their attire, and his stairway by which he went up to the house of the LORD, she was breathless. 5 Then she said to the king, "It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. 6 Nevertheless I did not believe their reports until I came and my eyes had seen it. And behold, the half of the greatness of your wisdom was not told me. You surpass the report that I heard. 7 How blessed are your men, how blessed are these your servants who stand before you continually and hear your wisdom. 8 Blessed be the LORD your God who delighted in you, setting you on His throne as king for the LORD your God; because your God loved Israel establishing them forever, therefore He made you king over them, to do justice and righteousness." 9 Then she gave the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold and a very great [amount of] spices and precious stones; there had never been spice like that which the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. 10 The servants of Hiram and the servants of Solomon who brought gold from Ophir, also brought algum trees and precious stones. 11 From the algum trees the king made steps for the house of the LORD and for the king's palace, and lyres and harps for the singers; and none like that was seen before in the land of Judah. 12 King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all her desire which she requested besides [a return for] what she had brought to the king. Then she turned and went to her own land with her servants.

In this chapter we see, in the words of the Lord Jesus, "Solomon in all his glory" (Mt 6:29). All the kings of the earth come to Solomon to bring their

treasures to him (verses 23-24). An example of this we see in the queen of Sheba. Like them, in the kingdom of peace in the future all kings will contribute to the glory of the King Who is chosen by God (Isa 66:18b-19).

The queen of Sheba comes because of the fame of Solomon's glory has gone out. She leaves her land and comes to the house of God, Jerusalem. She comes to Solomon with questions and with wealth. The difficult questions she has are the difficult questions of life; they deal with the deepest questions of life. It seems that she has not yet received a satisfactory answer to her questions from anyone. Now she comes to put Solomon to the test. She wants to know if he really is as wise as is claimed of him. She talks to him about everything she has on her heart.

Only the wisdom of God, who is in Solomon, has an answer to her difficult questions and to what she has on her heart. Thus we see in the Gospels that the Lord Jesus, with perfect wisdom, is able to answer all the questions that are asked of Him, including trick questions (Mt 22:15). He hid nothing from them (Jn 18:20; cf. Acts 20:27).

There follows a sevenfold enumeration of the glory of Solomon which the queen sees and of which she is deeply impressed (verses 3-4). She realizes that the source of all that glory is God Himself. So today we may see and admire our Lord Jesus. The queen of Sheba sees:

1. "The wisdom of Solomon" (verse 3). We see Christ, Who for us is God's wisdom in connection with the cross (1Cor 1:24,30). For the church "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are hidden in Christ (Col 2:3). The church shows Christ as the manifold wisdom of God (Eph 3:10); He is the wisdom from above (Jam 3:15,17).
2. "The house he had built" (verse 3). We see the church as the temple, the dwelling-place of God in the present time and forever (Eph 2:21-22; Heb 3:6). It is God's intention that we show and tell about this house (cf. Eze 43:10).
3. 'The food at his table' (verse 4). The table is a picture of the place of fellowship with Him and what can be enjoyed in it. Food is a picture of Christ (Jn 6:35).
4. "The seating of his servants" (verse 4). This concerns his ministers, the highest civil officials, sitting at his table with him. An example

we see at Mephibosheth at the table with David. Mephibosheth was not a minister, but still enjoyed the great privilege of being at that place to share the meal with David (2Sam 9:10b,13). For us it is about fellowship with the Father and the Son (1Jn 1:3).

5. "The attendance of his ministers and their attire" (verse 4). Thus we must stand ready to minister the Lord Jesus. That is what we are called to do. We may do the ministry with what He has entrusted to us. That we may minister Him is something to be grateful for. He gives each of His own tasks to perform for Him.

His wealth is also reflected in the clothing of the minister. He who does the humblest ministry, he who does the simplest work, is dressed like a prince. Clothing means that we have put on Christ and show Him in our conduct (Lk 3:27; Eph 4:24).

6. "His cupbearers and their attire" (verse 4). The cupbearer serves the king directly. It represents the joy that we as believers are before the Lord when we serve Him (Isa 65:19; Zep 3:17). This is also linked to our dignity, which is expressed in our clothing (see the previous point).
7. "His stairway by which he went up to the house of the LORD" (verse 4) to bring there his burnt offerings. Solomon is the priest of his people. The Lord Jesus is in the midst of the church not only to receive our worship, but He Himself raises the song of praise to the glory of God (Psa 22:23; Heb 2:12b). He sings praises to God in the midst of the church, He is the great Priest (Heb 10:21), He is the mouth of the church that has come together. We bring our sacrifices through Him to God, He leads the worship.

She has seen with her eyes what she had heard in her land. We can, like them, hear "a report" through what we are told and impressed by it. But when we see it in reality, it surpasses everything we've heard. Also, a real appreciation is only possible after we have got to know from close by what we have heard about and thus get a share in it. The words she heard could not contain all the glory she sees now. After hearing comes seeing, that is growth. We see this growth in the queen of Sheba (verses 5-6). We also have to hear, come and see (Jn 1:40).

She is also a good observer with good judgment. In verse 7, she speaks of “men” and “servants”. ‘Men’ indicates adulthood, mature in insight; ‘servants’ indicates submission.

After speaking of Solomon’s men and servants, she speaks of the LORD Himself (verse 8). She notices that the LORD has put him on His throne as king because of His pleasure in Solomon. Solomon’s throne is the throne of the LORD. She also notes that God’s love for His people is expressed in the fact that He gave a king like Solomon to His people. Thus, the reign of the Lord Jesus over Israel will be a special proof of God’s love for His earthly people. At the same time this is a beautiful picture of God’s love for the church. God so loves the church that He gave the Lord Jesus, in His capacity as Head over all things, to her (Eph 1:22).

The Queen of Sheba gives Solomon a huge gift of gold and precious stones, as well as very rare spices that represent an enormous value (verse 9). These are types of the appreciation that someone has for the Lord Jesus, after he has seen and been deeply impressed by His great glory. The heart is completely overwhelmed by it and will express it. The spices represent the unique scent of Christ spread by believers for whom Christ is everything.

Other gifts are added to the gifts of the queen (verse 10), which are brought by “the servants of Hiram and the servants of Solomon” (cf. Rev 21:24,26). Of the added gifts Solomon uses the algum trees to make “steps” out of it both for the house of the LORD and for his own house. This indicates the application of possibilities to ascend to the higher things, the things of heaven, of Christ and of God. In this context, a study of the ‘songs of degrees’, or ‘songs of steps’, also called ‘songs of ascents’, Psalms 121-134, will also fit well.

Making these steps suggests that we are helped to search for the things that are above and to think of them, because Christ is there (Col 3:1-2). This help is given to us through the gifts the Lord has given to His church. If we use them, it will give us instruments in our hands and make us singers, so that we can sing about the fame of Christ in sonorous sounds. That will not be a mere repetition of what others have said, but will be unique in its expression and experience, something that is “never seen before”. As we continually seek the things that are above, we will see more and more of the glory of Christ and express it in our thanksgiving.

The queen of Sheba gets everything she asks for from Solomon. What she gets is more than what she gave Solomon. So does the Lord also with us. If we give to Him what we have seen in Him, He will bless us even more abundantly. After receiving all the riches of Solomon, she returns to her country. There she can tell what she saw and show what she got. That also applies to us. Richly blessed we may enter the world and tell there about the Lord Jesus and how rich we have become in Him.

Verses 13-28 | Wealth of Solomon

13 Now the weight of gold which came to Solomon in one year was 666 talents of gold, 14 besides that which the traders and merchants brought; and all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the country brought gold and silver to Solomon. 15 King Solomon made 200 large shields of beaten gold, using 600 [shekels of] beaten gold on each large shield. 16 [He made] 300 shields of beaten gold, using three hundred shekels of gold on each shield, and the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon. 17 Moreover, the king made a great throne of ivory and overlaid it with pure gold. 18 [There were] six steps to the throne and a footstool in gold attached to the throne, and arms on each side of the seat, and two lions standing beside the arms. 19 Twelve lions were standing there on the six steps on the one side and on the other; nothing like [it] was made for any [other] kingdom. 20 All King Solomon's drinking vessels [were] of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon [were] of pure gold; silver was not considered valuable in the days of Solomon. 21 For the king had ships which went to Tarshish with the servants of Hiram; once every three years the ships of Tarshish came bringing gold and silver, ivory and apes and peacocks. 22 So King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom. 23 And all the kings of the earth were seeking the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart. 24 They brought every man his gift, articles of silver and gold, garments, weapons, spices, horses and mules, so much year by year. 25 Now Solomon had 4,000 stalls for horses and chariots and 12,000 horsemen, and he stationed them in the chariot cities and with the king in Jerusalem. 26 He was the ruler over all the kings from the Euphrates River even to the land of the Philistines, and as far as the border of Egypt. 27 The king made silver [as common] as stones in Jerusalem, and he made cedars as plentiful as sycamore trees that are in the

lowland. 28 And they were bringing horses for Solomon from Egypt and from all countries.

Every year, Solomon receives no less than 666 talents of gold (verse 13). In addition, he also has income from trade and income from gifts of “all the kings of Arabia” (verse 14). Also governors contribute to the income of Solomon. The wealth of Solomon is enormous, but not complete. This can be deduced from the weight of gold that comes in for him in one year, namely 666 talents. This number “is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six” (Rev 13:18) and indicates weakness, while the number seven indicates perfection.

From the gold Solomon makes large and small shields (verses 15-16). The large shields protect the whole body, the small shields are supposed to serve as status symbols. In total, he makes five hundred shields with a combined weight of approximately twenty-four hundred kilos of gold. Solomon put all the shields “in the house of the forest of Lebanon”, transforming that house into a fortress (cf. Isa 22:8).

We can say that the throne is the climax of the whole description of Solomon’s glory (verses 17-19). It is an impressive throne. There is a six-fold ascent, with the throne on the seventh step. The lions symbolize his royal majesty.

The word translated with “footstool” (verse 18) is a difficult word to translate. The word probably refers to something that has to do with the sheep or the lamb. That connects the lamb with the lion. This leads to the thought that we also find in Revelation 5. There the gaze of John of the Lion (Rev 5:5) is directed to the Lamb (Rev 5:6a). The Lamb shows the way along which He came to the throne: through the way of death.

The six steps represent the way the Lamb has gone to take His place on the throne. The seventh step is His taking place on the throne. We can think of the following ‘steps’:

1. The way of the Lamb has begun in the counsel of God to come to the kingdom of God.
2. The second step to the throne is His incarnation and the way He has gone as Man on earth.
3. The third step is His death. That step also had to be climbed.

4. The fourth step is His resurrection.
5. The fifth step is His exaltation at the right hand of God.
6. The sixth step is His return to the earth, to
7. take there the seventh step and sit down on the throne of His glory.

To describe the immense proverbial wealth of Solomon, the chronicler points to the drinking vessels of gold and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon of pure gold (verse 20). That there is nothing of silver, that silver even was not considered valuable, increases the picture of Solomon's wealth. A lot of wealth comes from Tarsis (verse 21).

Besides being rich in gold, Solomon is also rich in wisdom. This combination makes him "greater than all the kings of the earth" (verse 22). All kings seek him also because of his wisdom (verse 23). They do not come empty-handed (verse 24). Their gifts make him still richer.

Solomon also has a large number of stalls for his many horses (verse 25). He also has chariots and 12,000 horsemen. He stations these reinforcements in chariot cities and also with himself in Jerusalem. The extent of his kingdom, according to the promise made to Abraham (Gen 15:18), is mentioned (verse 26). With other examples Solomon's great wealth is emphasized (verse 27), while pointing out that the horses for Solomon's army are brought in from Egypt "and from all countries" (verse 28). It shows his supremacy over all kingdoms. The great empires of the world have, as it were, become provinces in his empire.

The fact that Solomon has so many gold and horses seems to be contrary to the warning in the royal law that the king should not take much gold and should not buy many horses (Deu 17:16-17). There is also warned against taking many wives. The latter is not found here, but in 1 Kings. Here in 2 Chronicles we should not see the multiplication of gold and horses as something repulsive, but as a sign of his wealth and power.

Verses 29-31 | The Death of Solomon

29 Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, from first to last, are they not written in the records of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer concerning Jeroboam the son of Nebat? 30 Solomon reigned forty years in Jerusalem over all Israel. 31 And Solomon

slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of his father David; and his son Rehoboam reigned in his place.

“The rest” (verse 29) is not a general expression in the sense of a remainder, but indicates a ‘holy rest’, which is left over and deserves attention. That rest is not included in God’s Word, but is documented by God’s prophets. They are prophets who have accompanied him in the Name of God and who now, as it were, lead him out of his earthly existence.

We know Nathan as the man who accompanied David and also confronted him with his sin (2Sam 7:1-5; 12:1-14). Ahijah announced in the later days of Solomon the tearing of the empire and announced Jeroboam the kingship over ten tribes (1Kgs 11:29-39). According to what the chronicler says here, Iddo has also spoken about Jeroboam. Thus, the mention of these prophets at the end of Solomon’s life indicates in veiled terms his unfaithfulness.

Yet the end of Solomon’s reign is described without any direct reference to the decline of his reign and his personal failure. This is in accordance with the intention of the inspired chronicler who always shows the side of God’s grace.

Solomon dies after forty years of kingship in 930 BC (verse 30). After his death his son Rehoboam becomes king (verse 31). Under his kingship, the reign gets a different content and character.

2 Chronicles 10

Introduction

Here begins a new section. Of the kings of Judah who now come to our attention, it is mentioned of seven kings that they do what is good in the sight of the LORD. The other kings fail. That failure is painted, despite the difference with both books of Kings, where the emphasis is on responsibility and therefore on failure. The emphasis in the books of Chronicles is not on that, but on the grace of God.

From the reign of King Rehoboam 2 Chronicles becomes a book about a period of almost four hundred years (from 930-538/536 BC) showing a history of failure and grace. The emphasis is on the restoration that may follow in God's grace time and again on failure. God does not prevent failure, but provides restoration. We see this for example with Peter, who fails, but for whom the Lord has prayed (Lk 22:32).

The first and second book of Kings mainly describe the history of the ten tribes with a single reference to the two tribes. In the second book of Chronicles it is mainly about the two tribes with a single reference to the ten tribes. The emphasis here is on the two tribes because in Judah is Jerusalem and in Jerusalem stands the temple and in Jerusalem sits a prince from David's house on the throne. There is God with His heart.

There is not one king in the ten tribes who does what is good in the eyes of the LORD. There everything is failing with perhaps a small exception with Jehu, who at least started well. 2 Chronicles will turn out to be a book of revivals. So we notice that Rehoboam is humiliating himself (2Chr 12:6,12). Yet he is not a type of the Lord Jesus, although he is a son of David, for he also does what is evil in the eyes of the LORD (2Chr 12:14).

The Lord Jesus never had to humiliate Himself. He can say: "I am gentle and humble in heart" (Mt 11:29). Humiliation always comes after sin, personal and communal. Humility is a present mind and does not suppose sin.

The LORD has given authority to the king that rules over his people, He entrusted that authority to him. All kings exercise the power of David. The

only question is how they do it. They are nothing but servants of God. In David and Solomon we have, besides references to the kingdom of peace, also references to the present time. We too have to do with the kingdom of God. Of that kingdom the Lord Jesus is the Commander, the King, and the believers are the subjects.

That kingdom is not a public kingdom, but a kingdom in secret. Anyone who confesses Christ as Lord is a subject in that kingdom. Wherever the authority of Christ as Lord is established and confessed, God's kingdom becomes visible. We can think especially of the lives and families of the believers. That authority is not always direct authority, but it is also indirect, for example by parents (Eph 6:1). The kingdom of God is an important topic for the early church, as we see in the book of Acts.

After the Lord Jesus went to heaven, He entrusted the government in His kingdom –hidden from the eyes of the world – to the responsibility of His subjects. The question then is how someone behaves in God's kingdom, when the Lord of that kingdom is absent, in heaven.

We see this in the parable of the good and the evil slave (Mt 24:45-51). When the Lord comes to ask for accountability for the policies of His slaves, it becomes clear that there are faithful and faithless subjects (slaves). For those who have a position of authority in that kingdom, it is so, that he who is first a good slave, becomes an evil slave.

Verses 1-5 | Israel's Request for Burden Relief

1 Then Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. 2 When Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard [of it] (for he was in Egypt where he had fled from the presence of King Solomon), Jeroboam returned from Egypt. 3 So they sent and summoned him. When Jeroboam and all Israel came, they spoke to Rehoboam, saying, 4 "Your father made our yoke hard; now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you." 5 He said to them, "Return to me again in three days." So the people departed.

Rehoboam –he reigns from 931-913 BC –goes to Shechem (verse 1). Shechem is located in the area of the ten tribes, about sixty kilometers north of Jerusalem, the city of God's choice. Rehoboam's choice of Shechem seems

to be a concession to the dissatisfied northern tribes to appease them. The people came to Shechem to make him king there. By coming to them he gives the impression that he chooses for them. In so doing, however, he gives the people a wrong impression and thereby leads them away from the city where God dwells. He says as it were what Jeroboam will do later, that the city of God is too far away.

Jeroboam, the Ephraimite, is the natural leader of the people. He hears of the change of throne in Egypt, where he fled for fear of Solomon (1Kgs 11:26-40), and returns to Israel (verse 2). He does not come only on his own initiative. The people themselves want him as leader. Therefore they let him call (verse 3). Together with the whole of Israel, Jeroboam goes to Rehoboam with a request. Their request is that the heavy yoke imposed on them by Solomon should be lightened.

They never dared to express the request he and all of Israel made during the reign of Solomon. That didn't arise in their minds either. They certainly had to give to and do a lot for Solomon, but under his reign they also experienced great prosperity, wealth and peace. Solomon's reign has been a blessing for the people.

That has changed when Solomon deviated from the LORD. Then it was no longer a privilege to help maintain the prosperity of their king. What was a privilege became a yoke. The heavy yoke they are talking about now consists of great efforts and large sums of money that the people must provide to maintain all the glory of Solomon. Asking to lighten their burdens is a program item in a political campaign that always is welcomed by the supporters. Jeroboam makes clever use of the knowledge that the people are not satisfied with the high tax burden.

Rehoboam hears the request and asks for three days of reflection (verse 5). In so doing, he shows that, for him, this request is only part of a political joust. He is also only interested in making the greatest possible profit from this case himself.

Verses 6-14 | Consultation and Decision of Rehoboam

6 Then King Rehoboam consulted with the elders who had served his father Solomon while he was still alive, saying, "How do you counsel [me] to answer

this people?" 7 They spoke to him, saying, "If you will be kind to this people and please them and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever." 8 But he forsook the counsel of the elders which they had given him, and consulted with the young men who grew up with him and served him. 9 So he said to them, "What counsel do you give that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying, 'Lighten the yoke which your father put on us'?" 10 The young men who grew up with him spoke to him, saying, "Thus you shall say to the people who spoke to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you make it lighter for us.' Thus you shall say to them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's loins! 11 Whereas my father loaded you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I [will discipline you] with scorpions.'" 12 So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day as the king had directed, saying, "Return to me on the third day." 13 The king answered them harshly, and King Rehoboam forsook the counsel of the elders. 14 He spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, saying, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to it; my father disciplined you with whips, but I [will discipline you] with scorpions."

Rehoboam first asks counsel from "with the elders who had served his father Solomon while he was still alive" (verse 6). The elders give an answer that can be explained in two ways, positive and negative (verse 7). The positive approach is that Rehoboam, by following their counsel, meets the people and becomes their servant. The elders tell him that being good to the people is the best he can do. They advise him that he should be kind to the people and that his words will be good words to the people.

Their counsel comes down to being the most, he must want to be the least. When he does, he resembles the Lord Jesus, Who is in the midst of His disciples as One Who serves (Lk 22:26-27). Serving brings to the throne to rule over the twelve tribes. You learn to rule by wanting to serve. That is the counsel of the elders. Being ready to be the least brings to the highest place.

If the approach is negative, it should be noted that the elders are only interested in their own interests. They have served with Solomon, but apparently have gone along in his wrong way. Now they see that they will lose their position if they get the people against them. They realize that

Solomon has lost all his credit and that those who belong to the old guard and remind them of the hard yoke only make themselves to be hated more when they show a hard attitude. Their counsel in this case does not come from the search for the will of God, but from the search for the favor of men (cf. 1Thes 2:4b).

In which way however we look at the elders' counsel, Rehoboam doesn't like it, because following their counsel means that he has to surrender his absolute authority. He rejects their counsel (verse 8). With this attitude he goes to "the young men who grew up with him and served him". He does not first ask counsel from both parties and then chooses, but rejects the counsel of the elders even before he has consulted the young men. He has no respect for the wisdom of the elders. He prefers to tailor his wishes to his peers, who are also employed by him.

Although he is their superior, he places himself at their level. He asks them what "we" – that is, he and they, and not he as king – "will answer this people" (verse 9). He also spoke to the elders about "this people" (verse 6), in which a certain contempt resounds. He repeated to the young men that the people had asked him to lighten the yoke.

His contemporaries, "who grew up with him", take their chance (verse 10). They are the new generation that wants to come to power at all costs. As to them the elders have had their time. A new wind must blow, their wind. However, that wind is not the wind of a pleasant coolness, but a hurricane that causes death and destruction. They say to him that he must impose more burdens on the people than they already have.

The young men also put the words in his mouths, which he should speak to the people: "Thus you shall say to them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's loins!'" . The saying comes down to instead of the requested relief, the burdens of the people is increased so much that the burdens of his father compared to that are as nothing.

Rehoboam has put himself in a position to become the servant of his contemporaries. Instead of speaking the good words that the elders advised him, they tell him to speak words that can only arouse the anger and wrath of the people. Their counsel is that he rules the people with an iron fist. The

people must and will obey him (verse 11). His father Solomon may have used whips to teach obedience to the people, but he will use scorpions.

As agreed, after three days Jeroboam and all the people come to Rehoboam to hear his answer (verse 12). Rehoboam gives a hard answer (verse 13) instead of a soft answer (Pro 15:1; 16:18). Again it is said that he gives this answer because he rejects the counsel of the elders (verse 8). In total contrast to the yoke of the Lord Jesus, which is easy, or light (Mt 11:30), he tells the people that he will impose a heavy yoke on them.

Many have ruined themselves and others by trapping and inciting those who are among them. Rehoboam bears his father's crown, but does not have the wisdom of his father. He has not the wisdom of Job who did not despise the cause of his male or female slaves in a dispute with him (Job 31:13), but patiently listened to them, considered their reasons, and gave them a gentle answer. This attitude must adorn all who have a degree of authority over others. Friendliness brings things about, while violence breaks down.

Verses 15-19 | Israel's Apostasy From the House of David

15 So the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn [of events] from God that the LORD might establish His word, which He spoke through Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat. 16 When all Israel [saw] that the king did not listen to them the people answered the king, saying,

“What portion do we have in David?

[We have] no inheritance in the son of Jesse.

Every man to your tents, O Israel;

Now look after your own house, David.”

So all Israel departed to their tents. 17 But as for the sons of Israel who lived in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. 18 Then King Rehoboam sent Hadoram, who was over the forced labor, and the sons of Israel stoned him to death. And King Rehoboam made haste to mount his chariot to flee to Jerusalem. 19 So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

The answer given by Rehoboam brings about a turn of events in Israel that comes from God (verse 15). Through the answer of Rehoboam God fulfills His word which He spoke through Ahijah about the division in the people

(1Kgs 11:31-32). It therefore seems as if Rehoboam has no choice because God has predicted it that the people will fall apart in two parts. However, a prediction of God should never and can never be an excuse for the actions of a human. Rehoboam is fully responsible for what he does. So it is with the rejection of the Lord Jesus. Everything that happened to Him is foretold, but that is never an excuse for those who rejected Him. In his disobedience man fulfills the counsel of God (Gen 50:20; Acts 2:23).

Rehoboam's actions are the cause of the tearing of the realm. In David and earlier in Ephraim we see this division between the ten and the two tribes. In 1 Kings 11 the empire is torn as a result of the sin of Solomon. The direct reason is the folly of Rehoboam. He is what his father Solomon says, the foolish son of a wise king (Ecc 2:19). According to his son Abijah's testimony, he is "young and timid" here (2Chr 13:7).

When there is spoken of "all Israel" (verse 16), it is the ten tribes. Verse 1 also mentions 'all Israel', but that still refers to the twelve tribes. In the next chapter there is also mention of "all Israel", by which is meant all Israel in the two tribes (2Chr 11:3; 12:1). The true Israel, from the tearing, is to be found among the kings from the house of Judah. Where God dwells among His people, there is all Israel represented. That is Israel according to God's thoughts.

We can apply this to the church today. We can ask the question for ourselves where God now dwells, when there is so much division. The answer is that the Lord Jesus dwells there in the midst of His people, where believers come together in the knowledge that they represent the whole, without the presumption that only they are God's people.

The people take their hands off the house of David. They say they have no part in David. Everyone should stand up for himself. This is a particularly bad reaction from the people. Never can the failure of a king be an excuse for the people to turn away from the king appointed by God.

There are also Israelites who live in Judah (verse 17). They do not follow their brothers of the ten tribes in their apostasy, but remain faithful to Rehoboam. In so doing they remain faithful to the house of David which God has given over His people as the house of kingship.

Rehoboam does not want to face the fact that he has lost authority over the ten tribes (verse 18). He sends Hadoram to them. That is the man who is over the forced labor, that is to say, he takes care of the deployment of labor. It is certainly not tactical of Rehoboam to send this man. Hadoram is the embodiment of the hard times experienced by the people under Solomon. He is probably one of the most hated people of the old regime. This is shown by the fact that they receive him with a rain of stones and kill him with it.

For Rehoboam the death of Hadoram is the reason to flee to Jerusalem. There he feels safe. He makes haste to mount his chariot to flee.

The description of the events of the tearing of the realm is finished with the conclusion that the Israelites in this way, “so”, apostatize from the house of David (verse 19). The remark “to this day” indicates that this situation is still the case on the day the chronicler records everything.

The chronicler leaves the rebellion of Israel for what it is – it is described in 1 Kings 12. In the remainder of his account of history he focuses on the developments in the two tribes and in the two tribes he focuses on those who want to remain faithful to the LORD.

2 Chronicles 11

Introduction

Rehoboam is the first king of Judah in the situation of a realm torn in two parts, of which he is the direct cause. As the chronicler intended, the history of Rehoboam as the descendant of David is described from the point of view of God's grace. The emphasis is therefore on what is commendable with Rehoboam. We see that he

1. obeys the word of God which comes to him through the prophet (2Chr 11:1-4),
2. strengthens his kingdom by strengthening cities (2Chr 11:5-12),
3. becomes a refuge for priests and Levites of the ten tribes realm (2Chr 11:13-17) and
4. humbles himself before the LORD (2Chr 12:5-12).

Verses 1-4 | Prohibition to Fight Against Israel

1 Now when Rehoboam had come to Jerusalem, he assembled the house of Judah and Benjamin, 180,000 chosen men who were warriors, to fight against Israel to restore the kingdom to Rehoboam. 2 But the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, 3 "Speak to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, saying, 4 'Thus says the LORD, "You shall not go up or fight against your relatives; return every man to his house, for this thing is from Me.'" So they listened to the words of the LORD and returned from going against Jeroboam.

Rehoboam is not going to let the tearing exist (verse 1). He wants to subject Israel again to himself. For this he assembles a large and experienced army. However, the LORD addresses the word to "Shemaiah the man of God", to speak His words against Rehoboam and all Israel that is in Judah and Benjamin (verses 2-3).

A man of God is one who goes in God's ways when the mass deviates. A man of God is the man or woman who acknowledges, maintains and displays God's rights and features in a situation where these are not taken into account. Timothy in the New Testament is the only one so called

(1Tim 6:11) and to whom Paul describes the general features of a man of God (2Tim 3:16-17).

The word of the LORD forbids Rehoboam to go up against his brethren or to fight against them (verse 4). The reason for this does not seem to be so much that he should not start a civil war, but rather that he himself is the cause, the direct cause of the tearing. He cannot undo evil by force of arms. You cannot be used by the Lord to give exhortations to others if you need them yourself.

Another reason is that this matter is from the LORD. He has allowed it, so that His word about it to Jeroboam has been fulfilled (1Kgs 11:31). It shows that God is not overtaken by sin. This does not mean that God incites to sin. God cannot sin and does not incite anyone to sin (Jam 1:13b).

We can apply the situation that has arisen in Israel to the present situation in the church. We see that there are factions. That God allows there to be factions is “that those who are approved may become evident among you” (1Cor 11:19). In the church we are not called to undo the factions and divisions. We are called “to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). We cannot make the unity of the Spirit, because it is an existing unity. We must preserve it and do so “with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (2Tim 2:22).

Rehoboam and his men are so wise to listen to “the words of the LORD” from the mouth of the man of God. They don’t go against Jeroboam, but return home.

Verses 5-12 | Rehoboam Strengthens Cities

5 Rehoboam lived in Jerusalem and built cities for defense in Judah. 6 Thus he built Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa, 7 Beth-zur, Soco, Adullam, 8 Gath, Mareshah, Ziph, 9 Adoraim, Lachish, Azekah, 10 Zorah, Aijalon and Hebron, which are fortified cities in Judah and in Benjamin. 11 He also strengthened the fortresses and put officers in them and stores of food, oil and wine. 12 [He put] shields and spears in every city and strengthened them greatly. So he held Judah and Benjamin.

The fact that Rehoboam cannot and does not go to war is an opportunity for other activities. He focuses on strengthening his own cities in order to

be able to defend himself better against possible attacks. Most of the fortifications are more on the southwest border. This seems to have been motivated by fear of the king of Egypt. It is not inconceivable that Jeroboam will receive help from that side, for he found refuge there when he had fled from Solomon (2Chr 10:2; 1Kgs 11:40). For him, the threat of Egypt is greater than that of the northern ten tribes empire.

He appoints officials in the fortified cities to monitor the situation. He also builds up stocks in these cities by storing “food, oil and wine”. He also provides these cities with “shields and spears”. In this way he ensures the continuation of life in the city in the event of a siege, at least for a longer period of time.

In a spiritual sense, “stores of food” represent what food can be found in the Word of God, in the Lord Jesus. It is important that we build up these food supplies, because also in our lives there can be times that the enemy is attacking us so much that we have to rely on what we have stored.

- “Oil” represents the Holy Spirit Who gives us the power to resist the enemy (Gal 5:16-17; 1Jn 2:20,27).
- “Wine” indicates that there is joy, no matter how the enemy attacks us and does his best to harm us. This joy is found in our fellowship with the Father and the Son (1Jn 1:3-4).
- The “shields” remind us of “the shield of faith” (Eph 6:16).
- In the “spears” we can see a picture of the Word of God with which we can defeat the enemy.

Verses 13-17 | Rehoboam Is Strengthened

13 Moreover, the priests and the Levites who were in all Israel stood with him from all their districts. 14 For the Levites left their pasture lands and their property and came to Judah and Jerusalem, for Jeroboam and his sons had excluded them from serving as priests to the LORD. 15 He set up priests of his own for the high places, for the satyrs and for the calves which he had made. 16 Those from all the tribes of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the LORD God of Israel followed them to Jerusalem, to sacrifice to the LORD God of their fathers. 17 They strengthened the kingdom of Judah and supported Rehoboam the son of Solomon for three years, for they walked in the way of David and Solomon for three years.

Just like Rehoboam, Jeroboam is also working on the strengthening of his kingdom, but his strengthening consists of founding his own religion. He excludes the true priests and Levites and thereby drives them out from all the tribes of Israel to Rehoboam (verses 13-14). They go to Rehoboam because the temple is in Jerusalem. That attracts them.

In Christianity we see this happening when the true priests and servants of the Word go to the place where the church meets around the Lord Jesus. Those believers leave a (sectarian) church bond because the Word of God is not listened to. They answer the call: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues" (Rev 18:4b).

The priests and the Levites are encouraged or forced in their hearts to leave Jeroboam because he has established an alternative religion (verse 15). He established this surrogate religion to prevent the inhabitants of the ten tribes from crossing the border into the two tribes. For those who take it easy, there is no need to go all the way to Jerusalem. Jeroboam has his own chosen and appointed priests. In such a situation, it is impossible for real priests to remain. How could they participate in the self-willed religion of Jeroboam and sanction it in this way?

We see the actions of Jeroboam and the reaction of God's people to them in church history. During the Reformation many stayed in the roman catholic church, at the idol service, the service of and to demons. Others have said goodbye to it and asked for the service of God. After the degeneration in protestantism, members of God's people left again to see where they can perform priestly service in the way God wants.

Not only priests and Levites from Israel come to Rehoboam, but also common Israelites (verse 16). However, they have a wonderful characteristic: they have devoted themselves with all their heart to seeking the LORD. Such a heart can't be stopped by anything and goes looking to come where He is. These Israelites are a powerful support for Rehoboam. Unfortunately, the effect of this reinforcement only lasts three years (verse 17).

The reinforcement is not only numerical, but also substantive. These people have paid a price to come where the LORD dwells. Their dedication to Him has been proved and also has its constructive effect on those who are

already there. Believers who have paid a price, for example in the form of denial by family members, are often more convinced of the special thing about coming together to the Name of the Lord Jesus than those who have been familiar with it since childhood.

Verses 18-23 | Family and Reign of Rehoboam

18 Then Rehoboam took as a wife Mahalath the daughter of Jerimoth the son of David [and of] Abihail the daughter of Eliab the son of Jesse, 19 and she bore him sons: Jeush, Shemariah and Zaham. 20 After her he took Maacah the daughter of Absalom, and she bore him Abijah, Attai, Ziza and Shelomith. 21 Rehoboam loved Maacah the daughter of Absalom more than all his [other] wives and concubines. For he had taken eighteen wives and sixty concubines and fathered twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters. 22 Rehoboam appointed Abijah the son of Maacah as head and leader among his brothers, for he [intended] to make him king. 23 He acted wisely and distributed some of his sons through all the territories of Judah and Benjamin to all the fortified cities, and he gave them food in abundance. And he sought many wives [for them].

Rehoboam falls into the same error as his father by taking many wives (verses 18-21). The son of his favorite wife Maacah, Abijah, is appointed by him as his successor to the throne (verse 22). In preparation for this he appoints him as head and leader among his brothers.

In spite of his sins, the Holy Spirit mentions of him that he also deals wisely with his sons (verse 23). It is wise of him to spread his many sons over the whole people. This prevents them from arguing with each other. He gives each one his own task with his own responsibilities. If everyone fills it up and is working on it, they also don't have time, for example, to present themselves as rivals of Abijah whom he has destined to be his successor.

2 Chronicles 12

Introduction

What is described in this chapter resembles what we have come across in the book of Judges again and again. We times and again find there how

1. the people leave the LORD first;
2. then He surrenders them into the hand of an enemy;
3. then Israel humbles itself when they hear from a prophet why it happened,
4. after which God provides a solution.

Verses 1-12 | The LORD Hands Over Israel to Egypt

1 When the kingdom of Rehoboam was established and strong, he and all Israel with him forsook the law of the LORD. 2 And it came about in King Rehoboam's fifth year, because they had been unfaithful to the LORD, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem 3 with 1,200 chariots and 60,000 horsemen. And the people who came with him from Egypt were without number: the Lubim, the Sukkiim and the Ethiopians. 4 He captured the fortified cities of Judah and came as far as Jerusalem. 5 Then Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and the princes of Judah who had gathered at Jerusalem because of Shishak, and he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, 'You have forsaken Me, so I also have forsaken you to Shishak.'" 6 So the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves and said, "The LORD is righteous." 7 When the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, "They have humbled themselves [so] I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some [measure] of deliverance, and My wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by means of Shishak. 8 But they will become his slaves so that they may learn [the difference between] My service and the service of the kingdoms of the countries." 9 So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's palace. He took everything; he even took the golden shields which Solomon had made. 10 Then King Rehoboam made shields of bronze in their place and committed them to the care of the commanders of the guard who guarded the door of the king's house. 11 As often as the king entered

the house of the LORD, the guards came and carried them and [then] brought them back into the guards' room. 12 And when he humbled himself, the anger of the LORD turned away from him, so as not to destroy [him] completely; and also conditions were good in Judah.

Rehoboam is not a wise son. "He who keeps the law is a discerning son" (Pro 28:7), but Rehoboam forsakes "the law of the LORD" (verse 1). Although he finds himself in the place where the LORD dwells and where true priestly service takes place, this does not appear to be a guarantee that he cannot deny that place. Knowing the place at the altar – for us that is the Lord's Table – is no guarantee of faithfulness. "All Israel" – that is only Judah here, because that is true Israel for God – follows its leader on the wrong path. Spiritual leaders have an enormous responsibility.

It went well for three years (2Chr 11:17) because he listened to the LORD. When he has been in power for five years, things go wrong (verse 2). How briefly lessons from the past determine our actions. When three good years are over, the LORD must turn His hand against the people two years later.

The world enters the heart that has lost contact with the power of God. The enemy comes towards Rehoboam massively (verse 3). Deviation from God allows the enemy massively to attack the people of God. The world has gained massively access to the church through its unfaithfulness. All the fortified cities (verse 4) he built earlier (2Chr 11:5-12) avail him nothing. He who deviates from the LORD, loses all his earlier built-up spiritual strength.

To exclude any misunderstanding about the reason for this submission, God sends a prophet, a man of God (verse 5; 2Chr 11:2), who explains the cause of this discipline. The prophet comes when the entire government is considering the crisis, possibly to discuss how to dispose of their enemy with human resources. So, today too, there are many deliberations taking place, looking only at one's own means, without going into God's presence to ask Him why this happens. Shishak was able to invade Judah, not because the border control had failed, but because God had sent him. This is because they have forsaken Him and He must forsake them (Deu 31:16-17).

The word of the prophet and the discipline of God are humbling (verse 6). God is righteous in His actions. After this acknowledgement God makes

Himself known as a God of mercy and grace. The prophet has spoken God's word, and that has hit target. God acknowledges humility and promises salvation (verse 7). Yet conversion is only partial, not with the whole heart. This is why God does not completely take away the discipline, but limits it.

They will have to feel what it is like to abandon the LORD (verse 8). That is His love. He speaks of "My service". His service is a pleasant service, for it is pleasant and a benefit for the believing soul to serve Him. The worship service to God, the presenting of the body "a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God" (Rom 12:1), is the greatest joy for the heart of the believer.

On the other hand there is "the service of the kingdoms of the countries", which is the hard slave service under pagan monarchs. God makes them feel this service so that they may come to a true confession (cf. Hos 2:6). They will then experience that serving God makes free and rich, while serving the nations makes them prisoners and poor.

In His wisdom the LORD allows the enemy to take with him all the treasures that David by war and Solomon by trade have acquired (verse 9). The golden shields, which speak of Divine protection, are taken away. Rehoboam does not fully comply with the discipline of the LORD. He makes fake shields (verses 10-11). He wants to have his shields to go to the house of the LORD in glory, just like his father Solomon did in the past (2Chr 9:4b).

In this action we see in the picture what unfaithfulness can lead to. Unfaithfulness leads to a pitiful imitation of the glory that Rehoboam once possessed in reality, but is now lost, while he wants to hold on to it. A semblance of spirituality is held. It is the attitude of "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," while one is blind to the actual state "and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (Rev 3:17).

Once again the Spirit of God mentions that because of the humiliation of Rehoboam the LORD turns His anger away from him and does not destroy him completely (verse 12; verse 7). This repetition shows how much value God attaches to humiliation and how He likes to turn His anger away.

“And also conditions were good in Judah.” This seems to contradict what is said in 1 Kings about the depraved spiritual state of Judah (1Kgs 14:22). However, there is no such contradiction. In the greatest terror of sin, the LORD sees the hearts that remain faithful to Him. We depreciate a church because of something bad and forget the good that is there. Paul does not depreciate the church in Corinth just like that. He admonishes them precisely because he recognizes them as the church of God.

Verses 13-16 | Reign of Rehoboam and His Death

13 So King Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem and reigned. Now Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD had chosen from all the tribes of Israel, to put His name there. And his mother's name was Naamah the Ammonitess. 14 He did evil because he did not set his heart to seek the LORD. 15 Now the acts of Rehoboam, from first to last, are they not written in the records of Shemaiah the prophet and of Iddo the seer, according to genealogical enrollment? And [there were] wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually. 16 And Rehoboam slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David; and his son Abijah became king in his place.

Rehoboam can strengthen his position because Jerusalem is “the city which the LORD had chosen from all the tribes of Israel, to put His name there” (verse 13). However, Rehoboam does not take this into account, but follows his own heart (verse 14). The origin of any deviation lies in the choice on which heart is put. If this is not the LORD, every form of evil is possible.

One of those evil consequences is that there is constant war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam (verse 15). What remains of his earlier obedience to the LORD not to go up against Jeroboam (2Chr 11:4)? Perhaps we should not immediately think of large-scale warfare, but rather of constant border clashes.

When Rehoboam dies, he leaves behind no land where it is good to live. He has not brought the people back to the LORD. His son Abijah becomes king in his place. Will he do better than his father? A new ruler often gives hope for improvement, but time and again people are disappointed in their expectations. Only when the great Son of David comes to power there will be endless peace.

2 Chronicles 13

Introduction

It is worth remembering that here we still find principles related to the kingdom of God, as it is in the present dispensation to people and what they have done with it. We see what the kings do with their responsibility. We see in 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles what the grace of God brings about despite the failure. Restoration is always the result of that grace through which God maintains His work. We see this principle clearly in this chapter.

Verses 1-3 | War Between Abijah and Jeroboam

1 In the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam, Abijah became king over Judah. 2 He reigned three years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Micaiah the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah. Now there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. 3 Abijah began the battle with an army of valiant warriors, 400,000 chosen men, while Jeroboam drew up in battle formation against him with 800,000 chosen men [who were] valiant warriors.

Abijah becomes king (verse 1). This is not because he is appointed by the LORD – as is the case with David and Solomon – but because his father has appointed this (2Chr 11:22). Although he was not appointed by the LORD, we see that God fulfills His plan through all human actions and thus maintains the kingship of the house of David. He does so in view of the great Son of David.

Abijah reigns for three years (verse 2), from 913-911 BC. In 1 Kings 15 we also have the history of Abijah (his name means ‘Yahweh is my Father’). There – he is called there Abijam – the emphasis is on the evil character of Abijah. There we see that his heart does not have the right mind (1Kgs 15:3). We do not read there about his battle with Jeroboam, which is being measured out broadly here.

What the LORD has forbidden his father Rehoboam (2Chr 11:1-4), does Abijah do: he begins the battle with Jeroboam (verse 3). He does not resign himself to a situation of which the LORD said it came from Him (1Chr

11:4). So when he begins the battle with Jeroboam, he does something for which he has not received a commission from the LORD. Nor are we called upon to fight against fellow Christians to subjugate them to us. We must defend the truth, but not impose it. Our struggle is a defensive struggle, not an offensive one.

The force ratio between the two armies is 1 to 2 (cf. Lk 14:31). Any thinking should have stopped Abijah from that battle. After all, he will lose hopeless if he relies on his own strength. He only sees his desperate situation when Jeroboam has enclosed him (verse 13). Then he calls to the LORD.

Verses 4-12 | Abijah's Speech to Israel

4 Then Abijah stood on Mount Zemaraim, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, and said, "Listen to me, Jeroboam and all Israel: 5 Do you not know that the LORD God of Israel gave the rule over Israel forever to David and his sons by a covenant of salt? 6 Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of David, rose up and rebelled against his master, 7 and worthless men gathered about him, scoundrels, who proved too strong for Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, when he was young and timid and could not hold his own against them. 8 "So now you intend to resist the kingdom of the LORD through the sons of David, being a great multitude and [having] with you the golden calves which Jeroboam made for gods for you. 9 Have you not driven out the priests of the LORD, the sons of Aaron and the Levites, and made for yourselves priests like the peoples of [other] lands? Whoever comes to consecrate himself with a young bull and seven rams, even he may become a priest of [what are] no gods. 10 But as for us, the LORD is our God, and we have not forsaken Him; and the sons of Aaron are ministering to the LORD as priests, and the Levites attend to their work. 11 Every morning and evening they burn to the LORD burnt offerings and fragrant incense, and the showbread is [set] on the clean table, and the golden lampstand with its lamps is [ready] to light every evening; for we keep the charge of the LORD our God, but you have forsaken Him. 12 Now behold, God is with us at [our] head and His priests with the signal trumpets to sound the alarm against you. O sons of Israel, do not fight against the LORD God of your fathers, for you will not succeed."

Before the battle is fought, Abijah tries to convince his opponent that he has the right on his side. He does so by means of a speech he gives while

standing on Mount Zemaraim. We can therefore call it a 'sermon on the mount'. He addresses "Jeroboam and all Israel". He speaks to Jeroboam in the first place, but the whole of Israel must hear it. The speech he gives seems to be propaganda for the imminent battle. What he says must justify the battle he wants to wage.

His speech is special. Its content is largely in accordance with the truth. Unfortunately, for Abijah this is only an external matter. He uses religious arguments to pursue his own political goals. His speech comes down to the fact that he and his people are the faithful and Jeroboam and his people the apostate. This pretense can be heard in the contrast of "you" (verses 8-9) on the one hand and "we" and "us" (verses 10-12) on the other.

Abijah points to:

1. The salt covenant with David. God gave him and his sons after him the kingship of the twelve tribes (verse 5). Salt covenant means that it is an eternal covenant (Num 18:19b). What Abijah says is true, but at the same time it is an accusation against himself, because he himself does not take this covenant into account.
2. The revolt of Jeroboam (verse 6). Abijah humiliates Jeroboam in his indictment of him and does not do justice to the matter, for God has promised Jeroboam the kingdom.
3. The weakness of his father (verse 7). He seems to suggest that while his father may have been too weak to defeat Jeroboam – as if God's will did not underlie his father's decision not to fight –, Jeroboam now faces a man of a different caliber, someone who is strong enough.
4. The introduction of idolatry by Jeroboam and the creation of a priestly service (verses 8-9). What Abijah says about it is true.
5. The true priestly service (verses 10-11). Regardless of Abijah's person and mind, he gives a magnificent summary of the contents of the true priestly service. From his mouth it unfortunately sounds like "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1Cor 13:1), because he lacks love for the LORD.
6. God is with them at their head. He claims the presence of God here, without considering what his own attitude towards God should be. Instead of humbling him, his language sounds like the language of

the Pharisee who also declares high about his relationship to God and claims God for himself (Lk 18:11-12).

What Abijah says may all be so true, but it sounds like the “deceptive words” in the days of Jeremiah, when people boast in the same way and say, “This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the LORD (Jer 7:4). What is such a confession worth if the heart is not connected to it? The service of Jeroboam is reprehensible. Abijah’s pretense is equally reprehensible. He boasts about the LORD’s service, but his heart is far from Him.

While Abijah gives his pompous speech and the arrogant “but as for us, ... we have not forsaken Him” (verse 10), sounds from his mouth, the people of which he is king sacrifice to the idols. That turns out when his son Asa becomes king. For immediately after his appointment King Asa holds a clean-up action and “removed the foreign altars and high places” (2Chr 14:3). Where does Abijah get the courage to do so high and mighty, when there is so much idolatry in Judah at that moment?

Abijah’s statement “the LORD is our God” (verse 10) is a moderation against the background of the sins in which he himself lives (1Kgs 15:3) and the idolatry committed by the people. He praises orthodoxy and tradition, but life out of and with God is strange to him. He uses the dedication of others – priests and Levites who faithfully perform their task – to maintain himself and claim the right to fight the right battle.

The fact that God is at the head (verse 12) may indicate that he still trusts God for the victory (cf. Deu 20:4). However, it is not trust from a personal faith in the power God. It is very similar to the pretense of Hophni and Phinehas, who claim the ark – the symbol of the presence of the LORD – for their position and take it with them as a mascot in the battle against the Philistines (1Sam 4:3-5).

In summary, we can say that Abijah points to

1. the false leadership of Jeroboam in the northern realm (verse 6),
2. a false company (verse 7),
3. false gods (verse 8),
4. false priests (verse 9)

in contrast

1. with true priests (verse 10),
2. true service (verse 11) and
3. true Divine authority (verse 12).

Verses 13-22 | Abijah Defeats Jeroboam

13 But Jeroboam had set an ambush to come from the rear, so that [Israel] was in front of Judah and the ambush was behind them. 14 When Judah turned around, behold, they were attacked both front and rear; so they cried to the LORD, and the priests blew the trumpets. 15 Then the men of Judah raised a war cry, and when the men of Judah raised the war cry, then it was that God routed Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. 16 When the sons of Israel fled before Judah, God gave them into their hand. 17 Abijah and his people defeated them with a great slaughter, so that 500,000 chosen men of Israel fell slain. 18 Thus the sons of Israel were subdued at that time, and the sons of Judah conquered because they trusted in the LORD, the God of their fathers. 19 Abijah pursued Jeroboam and captured from him [several] cities, Bethel with its villages, Jeshanah with its villages and Ephron with its villages. 20 Jeroboam did not again recover strength in the days of Abijah; and the LORD struck him and he died. 21 But Abijah became powerful; and took fourteen wives to himself, and became the father of twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. 22 Now the rest of the acts of Abijah, and his ways and his words are written in the treatise of the prophet Iddo.

While Abijah gives his speech, Jeroboam lays an ambush (verse 13). When Abijah notices that, it's over with his talk. He boasts, so to speak, of standing on the foundation of the faithful Philadelphia, while his heart is in the lukewarm state of Laodicea. Then he calls to the LORD. He only does this when He has taught him a good lesson and not before he enters into the confrontation. Yet God helps. He is never called upon in vain (Psa 34:6-7; 50:15; 107:6).

When every way out is cut off around us, the way up is always open (2Cor 4:8b). The battle from the "front" (verse 14) can be applied to fear for the future, paralyzing us to do something for the Lord. The battle from the "rear" we can apply to memories of mistakes made, the consequences of

sins, the misunderstandings that alienate us from others and make it difficult for us to live as we would like to.

But when we have the battle from the front and the rear, when we are surrounded and enclosed by the battle, we may remember that God also encloses us “behind and before” (Psa 139:5) and covers us with His hand. He then gives the victory. In the blowing of the trumpets we see the call to the LORD, as was said by Moses (Num 10:9).

After his defamatory defeat, Jeroboam has no strength left (verse 20). He is no longer capable of a new showdown. Abijah has nothing more to fear from him. The end of Jeroboam’s bad life is attributed to an act of God. He does not fall asleep, but the LORD hits him deadly, possibly by illness or stroke (cf. Acts 5:1-10; 12:21-23; cf. 1Cor 11:30).

Unlike Jeroboam, who is very weak, Abijah strengthens his position (verse 21). His strength seems to lie in the number of children he conceives with the wives he has taken for himself.

This brings the chronicler to the end of his description of Abijah’s life. “His ways and his words”, that is to say what can still be said of him, “are written in the treatise of the prophet Iddo” (verse 22). That treatise was not taken up in God’s Word, but it was recorded by a prophet of the LORD. That treatise will appear before the judgment seat of Christ on the day that all men will be revealed and will be opened to show Abijah what and how “his ways and his words” have been”. He will be judged correspondingly (2Cor 5:10).

2 Chronicles 14

Introduction

To the history of Asa – his name means “healing” or “restoration” – are dedicated in the first book of Kings only sixteen verses (1Kgs 15:9-24), while this second book of Chronicles dedicates three chapters to him.

From the long reign of Asa, the chronicler selects four events:

1. His first reformation with the resulting peace (2Chr 14:1-8);
2. his victory over the Cushite Zerah (2Chr 14:9-15);
3. his second reformation as a result of his victory (2Chr 15:1-19);
4. his act of unfaithfulness and its consequences (2Chr 16:1-14).

We can use these four events to divide his history into, as it literally says when the end of his life is described, “the first and the last” (2Chr 16:11). His life has a first and a last part. The contrasts can be seen in 2 Chronicles 14-15 on the one hand and 2 Chronicles 16 on the other hand. His history makes clear that there is a blessing attached to the search for God, but also how foolish it is to seek help from people.

Verses 1-8 | Asa King of Judah

1 So Abijah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David, and his son Asa became king in his place. The land was undisturbed for ten years during his days. 2 Asa did good and right in the sight of the LORD his God, 3 for he removed the foreign altars and high places, tore down the [sacred] pillars, cut down the Asherim, 4 and commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers and to observe the law and the commandment. 5 He also removed the high places and the incense altars from all the cities of Judah. And the kingdom was undisturbed under him. 6 He built fortified cities in Judah, since the land was undisturbed, and there was no one at war with him during those years, because the LORD had given him rest. 7 For he said to Judah, “Let us build these cities and surround [them] with walls and towers, gates and bars. The land is still ours because we have sought the LORD our God; we have sought Him, and He has given us rest on every side.” So they built

and prospered. 8 Now Asa had an army of 300,000 from Judah, bearing large shields and spears, and 280,000 from Benjamin, bearing shields and wielding bows; all of them were valiant warriors.

There is war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam (2Chr 12:15) and between Abijah and Jeroboam (2Chr 13:2), but in the days of Asa – he reigns from 911-870 BC – there is ten years rest (verse 1). This is because he does what is good and right in the sight of the LORD (verse 2). This rest has not been there since the tearing of the realm.

Asa with Jehoshaphat, Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham, Hezekiah, and Josiah is one of the eight kings of Judah who do what is right “in the sight of the LORD”. The “sight of the LORD” speak of the absolute attentiveness of the LORD; nothing is hidden from him. “His eyes ... like a flame of fire” (Rev 1:14) see and see through everything. These eyes also note that of these eight kings, seven deviate from Him at a later age. Only from Jotham no deviation is mentioned (2Kgs 15:32-38). The general testimony, however, is that they have done what is right in His sight. When someone gets older, it doesn’t automatically mean that he becomes more spiritual. None of the kings of the ten tribes did what is good in the sight of the LORD, except Jehu in the beginning of his reign.

Asa starts his reign with a big cleaning (verse 3). All idolatry goes out. He also commands Judah to seek God and to observe the law and the commandment (verse 4). Because Asa removes everything that dishonors God, there is rest in the kingdom during his reign (verse 5). The seeking and doing of the Lord’s will gives peace. It is good to remove evil, but if seeking the Lord does not replace it, a vacuum will arise that will be filled by the evil one (cf. Mt 12:43-45).

Also, observing “the law and the commandment” provides protection against an invasion by the enemy. If the believer feeds on the truth of God’s Word and lives up to it, it will make him strong, and his life will be to the glory of God. A time of rest is a time when the flesh is not active and the fruit of the Spirit becomes visible.

Asa makes good use of the time of rest by strengthening the cities (verse 6; cf. Acts 9:31). In a time of rest we should not be unemployed, but busy.

Strengthening the defense (verse 7) can be applied to strengthening our spiritual life:

1. Walls" speak of separation from the world to God, which gives security.
2. "Towers" are lookouts and speak of being attentive to an attack by the enemy, so we can see him from afar.
3. "Gates" speak of allowing the good and closing for the wrong.
4. "Bars" ensure the safety of life, that nothing is allowed in it that is detrimental to the new life.

Asa does all this at the beginning of his reign.

The example of Asa is therefore especially applicable to the newly converted or the youth, for whom life with the Lord is still ahead of them. The seeking of the Lord gives rest. From that rest can be built a healthy spiritual life. It is important that young believers feed on God's Word and read books that explain God's Word and work confirmation in faith. Those who do so will be prosperous in the growth of their faith life.

The rest that Asa has, does not make him carefree. He also has a well-equipped army to repel any possible attack on the people. The men of Judah can fight with spears if they have to deal with an enemy nearby (verse 8). The large shield can stop the arrows being fired at them from a distance. The men of Benjamin can shoot with the bow to hit an enemy from a distance. The small shields can repel the sword from the enemy when it is close to them. The men from Judah and Benjamin are all "valiant warriors". They stand shoulder to shoulder and are complementary in their abilities.

Verses 9-15 | Victory Over the Ethiopians

9 Now Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and 300 chariots, and he came to Mareshah. 10 So Asa went out to meet him, and they drew up in battle formation in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. 11 Then Asa called to the LORD his God and said, "LORD, there is no one besides You to help [in the battle] between the powerful and those who have no strength; so help us, O LORD our God, for we trust in You, and in Your name have come against

this multitude. O LORD, You are our God; let not man prevail against You.” 12 So the LORD routed the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled. 13 Asa and the people who [were] with him pursued them as far as Gerar; and so many Ethiopians fell that they could not recover, for they were shattered before the LORD and before His army. And they carried away very much plunder. 14 They destroyed all the cities around Gerar, for the dread of the LORD had fallen on them; and they despoiled all the cities, for there was much plunder in them. 15 They also struck down those who owned livestock, and they carried away large numbers of sheep and camels. Then they returned to Jerusalem.

In these verses we have a second history in the life of Asa. The LORD has given him rest. Everything is in peace. Then comes the trial. If Asa has everything in order, “the evil day” comes (Eph 6:13a). Then it turns out that he stands firm because he has put on the armor. The fact that the enemy comes here to Asa (verse 9) is not the result of deviation. Then the enemy’s attack would be a disciplinary act of God to make the people return to Him through it. However, the people here have not deviated from the LORD. The LORD has another intention with this attack. He allows the enemy to go up against Judah to test the faith of the people.

The way in which Asa engages in the battle provides proof of his loyalty and consecration. When the enemy goes up against him, he goes out to meet him (verse 10). Asa is not afraid. The lack of fear is not because he relies on his trained and well-equipped army. The enemy’s attack leads him to prayer (verse 11). He is not blind to the superiority of the enemy. The enemy’s army is twice as big as his army. He sees himself facing a huge crowd and realizes that he lacks the strength to overcome this enemy. However, he knows the power of the LORD. He calls to Him and thereby places the LORD between himself and the enemy.

If God stands between us and our difficulties, the difficulties will not fade away, but we will measure them according to the power of God and not according to our own strength, or better: the lack thereof. If our cause and that of God are one, we are invincible. Asa, who sought God in his prosperity, approaches to Him with boldness in days of trial. He goes to Him as “His God” (verse 11). This personal relationship with God is of the utmost importance in every circumstance in which we find ourselves.

The prayer of Asa is short, but rich in content. In it he expresses his unconditional confidence in God's omnipotence (cf. 1Sam 14:6). He knows and pronounces that the LORD is the only One Who can help. Asa relies only on Him. He also knows that the LORD is there for everyone who recognizes his own powerlessness and therefore calls upon Him. Asa can also say that he did not end up in this situation because of willfulness. He knows that he is in the way of the LORD, and that in His Name he has come against the enemy, "this multitude".

Therefore he boldly appeals to God, that He proves Himself strongly to these mortals. He makes it a matter between the LORD, the Almighty God of His people, and man. What will man be able to do against that almighty God? There is a great faith and also a great knowledge of God in what Asa says about God and in the way he speaks to Him.

His prayer is heard. The LORD stands up for Asa and Judah. He strikes the Ethiopians in such a way that they flee (verse 12). Asa and the people pursue them and kill many. As a result, there is no power left for the enemy to resume battle. God gives a great victory. The army of Israel is the army of the LORD, "His army" (verse 13). The cities that are overwhelmed are aware that the judgment comes over them because of the LORD, the God of Israel (verse 14; cf. Exo 23:27; Deu 11:25; Jos 2:9; Rev 6:16). After the victory the booty is taken to Jerusalem, God's center (verse 15).

2 Chronicles 15

Verses 1-7 | Prophecy of Azariah

1 Now the Spirit of God came on Azariah the son of Oded, 2 and he went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Listen to me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: the LORD is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. 3 For many days Israel was without the true God and without a teaching priest and without law. 4 But in their distress they turned to the LORD God of Israel, and they sought Him, and He let them find Him. 5 In those times there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for many disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands. 6 Nation was crushed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every kind of distress. 7 But you, be strong and do not lose courage, for there is reward for your work."

After the resounding victory over a powerful enemy, Asa is at a high point of his reign. Standing at a height is a dangerous situation. That is what the LORD knows. He wants to warn Asa not to become arrogant, but to remain dependent on Him. For this He uses His prophet Azariah (verse 1). Azariah means 'him whom the LORD helps'. That the LORD sends a man with this name to Asa is already an important message in itself. The name Azariah indicates that Asa owes his victory to the fact that the LORD helped him.

God sends His Spirit on the man with this name. When it says that the Spirit comes on someone, it usually means that such a person receives a special strengthening and boldness for his service to speak the Word of God. Immediately after the Spirit of God came on Azariah, he leaves the city to meet Asa (verse 2). There is no fear of meeting the king. Full of the power of the Spirit and without fear of man, he simply speaks the word the LORD has commanded him to speak, no more and no less. The Spirit of God teaches him what he must say and enables him to present it plain and clear.

Azariah is not sent to Asa to point out the wrong thing, because there is nothing wrong to point out. He also does not come to congratulate him. He comes to keep the king on the right path, to keep him from doing something wrong. Azariah points out to Asa what it takes to remain standing firm after his battle of faith and victory, that is, "having done everything, to stand firm" (Eph 6:13b). It is to keep him for a dip, as Samson and Elijah knew it, or as David, who came to his sin with Bathsheba during rest after victories.

Although Asa is his direct goal, Azariah also addresses "all Judah and Benjamin". He calls on them all to listen to him, because he has something important to say. What he says is short and easy to understand. It requires no linguistic insight or great intelligence. It is precisely for this reason that what he says is also penetrating: "The LORD is with you when you are with Him." This is not an 'one-liner', like so much that is being shot via twitter today. It is a deep and profound truth that must be absorbed into the heart and conscience and must be lived up to in life.

This simple and at the same time profound truth is followed by an invitation and a warning from Azariah. The invitation is that the LORD lets Himself be found when somebody seeks Him. Asa has already experienced this (2Chr 14:7). Here he is reminded to it. We need such a reminder regularly. But that's not all. We also need to be warned. The warning is that whosoever forsakes Him will be forsaken by Him.

By the many days that Israel was without the true, or faithful, God (verse 3), Azariah probably means the time of the judges in the book of Judges (Jdg 5:6; cf. verse 5). That is a time when everyone does what is good in his own eyes. The teaching of God's Word is absent and people don't mind the law. God cannot accompany on that path of unfaithfulness. This shows God's faithfulness. He remains faithful to Himself (2Tim 2:13). It is certain that He will be found when they convert to Him in their distress and seek Him (verse 4). Azariah also points this out.

However, Azariah emphasizes the main characteristics of those times (verse 5). The people do not experience peace in such times and cannot give it to whoever goes out or give it to whoever comes in. Peace is lacking because there are many disturbances. Disturbance or confusion and peace

cannot go hand in hand. Such a situation has a devastating effect on the people. The nations – by which we must probably understand the tribes of Israel – and cities are crushing each other (verse 6). This result, which they themselves produce, is at the same time a discipline of God. He makes them experience the consequences of their deviation personally.

The situation Azariah paints is a striking picture of the situation in Christianity we are experiencing today. The teaching of God’s Word is no longer heard in large parts of Christianity. If a text is sometimes read out in a church service, it is often used as a hook for a social chat. In Christianity there is no peace, but great disturbance or confusion, and that while “God is not [a God] of confusion but of peace” (1Cor 14:33). Here we also see the great contrast between confusion and peace. If there is confusion in a local church and peace is therefore absent, the result is that that church is ruined. This must be seen as a judgment of God Who punishes all false certainty “with every kind of distress”.

This situation does not have to discourage the faithful believer. He may take to heart the word of encouragement that Azariah speaks (verse 7). As an extra incentive, Azariah points to reward that will be paid by the LORD according to work. “Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary” (Gal 6:9). There is reward that the Lord will give in accordance with what we have done for Him (Jer 31:16). Nothing of what we have done for Him is in vain (1Cor 15:58).

Verses 8-11 | Reforms and Offerings

8 Now when Asa heard these words and the prophecy which Azariah the son of Oded the prophet spoke, he took courage and removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities which he had captured in the hill country of Ephraim. He then restored the altar of the LORD which was in front of the porch of the LORD. 9 He gathered all Judah and Benjamin and those from Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon who resided with them, for many defected to him from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him. 10 So they assembled at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa’s reign. 11 They sacrificed to the LORD that day 700 oxen and 7,000 sheep from the spoil they had brought.

The words and prophecy of the prophet are effective. It places Asa in God's presence. This leads him to purify even more (verse 8). Words are not neutral. They process something, they do something in and with someone. Good, encouraging words give courage and encourage action. Everything that reminds of idolatry is removed by Asa. To do this you need spiritual strength. He not only removes, but also builds. He renews the altar of the LORD, which speaks of worship, and gives it its right place again (cf. 1Kgs 18:30b-32a).

We too must 'renew the altar' from time to time. This means that we must regularly read the Scriptures to check whether our thoughts about the altar, which is for us the Lord's Table, are still in accordance with God's thoughts. Renewal in this context means returning to the original intention. We must always ask ourselves whether the Lord's Table in our thinking and also in the midst of the believers still corresponds to what the Bible says about it. In practice, this means that all believers are received at the Table of the Lord, with whom there are no Scriptural hindrances to participate in His Supper at His Table.

The faithfulness and zeal of faith of Asa attract many (verse 9; cf. Zec 8:23). A sincere heart attached to the Lord speaks to the conscience of others. To which war is not able, namely, to unite Israel and Judah, that works faithfulness to the Word of God. A second exodus from north to south takes place (cf. 2Chr 11:13,16). Asa calls together all the people of God, even those from the ten tribes who are with him. He is not sectarian.

They meet "in the third month" (verse 10). That is the time in which the Feast of Weeks is celebrated, that is Pentecost. It is the great feast of joy because the wheat harvest has been brought in. There is more reason to celebrate here, because the enemy has been defeated and a large booty has been brought in. Of that booty are brought offerings to the LORD (verse 11). With this, His part is given to Him. It is good that we too give Him His share of all that the Lord has given us as joy and possession, showing Him that we thank Him for it. After all, we owe everything to Him!

Verses 12-15 | The Covenant

12 They entered into the covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and soul; 13 and whoever would not seek the LORD God of

Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, man or woman. 14 Moreover, they made an oath to the LORD with a loud voice, with shouting, with trumpets and with horns. 15 All Judah rejoiced concerning the oath, for they had sworn with their whole heart and had sought Him earnestly, and He let them find Him. So the LORD gave them rest on every side.

After the people have made sacrifices to the LORD, they also give themselves to Him. They do this by entering into a covenant (verse 12). Perhaps they came to that thought during the feast in the third month (verses 10-11), because legislation at Mount Sinai also takes place in the third month (Exo 19:1). After the renewal of the altar there is now also a renewal of the covenant.

The fact that the people have not been able to fulfil the Sinai covenant is not in the foreground here. It is about their mindset. It is beautiful and worth following. They really intend to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and soul. They go so far that they will kill all who do not seek the LORD, the God of Israel, regardless of age and gender (verse 13).

They make an oath before the LORD (verse 14). They don't do it mumbling, as if it happens reluctant and hesitant, but "with a loud voice, with shouting, with trumpets and with horns". It is not only a matter of their voice, but also of their heart and feelings (verse 15). Their appointment causes great joy in their hearts. If God can seize our hearts, if we give Him our hearts, we have joy. The result is that He is found, and when He is found, there is rest and peace.

Verses 16-19 | The Own House and the House of God

16 He also removed Maacah, the mother of King Asa, from the [position of] queen mother, because she had made a horrid image as an Asherah, and Asa cut down her horrid image, crushed [it] and burned [it] at the brook Kidron. 17 But the high places were not removed from Israel; nevertheless Asa's heart was blameless all his days. 18 He brought into the house of God the dedicated things of his father and his own dedicated things: silver and gold and utensils. 19 And there was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign.

Asa also realizes that he cannot ask his people anything that he does not live up to in his own house. That is why he deposes his grandmother. Asa also eradicates what she has imported in idolatry. He spares neither her nor her idols, but deals with her and her idols as befits a king who fears God.

It took a while, because Asa does this at the end of all the cleansings, but then he finally cleanses his own house of elements that God hates. With this he resembles Levi, who “said of his father and his mother, ‘I did not consider them’” (Deu 33:9) and Gideon, who begins his work by breaking down the altar of Baal in his father’s house (Jdg 6:25). Also in the church one cannot be an overseer if he “does not know how to manage his own household” (1Tim 3:5).

Asa’s action shows that his heart is united and not divided (cf. Psa 86:11), although not all the high place have been removed from Israel. Now that he has his own house in order, his concern can go to the house of God (verse 18). He brings in all kinds of dedicated gifts, both those of his father and of himself.

We too can bring our gifts, spiritual and material, into the house of God, the church. That is what we do, if we dedicate everything we have learned about the truth from our leaders and what we have received from others in money and goods, for the service in the house of God. Also what we have discovered ourselves of the truth and what we have earned ourselves in money and good, we may use for the service in the house of God. In this way God is glorified and is it made available to Him to participate in His work, which will again be His glorification.

The result of dedicating all these means is that there is no war (verse 19). For us, this means that when we dedicate ourselves to the Lord, there are no mutual frictions or tensions.

2 Chronicles 16

Verses 1-6 | Asa Asks for Help From the King of Syria

1 In the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah and fortified Ramah in order to prevent [anyone] from going out or coming in to Asa king of Judah. 2 Then Asa brought out silver and gold from the treasuries of the house of the LORD and the king's house, and sent them to Ben-hadad king of Aram, who lived in Damascus, saying, 3 "[Let there be] a treaty between you and me, [as] between my father and your father. Behold, I have sent you silver and gold; go, break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so that he will withdraw from me." 4 So Ben-hadad listened to King Asa and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel, and they conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-maim and all the store cities of Naphtali. 5 When Baasha heard [of it], he ceased fortifying Ramah and stopped his work. 6 Then King Asa brought all Judah, and they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber with which Baasha had been building, and with them he fortified Geba and Mizpah.

In this chapter we have the sad end of the history of Asa. After having shown great faith, Asa fails in a new trial. It starts with the building of Ramah by Baasha the king of Israel (verse 1). Ramah must become a dividing city between the brother peoples. Baasha, the king of the ten tribes realm, wants to prevent his subjects from defecting to the realm of Asa. He is the picture of the nominal Christian who wants to stifle any activity aimed at serving God because through such activities he loses his own authority and influence.

Asa does not seek the LORD's face on this matter, but seeks his support from Ben-hadad, the king of Aram or Syria (verses 2-3). He buys this support and gets the money for it from the treasuries of the LORD's house. With this, he destroys at one stroke his own dedication (2Chr 15:18) and the blessing obtained from the LORD (2Chr 14:13-14).

His tactics seem to be successful. Ben-hadad now turns against Israel and takes possession of cities there (verse 4), which subsequently leads to Baa-

sha ceasing its building activities (verse 5). Asa conquers territory and uses Baasha's materials to strengthen his own cities (verse 6). But the treasures which he has taken from the house of the LORD and has given away, he will not get back.

Thus, things of the world may enter the church and members of the church may see it as a proof of blessing. However, spiritual wealth is lost in these activities. The beginning of sin is like flowing water in through a hole in the dike: as the water flows through the hole, the hole gets bigger and the flow gets stronger. We see that with Asa in the following verses. Asa rejects the prophet who comes to him, and he rejects those who agree with the prophet (verse 10). Finally, in his illness he seeks not the LORD, but the physicians (verse 12).

In the last mention of King Asa in the Old Testament (Jer 41:9), we read what was the beginning of his deviation. We read there about a cistern "it was the one that King Asa had made on account of Baasha, king of Israel". Other translations state that he made this cistern or pit "for fear of Baasha king of Israel" (the English Darby translation and the German Elberfelder translation). Asa made a kind of shelter because he is afraid of Baasha. "The fear of man bringeth a snare" (Pro 29:25) and Asa runs into this snare.

Verses 7-10 | The Message of Hanani

7 At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him, "Because you have relied on the king of Aram and have not relied on the LORD your God, therefore the army of the king of Aram has escaped out of your hand. 8 Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubim an immense army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you relied on the LORD, He delivered them into your hand. 9 For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars." 10 Then Asa was angry with the seer and put him in prison, for he was enraged at him for this. And Asa oppressed some of the people at the same time.

The seer Hanani – his name means 'gracious' – who comes to Asa, does not come with an encouraging message, but with a serious exhortation (verse 7). He points out to Asa how he has relied on the LORD when he had to

deal with a tremendous force majeure of enemies and that the LORD has therefore given him the victory (verse 8). The LORD is still the same. As He has answered his prayer before, He still wants it.

The LORD seeks opportunities to hear (verse 9a; 1Pet 3:12; Pro 15:3; 5:21). For this His eyes move to and fro throughout the earth. Here we see that not a man seeks the face of the LORD, but the LORD seeks the faces of people who are directed toward Him. It shows His desire to help the powerless. The LORD waited for a call of the faith of Asa to show His power for his favor.

It is foolish not to go to God (verse 9b). It is foolish to lean on a broken reed and not on the unshakable Rock of the centuries. The alliance with Ben-hadad may give Asa the desired result, but he gets wars. A covenant with the world prevents us from conquering it. The many experiences we have of the Lord's goodness do not always increase our confidence. A new trial often shows our lack of confidence or our forgetfulness of past deliverances. Only when we have nothing else we do trust Him.

The effect of the prophet's words on Asa is enmity (verse 10). He is the first Old Testament king of whom we read that he persecutes a prophet. More kings will follow in doing that, such as Joash (2Chr 24:21) and Herod (Mk 6:17,27). By throwing Hanani into prison, he wants to silence the voice of God.

This is what people will always try when they are addressed in their conscience, but do not want to break with evil. Joseph, Daniel, Jeremiah and John the baptist experienced the same as Hanani. Even today, everyone who speaks God's Word will experience this in situations where one resists Him. In mild form the faithful preacher experiences that, for example, if he is not invited or allowed to speak because of his faithful preaching.

Not only Hanani has to suffer. All those who are like Hanani and remind Asa to his unfaithfulness to the LORD, will have to deal with his anger. Asa oppresses them with the aim of silencing them. He just doesn't want to listen to the voice of the LORD anymore. That is a tragic development for a man who started so well and continued well for so long.

Verses 11-14 | The End of Asa

11 Now, the acts of Asa from first to last, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. 12 In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa became diseased in his feet. His disease was severe, yet even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but the physicians. 13 So Asa slept with his fathers, having died in the forty-first year of his reign. 14 They buried him in his own tomb which he had cut out for himself in the city of David, and they laid him in the resting place which he had filled with spices of various kinds blended by the perfumers' art; and they made a very great fire for him.

The whole history of Asa is described “in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel” (verse 11). It is also emphasized “from first to last”. This book is not included in the Bible. It is not, however, the case that his history has been lost. On the day everything will be revealed by God, He will use that book as a testimony for His judgment of the life of Asa.

After his rejection of Hanani and others, Asa becomes diseased in his feet (verse 12). Why in his feet? Is this not symbolic for his walk? Asa is no longer walking in faith. In his old age he has gone his own way. The disease in his feet is a disciplinary means of the LORD to bring him back on the way of faith.

Thus, the Lord can also “paralyze” us, making us incapable of serving. He can take the power out of our walk of faith if we are not prepared to return to Him with repentance about our wrong walk. We may well pray: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way” (Psa 139:23-24).

Asa reacts to the discipline, which is intended to make him repent, by committing a new error. He seeks his help not of the LORD, but of the physicians. In itself, it is not wrong that he seeks help from physicians. His fault is that he expects his help only from these people and not from the LORD (cf. 2Kgs 20:5-7; Psa 103:3). Therefore his end is not like that of Paul, who can say at the end of his life: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith” (2Tim 4:7). A good start does not guarantee a good end. Therefore we need endurance in the race ahead of us (Heb 12:1).

After a reign of forty-one years including a disease during the last two years, Asa goes to sleep “with his fathers” (verse 13). He is buried “in his own tomb which he had cut out for himself” in Jerusalem, here called “the city of David” (verse 14). We don’t know when he had that grave cut out. In any case, he wanted his body to be placed in a place connected with the name of David. It seems that he has relied on the promises made to David with a view to an everlasting kingship that will find fulfilment in the great Son of David.

The people do him great honor at his burial. They “laid him in the resting place which he had filled with spices of various kinds blended by the perfumers’ art”. Asa has not only has taken care of a grave, but also a bed that doesn’t spread the death scent, but a wonderful scent. Perhaps he did so because he wants to be remembered by his people as someone who did good. He has done so for most of his life. The people seem to be aware of this and therefore make a very great fire for him (cf. 2Chr 21:19; Jer 34:5). We can think of the burning of incense.

2 Chronicles 17

Introduction

Jehoshaphat – he reigns from 870-845 BC – is a king who on the one hand is faithful to the LORD and on the other hand is connected to the wicked Ahab and his family. In the first part of its history there is still a clear distinction between Jehoshaphat and Ahab. After his connection with Ahab it appears that he has more to fear from Ahab as a friend than as an enemy.

It also happens in the Christian's life that, at the beginning of his being a Christian, he arms himself well against his dealings with the evil in which he has lived, but that he later becomes careless in it.

Verses 1-6 | The Faithfulness of Jehoshaphat

1 Jehoshaphat his son then became king in his place, and made his position over Israel firm. 2 He placed troops in all the fortified cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah and in the cities of Ephraim which Asa his father had captured. 3 The LORD was with Jehoshaphat because he followed the example of his father David's earlier days and did not seek the Baals, 4 but sought the God of his father, followed His commandments, and did not act as Israel did. 5 So the LORD established the kingdom in his control, and all Judah brought tribute to Jehoshaphat, and he had great riches and honor. 6 He took great pride in the ways of the LORD and again removed the high places and the Asherim from Judah.

Jehoshaphat succeeds his father Asa as king (verse 1). He is one of the God-fearing kings of Judah. In this chapter we read about his faithfulness to the LORD and about his dedication to the people of the LORD. He starts well. He has a powerful influence not only on Judah, over which he is king, but also on Israel, over which Ahab rules. In Judah he lays armies and garrisons in all the fortified cities (verse 2). He does the same in the cities in Ephraim that his father Asa has conquered. Here Jehoshaphat is not yet connected to Ahab by family ties.

In the beginning Jehoshaphat walks in "his father David's earlier days" (cf. 1Kgs 15:3,11; 2Kgs 14:3; 16:2; 18:3), to which it is related that he does not

seek the Baals (verse 3). One excludes the other. In the next verse the same is said, but by other examples (verse 4). In contrast to not seeking the Baal's (verse 3) he seeks "the God of his father" and that he "followed His commandments". This is linked to the fact that he "did not act as Israel did".

Jehoshaphat has two fathers, his "his father Asa" (verse 2) and "his father David" (verse 3). With his father Asa he has seen what trust in daily life means. Going in the earlier ways of his father David shows that he remains faithful to what this man of God once instituted for the temple service. He remains on the old paths and does not seek renewal as if the old were no longer good. This sense of mind the LORD blesses. He confirms the kingship of Jehoshaphat (verse 5). Jehoshaphat is also confirmed by the people. He receives tribute from all Judah. By this Judah joyfully acknowledges that a king reigns who wants the right things for them. Thus he has great riches and honor.

Jehoshaphat may conclude from all this that God will bless him if he continues in this way. That he "took courage" (Darby Translation) in the ways of the LORD is a beautiful expression of his gratitude to Him (verse 6). His taking courage is not only an intention, but is also reflected in his actions. He proves his faithfulness by removing "the high places and the Asherim from Judah".

Verses 7-13 | Teaching of the Law and Fortifications

7 Then in the third year of his reign he sent his officials, Ben-hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel and Micaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah; 8 and with them the Levites, Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah and Tobadonijah, the Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram, the priests. 9 They taught in Judah, [having] the book of the law of the LORD with them; and they went throughout all the cities of Judah and taught among the people. 10 Now the dread of the LORD was on all the kingdoms of the lands which [were] around Judah, so that they did not make war against Jehoshaphat. 11 Some of the Philistines brought gifts and silver as tribute to Jehoshaphat; the Arabians also brought him flocks, 7,700 rams and 7,700 male goats. 12 So Jehoshaphat grew greater and greater, and he built fortresses and store cities in Judah. 13 He had large supplies in the cities of Judah, and warriors, valiant men, in Jerusalem.

Not only does Jehoshaphat remove the idolatrous heights, but he confirms the people in the Word of God, the only guarantee to remain free from idolatry (verse 7). He lets this service done by the Levites and priests (verse 8; Deu 33:10a). He gives them, as it were, the instruction: "Preach the Word" (2Tim 4:2). They must teach God's Word in "all cities", so without exception (verse 9).

The Levites teach the people the book of the law of the LORD on the spot and explain it. All hear the Word of God, again or for the first time. The teaching is not so much to correct the people because there are wrong practices, but to strengthen the good, to build up the faith. Its effect is visible not only with the people themselves, but also with the nations around them (verse 10; Gen 35:5; Jos 2:11; 5:1; Acts 2:42-43; 5:11).

Then surrounding peoples bring tribute to Jehoshaphat. The Philistines come from the west with gifts and silver and the Arabs come from the south with flocks (verse 11). It is a picture of what will happen in the thousand years kingdom of peace when the Lord Jesus reigns and all nations come to worship Him (Zec 14:16).

Because of everything that is brought to Jehoshaphat, he gets more and more prestige (verse 12). He handles his gifts and money well. His prosperity does not make him lazy and careless, but diligent. In the cities of Judah he is working hard (verses 12-13). Possibly there is much weakening there that needs to be strengthened, which he does by building fortresses and store cities. He makes Jerusalem an army base. He is working with a view on the future. He thinks about possible enemies and about the need that can arise and makes preparations with that in mind.

We too must use times of spiritual prosperity to strengthen our faith life and build up stocks of knowledge of the Word of God. We will need it at times when we have to fight for our faith, or when other circumstances prevent us from doing so.

A people with strong spiritual leaders and founded on the Word of God is a strong people. That's the effect of listening to the Word. Maybe one is not aware of this effect, but it is perceived by others. Being founded on the Word of God is the best protection. This is still the way it works today. Spiritual power through the proclamation of the Word has great conse-

quences. Others will also begin to dedicate themselves. The Word gives power.

Verses 14-19 | The Valiant Warriors of Jehoshaphat

14 This was their muster according to their fathers' households: of Judah, commanders of thousands, Adnah [was] the commander, and with him 300,000 valiant warriors; 15 and next to him [was] Johanan the commander, and with him 280,000; 16 and next to him Amasiah the son of Zichri, who volunteered for the LORD, and with him 200,000 valiant warriors; 17 and of Benjamin, Eliada a valiant warrior, and with him 200,000 armed with bow and shield; 18 and next to him Jehozabad, and with him 180,000 equipped for war. 19 These are they who served the king, apart from those whom the king put in the fortified cities through all Judah.

The last verses of the chapter describe the character and abilities of five army commanders. A commander he is able to deploy his “valiant warriors” where necessary. The commanders are soldiers who have grown into leaders.

There are several commanders. Their cooperation is important. They stand shoulder to shoulder in the battle. We always read about “next to him” (verses 15,16,18). All of them “served the king” (verse 19). The king is the commander-in-chief. The cooperation of the commanders will run smoothly if each of them follows the instructions of the commander-in-chief. The mentioned commanders and their troops are not the only ones who are in the service of the king. Jehoshaphat also placed men in the fortified cities throughout Juda. His power is great!

The chronicler mentions something special about one of the commanders, Amasiah (verse 16). Amasiah is one “who volunteered for the LORD”. It seems to indicate an extra, a deeper motif. The others do their work well too, but with him it comes out strongly that he does it voluntarily and for the LORD. We can say that he first gave himself to the Lord and then to God's people (2Cor 8:5b; Rom 12:1).

2 Chronicles 18

Introduction

In this chapter we see - in pictures - the results of a compromise with the godly world. We also receive the lessons God wants to teach His people to prepare them for religious compromises.

Verses 1-3 | Jehoshaphat's Allies Himself With Ahab

1 Now Jehoshaphat had great riches and honor; and he allied himself by marriage with Ahab. 2 Some years later he went down to [visit] Ahab at Samaria. And Ahab slaughtered many sheep and oxen for him and the people who were with him, and induced him to go up against Ramoth-gilead. 3 Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, "Will you go with me [against] Ramoth-gilead?" And he said to him, "I am as you are, and my people as your people, and [we will be] with you in the battle."

When Jehoshaphat has wealth and honor in abundance (cf. 2Chr 17:5), he enters into marriage ties with the wicked Ahab (verse 1). Here Jehoshaphat leaves obedience to the Word, to which he owes his wealth and honor, and connects with the house of the wicked Ahab. His son Jehoram marries the daughter of Jezebel, Athaliah. In the eyes of some people this may be a great choice, but Jehoshaphat in arranging this he brings evil in his house and in Judah.

This is the first indication of a sinful trait with the God-fearing Jehoshaphat. That sinful trait is the making of an alliance with an unbeliever. He did so with Ahab, with Ahaziah, and with Jehoram, three wicked kings of the ten tribes realm. The fact that he does this up to three times seems to indicate that he is a slow learner at this point.

For us, this contains a serious lesson. That lesson is that we get entangled in evil again and again if we do not radically condemn it. God has forbidden His people to make an alliance with Syria or other God hostile surrounding peoples. Such alliances are causing great damage. However, an alliance with apostate Israel is an even greater evil. Israel is not just one of the pagan peoples. They know the LORD, but have turned their backs on

Him. They serve the golden calves and imagine serving Him with them. This is a treacherous mixture. It is more than idolatry by those who do not know the LORD. Israel is a more dangerous enemy because of its wrong example, rather than its strength.

This is not an alliance with unbelievers in general – that is not allowed (2Cor 6:14) – but an alliance with nominal Christians. What Jehoshaphat does can be found in the ecumenical movement, where Christians find each other without any question of obedience to God’s Word. There is only one safe way we can go when we are faced with something that wrongly claims to be in touch with God and to acknowledge Him. That is, we keep ourselves completely separate with spiritual judgment from what pretends acknowledging God, while not taking His will into account, and regard it as an enemy.

There are about nine years between the marriage ties and Jehoshaphat’s visit to Ahab. Then the moment comes when the seed that has been laid (verse 1) grows into a common interest. Jehoshaphat visits Ahab (verse 2a) and thus enters a social environment from which he does not know how to escape (1Cor 15:33). Ahab is very honored with the visit Jehoshaphat brings him.

In 1 Kings 22, a chapter almost identical to this chapter, the case is viewed from the point of view of Ahab. There the emphasis is on the fact that it is smart of him to seek a connection with a man as God-fearing as Jehoshaphat. Here it is seen from the side of Jehoshaphat and then the connection he seeks with a man as wicked as Ahab is reprehensible. It is a big stain on his reign. In the previous chapter Jehoshaphat has strengthened his cities, but here it appears that he has not strengthened his heart.

The many sheep and oxen that Ahab slaughters for Jehoshaphat (verse 2b), are a bigger snare for Jehoshaphat than the armies of Ahab. What Jehoshaphat does, does not fit in with a walk in the ways of his father David, with what he pronounced in some psalms (Psa 26:5; 141:4). The feast Ahab is making in honor of Jehoshaphat is only meant to win him for his plans.

The kisses of the enemy are deceptive. The enemy never gives anything for nothing. The slaughter of sheep and oxen means sacrificing them. It represents a sacrificial meal. Thus, in our time an apostate church will go

very far to agree with the faithful to keep or draw them into an alliance with itself.

Ahab has the plan to recapture Ramoth in Gilead from the king of Aram or Syria. For that he wants the help of Jehoshaphat (verses 2-3). The latter agrees. He does so with words that are almost unbelievable. He makes himself like Ahab, and also takes his whole people with him in this equation. He not only falls into the trap himself, but also leads others into it. With this he drags his people on the road down.

How often do we say to the world, 'I am like you.'? Look at our participation in social life. Do we attend the same events; do we talk about the things of the world in the same way? If that happens, it is almost impossible to see the difference between the 'Jehoshaphats' and the 'Ahabs' in such situations. Only personal attachment to Christ will preserve us for identification with and absorption into the world.

Jehoshaphat's alliance with Israel against Syria is no better than his father Asa's alliance with Syria against Israel (2Chr 16:7-9). Of what Jehoshaphat does as a leader, others will say: 'What kind of evil can there be in such a cooperation if a God-fearing man like Jehoshaphat participates in it? If there was something wrong in it, wouldn't Jehoshaphat join in?' This is also the way the Christian world is talking today. Many of them agree with Jehoshaphat's attitude by saying that he is a broad-minded man.

Verses 4-11 | The Message of the False Prophets

4 Moreover, Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Please inquire first for the word of the LORD." 5 Then the king of Israel assembled the prophets, four hundred men, and said to them, "Shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I refrain?" And they said, "Go up, for God will give [it] into the hand of the king." 6 But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not yet a prophet of the LORD here that we may inquire of him?" 7 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me but always evil. He is Micaiah, son of Imla." But Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say so." 8 Then the king of Israel called an officer and said, "Bring quickly Micaiah, Imla's son." 9 Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah were sitting each on his

throne, arrayed in [their] robes, and [they] were sitting at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets were prophesying before them. 10 Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made horns of iron for himself and said, "Thus says the LORD, 'With these you shall gore the Arameans until they are consumed.'" 11 All the prophets were prophesying thus, saying, "Go up to Ramoth-gilead and succeed, for the LORD will give [it] into the hand of the king."

Yet Jehoshaphat does not simply agree with Ahab's proposal. It is as if his conscience tells him to consult the LORD first (verse 4). That is what he says to "the king of Israel", that is to say to the man who reigns over God's people. It illustrates the tragedy and the apostasy of Israel and its leader. It's nice that Jehoshaphat suggests it, but it's too late. He has already promised his cooperation to this expedition. If the LORD nevertheless answers such a request, the answer can only be judgmental because of the situation.

Ahab first calls his own prophets together (verse 5). These are prophets he has gathered himself and who caress his hearing, just as we encounter them in our days, the last days of Christianity, and for which we are warned (2Tim 4:3-4). When Ahab asks them whether they will go to war, these false prophets boldly take the Name of God in their mouths and guarantee a prosperous way in His Name. They are prophets who speak what people like to hear, and that certainly is not the truth (Isa 30:10; Eze 13:7; Mt 7:22-23). However, Jehoshaphat will not let himself be fooled (verse 6). Although the four hundred prophets have made a unanimous statement, he asks if there is not "yet" a prophet of the LORD.

With this question Jehoshaphat can mean two things. He can ask if there is yet another prophet besides these four hundred prophets, but then of *the same kind*, giving the impression that he also sees these four hundred prophets as prophets of the LORD. He can also mean, and this seems to be more the case, that he wants to hear another prophet of the LORD, a *real prophet*, by which he indicates in veiled terms that those four-hundred are for him no real prophets of the LORD. He is already so entangled in the trap that Ahab opened for him, that he can no longer give clear testimony. It is foolish to ask the LORD's guidance if we have already made our decision.

Ahab cannot ignore Jehoshaphat's question (verse 7). He must let Micaiah come, the man he sees as a prophet of doom. Ahab knows that Micaiah is a real prophet. This we also see with King Zedekiah in relation to Jeremiah (Jer 37:17) and with Herod in relation to John the baptist (Mk 6:20a). Ahab hates Micaiah. That man is connected for him to doom, and not to the fact that he speaks the word of the LORD.

It is absurd to hate Micaiah and want to kill him because he tells him the truth about future things. It is as foolish as it is for a resident of a house to kill his dog who keeps barking to warn him of a burglar. Thus the Bible, the preacher and also the church are hated for the same reason. They have no hopeful message for the future of the world, but announce the judgment over it.

Ahab's condemnation of the prophet Micaiah goes too far for Jehoshaphat. He tells Ahab not to speak like this. Here we see that the new life indeed is present in Jehoshaphat. It is a testimony, although a weak testimony.

Ahab does what Jehoshaphat wants. He calls an officer and gives him the order to summon Micaiah, Imla's son (verse 8). Jehoshaphat's question to get a real prophet and his reprimand of Ahab change nothing to his ambivalent attitude. He stays where he is, with Ahab. Both Ahab and he sit on a throne and both are arrayed in their robes (verse 9). They are at the threshing floor. The threshing floor is a picture of purifying judgment. It is the place where the chaff is separated from the wheat. This separation will happen in a moment.

While the messenger is on his way to bring Micaiah, the prophets of Ahab continue to perform. The prophet Zedekiah takes the words "thus says the LORD" (verse 10) in the mouth and predicts a great victory. Today also many so-called prophets take the words 'thus says the Lord' in their mouths (verse 11). They always talk about prosperity. However, they are false prophets, with a mouth "smoother than butter" and words "softer than oil" (Psa 55:22).

Verses 12-27 | The Message of Micaiah

12 Then the messenger who went to summon Micaiah spoke to him saying, "Behold, the words of the prophets are uniformly favorable to the king. So

please let your word be like one of them and speak favorably." 13 But Micaiah said, "As the LORD lives, what my God says, that I will speak." 14 When he came to the king, the king said to him, "Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I refrain?" He said, "Go up and succeed, for they will be given into your hand." 15 Then the king said to him, "How many times must I adjure you to speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?" 16 So he said,

I saw all Israel
Scattered on the mountains,
Like sheep which have no shepherd;
And the LORD said,
'These have no master.

Let each of them return to his house in peace."

17 Then the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?" 18 Micaiah said, "Therefore, hear the word of the LORD. I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing on His right and on His left. 19 The LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab king of Israel to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said this while another said that. 20 Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD and said, 'I will entice him.' And the LORD said to him, 'How?' 21 He said, 'I will go and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Then He said, 'You are to entice [him] and prevail also. Go and do so.' 22 Now therefore, behold, the LORD has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of these your prophets, for the LORD has proclaimed disaster against you." 23 Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near and struck Micaiah on the cheek and said, "How did the Spirit of the LORD pass from me to speak to you?" 24 Micaiah said, "Behold, you will see on that day when you enter an inner room to hide yourself." 25 Then the king of Israel said, "Take Micaiah and return him to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king's son; 26 and say, 'Thus says the king, "Put this [man] in prison and feed him sparingly with bread and water until I return safely.'"" 27 Micaiah said, "If you indeed return safely, the LORD has not spoken by me." And he said, "Listen, all you people."

The messenger warns Micaiah to watch out for what he says because the four hundred prophets have all said the same thing (verse 12). But Micaiah is not impressed. He will only speak what his God says (verse 13). This is

the hallmark of the true servant. Micaiah is a prisoner for God (cf. Eph 3:1; 4:1), while Jehoshaphat is a ruler and also an ally and therefore a prisoner of a wicked man.

When Ahab asks Micaiah the question whether or not he will go up, he receives an answer (verse 14). In that answer Micaiah is joking the king by saying the same thing that the prophets have already said. Ahab feels this, he doesn't know Micaiah speaking that way, and says that Micaiah will speak the truth that he is so afraid of (verse 15). Ahab also realizes that the four hundred have only said what he wants to hear.

If we make a comparison with church history, it is clear that the church is not moving in the right direction. Yet we see that a gospel is being preached that it will all become more beautiful and better: 'There will be a revival, there will be this happening and that will happen'. It is proposed to enter into dialogue with the world and to participate in bearing a common responsibility to make Christianity an influential power on earth.

There are indeed some 'doomsayers' who go against this. Of them is said what Ahab says of Micaiah: 'Did I not tell you? They preach nothing but evil and disappointments and that the world will be worse and that what I say and want is not good.' They try to justify their vision, but eventually it will become clear who is 'the prophet of God'.

Micaiah let the word of the LORD be heard (verse 16). Ahab understands that the word of the LORD is judgment. He turns to Jehoshaphat to remind him that he predicted that this would be the case (verse 17). Jehoshaphat hears it and does nothing with it, because he is imprisoned in the snare of his alliance with the wicked Ahab.

Micaiah has a message not only for Ahab, but also for the four hundred prophets (verses 18-22). He has seen in a vision what has happened in heaven. What is happening in heaven, only men of God have seen as Isaiah and Ezekiel and here also Micaiah. Micaiah tells Ahab and his prophets what he has seen and heard. – What he has seen and heard, will have encouraged him enormously in his lonesome performance opposite the mass of false prophets. – He has seen angels around God on His throne. He describes how the LORD entered into dialogue with His court (cf. Job 1:6; 2:1).

There is no dividing line between good and evil angels. Angels can be sent out for good, but also for evil. With Saul there is an evil spirit of the LORD who frightens him (1Sam 16:14). It teaches us that God disposes of all powers, good and evil. This spirit is used in God's hand to mislead the prophets.

The prophets of Ahab are driven by demons, while behind them is a spirit appointed by the LORD to let the demons do their work in those prophets. After all, it is not a battle between two armies, an army of God and an army of Satan, as if it were two equal forces. God is above all and uses everything for His purpose. The false spirits in the mouths of false prophets cannot go beyond God's permission.

Zedekiah is furious and strikes Micaiah on the cheek (verse 23). He feels his honor is affected. Micaiah will not argue to prove that he spoke the words of God (verse 24). Its truth will be evident in its fulfillment. For Zedekiah there is a separate prophecy. He will flee from room to room and also see from this that Micaiah has spoken the truth (cf. Deu 18:22).

Micaiah is taken away (verse 25). What will have passed through Jehoshaphat when he sees what happens to a faithful prophet of the LORD?

Verses 28-34 | Death of Ahab

28 So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah went up against Ramoth-gilead. 29 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you put on your robes." So the king of Israel disguised himself, and they went into battle. 30 Now the king of Aram had commanded the captains of his chariots, saying, "Do not fight with small or great, but with the king of Israel alone." 31 So when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, "It is the king of Israel," and they turned aside to fight against him. But Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him, and God diverted them from him. 32 When the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him. 33 A certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel in a joint of the armor. So he said to the driver of the chariot, "Turn around and take me out of the fight, for I am severely wounded." 34 The battle raged that day, and the king of Israel propped himself up in his chariot in front of the Arameans until the evening; and at sunset he died.

Despite the clear prophecy of Micaiah Jehoshaphat goes along in the battle (verse 28). Jehoshaphat is so entangled that even on the advice of Ahab he goes into battle recognizably as king, while Ahab disguises himself (verse 29). With this Jehoshaphat indicates that he is like the king of Israel. He reveals his own identity and is for the people of the 'world' the king of Israel. Therefore the enemy focuses on him. The king of Aram or Syria has ordered to worry about nothing and nobody but only about the king of Israel (verse 30). He is the target of the fight. When then they see Jehoshaphat, they think he is the king of Israel (verse 31a). They turn aside to fight against him.

Then two miracles happen. The first is that Jehoshaphat is miraculously saved and the second is that Ahab is miraculously killed. Jehoshaphat is saved because he cries out to the LORD to come to his aid (verse 31b). Emergency learns to pray. The LORD helps him and turns the enemy away from him by showing them that he is not the king of Israel (verse 32). Jehoshaphat is delivered by pure grace. David has experienced the same thing. He is also once delivered by the LORD from a snare in which he went into himself in his flight from Saul (1Sam 27:1-3; 29:9-11).

Ahab dies, as God has said. His disguise has, of course, not benefited. A man shoots his arrow at Ahab without realizing that he is pointing his arrow at Ahab (verse 33). It is not right to assume that the man shoots at random. A soldier does not do anything like that. His shooting at random is that he has no idea he has chosen Ahab as the target of his arrow. The arrow "strikes the king of Israel in a joint of the armor".

Jehoshaphat is saved despite his striking royal dress that has made him the target white of the enemy; Ahab dies despite his inconspicuous armor, which led him to believe he could escape the enemy's attention. Who can do evil to those who are protected by God? And who or what can protect those whom God will kill?

Ahab realizes his situation and orders to take him out of battle to take care of his wound. However, this does not seem to succeed because of the ongoing struggle (verse 34). He is forced to stay in battle and slowly bleeds to death. By the time the sun goes down, his life goes down and he dies. Ahab is not mentioned hereafter. It is about Jehoshaphat.

2 Chronicles 19

Verses 1-3 | Jehoshaphat Rebuked

1 Then Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned in safety to his house in Jerusalem. 2 Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him and said to King Jehoshaphat, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD and so [bring] wrath on yourself from the LORD? 3 But there is [some] good in you, for you have removed the Asheroth from the land and you have set your heart to seek God."

Jehoshaphat's safe homecoming is in sharp contrast with Ahab's end (2Chr 18:27a,34). Jehoshaphat returns "in safety to his house in Jerusalem" (verse 1). With that he gets more than he earns. For he has said, "I am as you are" (2Chr 18:3). He did not go the way of the righteous, but that of the wicked. In that way he should have perished: "For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish" (Psa 1:6).

Still impressed by what happened – that the word of the prophet Micaiah became true – there comes a message from God. Back home Jehoshaphat is visited by a prophet, Jehu (verse 2). This is the son of Hanani, who prophesied to Asa and therefore ended up in prison (2Chr 16:7-10). His son Jehu, however, did not become afraid of this, and fearlessly prophesied to Asa's son when he had been on the wrong path. Here a faithful father has a faithful son. Jehoshaphat reacts differently than his father (Pro 15:5,32).

The prophet speaks clear language (verse 2). Prophets call things by their name. He speaks to Jehoshaphat that he has turned things completely upside down by supporting the wicked in his bad work and showing love for those who hate the LORD. He has been the opposite of the LORD and His judgment of sin. That's why "wrath ... from before the LORD" is resting on Jehoshaphat. The LORD cannot rejoice about him who is the king of His people. On the contrary. Jehoshaphat was not like David who did choose the LORD's side against evil and the evil ones (Psa 139:21; cf. Jam 4:4; Lk 16:13).

After his solemn admonition Jehu also talks about the good things that are present with Jehoshaphat. A true prophet also has love for the one to whom he speaks and also calls the good (verse 3). The Lord knows the good of everyone who loves Him. The lesson for us from all this is that we should only love what God loves.

The good Jehoshaphat did consists of two things. The first is that he has removed the Asheroth from the land. This is an external action. Secondly, this action proves that his heart is in order before God. He had set his heart to seek God. This is an inner mind, which is also an action of Jehoshaphat. Both are pleasing to God and are noticed and appreciated by Him.

Verses 4-11 | Jehoshaphat Restores Judgment

4 So Jehoshaphat lived in Jerusalem and went out again among the people from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim and brought them back to the LORD, the God of their fathers. 5 He appointed judges in the land in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city. 6 He said to the judges, "Consider what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the LORD who is with you when you render judgment. 7 Now then let the fear of the LORD be upon you; be very careful what you do, for the LORD our God will have no part in unrighteousness or partiality or the taking of a bribe." 8 In Jerusalem also Jehoshaphat appointed some of the Levites and priests, and some of the heads of the fathers' [households] of Israel, for the judgment of the LORD and to judge disputes among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 9 Then he charged them saying, "Thus you shall do in the fear of the LORD, faithfully and wholeheartedly. 10 Whenever any dispute comes to you from your brethren who live in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and ordinances, you shall warn them so that they may not be guilty before the LORD, and wrath may [not] come on you and your brethren. Thus you shall do and you will not be guilty. 11 Behold, Amariah the chief priest will be over you in all that pertains to the LORD, and Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the ruler of the house of Judah, in all that pertains to the king. Also the Levites shall be officers before you. Act resolutely, and the LORD be with the upright."

Jehoshaphat lives again in Jerusalem (verse 4). This indicates that he is again in the presence of the LORD. He continues on the right way. Now that he himself is back in the right place, he also brings the people "back to

the LORD, the God of their fathers". This is better than what he has done before, when he took the people on the wrong path in his cooperation with Ahab. Jehoshaphat has converted and does his "first works" here (Rev 2:5; 2Chr 17:1-4,7-9).

As in 2 Chronicles 17, he regulates justice among the people by appointing judges "in the land in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city" (verse 5). It is striking how emphatically the places where Jehoshaphat appoints the judges are described. It is not just general "in the land", but "in all the fortified cities of Judah" and then also "city by city". It indicates that Jehoshaphat takes his task seriously. He has become wiser through experience.

The fact that he takes his task seriously is not only demonstrated by the appointment of judges. It is also evident from what he says to the judges. He impresses upon them that they should remember well that they represent the LORD as the supreme Judge (verse 6). He is present at all rendering judgment. On his behalf they speak justice and not for people. Paul is aware that the judgment of his service does not depend on people, but on the Lord (1Cor 4:3-4), and we should also think of that.

Jehoshaphat not only lets the word preach, but also ensures that people live up to it. The judges must decide how to proceed in cases where disputes have arisen. They know the law of the LORD and must apply it correctly. Jehoshaphat binds them to the heart that they will fulfill their duty "in the fear of the LORD" (verse 7). That will keep them from speaking what people like to hear or what suits them best. They will also be preserved for taking a bribe.

So should we also do if there are disputes between believers (1Cor 6:5; Mt 18:15-20). If we know ourselves responsible, how careful we will be with our statements among God's people. Judges are people who know God's will in difficult cases. They are wise men who, in practical difficulties, speak the right word from God's Word.

Justice must be spoken that answers to Who God is, in a way that justice reflects His features. He is righteous and completely consistent in His judgment. He is "the righteous Judge" (2Tim 4:8). "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do justice? (Gen 18:25, literal translation). He is the God Whom we

call upon as Father and Who “impartially judges according to each one’s work” (1Pet 1:17).

Jehoshaphat also establishes a higher court, formed by some Levites and priests from Judah, to which he also adds some heads of families from Israel (verse 8). This court is located in Jerusalem. There the “judgment of the LORD” is done, that is, in His Name. That’s where it all starts. Then we read about judging “disputes among the inhabitants of Jerusalem”. It is about them, it concerns them.

The judges of this court, like their colleagues in the cities of Judah van Jehoshaphat, are commanded to judge “in the fear of the LORD” (verse 9; cf. verse 7). Jehoshaphat adds that they will do their work “faithfully and wholeheartedly”. Faithfulness is an important condition in every work we do for the Lord. It is even the most important measure for judging our service (1Cor 4:2). We can only prove this faithfulness if our heart is all for the Lord.

For the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the court is the ordinary court of justice. For the inhabitants of the other cities, it seems more like a higher court where they can go for justice if they cannot find a solution in their own place of residence (verse 10; cf. Deu 17:8). The judges have a great responsibility to deal with any dispute in such a way that both themselves and the persons they judge are not found guilty before the LORD.

The highest judges are mentioned (verse 11). There are two of them. There is the “chief priests ... for every matter [that] concerns the LORD”, that is to say in the things that are in connection with worship and temple service. Also there is “the leader of the house of Judah for every case [that] concerns the king”. This applies more to all state and administrative matters. These issues are very much intertwined in Israel.

The chief priest and the ruler of Judah are together a picture of the Lord Jesus as King-Priest. Finally, every member of God’s people must be accountable to Him. We will have to answer to the Lord Jesus for every decision we make.

After his extensive explanation of what is expected of the judges, Jehoshaphat says that they should get to work. He also spoke one last word of encouragement to them. He encourages them to act resolutely. This

means to act in accordance with the will of the LORD. If they do, they will be upright and may they be sure that the LORD is with them. "The upright" is the one who does what is right in the eyes of God and who lives from the Word of God.

2 Chronicles 20

Introduction

In this chapter we have an event in which we see the place and power of prayer in the battle for LORD. Here we learn how the kingdom of God functions in the world. It shows us the picture of a praying and fighting church. It is a highlight in this book.

Verses 1-4 | Jehoshaphat in Distress

1 Now it came about after this that the sons of Moab and the sons of Ammon, together with some of the Meunites, came to make war against Jehoshaphat. 2 Then some came and reported to Jehoshaphat, saying, "A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea, out of Aram and behold, they are in Hazazon-tamar (that is Engedi)." 3 Jehoshaphat was afraid and turned his attention to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. 4 So Judah gathered together to seek help from the LORD; they even came from all the cities of Judah to seek the LORD.

A powerful enemy comes to make war against Jehoshaphat (verse 1). They are Moabites, Ammonites and Meunites. Moabites and Ammonites are family of the Israelites. They descend from Lot, the nephew of Abraham (Gen 19:30-38; 12:5). In his prayer, Jehoshaphat calls the Meunites "the sons of ... Mount Seir" (verse 10; cf. verses 22-23), which means that they are Edomites, or descendants of Esau. These peoples have always revealed themselves as enemies of God's people. They represent people who have a certain relationship with God's people, but hate God's people and God's truth. We must be wary of this enemy.

Jehoshaphat gets the message that the enemies are coming and he is told where they are at that moment (verse 2). He is not suddenly attacked by the enemy, but is a warned man. Although Jehoshaphat has a good and brave army, he does not place his trust in it. He realizes what is said in Psalm 33 (Psa 33:16,20).

The fear of the enemy drives him and all the people to God in fasting and prayer (verse 3). Fasting is voluntary renunciation of food – more gener-

ally, renunciation of things that are lawful – in order to pray more intensively. Fasting is making oneself small before God, it is humbling oneself.

All Judah is called together to seek help from the LORD (verse 4). From all the cities of Judah they come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD, to ask Him what they should do. Normally the people come to Jerusalem three times a year on the occasion of the three great feasts (Deu 16:16). But now they come to have fellowship in prayer, not because it is prescribed, but because they feel the need.

Jehoshaphat is the true spiritual leader of his people. Spiritual leadership is expressed in it that one does not want to be great, but wants to be small together with the people. Need brings the people together and on their knees (Acts 4:23-24a).

Verses 5-13 | Prayer of Jehoshaphat

5 Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD before the new court, 6 and he said, "O LORD, the God of our fathers, are You not God in the heavens? And are You not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Your hand so that no one can stand against You. 7 Did You not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel and give it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever? 8 They have lived in it, and have built You a sanctuary there for Your name, saying, 9 'Should evil come upon us, the sword, [or] judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house and before You (for Your name is in this house) and cry to You in our distress, and You will hear and deliver [us].' 10 Now behold, the sons of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom You did not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt (they turned aside from them and did not destroy them), 11 see [how] they are rewarding us by coming to drive us out from Your possession which You have given us as an inheritance. 12 O our God, will You not judge them? For we are powerless before this great multitude who are coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on You." 13 All Judah was standing before the LORD, with their infants, their wives and their children.

When the call is made by Jehoshaphat and the people have come, he himself takes the lead in prayer (verse 5). He leads in prayer while standing

between the whole people of Judah and Jerusalem. He is one with His people. The place of prayer is “the house of the LORD before the new court”. He knows that God’s house is a house of prayer, and he makes an explicit appeal to this later (verses 9-10).

The chronicler also mentions that Jehoshaphat is ‘before the new court’. This may have something to do with the altar renovated by his father Asa (2Chr 15:8). It emphasizes what is new. Jehoshaphat is new and fresh in his approach to God. He is not approaching God from rut, but from a new arising desire.

Jehoshaphat prays orderly, there is coherence in his prayer. This is important for public prayer. He begins by addressing God as the “God of our fathers”, the God Who has been their God throughout the ages (verse 6). His dwelling place is not a limited place on earth, as it is for the idols, but He lives in the heaven that is stretched out all over the earth. Certainly He has chosen Jerusalem and the temple as His dwelling place on earth, but Solomon also said that this house and even the heaven of heaven cannot contain Him (2Chr 6:18).

Jehoshaphat describes God in His omnipotence and exaltation. He calls to the God Who rules over all kingdoms, including the hostile nations with their gods. The enemies that are raised up against him are in his hand, a hand in which is power and strength, so that no one can stand against Him.

Jehoshaphat knows how God used to act to give his people their land and reminds Him of that (verse 7). He knows that this happened according to his promise to “Abraham Your friend” (Isa 41:8; Jam 2:23; cf. Jn 15:14). Abraham is His confidant to whom He has made His thoughts known. Did He not give the land for ever to the descendants of Abraham? Then it cannot be that the enemies will drive them out of it. Jehoshaphat pleads with God on the basis of God’s promises. We can do the same.

The offspring has gone to live in the land and has built a sanctuary there for the name of the LORD (verse 8). It is as if Jehoshaphat presents the building of the sanctuary for the LORD as the great goal of living in the land. That is true. God’s goal with the deliverance of His people from Egypt is to

dwell among His people. Moses has already pointed this out in the song he sings immediately after he has led the people out of Egypt (Exo 15:13,17).

Jehoshaphat recalls what Solomon said in his prayer at the dedication of the temple (verse 9; 2Chr 6:20-25). He and his people are now in a situation mentioned by Solomon. Solomon said that the LORD will hear and deliver when they cry unto him out of their distress. Is this not also a great encouragement for us to cry out to the Lord in our distress, pleading with Him on His promises to hear and to deliver?

Then Jehoshaphat points out the immediate danger to the LORD with the words "Now behold" (verse 10). He asks as it were whether the LORD wants to look closely at the danger in which they find themselves. The people who are coming to them now, the LORD did not allow to attack them at the time. And now the people whom they had to spare and leave in their own inheritance come, to drive them out of the inheritance which God gave his people (verse 11; Deu 2:8-9,19). This should not happen, should it? Surely, it will not be the case that their former obedience is now punished?

Jehoshaphat addresses "our God" and asks a question that already contains the answer (verse 12). Will God not judge them? Of course He will. After all, He knows that in Jehoshaphat and his people there is no strength against the great force of the enemy.

While he himself also has a large army and is powerful, Jehoshaphat declares his powerlessness. The fact that he has a large army indicates that he does not neglect his responsibility; he is ready for it. But when it comes down to it, he is also aware of the fact that without the LORD all these provisions will not benefit him and have no meaning. Therefore he and his people turn their eyes to the LORD. With this they say: "LORD, if there is help to come, it must come from you. That's why we look at You."

When Jehoshaphat prayed, the whole people stand in silence before the LORD, waiting for His reaction (verse 13). At this prayer also the little children are present. They occupy an important place to God (1Chr 25:8; 26:13; 2Chr 31:15; 2Kgs 23:2). It is an important and encouraging experience for them to see how the elderly seek the LORD. The fact that several categories of the people are mentioned by name shows that the whole people, young and old, men and women, is one of soul, one of thought, one of desire.

Verses 14-19 | Answer of the LORD

14 Then in the midst of the assembly the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, the Levite of the sons of Asaph; 15 and he said, "Listen, all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: thus says the LORD to you, 'Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God's. 16 Tomorrow go down against them. Behold, they will come up by the ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the valley in front of the wilderness of Jeruel. 17 You [need] not fight in this [battle]; station yourselves, stand and see the salvation of the LORD on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.' Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out to face them, for the LORD is with you." 18 Jehoshaphat bowed his head with [his] face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the LORD, worshiping the LORD. 19 The Levites, from the sons of the Kohathites and of the sons of the Korahites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel, with a very loud voice.

The answer of the LORD comes. He sends His Spirit in the midst of the church. He does not send His Spirit on Jehoshaphat, which we might expect, but on Jahaziel, a Levite from the sons of Asaph (verse 14). The Spirit is free in choosing His instrument to reveal the will of God.

Jahaziel will not have been "overwhelmed" by the fact that the Spirit comes upon him. That he is one of Asaf's sons indicates that he is a singer. His task is to praise the LORD. This activity is a good preparation to be used by the Spirit for the benefit of God's people in the midst of which he is.

The message that Jahaziel has for people and king is an encouragement (verse 15). He asks for special attention for it with the word "listen". It is a word of the LORD Himself. The encouragement is that they do not have to be impressed by the enemy's great multitude, because they do not have to fight against it themselves. God will fight for them. So they should not compare the power of the enemy with their own power, but with the power of God. And what does the enemy then represent?

That the battle is not of the people, but of God, goes like a chorus through the Old Testament. We hear it from the mouth of Moses when the people are at the Red Sea (Exo 14:14) and then we hear it from the mouth of Da-

vid when he is opposite Goliath (1Sam 17:47). Now we hear it here when Jehoshaphat is facing a great hostile army. For us it is also the case. We can only fight the good fight if we realize that it is actually the Lord's fight. Therefore the armor of *God* is also given to us for our battle (Eph 6:10-18).

Jahaziel says what has to be done (verse 16). God can defeat the enemy in many ways. However, he chooses a way that makes it clear to His people that the victory is His work. Jahaziel tells the people what they should do. They have to go down to the enemy tomorrow. He informs the people where the enemy is now and where the enemy will be tomorrow. God knows every movement of the enemy and also the way he goes.

What encouragement is that for His people to entrust themselves to Him for the battle. So God tells His people today through people whom He makes capable of doing so, where the enemy is, where they should be careful not to fall into a spiritual trap. The place where Jehoshaphat and the people will find the enemies is "at the end of the valley". It points out that the humiliation and acknowledgment of one's own incapacity, of which the valley is a picture, will end in a victory for the people.

The meeting with the enemy is not meant to wage a battle with them (verse 17). Once again Jahaziel points out that the people should not fight in this war. They just have to station, stand and watch. In this way they can learn how God intervenes for His people. He will make them see His salvation. His salvation is with them, with Judah and Jerusalem. There is no reason for fear and dismay, which may be imposed on them when they think that they will come face to face with the enemy. They can go up against the enemy without fear, "for the LORD is with you". And what is there to fear or be dismayed when He is with us?

The word of the prophet has a wonderful effect on Jehoshaphat and the people. They are deeply impressed by the word of the LORD. They all fall down before the LORD and bow before Him (verse 18). Here is nothing to be found of an unconsciously 'falling in the Spirit'. Such a thing is completely alien to Scripture. What happens here is done consciously by every person present.

While Jehoshaphat and the people are in worship before the LORD, "the Levites, from the sons of the Kohathites and of the sons of the Korahites,

stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel, with a very loud voice” (verse 19). The Kohathites are Levites whose task is to take care of the most holy things (Num 4:4). The Korahites are descendants of the Kohathites (Num 16:1; 1Chr 6:38). Korah rebelled against the LORD and is judged (Num 16:1-2,31-33), but grace spared some children of Korah (Num 26:11). Those who know the holy of holies (descendants of Kohath) and those who know what grace is (descendants of Korah) realize in this situation that it is appropriate to praise the LORD “with a very loud voice”.

The prayer meeting has been changed into a praise, and this without any more enemy being defeated. What a just and wonderful tribute to Him Who is worthy of all honor and Who is most honored when we honor Him for what is yet to come.

Verses 20-30 | The LORD Defeats the Enemy

20 They rose early in the morning and went out to the wilderness of Tekoa; and when they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, “Listen to me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, put your trust in the LORD your God and you will be established. Put your trust in His prophets and succeed.” 21 When he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who sang to the LORD and those who praised [Him] in holy attire, as they went out before the army and said, “Give thanks to the LORD, for His lovingkindness is everlasting.”

22 When they began singing and praising, the LORD set ambushes against the sons of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; so they were routed. 23 For the sons of Ammon and Moab rose up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir destroying [them] completely; and when they had finished with the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another. 24 When Judah came to the lookout of the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude, and behold, they [were] corpses lying on the ground, and no one had escaped. 25 When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take their spoil, they found much among them, [including] goods, garments and valuable things which they took for themselves, more than they could carry. And they were three days taking the spoil because there was so much. 26 Then on the fourth day they assembled in the valley of Beracah, for there they blessed the LORD. Therefore they have named that place “The Valley of Beracah” until today. 27 Every man of Judah

and Jerusalem returned with Jehoshaphat at their head, returning to Jerusalem with joy, for the LORD had made them to rejoice over their enemies. 28 They came to Jerusalem with harps, lyres and trumpets to the house of the LORD. 29 And the dread of God was on all the kingdoms of the lands when they heard that the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel. 30 So the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for his God gave him rest on all sides.

The next day, the day after all the encouraging promises, they get up early and go out to the wilderness of Tekoa (verse 20). Possibly because yesterday's overwhelming impressions have weakened somewhat, Jehoshaphat stands and addresses the people just before departure. He calls them to listen to him, for he has two more powerful encouragements for them.

His first encouragement is to trust in the LORD, Whom they know as their God. If they do, and only then, they will stand before the enemy and not shudder. The second encouragement is to trust the prophets of the LORD, for they have spoken His words to them. And has any word ever remained unfulfilled that the LORD has spoken? Well, if they trust His prophets, that is, if they trust His Word, they will prosper and win.

After his encouraging speech Jehoshaphat consults with the people (verse 21). The result of the consultation is that they appoint singers for the LORD to praise Him "in holy attire". It is as if the hymn of the previous day still resounds in their ears and hearts and they want to continue with it. The praise of the LORD gives strength.

The singers go out before the army. The weapons will not be used, for the LORD has said that he will fight. That the men are armed is not to fight, but to confirm victory. Praise goes out for victory. Victory follows the praise. The contents of the hymn of praise "give thanks to the LORD, for His lovingkindness is everlasting", is the great chorus of the kingdom of peace (Psa 136:1-26).

At the same time that cheers and praises sound, the LORD defeats the enemies through ambushes (verse 22). The following verse shows how victory is achieved (verse 23). The LORD lets the enemies fight against each other. Without any intervention of a human being victory is achieved.

Thus the Lord Jesus also achieved the victory on the cross and we may reap the fruits of it. It is not necessary for Christians to eradicate an out-

ward, false religion. Such a religion eradicates itself because it carries in itself the seed of its own destruction.

What Israel only has to do is look at the result and reap the fruits. They see the result at “the lookout of the wilderness” (verse 24). From there they only see dead enemies. No one has escaped, just as no one will escape the final judgment of God. That victory is only God’s work is not common, because God usually uses His people to defeat enemies. However, God is not bound by certain methods. His choice is always such that He is glorified in the result.

In this case Jehoshaphat and the people may take for themselves of the spoil (verse 25). That too is not self-evident (Jos 6:18; 1Chr 18:11). Here God allows it. They take from the spoil as much as they can carry. They can’t carry everything at once, there’s so much there. The spoil is so big that they spend three days to take it.

After three days of taking of the spoil, the people gather on the fourth day in “the valley of Beracah”, which means “the valley of praise” (verse 26). The valley of praise gets its name here. The meeting takes place here and not in Jerusalem near the temple. In an application to us, it reminds us that God wants to receive praise outside the meeting of the church as soon as there is reason to do so. We don’t have to wait for that to happen until we meet as a church, where there is a special place for it, when we meet at the Lord’s Table to proclaim His death in the use of His Supper.

After this spontaneous expression of praise for the victory, the men, with Jehoshaphat at the head, return to Jerusalem full of joy (verse 27). The reason for their joy is what the LORD has done with their enemies. Arriving in Jerusalem they go to the house of the LORD (verse 28) under musical accompaniment. From there they left and there they return.

For us, too, the church is the place of departure for everything we may do for the Lord and the place to which we return after we have been allowed to do something for the Lord (cf. Acts 14:26-27). In this way we may share with the ‘home church’ what the Lord has done and glorify Him together for it.

The news of the LORD’s victory over the enemies of Israel has the effect that there is “the dread of God ... on all the kingdoms of the lands” that

hear of it (verse 29). This is always the result when God works with and for His people. It does not mean that the peoples start to seek God. It is more so that they will think twice before they go to war against Israel, against a people with such a mighty God. The result is that through this intervention of God the kingdom of Jehoshaphat has rest on all sides (verse 30).

It is worth noting that this history also has a prophetic meaning. In the same way as the Spirit of the LORD comes upon Jahaziel (verse 14), so according to Joel 2 the Spirit will come upon all Israel in the end time, that is to say, upon the faithful remnant that is then all Israel (Joel 2:28-29; cf. Rom 11:25-26). In Joel 3 there are two references to this history (Joel 3:2,12). The “valley of Jehoshaphat” mentioned there is probably the same as “the valley of Beracah” (“valley of praise”) in this chapter (verse 26). In Joel 2 we see the same preparation for meeting the enemy as here (Joel 2:15-17).

Verses 31-34 | End of the Reign of Jehoshaphat

31 Now Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah. He [was] thirty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-five years. And his mother's name [was] Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. 32 He walked in the way of his father Asa and did not depart from it, doing right in the sight of the LORD. 33 The high places, however, were not removed; the people had not yet directed their hearts to the God of their fathers. 34 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first to last, behold, they are written in the annals of Jehu the son of Hanani, which is recorded in the Book of the Kings of Israel.

The kingship of Jehoshaphat is a finite kingship. The chronicler has come to the end with his description of it. He concludes by saying that Jehoshaphat has reigned over Judah (verse 31). He also gives some general information about the age of Jehoshaphat, the duration of his reign and who is his mother. He reminds us that Jehoshaphat did not deviate from the way his father Asa went – not thinking of the failure we also saw with Asa – and that he did what was “right in the sight of the LORD” (verse 32). This is the general impression that the Spirit of God gives of Jehoshaphat’s life. It’s good to remember that when we think about Jehoshaphat’s life.

However, that general impression does not blind him to the fact that the high places have remained (verse 33) and that he has not been able to

change the direction of the heart of the people. The altitudes of sacrifice are a danger to the people, for they work to forget the place where the LORD dwells. That is also the case today. There is one place of worship. If this is thought up, it will prevent someone from setting up a place of worship on his own initiative.

What Jehoshaphat did more during his reign is written down by Jehu, Hanani's son. This prophet described the history of Jehoshaphat's kingdom and works, from beginning to end. This description is not part of Holy Scripture, but is included in the book describing the lives of the kings of Israel. It is not inconceivable that on the day we are all revealed before the judgment seat of Christ (2Cor 5:10) it will also serve as testimony for the judgment of the life of Jehoshaphat.

Verses 35-37 | Another Wrong Alliance

35 After this Jehoshaphat king of Judah allied himself with Ahaziah king of Israel. He acted wickedly in so doing. 36 So he allied himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish, and they made the ships in Ezion-geber. 37 Then Eliezer the son of Dodavahu of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat saying, "Because you have allied yourself with Ahaziah, the LORD has destroyed your works." So the ships were broken and could not go to Tarshish.

It is as if the chronicler suddenly remembers an event from Jehoshaphat's later life which he also wants to mention. Of course this happens under the guidance of God's Spirit. Yet it is remarkable that the chronicler mentions this after he has completed his account of the life of Jehoshaphat. It shows that we can reach a moment when we can look back on a fulfilled life, but as long as we live there is a danger that we will fall into an old sin again.

The sad announcement is made of the third wrong alliance Jehoshaphat made (verse 35). After his military alliances, first with Ahab (2Chr 18:3) and later with Jehoram, the son of Ahab (2Chr 3:6-7), he now enters into a trade alliance with Ahaziah, the king of Israel. This Ahaziah is a man who acts wickedly in everything he does.

Jehoshaphat takes the initiative for a business relationship with this wicked man. He does so because he sees a gain in the alliance (verse 36). Together they make ships in Ezion-geber. According to his calculations, the

money involved in making the ships will not only be recouped, but will also generate a lot of profit. That will have been his expectation.

Jehoshaphat however calculated without calculating with the LORD. The LORD sends Eliezer to him with a prophecy. The prophet tells him that of all his calculations nothing will be left. His works will be broken by the LORD because of his alliance with the wicked Ahaziah. This alliance is a dishonor to the LORD. He must break this unequal yoke (2Cor 6:14). God's discipline comes over Jehoshaphat. The ships are shipwrecked even before they sail to Tarsis. As it were, they have only just been launched or they sink.

For us, it contains the lesson that we should not go together with the world for profit. This only results in losses for both parties.

2 Chronicles 21

Verses 1-7 | Jehoram King of Judah

1 Then Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David, and Jehoram his son became king in his place. 2 He had brothers, the sons of Jehoshaphat: Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azaryahu, Michael and Shephatiah. All these [were] the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel. 3 Their father gave them many gifts of silver, gold and precious things, with fortified cities in Judah, but he gave the kingdom to Jehoram because he was the firstborn. 4 Now when Jehoram had taken over the kingdom of his father and made himself secure, he killed all his brothers with the sword, and some of the rulers of Israel also. 5 Jehoram [was] thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. 6 He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab did (for Ahab's daughter was his wife), and he did evil in the sight of the LORD. 7 Yet the LORD was not willing to destroy the house of David because of the covenant which He had made with David, and since He had promised to give a lamp to him and his sons forever.

When Jehoshaphat died, he was buried with his fathers in the city of David, that is Jerusalem (verse 1). That the city is called “the city of David” reminds us to the kingship of David, the man after God’s heart, and to the promises of eternal kingship in the great Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jehoshaphat is succeeded by his son Jehoram, who reigns from 848-841 BC. Jehoshaphat has more sons (verse 2). However, they are first referred to as “brothers” of Jehoram. This relationship is therefore emphasized.

Jehoshaphat gave his sons wealth and fortified cities (verse 3). Rehoboam did something similar (2Chr 11:23). It is hard to say whether Jehoshaphat’s policy was sensible. It may have contributed to Jehoram, who gets the kingship from him because he is the eldest son, seeing them as a danger to the undermining of his power. After all, his brothers all have an area over which they have authority.

Jehoram is an evil man. When he has come on the throne, he first does all that is necessary to strengthen his position as king (verse 4; cf. 2Chr 23:1). To strengthen his position, he may have given people important posts to ensure their support in exercising and maintaining his power. He will have done it with the plan in mind to kill all his brothers, a plan he then executes.

After the murder of his brothers (cf. Jdg 9:5), he also kills a number of rulers. Except that he sees them as competitors that threaten him in the exercise of his power, it may be that these men fear the LORD and address Jehoram about his evil path. We read from his brothers that they are better than he (verse 13). Such voices are definitively silenced.

Authorities do everything to strengthen and maintain their position. They eliminate anyone they see as a threat to their position. People who act like Jehoram, do so because they expect that they themselves will be treated this way by others. They want to prevent that.

Jehoram is an adult man when he becomes king and commits these murders (verse 5). He has been on the throne for eight years. What he does is the same as the kings of Israel do. The cause of this is his marriage to a daughter of Ahab (verse 6). Through this, Jehoshaphat's house is connected to Ahab's house. The murders he commits show the influence that his wicked wife has on him, who also perform a massacre herself (2Chr 22:10). That woman has her murderousness not of a stranger, but of Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, who will have been closely involved in her upbringing (1Kgs 18:4; 19:2; 21:7-15).

Despite this monstrous marriage and its monstrous manifestations, the LORD did not destroy the house of David. The reason for this is the covenant He made with David (2Sam 23:5; 1Chr 17:12; Isa 55:3). Man's actions cannot destroy God's faithfulness.

Verses 8-11 | Rebellion of Edom and Libnah

8 In his days Edom revolted against the rule of Judah and set up a king over themselves. 9 Then Jehoram crossed over with his commanders and all his chariots with him. And he arose by night and struck down the Edomites who were surrounding him and the commanders of the chariots. 10 So Edom revolt-

ed against Judah to this day. Then Libnah revolted at the same time against his rule, because he had forsaken the LORD God of his fathers. 11 Moreover, he made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot and led Judah astray.

Unfaithfulness to the Lord always brings with it loss of power over enemies. We see that here too. Edom, who is subject to Judah, rebels against the authority of Judah and establishes his own kingdom (verse 8). Jehoram doesn't accept that. He tries to submit Edom to himself again (verse 9). He goes up against Edom and defeats them. However, the victory is not complete, because Edom continues to resist and has not been brought back entirely under the authority of Judah (verse 10).

Also Libnah, a priest city, withdraws from his power. The reason is: "Because he had forsaken the LORD God of his fathers." Possibly the priests revolted against this wicked king because he led the people to idolatry. Jehoram also makes high places (verse 11).

With this he goes further than his ancestors, of whom we read that they have not removed the high places. However, Jehoram not only lets idolatry exist, but even stimulates it, he encourages it. He causes the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the city which the LORD has chosen to make His Name dwell there, to play the harlot, which is idolatry (Exo 34:15-16). He seduces Judah to do that. This is outright rebellion against the LORD.

Verses 12-15 | A Letter From Elijah

12 Then a letter came to him from Elijah the prophet saying, "Thus says the LORD God of your father David, 'Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father and the ways of Asa king of Judah, 13 but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and have caused Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot as the house of Ahab played the harlot, and you have also killed your brothers, your own family, who were better than you, 14 behold, the LORD is going to strike your people, your sons, your wives and all your possessions with a great calamity; 15 and you will suffer severe sickness, a disease of your bowels, until your bowels come out because of the sickness, day by day.'"

Then Elijah suddenly appears on stage in a letter. Here Elijah must already have gone to heaven, an event described in 2 Kings (2Kgs 2:1,11). How

about a letter from him? It is a prophetic letter in which Elijah writes down events that have been announced to him by the LORD. The letter is handed over to Jehoram at the right time.

This letter from Elijah is noteworthy in the light of the area and the nature of his service. Elijah has served as a prophet in the ten tribes realm. That is the area of his service. The service he does through the letter is directed at the king of Judah and the situation there. His service has always been oral and now we read that he wrote something. It is the first time that we read of the writing of any prophet. It is a letter to this evil king.

The content of the letter does fit in with Elijah's service, which was not only, but nevertheless mainly a service of judgment. The letter contains a word from the LORD, Who presents himself to Jehoram as "the LORD God of your father David". The remembrance to David shows the great contrast between David and Jehoram. This way of presenting also makes it clear that the LORD is not the God of Jehoram.

The content of the letter is the announcement of judgment with its reasons. First the different reasons are given:

1. Jehoram did not go in the ways of his father Jehoshaphat and in the ways of his grandfather Asa;
2. on the contrary, he has gone in the ways of the kings of Israel;
3. he has caused the people to play the harlot as the house of Ahab has done with Israel;
4. moreover, he has killed his brothers, his own family, people who are better than him.

The judgment is in accordance with his grave sins. The list is detailed and leaves nothing to be desired in terms of clarity. There will come great calamity about

1. his people,
2. his children,
3. his women,
4. his property and
5. himself.

He himself will suffer severe sickness, a disease of his bowels. That disease will be so severe that his bowels come out because of the sickness. That will result in his death.

So first Jehoram is struck in what surrounds him, what he cherishes, where he sees his importance reflected, what serves his honor. Then he is taken out of this life by a two-year lasting terrible sickness.

Verses 16-17 | The Discipline of the LORD

16 Then the LORD stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines and the Arabs who bordered the Ethiopians; 17 and they came against Judah and invaded it, and carried away all the possessions found in the king's house together with his sons and his wives, so that no son was left to him except Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons.

The word of the LORD to and over Jehoram is fulfilled; the judgment comes. The judgment comes first from outside, but comes from the LORD. The LORD stirs up an enemy against Judah (verse 16). The LORD stirs up the spirit, which means that He stimulates their spirit and sets them in motion to go up against Judah. He uses peoples who do not know Him and do not want to serve Him, and makes them tools to carry out His will. For this he brings together two peoples who live far apart. The Philistines live nearby, it is a neighboring country; the Arabs live on the border of Ethiopia.

The man who has killed his brothers to enjoy everything alone, now experiences that his sons and wives are killed (verse 17). However, God keeps the lamp burning even now (verse 7), no matter how weak the glow may be. The youngest son of Jehoram, Jehoahaz, remains. Jehoahaz is the same person as Ahaziah (2Chr 22:1), where in the name the prefix becomes the suffix, without changing the meaning of the name.

Verses 18-20 | Death of Jehoram

18 So after all this the LORD smote him in his bowels with an incurable sickness. 19 Now it came about in the course of time, at the end of two years, that his bowels came out because of his sickness and he died in great pain. And his people made no fire for him like the fire for his fathers. 20 He was thirty-two

years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years; and he departed with no one's regret, and they buried him in the city of David, but not in the tombs of the kings.

"So after all this", that is to say after all the misfortune by means of enemies, the LORD strikes Jehoram with a sickness that runs slowly and for which no cure is possible (verse 18). As Elijah has predicted, it is a disease of its bowels. The word used here for 'disease' is only found in four other texts (Deu 29:22; Psa 103:3; Jer 14:18; 16:4). The chronicler, as it were, holds us up as a mirror the end of a wicked man. In the quoted texts in which the word 'disease' appears, Psalm 103:3 lights up comfortingly. If we suffer from such a disease and then resort to the LORD, He will provide a solution.

The slowness of the disease can be seen as a proof of God's grace, giving him time to repent. Asa also fell ill at the end of his life (2Chr 16:12). Asa is a man who is faithful in his heart, but has gone the wrong *way* at the end of his life. This is illustrated by the fact that he gets sick at his *feet*. Jehoram is a man who is unfaithful in his *heart*. That is illustrated by the disease of his bowels. He who, so to speak 'in his bowels' has had no compassion for his brothers, is struck in his bowels. During his sickness he does not receive any support from women or children, because they have all been killed. He also receives no pity from the people.

No one has appreciated him during his life, no one regrets him when he dies. He goes, still quite young and after a rather short reign. This is a dark page in the history of God's people in Judah. There will be a few more of these dark pages, until Joash becomes king and the darkness fades away a little.

2 Chronicles 22

Introduction

The consequences of Jehoram's marriage to Athaliah can be seen in the history of the people, which we have before us in these chapters. These are consequences that cannot be undone. In the genealogy of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 1 three names are missing: Ahaziah, Joash and Amaziah (Mt 1:8). This are the three generations born out of Athaliah.

Verses 1-9 | Ahaziah King of Judah

1 Then the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah, his youngest son, king in his place, for the band of men who came with the Arabs to the camp had slain all the older [sons]. So Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah began to reign. 2 Ahaziah [was] twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Athaliah, the granddaughter of Omri. 3 He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counselor to do wickedly. 4 He did evil in the sight of the LORD like the house of Ahab, for they were his counselors after the death of his father, to his destruction. 5 He also walked according to their counsel, and went with Jehoram the son of Ahab king of Israel to wage war against Hazael king of Aram at Ramoth-gilead. But the Arameans wounded Joram. 6 So he returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which they had inflicted on him at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael king of Aram. And Ahaziah, the son of Jehoram king of Judah, went down to see Jehoram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick. 7 Now the destruction of Ahaziah was from God, in that he went to Joram. For when he came, he went out with Jehoram against Jehu the son of Nimshi, whom the LORD had anointed to cut off the house of Ahab. 8 It came about when Jehu was executing judgment on the house of Ahab, he found the princes of Judah and the sons of Ahaziah's brothers ministering to Ahaziah, and slew them. 9 He also sought Ahaziah, and they caught him while he was hiding in Samaria; they brought him to Jehu, put him to death and buried him. For they said, "He is the son of Jehoshaphat, who sought the LORD with all his heart." So there was no one of the house of Ahaziah to retain the power of the kingdom.

When Jehoram died, the inhabitants of Jerusalem make the youngest son of Jehoram, Ahaziah, king in his place (verse 1). He is the only candidate. His older brothers were all killed by the band that came with the Arabs (2Chr 21:16-17).

Three times there has been a slaughter of members of the royal family, the royal house of David. First Jehoram killed all his brothers after he himself had taken the reign into his own hands as the eldest son (2Chr 21:4). Then all the sons of Jehoram are murdered by Philistines and Arabs (2Chr 21:16-17). Only Ahaziah – in the previous chapter he is called Jehoahaz – the youngest son, remains, which is repeated here. The third slaughter we see later in this chapter. There the brothers of Joash are murdered, a murder that only Joash escapes from (verses 10-11). This means three slaughters with one exception each. This is because of the lamp God promised to always keep burning in the house of David.

The age of Ahaziah mentioned here (verse 2) is a transcription error. His father Jehoram is forty when he dies (2Chr 21:20). Then Ahaziah can hardly be forty-two. In the same history in 2 Kings it says that he is twenty-two when he becomes king (2Kgs 8:26). He reigns for only one year. During that one year his wicked mother, whose name is mentioned here, Athaliah, is his counselor (verse 3). Then nothing good can come.

Athaliah is the daughter of Ahab (2Chr 21:6). The fact that she is called “the granddaughter of Omri” here, shows all the more the malice of her performance, in which there is no respect for the LORD at all. Omri is the father of Ahab and the founder of a wicked reign that through his son has developed further in wickedness. He is the inventor of a religion without God that has been practiced by Ahab, as the prophet Micaiah tells the people (Mic 6:16a). Athaliah is a fervent supporter of Omri’s statutes and very diligent in performing those statutes.

Ahaziah, through his upbringing, is completely imbued with the wicked atmosphere of the house of Ahab. During his upbringing he was given all the elements to allow him to continue on his evil path. It has deformed his mind. When he is in power, his mother does not stop giving him instructions. On the contrary, she smells the power. Not only his mother, but also the members of Ahab’s house give him evil advice (verse 4). Everything

they whisper to him is to his ruin. For example, Ahaziah has been surrounded by evil people who let him tumble down on the way of and to destruction.

On their advice, Ahaziah commits himself to his uncle Jehoram in his fight against the Syrians (verse 5). Following this advice leads to his destruction (verse 4). Jehoram is wounded in the fight against the Syrians, in which he is defeated (verse 6). Jehoram then goes to Jezreel to heal. When Ahaziah hears about it, he visits him. When Jehoram is restored, Ahaziah connects again with Jehoram, now to meet Jehu together with him (verse 7).

Jehu is the man anointed by the LORD to exterminate the house of Ahab. The history of Jehu is described in 2 Kings 9-10. Ahaziah will be dragged into ruin because of his ties with Ahab's house. He has bound himself to a wicked man and will share in the judgment of that wicked man. This is a warning to us that we do not engage in religious wickedness. If we do, we will share in the plagues that have been predicted about it (Rev 18:4).

That Ahaziah goes with Jehoram is "from God". We see here that God is above the events. He uses the self-willed actions of man to carry out His intentions. Thus He brings together the object of His anger and the means of the exercise of His anger. First of all, Jehu executes judgment on the house of Ahab (verse 8). Then he goes in search of Ahazia, who hides in Samaria (verse 9). Because of the good memory of Jehoshaphat his (grand) son Ahaziah gets a place in the grave.

The final line states that after Ahaziah's death no direct succession is possible, because there is nobody in his house who is powerful enough to reign. This notice is the introduction to the next section, in which we are told that there is still a successor, but one that is not yet able to reign (verses 10-12).

The end of Ahaziah as described (verse 9), does not resemble the way Ahaziah ends according to the historiography in 2 Kings (2Kgs 9:27). These are two different stories. The key is that the chronicler, writing after the exile, does not write about the city of Samaria, but about the entire landscape of Samaria. We must first read the story of 2 Kings and then the story in 2 Chronicles.

Verses 10-12 | Slaughter by Athaliah; Joash Saved

10 Now when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she rose and destroyed all the royal offspring of the house of Judah. 11 But Jehoshabeath the king's daughter took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons who were being put to death, and placed him and his nurse in the bedroom. So Jehoshabeath, the daughter of King Jehoram, the wife of Jehoiada the priest (for she was the sister of Ahaziah), hid him from Athaliah so that she would not put him to death. 12 He was hidden with them in the house of God six years while Athaliah reigned over the land.

When Ahaziah is dead, Athaliah kills “all the royal offspring of the house of Judah” (verse 1). The murderousness of Athaliah must have focused mainly on the sons of her son Ahaziah. After all, there is not much else to eradicate, given the two previous slaughters. That she is out to kill even her own grandchildren, proves once again that she is a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. She wants to have the power herself and strengthen herself against Jehu to avenge himself against him. All this is the result of the marriage connection Jehoshaphat arranged between his son and the daughter of Ahab (2Chr 18:1).

Then the miracle of God's grace happens. He has Joash, who is a baby, rescued by his aunt Jehoshabeath (verse 11). Jehoshabeath is a daughter of Jehoram, but of another mother. She is a special woman. Twice she is referred to as the daughter of the king, while she is also “the wife of Jehoiada the priest”. We can say that she is a ‘royal-priestly’ woman. It gives her a great dignity which makes her far superior to the pretentious person Athaliah. Jehoshabeath is out for salvation, Athaliah is out for destruction. Jehoshabeath serves God's people, Athaliah serves herself.

There is another God-fearing woman who, together with Jehoshabeath, withstands the wicked woman Athaliah. That is the nurse of Joash. Joash is still so little, that the nurse has to come along to feed and care for him in secret. What an important task this unknown woman, whose name we do not even know, gets!

Joash is raised in the temple for six years (verse 12). Like Samuel, from his earliest existence he has been in a place where God is present more than anywhere else, and he is formed by the atmosphere that prevails there.

Unlike Samuel, Joash lives six years in the deepest secrecy of the temple. No one knows that there is another descendant of David's house alive. The thought that there is no one left of David's house must be a great trial for the faithful for six years.

Joash passed through death, as it were, because he is kept hidden. The time of the apparition comes and then he starts to reign, along with Jehoiada, the priest. Here we see a reference to the kingdom of peace. After being hidden with God, the Lord Jesus appears to establish His kingdom of peace (Col 3:3-4). Moses is also hidden for a time (Exo 2:2).

While Joash is hidden, Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel, reigns over the house of David. She is connected in name with God's people, but she is essentially a great enemy of God. We see that in the great Babylon of whom she is a picture. From Babylon we read that she sits as queen and rules over God's people (Revelation 17-18). Babylon does not tolerate opposition and does not live in the lack of the beloved (Rev 18:7). But it will not always remain like that.

2 Chronicles 23

Introduction

The history of Joash here is actually the history of Jehoiada. Jehoiada is the main character in this chapter. He must be over ninety years old here and a venerable appearance at his performance. When he dies, the appreciation for him turns out: he is buried with the kings (2Chr 24:16).

Verses 1-3 | The Covenant With the King

1 Now in the seventh year Jehoiada strengthened himself, and took captains of hundreds: Azariah the son of Jeroham, Ishmael the son of Johanan, Azariah the son of Obed, Maaseiah the son of Adaiah, and Elishaphat the son of Zichri, [and they entered] into a covenant with him. 2 They went throughout Judah and gathered the Levites from all the cities of Judah, and the heads of the fathers' [households] of Israel, and they came to Jerusalem. 3 Then all the assembly made a covenant with the king in the house of God. And Jehoiada said to them, "Behold, the king's son shall reign, as the LORD has spoken concerning the sons of David.

"The seventh year" (verse 1) is the year after the six years mentioned in the last verse of the previous chapter (2Chr 22:12). Joash has been hidden in the temple for six years. The time of his open performance to accept his kingship has come. During his being hidden two women, Jehoshabeath and the nurse, took care of Joash. Now that he will openly come forth as king, Jehoiada comes to the fore.

Jehoiada is a careful man. He keeps the boy hidden until the time is ripe to show him. Before that time, he strengthens his position. He begins by involving in a covenant the commanders over a hundred – the army officers, by whom he assures himself of the support of the army – and five named men. If we have a plan to do something for the Lord, it is also important to involve the right people. These are collaborators who share the same goal and who know themselves called by the Lord. Paul also makes careful choices about who he wants to take with him and who he does not want to take along on his missionary journeys.

The next step of Jehoiada is that he makes the five men mentioned travel around in Judah to call upon the Levites and the family heads to come to Jerusalem (verse 2). It will not be said that the call is to have a protest meeting. Maybe it has been said that it is to have a feast day. Such a thing will arouse the least suspicion in Athaliah.

If we know that the Lord has said something, it is enough to go in faith. A revival begins, just like here with Jehoiada, with a few, in a small circle, but who has or gets knowledge of the hidden Christ. The circle is getting bigger and bigger and many are involved in it – so there can be chaff under the wheat and the revival fades away again. After the commanders and five men follow the Levites, the family heads and all the assembly.

Then the whole gathered assembly enters into a covenant with the king (verse 3). This happens in the house of God, that is, before God's face. With the words "behold, the king's son" Jehoiada turns the eyes of all to Joash. He underlines his action with a reference to what the LORD Himself has said. It is not a selfish act, but in accordance with what "the LORD has spoken concerning the sons of David".

In this little boy lies the hope for the future. Christ is not of value either, yet He is "the hope of glory" (Col 1:27). As it was tried to kill Joash, but who escaped by "fleeing" into the house of the LORD, so it is tried to kill the Lord Jesus and He escaped by fleeing to Egypt. Then He grew up in secret, in the things of His Father, until the time of His public performance had come.

So it is with Joash. Until his open appointment as king he dwells "in the shelter of the Most High" and spends the night "in the shadow of the Almighty" (Psa 91:1). He dwells in his younger years "in the house of the Lord all the days" of his life (Psa 27:4). Let this also be our refuge and our life, for our "life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3).

Verses 4-11 | Joash Proclaimed King

4 This is the thing which you shall do: one third of you, of the priests and Levites who come in on the sabbath, [shall be] gatekeepers, 5 and one third [shall be] at the king's house, and a third at the Gate of the Foundation; and all the people [shall be] in the courts of the house of the LORD. 6 But let no one

enter the house of the LORD except the priests and the ministering Levites; they may enter, for they are holy. And let all the people keep the charge of the LORD. 7 The Levites will surround the king, each man with his weapons in his hand; and whoever enters the house, let him be killed. Thus be with the king when he comes in and when he goes out.” 8 So the Levites and all Judah did according to all that Jehoiada the priest commanded. And each one of them took his men who were to come in on the sabbath, with those who were to go out on the sabbath, for Jehoiada the priest did not dismiss [any of] the divisions. 9 Then Jehoiada the priest gave to the captains of hundreds the spears and the large and small shields which had been King David’s, which were in the house of God. 10 He stationed all the people, each man with his weapon in his hand, from the right side of the house to the left side of the house, by the altar and by the house, around the king. 11 Then they brought out the king’s son and put the crown on him, and [gave him] the testimony and made him king. And Jehoiada and his sons anointed him and said, “[Long] live the king!”

After the presentation of the king in a closed circle of insiders, the open presentation of the king must now take place. For this presentation Jehoiada also has a plan of approach and gives instructions (verse 4). He determines that three groups must be formed. One third of the priests and Levites must serve as doorkeepers. They must take the guard at the gates of the temple, where the king is hidden, to ward off all intruders.

Another third is to supervise the course of events relating to the palace, the future residence of the king (verse 5). The last third must be at the Gate of the Foundation. It is assumed that through this gate the king goes from his house to the temple. Finally, all the people who are in Jerusalem, possibly on the occasion of the proclaimed feast day, must stand “in the courts of the house of the LORD”.

Of all the people, according to the precepts of the LORD, no one may enter the temple (verse 6). Entering the temple is only allowed to the priests and Levites who serve, “for they are holy”, that is, they are separated from the people for that purpose. Also now, only those who form a holy priesthood may offer up sacrifices to God (1Pet 2:5).

The Levites, the servants of the priests, must protect the king (verse 7). They must be armed and have those weapons in their hands to be able to

use them directly to repel an attack on the king. They may not for a moment deviate from the king's side, "when he comes in and when he goes out". This is about going into the temple and coming out again from the temple. The life of the king is completely connected to the temple. He is God's representative, and in order to represent Him well, he must regularly seek His presence.

This assignment also applies to us. Each of us is not only a priest, but also a Levite. We must protect our Lord, Jesus Christ, from attacks on His Person. The weapons given in our hands are spiritual weapons (2Cor 10:4; Eph 6:10-17). We are good soldiers when we protect the interests of our Lord. For this it is necessary that we are and stay close to Him. To be close to Him we will have to be wherever He goes or stands, wherever He sends us or wherever He lets us stay.

The Levites and all Judah do exactly what Jehoiada commanded (verse 8). Obedience is of the utmost importance to truly serve the interests of the king. It is obedience that is connected with service on the sabbath. The rule is that there is one team on duty, while another team is off duty. In this case, Jehoiada has cancelled all leaves. The Levites who will serve and the Levites who will be relieved must remain ready.

With regard to the Lord Jesus, to us obedience is also of the utmost importance. In that obedience there is no time for leave, for there is a fight to fight for Christ. Here the word from Ecclesiastes 8 applies: "There is no discharge in the time of war" (Ecc 8:8). For us the sabbath speaks of the rest for our souls which the Lord Jesus has worked for us through His work on the cross (Mt 11:28-30). There must be inner rest in order to be able to obey and fight.

The weapons that Jehoiada hands over to the commanders are from the time of King David and come from the sanctuary (verse 9). For us, this means that we can only fight with weapons that have also been used by the Lord Jesus, of whom David is a picture. He used the Word of God to defeat the devil (Mt 4:1-10). The Word of God is the Word that has its home in the house of God, the dwelling place of God. When we read and study the Word of God, if our mind is good, we are in the sanctuary. There we learn through God's Spirit the meaning of God's Word and how to use it.

After the instructions to the priests and the Levites regarding their place and task in view of the king, Jehoiada finally stations all the people, ... around the king" (verse 10). Every member of the people is in contact with the king and every other member. They also each have their weapons in hand, ready for immediate use. The safety cordon stands for the full width of the house. The arrangement is such that they have an eye on the altar and on the house.

This attitude shows us how important each member of the people of God is for the protection of the king. We can apply this to the church and its members. We have to be "united" (1Cor 1:10), no member should be missing or neglecting his task (1Cor 12:14-19). Each member must be able to use the spiritual weapons made available to him.

Together they must stand before the whole house of God, that is the church of the living God, to defend the truth of it. In that house is the Lord Jesus, "the mystery of godliness" (1Tim 3:15-16). In doing so, we must keep an eye on the Lord's Table, of which the altar is a picture, while also keeping an eye on the house, the whole church (1Cor 10:16-18).

When all the preparations have been made and each has taken his place, the great moment is there that the king is presented to the whole people (verse 11). The crown is put on Joash that gives him royal dignity and symbolizes his power over the people. He also receives "the testimony" in his hands, which is a copy of the law. Every king must have this to attune his reign to it (Deu 17:18). The law designates his dependence and submission. Authority and power are exercised in God's mind only when it happens in dependence on and obedience to Him. After that, Jehoiada and his sons – Jehoiada involved his family in this event – anoint Joash king.

For us it is a matter of acknowledging the Lord Jesus as Lord. We are made a kingdom over which He reigns. To behave royally we must read the Bible (Rev 1:3). It tells us what the Lord Jesus expects of us. Then we will also be preserved for arrogant and autonomous action. It is important that we involve our children in our acknowledging of the Lord Jesus as Lord. If that is our desire, we will give them God's Word as young as possible to become familiar with it.

Verses 12-15 | Athaliah Put to Death

12 When Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she came into the house of the LORD to the people. 13 She looked, and behold, the king was standing by his pillar at the entrance, and the captains and the trumpeters [were] beside the king. And all the people of the land rejoiced and blew trumpets, the singers with [their] musical instruments leading the praise. Then Athaliah tore her clothes and said, "Treason! Treason!" 14 Jehoiada the priest brought out the captains of hundreds who were appointed over the army and said to them, "Bring her out between the ranks; and whoever follows her, put to death with the sword." For the priest said, "Let her not be put to death in the house of the LORD." 15 So they seized her, and when she arrived at the entrance of the Horse Gate of the king's house, they put her to death there.

Athaliah hears the sound of the cheers of the people for the just anointed king (verse 12). She goes for the sound and comes to the people in the house of the LORD, for there everything is happening so far. The revival that is going on starts there. The opponents are also going there. So she sees what is going on, who it is about, where he stands, who is involved, and how they express themselves (verse 13).

Her reaction to her observations is that she tears her clothes. She does not do this because she is convinced of her sins in her conscience, but because she has lost her power. Her exclamation "Treason! Treason!" brings out how she is inwardly. She describes what happens as high treason.

If there is a revival in our lives, if we subject our lives completely to the authority of the Lord Jesus and honor Him again, we can count on the interest of our adversaries. They do not want to share it, but see it as treason. The calling of 'Treason!' is the typical reaction of religious men and politicians who do not want to give up any of their power when they see that others give themselves completely to the Lord and want to do obediently what He says. We can notice such reactions in personal lives as well as in the life of a church.

We can think of not participating in all kinds of good actions in the world and in the church and point to our submission to the Lord as a motive for this. Of course people who do not have the Spirit cannot understand this. They see as us traitors, because they think that a Christian should work for

those good things. We do not have to feel obliged because of their attitude to participate or to donate. The Lord must be our Client and not a charity organization.

Jehoiada orders to put Athaliah to death (verse 14). However, this must not happen in the house of the LORD. With this house she hasn't had any bond in her life. That connection may not be there in her death either. She is seized in the king's house that she has presumptuously occupied and there she is killed (verse 15). This has put an end to the reign of this wicked woman who claimed this reign for herself at the expense of the lives of many.

Verses 16-21 | Service to God Restored

16 Then Jehoiada made a covenant between himself and all the people and the king, that they would be the LORD's people. 17 And all the people went to the house of Baal and tore it down, and they broke in pieces his altars and his images, and killed Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars. 18 Moreover, Jehoiada placed the offices of the house of the LORD under the authority of the Levitical priests, whom David had assigned over the house of the LORD, to offer the burnt offerings of the LORD, as it is written in the law of Moses — with rejoicing and singing according to the order of David. 19 He stationed the gatekeepers of the house of the LORD, so that no one would enter [who was] in any way unclean. 20 He took the captains of hundreds, the nobles, the rulers of the people and all the people of the land, and brought the king down from the house of the LORD, and came through the upper gate to the king's house. And they placed the king upon the royal throne. 21 So all of the people of the land rejoiced and the city was quiet. For they had put Athaliah to death with the sword.

When the pretentious woman is killed, first a covenant is made (verse 16). Jehoiada is taking the initiative. It is a covenant between the LORD on the one hand and all the people and the king on the other hand. In this covenant the people and the king commit themselves “that they would be the LORD's people”. Then the idols are torn down and they kill Mattan, the priest of Baal, at the place where he offered to the idols (verse 17). It is not possible to recognize the king in his rights and God not. Therefore, she who wanted to be queen is killed in favor of the true king, the idols

are torn down in favor of the true God, and the imitation priest is killed in favor of the true priests.

When all counterfeiting has been eradicated, there is room for true service to God (verse 18). Now sacrifices can be made “as it is written in the law of Moses”. To that end, Jehoiada reinstated the offices to do that service. He dedicates the care of the temple to the priests so that they may bring sacrifices. The main objective is to offer the burnt offerings of the LORD. The burnt offerings are made “with rejoicing and singing” i.e. with joyful songs. This is done by the Levites, who follow “the order of David” and do not work according to their own insight.

It shows us that a true revival is centered around Christ and that it is about presenting Him to God as a true burnt offering. For us, this is the service of worship, in which we worship the Father “in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23), which means in a spiritual manner and in accordance with the truth of God’s Word. There are revivals that bring dedication, or interest in the Word. However, here it is about worship. Unfortunately, Christians in general do understand little what this means.

Jehoiada also makes sure that nobody enters the temple who is unclean (verse 19). He stations gatekeepers for this purpose. There must be supervision and discipline. On the one hand there is joy and song in the sanctuary and on the other hand there is an awareness of God’s holiness. What Jehoiada does is an indictment of the often light-hearted way in which Christians today can participate in the Supper in many groups. Without any investigation one can participate in the Supper in many places, because one leaves this to no more than the own responsibility of the participant. It is not thought that the Supper is celebrated at the Lord’s Table. The Table is the Lord’s Table. He decides who may participate and who may not.

Then it is time for the accession to the throne (verse 20). A large and diverse group is taken by Jehoiada to the house of the LORD, which until then was the residence of the king. The whole company is united, because they all have the same goal. It’s about giving the king the place where he belongs: the king’s throne. If all believers today have that goal in relation to the Lord Jesus, they will also go up together harmoniously.

When the king has taken his place on the throne, all of the people of the land rejoice (verse 21). The city has peace after Athaliah is killed. So there will be peace and joy when we judge evil and separate ourselves from religious corruption because we have given the Lord Jesus the place on the throne of our lives.

2 Chronicles 24

Introduction

Joash' government clearly shows two parts. These two parts show the opposite situation. Both parts show that Joash has no independent relationship with the LORD, but is influenced by advisers in his direct environment. The first part of his reign (verses 1-16) is characterized by the influence of a good counselor, Jehoiada (verses 2,14). Then he does what is right in the eyes of the LORD. The second part of his reign (verses 17-27) is characterized by the bad influence of the princes of Judah (verse 17).

Verses 1-3 | Joash King of Judah

1 Joash [was] seven years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name [was] Zibiah from Beersheba. 2 Joash did what was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest. 3 Jehoiada took two wives for him, and he became the father of sons and daughters.

Joash is still very young when he becomes king, he is only seven years old (verse 1). The duration of his reign is forty years. The chronicler mentions his mother's name: Zibiah, which means 'gazelle'. He also mentions the place where she comes from: Beersheba, which is situated southerly. Zibiah will certainly have supported her son in advice and deed during the first years of his reign. But the biggest influence on the reign of Joash has Jehoiada. Joash does, as long as he is under the good guidance of Jehoiada, what is right in the sight of the LORD (verse 2).

Even when it comes to Joash' marriage, Jehoiada arranges everything (verse 3). Jehoiada takes two women for him. This is the custom of the time, but it is not the original plan of God Who already established monogamous marriage at creation. The motif of Jehoiada with the two wives is not wrong. He wants the royal line to continue. That happens, because Joash conceives sons and daughters with his wives.

Verses 4-11 | Joash Wants to Restore the Temple

4 Now it came about after this that Joash decided to restore the house of the LORD. 5 He gathered the priests and Levites and said to them, "Go out to

the cities of Judah and collect money from all Israel to repair the house of your God annually, and you shall do the matter quickly." But the Levites did not act quickly. 6 So the king summoned Jehoiada the chief [priest] and said to him, "Why have you not required the Levites to bring in from Judah and from Jerusalem the levy [fixed by] Moses the servant of the LORD on the congregation of Israel for the tent of the testimony?" 7 For the sons of the wicked Athaliah had broken into the house of God and even used the holy things of the house of the LORD for the Baals. 8 So the king commanded, and they made a chest and set it outside by the gate of the house of the LORD. 9 They made a proclamation in Judah and Jerusalem to bring to the LORD the levy [fixed by] Moses the servant of God on Israel in the wilderness. 10 All the officers and all the people rejoiced and brought in their levies and dropped [them] into the chest until they had finished. 11 It came about whenever the chest was brought in to the king's officer by the Levites, and when they saw that there was much money, then the king's scribe and the chief priest's officer would come, empty the chest, take it, and return it to its place. Thus they did daily and collected much money.

It is nice to read that Joash' heart goes out to the house of the LORD already in his younger years (verse 4). He lived in it for six years and knows the house from the inside like no other. The impressions a child gains up to the age of six largely determine his further development. In the course of time, God's house has decayed and Joash wants to restore it, that is to say restore it to its original state.

We can learn from this for the local church where we must also have an eye for decay. This decay can take place by the creeping in of individuals and teachings or worldliness that weaken the functioning of the church. We can think, for example, of a weakening of fellowship with each other, of a change in the behavior of believers through conforming to this world, of an adaptation of the doctrine of God's Word to what the members of the church like to hear, of the introduction of worldly elements into the church.

Joash orders the priests and the Levites to go and collect money in the cities of Judah and in all Israel (verse 5). He wants to use this money to restore the house of "your God". By speaking of "your God", he points out to priests and the Levites the responsibility they have towards God.

They owe it to God because they must perform the priesthood and Levite service for Him in His house. Joash also wants them to do quickly what he said.

However, we read that the Levites do not act quickly. One reason may be that they are not really involved in the temple service with their hearts. It is possible that their interest in it has weakened over the years. We will not commit ourselves to God's house, to us the church of God, if this house does not have the deep interest of our hearts. We will not even do it if others remind us of our responsibilities.

Joash calls Jehoiada to account. He accuses him of negligence. Jehoiada, according to Joash, has been negligent in ensuring that the Levites "bring in ... the levy [fixed by] Moses the servant of the LORD" (verse 6; Exo 30:16). It remains to be seen whether this reproach is justified. What Joash wants is commendable. But the way in which he has worked raises questions. He has not sent the Levites with an appeal to Moses. All he has told them is that they need to collect money to restore the house of God. A heart that is not fully involved in a work for the Lord will not quickly be tempted to ask others to give for that work.

That his accusation may not be justified can also be inferred from the silence of the spiritual-minded Jehoiada. There is no defense to the criticism. This is not weakness or admitting that the saying is true, but rather speaks of spiritual strength. Silence on unjustified accusations often says more than speaking. We also see this silence with the Lord Jesus in all the accusations made against Him.

Joash says why the house of the LORD has ended up in a state that necessitates restoration (verse 7). It is Athaliah's fault. She is the embodiment of wickedness. Political power exercised for its own sake will always see service to God as an abhorrent matter. That power will do everything in its power to destroy the service to God. Such an evil power is not only about neglecting the church, but it will attack the church and take away all that is valuable for the service to God.

An evil power dictates that "the holy things of the house of the LORD" will be used "for the Baals". We see this, for example, in the popular interpretation of the suffering of Christ, of which a Dutch Christian broadcasting

is making a spectacle disgusting to faith (The Passion). The same goes for the Matthäus-Passion where the members of the cabinet go because it is so impressively performed. Heart and conscience remain completely off the hook. Thus the holy things that stand in God's house, the church, central, are thrown like pearls before swine (Mt 7:6). The tearing consequences for the church need not be guessed, for they are perceptible to anyone who has enlightened eyes of the heart.

Then Joash starts a new action for the collection of money (verse 8). On his command a chest is made which is placed "outside by the gate of the house of the LORD". Then, this time with an appeal to the levy of Moses, a proclamation is made in Judah and Jerusalem to bring the money (verse 9). The response to this proclamation is very different from last time. All leaders and all people are happy to contribute to the restoration of the temple (verse 10). They all like to give and keep giving until the restoration work is completed.

The chest is supervised by the Levites (verse 11). Whenever there is much money in the chest, they take it to the king's officer. The scribe of the king and the chief priest's officer empty the chest. A representative of the king and a representative of the high priest are involved. The testimony of two persons confirms a matter (2Cor 13:1). It is important to be able to account reliably for the money collected (2Cor 8:20-21).

This is also about the combination of king and priest. There is a close relationship and cooperation between the two. We also see this with the Lord Jesus, the true King-Priest (Zec 6:13). After the money is taken out of the chest in this responsible way, the chest is taken up again and put back in place at the temple. In this way money is collected in abundance.

Verses 12-14 | The Restoration of the Temple

12 The king and Jehoiada gave it to those who did the work of the service of the house of the LORD; and they hired masons and carpenters to restore the house of the LORD, and also workers in iron and bronze to repair the house of the LORD. 13 So the workmen labored, and the repair work progressed in their hands, and they restored the house of God according to its specifications and strengthened it. 14 When they had finished, they brought the rest of the money

before the king and Jehoiada; and it was made into utensils for the house of the LORD, utensils for the service and the burnt offering, and pans and utensils of gold and silver. And they offered burnt offerings in the house of the LORD continually all the days of Jehoiada.

The king and Jehoiada – here again we see the close connection between king and priest – make the money available to those who do the restoration work (verse 12). The money is used to hire workers. Masons, carpenters, workers in iron and bronze are needed to restore the house of the LORD. They work closely together, while everyone does what their capacities are.

The Lord Jesus, as the King-Priest, is busy giving us the means to build His house. The different workers who did the repair work point to the different tasks that believers have in building God's house. Masons we can see as a picture of evangelists. They bring living stones into the house of God. Carpenters work with wood. They give structure to God's house. In them we can see a picture of teachers. The workers in iron represent shepherds. They ensure that the believers remain well connected. The workers in bronze are busy with bronze. Bronze is a picture of God's righteousness. Workers in bronze can be seen as a picture of believers who help others to live in accordance with God's righteousness.

All these workers work with what is given to them by the king and Jehoiada (verse 13). It is nice to read that the repair work is progressing in their hands. The goal is to restore the house of God to its original state. To be able to work in this way, the workers must know what the original state is. Bringing God's house back to its original state also means that the house will be strengthened.

This also applies to all work that is done for the church. The blueprint of the church, and its local expression, is in the Word of God. We must consult God's Word when we work on the building of God's house. For us, working on God's house means showing fellow believers their position in Christ (Col 1:28-29) and that they are firmly established in Him (2Cor 1:21; Col 2:6-7).

After the repair work on the temple there appears to be money left (verse 14). That money is brought to the king and Jehoiada. Joash, probably on the advice of Jehoiada, makes all kinds of utensils out of it that can be used

for the service in the temple. As a result, as long as Jehoiada lives, “they offered burnt offerings in the house of the LORD continually”. Here we find the great goal of the restoration of God’s house: offering burnt offerings.

The restoration of God’s house with the result of offering burnt offerings suggests to us that the service of worship is once again central in the church. That is not programmed worship with song and music led by a worship leader, but worship led by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit wants to direct the heart of every member of the church to the Lord Jesus Who is the true burnt offering for God.

The burnt offering is the sacrifice that is for God in its entirety (Lev 1:9,13). God desires that the believers come as a church with burnt offerings. Jehoiada is a picture of the Lord Jesus Who is the “great priest over the house of God” (Heb 10:21). Through Him we may approach God in the sanctuary to bring our sacrifices (Heb 10:19-22).

Verses 15-16 | The Death of Jehoiada

15 Now when Jehoiada reached a ripe old age he died; he was one hundred and thirty years old at his death. 16 They buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done well in Israel and to God and His house.

Jehoiada’s life comes to an end. He does not die from a disease or an accident, but from old age (verse 15). He has reached the advanced age of one hundred and thirty years. Until his old age he was active in serving God and His house (verse 16). His service has been a blessing to Israel. He, who was a priest, behaved royally at the same time. Therefore he is “buried ... among the kings”. That they bury him there is proof of the respect of Joash and the people for him.

How are we known to the believers with whom we form a local church? Can be said of us that we have done good in the church? Good deeds must be done in the first place for God. He sees our whole life. Is that directed toward Him? Directly connected to this is doing good with regard to His house, that is the church, that are His own. Doing good to His house means that we behave in His house according to the standards He has given for it in His Word (1Tim 3:15).

Verses 17-18 | Joash Falls to Idolatry

17 But after the death of Jehoiada the officials of Judah came and bowed down to the king, and the king listened to them. 18 They abandoned the house of the LORD, the God of their fathers, and served the Asherim and the idols; so wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their guilt.

After each revival, lukewarmness follows. We see that here too. When the inspirer Jehoiada has died, Joash deviates from the way of the LORD. Jehoiada's influence has been decisive for his actions. Now that he has lost his grip and compass with Jehoiada's death, he is rudderless. Unfortunately, he has no personal contact with the LORD. Joash walked more through the faith of Jehoiada than through his own faith. We can make an application for ourselves of this with regard to our children. If we do not teach them to live with the Lord in an independent relationship with Him, they will – if they have to stand on their own two feet – turn their backs on the Lord.

Through the death of Jehoiada, a spiritual vacuum has been created with Joash. That void is filled by the officials of Judah (verse 17). They come to him and bow hypocritically down before him. They don't want to help him to continue reigning according to God's will, but they want to serve their own interests. Joash listens to their flattery. The king and the officials, who had just been busy restoring the temple, leave the LORD and His house and start to serve the idols (verse 18). Perhaps the officials have talked to him and said that the old service of the LORD is not sufficient and that serving "the Asherim and the idols" gives a much better feeling. Joash began, so to speak, by the Spirit, but ends up by the flesh (Gal 3:3).

God's answer to the deviation of Joash and the people does not fail. The people are guilty before Him. Because of this guilt God's pleasure no longer rests on Judah and Jerusalem, but now there comes wrath upon them.

Verses 19-22 | Joash Kills the Prophet of God

19 Yet He sent prophets to them to bring them back to the LORD; though they testified against them, they would not listen. 20 Then the Spirit of God came on Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest; and he stood above the people and said to them, "Thus God has said, 'Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD and do not prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, He

has also forsaken you.” 21 So they conspired against him and at the command of the king they stoned him to death in the court of the house of the LORD. 22 Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness which his father Jehoiada had shown him, but he murdered his son. And as he died he said, “May the LORD see and avenge!”

Before God actually makes them feel His wrath, which rests on them, He first sends them prophets in His grace (verse 19; cf. Jer 7:25). Through His prophets He wants to call them to return to Him. They warn of the consequences if the people persist in their deviation from Him. Unfortunately Joash don't listen.

One of the prophets is specially mentioned (verse 20). It is Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada. Zechariah is going to stand on an elevation to be better heard by the people (cf. Neh 8:5). That is why he also stands as a loner against the people. He is a true Antipas – meaning ‘against all’ –, who also testified as a loner and just like Zechariah had to pay with death for his testimony (Rev 2:13).

Zechariah presents to the people their sins without fuss. He tells them that their idolatry will not bring them the prosperity they expect. Their actions have no blessing because they have forsaken the LORD and He has had to forsake them. They are now on their way without Him. So how could there be prosperity for them?

Joash even gives the command to kill the man who brings him the words of God with stones (verse 21; Heb 11:37). Here a holy man (a priest and prophet) is killed in a holy place (the temple) with a holy message (a word of God) as if he were a blasphemer. How far have the king and his people deviated from the LORD.

Joash places himself in line with the wicked Ahab who also had a righteous man, Naboth, stoned (1Kgs 21:8-13). Zechariah is stoned in the court of the house of the LORD to which Joash has been so dedicated the first part of his reign. The place of worship is smeared with blood.

God's Spirit clearly indicates that this stoning is not only a crime but also an act of the greatest ingratitude (verse 22a; cf. Jdg 8:35). The favor that Zechariah's father, Jehoiada, has bestowed on him is gone from his memory.

If we forget to be thankful for all that the Lord has given us in our brothers and sisters, we may become their murderers spiritually if they point out our failures. Ungratefulness is one of the characteristics of the last days, that is the time in which we live (2Tim 3:1-3). It is a time when the Word of God is ignored by many.

When Zechariah dies, he calls that the LORD will avenge (verse 22b). This call for revenge fits the Old Testament. This call will also sound after the rapture of the church (Rev 6:9-11). In our time the believer fits a call for grace and forgiveness for his persecutors and those who torture them (Acts 7:59-60a).

In His speech against the Pharisees, the Lord Jesus refers to the murder of Zechariah (Mt 23:34-35; Lk 11:51). In that speech, He mentions the first and last murder of believers in the Old Testament as the beginning and the end of a long series of bloodshed of the righteous. The first murder is that of Abel, the last one is that of Zechariah. It is true that Zechariah is the last believer to be murdered in the Old Testament. We must remember that the book of Chronicles in the Hebrew Bible is the last book of the Bible and not, as in our Bibles, the book of Malachi.

Verses 23-24 | Judgment Executed on Joash

23 Now it happened at the turn of the year that the army of the Arameans came up against him; and they came to Judah and Jerusalem, destroyed all the officials of the people from among the people, and sent all their spoil to the king of Damascus. 24 Indeed the army of the Arameans came with a small number of men; yet the LORD delivered a very great army into their hands, because they had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers. Thus they executed judgment on Joash.

God's response to the call of his dying servant Zechariah for revenge is soon. At the turn of the year, the army of the Arameans or Syrians comes up against Joash (verse 23; cf. 2Sam 11:1). Syria's army even penetrates so far that they enter Jerusalem and destroy all the officials of the people. Thereby the people have become rudderless. The spoils that the Syrians rob on their campaign are sent to their lord, the king of Damascus.

The Syrians are supreme in their fight against Judah and Jerusalem. That is not because they are so numerous. On the contrary, they only have a small army (verse 24). Yet they achieve great successes because the LORD fights against His people. He shows Himself the adversary of His people because they have forsaken Him.

Previous kings – Abijah, Asa and Jehoshaphat – were not defeated, although Judah was facing a mighty army (2Chr 13:3; 14:11; 20:20). Here with Joash, however, the LORD gives the victory to Syria that “with a small number of men” has come against a mighty Judah. A mighty Judah is defeated by a small army, because the LORD gives them into the hand of their enemies (Lev 26:17a). Serving or forsaking the LORD is such a serious matter, that all military numbers are completely meaningless.

The Syrians are the disciplinary rod in God’s hand to execute “judgment on Joash”. The word for ‘executed judgment’ is also used for the judgments that have come concerning Egypt to persuade Pharaoh to release God’s people from Egypt (Exo 6:5; 7:4; 12:12; Num 33:4). This shows the seriousness of the discipline that the LORD brings over the leaders of His people. He brings here the judgments with which He has struck ungodly Egypt over His people.

Verses 25-27 | The Death of Joash

25 When they had departed from him (for they left him very sick), his own servants conspired against him because of the blood of the son of Jehoiada the priest, and murdered him on his bed. So he died, and they buried him in the city of David, but they did not bury him in the tombs of the kings. 26 Now these are those who conspired against him: Zabad the son of Shimeath the Ammonitess, and Jehozabad the son of Shimrith the Moabitess. 27 As to his sons and the many oracles against him and the rebuilding of the house of God, behold, they are written in the treatise of the Book of the Kings. Then Amaziah his son became king in his place.

The judgments were not only executed on the people, their leaders and their possessions, but also on Joash personally (verse 25). When the enemies depart, they leave Joash “very sick”, a sickness that is probably the result of serious injuries inflicted on him. With this the measure of God’s

discipline over him is not yet full. Two servants conspire against him and kill him, lying powerless on his sickbed. Joash is buried in the city of David, but not in the tombs of the kings, an honor he has given Jehoiada (verse 16).

The reason given for Joash' murder is "because of the blood of the son of Jehoiada the priest". It seems that of Jehoiada's sons Joash did not only kill Zechariah, but also other sons. The reason given does not mean that this has led the two killers to act. It means that God in His governmental ways allows the murder as a retaliation for the blood that Joash shed. The two men will be justly punished for their crime (2Chr 25:3).

The names of the servants and their origins are mentioned (verse 26). They are two sons of foreign, although Israel-related, women. The Ammonites and Moabites are descendants of Lot (Gen 19:30-38), the nephew of Abraham. They have always been hostile to God's people. That Joash has accepted them as servants may be the consequence of serving their gods. Those who fall into the idolatry always bring elements into their home that are hostile to them and are out of their ruin.

The chronicler ends his description of Joash' life with a reference to some things "written in the treatise of the Book of the Kings" (verse 27). This book has not been preserved for us. What it says is about his sons, possibly who they are and how he dealt with them. It also concerns "the many oracles against him". One might think of the judgment prophecies of the LORD that are spoken against him. The last reference is to "the rebuilding of the house of God", in which we can nevertheless note a certain appreciation for what Joash has done for God's house.

Joash' life may have had a tragic course and a tragic end, but God's faithfulness remains. The son of Joash, Amaziah, becomes king instead of Joash, so God still keeps a lamp burning for David's house. The light is not yet extinguished.

2 Chronicles 25

Introduction

Pride comes before the fall. We see this with the next two kings, Amaziah – he reigns from 796-767 BC – and his son Uzziah (2Chr 26:16). Both kings begin good, but end evil, just like Joash. Both kings have great success and come to great power, which goes straight to their head. Success is the cause of their pride. As a result of their pride there is a lack of trust in the LORD, for the two cannot go together.

Verses 1-4 | Amaziah King of Judah

1 Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. 2 He did right in the sight of the LORD, yet not with a whole heart. 3 Now it came about as soon as the kingdom was firmly in his grasp, that he killed his servants who had slain his father the king. 4 However, he did not put their children to death, but [did] as it is written in the law in the book of Moses, which the LORD commanded, saying, "Fathers shall not be put to death for sons, nor sons be put to death for fathers, but each shall be put to death for his own sin."

The conspiracy to which Joash fell prey was against him and not against the royal family. That's why Amaziah succeeds his father without further ado (verse 1). He is twenty-five years old when he becomes king. The number of years he has ruled is, as usually happens, told to us right at the beginning. Amaziah has ruled for twenty-nine years. Also the chronicler, as he often does, mentions the name of his mother, Jehoaddan, and the place where she comes from, Jerusalem.

The life of Amaziah is summarized in one sentence: "He did right in the sight of the LORD, yet not with a whole heart" (verse 2). In this he resembles his father Joash (2Kgs 14:3). The first part of the sentence is positive. That is also said of his father Joash. With Joash it is then said that doing what is right in the eyes of the LORD is limited to the duration of the life of Jehoiaada. With Amaziah there is also a limitation, which is that he is not

dedicated with all his heart to the LORD (cf. 1Chr 29:19). The Lord asks our whole heart. Half or divided hearts lack what is due to Him. He wants us to be all for Him.

Amaziah needs some time to get used to his new position (verse 3). The sudden death of his father brings him suddenly to the throne. He will have watched the actions of the officials and their dealings with his father. Now that he himself is in power, he must learn to deal with them. He seems to have succeeded in getting the kingship firmly in his hands. This will certainly include the study of the law.

When he feels strong enough as king, he acts against his father's murderers and lets them kill. Those murderers are called "his servants". So he had to tolerate them for some time in his vicinity as his staff. All this time, however, he has not lost sight of the fact that these are his father's murderers. In their execution, he does not go beyond what the law says (verse 4). He only executes them because the LORD has commanded in the law of Moses that not the whole family should be cut off, but only the guilty should be killed (Deu 24:16; Jer 31:29-30; Eze 18:19-20).

It is also important for us to first reflect on our position as a believer and the responsibilities that go with it. That means we have to concentrate on God's Word. The knowledge of God's Word is necessary to make good decisions. When it comes to the condemnation of evil in the church, discipline over public evil has to be executed according to the norm of God's Word. However, it must also be righteous, in accordance with the seriousness of the offence and applicable only to the person concerned.

Verses 5-13 | God Has Power to Help

5 Moreover, Amaziah assembled Judah and appointed them according to [their] fathers' households under commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds throughout Judah and Benjamin; and he took a census of those from twenty years old and upward and found them to be 300,000 choice men, [able] to go to war [and] handle spear and shield. 6 He hired also 100,000 valiant warriors out of Israel for one hundred talents of silver. 7 But a man of God came to him saying, "O king, do not let the army of Israel go with you, for the LORD is not with Israel [nor with] any of the sons of Ephraim. 8 But if you do go, do [it], be strong for the battle; [yet] God will bring you down

before the enemy, for God has power to help and to bring down.” 9 Amaziah said to the man of God, “But what [shall we] do for the hundred talents which I have given to the troops of Israel?” And the man of God answered, “The LORD has much more to give you than this.” 10 Then Amaziah dismissed them, the troops which came to him from Ephraim, to go home; so their anger burned against Judah and they returned home in fierce anger. 11 Now Amaziah strengthened himself and led his people forth, and went to the Valley of Salt and struck down 10,000 of the sons of Seir. 12 The sons of Judah also captured 10,000 alive and brought them to the top of the cliff and threw them down from the top of the cliff, so that they were all dashed to pieces. 13 But the troops whom Amaziah sent back from going with him to battle, raided the cities of Judah, from Samaria to Beth-horon, and struck down 3,000 of them and plundered much spoil.

Amaziah proceeds to a military action which, as we will see later, is directed against Edom (verse 5; verse 11). The reason for this is not clear. Amaziah assembles Judah and appoints an army of the best men from twenty years old and upward (cf. Num 1:2-3). There appear to be 300,000 men who qualify and who can handle spear and shield. This is a considerable army, but it still does not reach to the armies of Asa and Jehoshaphat who had an army of 580,000 and more than 1,000,000 men respectively (2Chr 14:8; 17:14-16).

Perhaps Amaziah has those numbers in mind when assessing the size of his army. In any case, he is not convinced that he can defeat the Edomites with this army. Therefore he complements his army with mercenaries from the northern empire, for which he pays a hundred talents of silver (verse 6). In his calculations, however, there is no room for the LORD.

Although Amaziah does not count with the LORD, He in His goodness sends a prophet, a man of God, to him (verse 7; cf. 2Chr 16:7; 19:2). The name of the man of God is not given. His name doesn't matter, because it's about what he has to say. He warns Amaziah not to rely on the soldiers of Israel and not to take them with him. The reason is that “the LORD is not with Israel [nor with] any of the sons of Ephraim”. Because there is no place left for Him in the northern kingdom, He cannot be with them either. If we deny the Lord the first place in our lives, He cannot help us in what we do.

The man of God tells Amaziah that he is free to fight with Edom despite the warning, and use of the soldiers he hires (verse 8). If he wants to, he must do so. Then he must encourage himself to be strong in battle. But he must also know that he will lose the battle because God will bring him down before the enemy. For God has power to help, but if he refuses to use that power, God will prove His power by bringing him down.

Amaziah is almost convinced. The only question he still has is what about the money he has invested in this expedition (verse 9). To this question the man of God gives the beautiful and encouraging and also comforting answer: "The LORD has much more to give you than this." Amaziah may choose: loss of money or loss of the battle. The choice between these two possibilities is in reality the choice between fighting with or without the LORD. We may know that the Lord will pay double for all we leave for Him. Every loss to Him is amply compensated by Him. The only question is whether we trust Him in that promise.

Amaziah made his choice (verse 10). He wants to go out with the LORD and thus without the troops from Ephraim. He dismisses the mercenaries so they can go back home. We might think that the hired troops like that. They have their money (verse 6) and can, without having to do anything for it and therefore without the chance that they will be killed in battle, return home. It is not like that, however. They get angry at Judah that they have been sent away.

The question is answered and the choice is made. Through the words of the prophet Amaziah takes courage and leads his people away to the Valley of Salt to fight against Edom (verse 11). Nothing is said about the battle, but about the result is. That's all very well. Amaziah defeats the sons of Seir – those are the Edomites, named after the area where they live – 10,000 men. Another 10,000 are taken away as captives (verse 12). These prisoners are taken to the top of a cliff and thrown down from the top of the cliff. They are all dashed to pieces by it, by which, so to speak, their corrupt inner being comes out.

Edom or Esau (Gen 36:1) is a picture of sin, the old nature or flesh. Edom has always behaved as a merciless enemy of God's people, and will be judged for it. The whole of Obadiah's prophecy is devoted to this (Oba 1:1-

21). We cannot feel sorry for sin, but must judge it mercilessly. Scripture calls us to kill our members which are on earth (Col 3:5). This means for us that we must learn to judge ourselves (1Cor 11:31) and also to judge sin in the church (1Cor 5:13b).

Then the chronicler makes another comment about the mercenaries sent home by Amaziah (verse 13). We have seen that these men have become furious about their sending away (verse 10). From what we read now, we might conclude that the cause of their burning anger is that by sending them away they will miss a great booty. They are therefore going to get the loss of profit and compensate themselves by attacking the cities of Judah. There they kill a large number of men and plunder much spoil.

How could such people be a help to God's affairs? People with selfish motives can never be a help in the struggle that children of God have to fight. They inflict losses on Amazia. We may wonder what about the LORD's promise that He has more to give than Amaziah lost by sending the mercenaries away. That promise will be fulfilled. The LORD has also given Amaziah a great victory. Yet there is no complete trust in the LORD, as the sequel shows.

Verses 14-16 | Amaziah and the Idols

14 Now after Amaziah came from slaughtering the Edomites, he brought the gods of the sons of Seir, set them up as his gods, bowed down before them and burned incense to them. 15 Then the anger of the LORD burned against Amaziah, and He sent him a prophet who said to him, "Why have you sought the gods of the people who have not delivered their own people from your hand?" 16 As he was talking with him, the king said to him, "Have we appointed you a royal counselor? Stop! Why should you be struck down?" Then the prophet stopped and said, "I know that God has planned to destroy you, because you have done this and have not listened to my counsel."

When Amaziah has defeated the Edomites, he returns home (verse 14). He takes the gods of the defeated enemies with him. If he were to destroy them after that, it would be a tribute to the LORD who stands above all idols. But instead of honoring the LORD and thanking Him for the victory he has given, Amaziah commits the folly to set up the gods of his

conquered enemies for himself, to bow down before them, and to burn incense to them!

In doing so, Amaziah is committing spiritually harlotry. Therefore the wrath of the LORD burns against him (verse 15). The anger of God is the flip side of His love. Again He sends a prophet. He points out to Amaziah the folly of praying to gods who have been unable to save their people from his hand. It is too crazy for words, we would say. How does someone come to such a stupid thing.

However, Amaziah is not amused by such remarks. It seems that he does not even let the prophet speak the full message, but gags him (verse 16). The prophet must be well aware that he does not speak to the first one the best. How does he dare to take the place of advisor to him, the king! Amaziah does not allow himself to be dictated by some chatterbox. He decides for himself who he listens to.

Then the prophet stops his admonition. He sees that Amaziah does not want to listen and concludes that God wants to destroy him. Rejecting good advice is a sign of destruction. This does not mean that God wants destruction, but that He has decided that whoever rejects admonition will end up in destruction (Pro 15:32a). Amaziah himself has made the choice for destruction and God confirms that choice. The prophet says what God does, while what God does, comes from Amaziah's refusal to listen to admonition and to repent.

Verses 17-24 | Amaziah Defeated by Joash

*17 Then Amaziah king of Judah took counsel and sent to Joash the son of Jehoahaz the son of Jehu, the king of Israel, saying, "Come, let us face each other."
18 Joash the king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, "The thorn bush which was in Lebanon sent to the cedar which was in Lebanon, saying, 'Give your daughter to my son in marriage.' But there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon and trampled the thorn bush. 19 You said, 'Behold, you have defeated Edom.' And your heart has become proud in boasting. Now stay at home; for why should you provoke trouble so that you, even you, would fall and Judah with you?" 20 But Amaziah would not listen, for it was from God, that He might deliver them into the hand [of Joash] because they had sought*

the gods of Edom. 21 So Joash king of Israel went up, and he and Amaziah king of Judah faced each other at Beth-shemesh, which belonged to Judah. 22 Judah was defeated by Israel, and they fled each to his tent. 23 Then Joash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Joash the son of Jehoahaz, at Beth-shemesh, and brought him to Jerusalem and tore down the wall of Jerusalem from the Gate of Ephraim to the Corner Gate, 400 cubits. 24 [He took] all the gold and silver and all the utensils which were found in the house of God with Obed-edom, and the treasures of the king's house, the hostages also, and returned to Samaria.

Instead of following the Divine counsel of God's prophet, Amaziah goes to others for counsel (verse 17). Those with whom he consults are not mentioned. Nor is it about those others, but about Amazia's attitude. Because He has said goodbye to God, He is working on the destruction that has been promised to Him.

The counsel he is taking is about a war he plans to wage with Joash, the king of Israel. A reason for that war could be the raid in Judah by mercenaries from the northern empire (verse 13). We also see that his victory over Edom has made him proud, as Joash notes (verse 19). The result of the counsel is that Amaziah sends messengers to the king of Israel to challenge him to fight each other.

Joash' answer comes in the form of a fable (verse 18). The thorn bush, good to throw in the fire, that's Amazia. The cedar, mighty and good for building, that is Joash. The wild beast that was in Lebanon is Joash' army. Carelessly the thorn bush is trampled. Joash lets Amaziah know why he is looking for the battle. He reminds him of his victory over Edom and that this has made him overconfident and he thinks he can also win from Israel easily.

Joash himself is no better than Amazia. We see that wicked people can see through the motives of other wicked people. That is because they are driven by exactly the same motives. Joash is as proud as Amazia. He predicts disaster for Amaziah and advises him to stay at home (verse 19). Joash is as certain of victory as Amazia. Both men speak diluted language; with both dependence on the LORD is completely lacking.

Amaziah has not listened to the prophet and he certainly does not listen to the warning of Joash (verse 20). God has His hand in this, for He is going to use Joash to punish Amaziah for seeking the gods of Edom. When it turns out that Amaziah doesn't want to listen, Joash goes up (verse 21). They face each other at Beth-shemesh, where they fight each other. Amaziah suffers the defeat and the soldiers flee, each to his tent (verse 22). Joash captures Amaziah and takes him to Jerusalem. What a humiliation it will have been for Amaziah to enter there as a prisoner.

More humiliations will follow. A large part of the wall of Jerusalem, "from the Gate of Ephraim to the Corner Gate, 400 cubits". (verse 23), which is on the north and north-west side of the wall, is torn down. Many of the treasures of the house of God, which are entrusted to the care of Obed-edom, are robbed (verse 24). Joash also takes hostages with him, to guarantee that Amaziah keeps calm. Then he returns to Samaria. The punitive expedition is over.

We see in this history how much is lost when, through victories given by the Lord, we become arrogant and fight for our own honor. If we are deaf to warnings given by the Lord, the disaster is complete. We then suffer losses in all areas. Our esteem is impaired and with it the Name of the Lord Whom we confess to know and serve.

We also lose the spiritual blessings that are stored for us in the house of God and that we can enjoy there. In fact, as 'hostages' we are held by the enemy who has gained power over us. This means that we have lost our true spiritual freedom. What a loss, for ourselves, but above all for the Lord, Who does not receive from our lives the honor He is so worthy!

Verses 25-28 | The Death of Amaziah

25 And Amaziah, the son of Joash king of Judah, lived fifteen years after the death of Joash, son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel. 26 Now the rest of the acts of Amaziah, from first to last, behold, are they not written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel? 27 From the time that Amaziah turned away from following the LORD they conspired against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish; but they sent after him to Lachish and killed him there. 28 Then they brought him on horses and buried him with his fathers in the city of Judah.

After his humiliating defeat, Amaziah has fifteen years to live, counting from the death of Joash, king of Israel (verse 25). That his death is related to the death of the king of Israel, shows how much Amaziah has become dependent on the king of the northern empire. What Amaziah has done more than what is described of him in this chapter is described “in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel” (verse 26; cf. 2Chr 16:11; 28:26; 32:32).

Since his departure from the LORD Amaziah has no rest anymore (verse 27). He is always in fear of a conspiracy that is forged against him. A conspiracy is very threatening. There is always the threat of being killed, but it is not known where, when and by whom it happens. To escape the conspirators he flees Jerusalem and goes to Lachis. After a restless time of fear he thinks he might find peace there. But the conspirators know how to find him, and he finds death instead of the desired rest. Thus the life of a man who has started well comes an inglorious end.

His body is brought on horses to Jerusalem (verse 28). There he is buried with his fathers.

2 Chronicles 26

Introduction

In this chapter and the ten following chapters we have the history of Uzziah and ten other kings. In the days of these kings most prophesy prophets of whom we have a bible book. This concerns both the so-called great and little prophets. What is written in the books of these prophets sheds light on these eleven chapters. It is highly recommended to read and take to heart the books of the prophets.

In this chapter we have again two parts. The first part shows an ascending line, containing the power and prosperity of Uzziah (verses 1-15). The second part shows a descending line, containing the pride, sickness and death of Uzziah (verses 16-23).

Verses 1-5 | Uzziah King of Judah

1 And all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who [was] sixteen years old, and made him king in the place of his father Amaziah. 2 He built Eloth and restored it to Judah after the king slept with his fathers. 3 Uzziah was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Jechiliah of Jerusalem. 4 He did right in the sight of the LORD according to all that his father Amaziah had done. 5 He continued to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding through the vision of God; and as long as he sought the LORD, God prospered him.

When Amaziah is killed, Uzziah becomes king (verse 1). He becomes that in a special way, namely because “all the people of Judah” make him king. This remarkable state of affairs may indicate that in Jerusalem there are other thoughts regarding the succession. But God here uses the will of the people to keep a lamp burning for David’s house. Uzziah – also called Azariah (2Kgs 15:1-7) – is only sixteen years old when he becomes king.

The first act described of Uzziah is that he builds the port of Eloth or Elath and brings it back under the authority of Judah (verse 2). Eloth is important for sea trade. The fact that he does this “after the king slept with his fa-

thers” probably refers to the death of the king of Edom. Restoration of lost territory can only take place if the LORD is recognized in His authority.

God is the God of restoration. When He gives restoration, it is to make us spiritually stronger through it. We also see this with Peter, who after his restoration is used by the Lord to strengthen his brothers (Lk 22:31-32). Peter was restored by Him after his denial of the Lord and strengthened his brothers in their faith through his letters.

Again it is said that Uzziah is sixteen years old when he becomes king (verse 3; verse 1). That emphasizes his age. It shows that God attaches great value to young people who want to live for Him. We have other examples of this in Joshua, Samuel, Solomon, Joash and Timothy. Uzziah is, apart from Manasseh, the longest reigning king. He reigns no less than fifty-two years, from 791-740 BC. His mother’s name is also mentioned, together with the place where she comes from. As is customary with mothers, she has had a great influence on his development. She will also have helped him to do his job well during his first years in reign.

The reign of Uzziah is described by comparing it with the reign of his father (verse 4). He does, like his father Amaziah, what is right in the sight of the LORD. This is, as with his father, the first part of his life, for at the end of his life he, like his father, departs from the LORD.

Uzziah is doing well as long as he seeks the LORD (verse 5). He is helped by someone, as happened with his grandfather Joash (2Chr 24:2). Uzziah has someone in Zechariah “who had understanding through the vision of God”. Zechariah must have had a special relationship with God. The right teaching comes from fellowship with God in the sanctuary, not from a theological college. It is a great blessing for Uzziah to have such a man next to him. Such a situation is a rarity (2Chr 15:3).

There is a task for older, spiritual believers to teach young believers to see God by reading His Word, for He reveals Himself in His Word. It is also necessary to teach young believers to seek God in prayer. It is to be hoped that young believers recognize the great privilege of such exhortations and act accordingly. There is also a great responsibility here for fathers in relation to their children.

Verses 6-15 | Military and Agricultural Prosperity

6 Now he went out and warred against the Philistines, and broke down the wall of Gath and the wall of Jabneh and the wall of Ashdod; and he built cities in [the area of] Ashdod and among the Philistines. 7 God helped him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians who lived in Gur-baal, and the Meunites. 8 The Ammonites also gave tribute to Uzziah, and his fame extended to the border of Egypt, for he became very strong. 9 Moreover, Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate and at the Valley Gate and at the corner buttress and fortified them. 10 He built towers in the wilderness and hewed many cisterns, for he had much livestock, both in the lowland and in the plain. [He also had] plowmen and vinedressers in the hill country and the fertile fields, for he loved the soil. 11 Moreover, Uzziah had an army ready for battle, which entered combat by divisions according to the number of their muster, prepared by Jeiel the scribe and Maaseiah the official, under the direction of Haniah, one of the king's officers. 12 The total number of the heads of the households, of valiant warriors, was 2,600. 13 Under their direction was an elite army of 307,500, who could wage war with great power, to help the king against the enemy. 14 Moreover, Uzziah prepared for all the army shields, spears, helmets, body armor, bows and sling stones. 15 In Jerusalem he made engines [of war] invented by skillful men to be on the towers and on the corners for the purpose of shooting arrows and great stones. Hence his fame spread afar, for he was marvelously helped until he [was] strong.

The LORD blesses him further with victories and prosperity. He has military and agricultural blessing. First there is military blessing. Uzziah's first acts of war are directed against the Philistines (verse 6). These enemies are closest to him. They live in the border area and are a constant threat. They are a picture of the nominal Christians, people who are also a great threat to the true Christians, because they are so close to the true Christians in their confession, while their hearts are far from the truth.

Uzziah breaks down the walls of some cities of the Philistines. In the spiritual sense, it suggests that the arguments that nominal Christians use for their erroneous teachings and wrong practices are unmasked and rejected by God's Word. We can think of the foolish reasoning that God is love and that 'thus' all love is from God. This is without shame applied to, for example, a homo-sexual relationship. But God's Word condemns such a

relationship. Uzziah is helped by God (verse 7). We can also count on His help when we resist the enemies of God and His Word. Such action compels respect (verse 8).

After dealing with the threats from outside Uzziah focuses on his land. He also starts there with buildings to protect God's center of worship. Hostile powers are particularly concerned with this. Therefore Uzziah builds some towers in Jerusalem and fortifies them (verse 9). Towers are lookout points to signal possible danger from afar, so that precautions can be taken. We can compare these towers to the warnings in the New Testament where we are told to look out for or heed people with wrong teachings and practices (Acts 20:28; 1Tim 4:16).

Uzziah is not only active in the city and for God's sanctuary, but also in the wilderness (verse 10a). Our lives do not only take place in the sanctuary, but also in the world. Towers are also needed in the wilderness, which means that vigilance is required in our daily lives (1Pet 5:8). Furthermore, Uzziah hews many cisterns in the wilderness to water the much livestock he has. We also need the refreshment from God's Word to keep our service to the Lord in offering sacrifices – for which livestock, among other things, serve – fresh. That takes effort, we have to 'hew' or dig for it into the Word of God.

The life of Uzziah not only consists of defending and surviving in the wilderness, but his heart also goes out to the hill country and the fertile fields (verse 10b). His heart goes out to the same as where God's heart goes out to (Deu 11:12). He loves God, He loves the land and He loves the people. Uzziah is a king-farmer with plowmen and vinedressers who he uses on the hill country and the fertile fields. It is his concern to harvest the rich fruit of the land as a sacrifice to God (Deu 26:6-11) and as food for the people (Ecc 5:8).

In this way the Lord also wants to use us as plowmen and vinedressers. This happens when we occupy ourselves with His Word in order to gather from it the rich fruit for which we want to worship Him and share it with His own. That works food and joy.

Then the chronicler returns to Uzziah's army (verse 11). Thereby the reference to Uzziah's love of agriculture is enclosed by two communications

about his military strength. It tells us that we can only enjoy the riches of the land, the fruits it produces – these are for us the blessings of the heavenly places in Christ (Eph 1:3) – if we are capable fighters for the truth. We must be strong “in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2Tim 2:1) and “as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2Tim 2:3) fight the battle.

In battle, “the total number of the heads of the households” (verse 12) is needed, no one may be missing, no one may evade it. These are those who occupy a responsible place in God’s people. They are themselves valiant warriors and have command over “an elite army ..., who could wage war with great power” (verse 13). It is also important in the spiritual struggle we are facing that there are good examples and good followers. The entire army must “help the king against the enemy”. Thus the Lord Jesus uses the believers to resist the enemy in his attempts to attack the church and deprive it of its blessings.

Uzziah has prepared for all the army – there is emphatically “all the army” – with all possible weapons to defend and attack (verse 14). The weapons made available to us by the Lord Jesus are not carnal, but spiritual (2Cor 10:3-5; Eph 6:10-18). Uzziah pays special attention to Jerusalem in order to strengthen the city with engines of war (verse 15a). Jerusalem is the center of worship and therefore the great target of enemy attacks. Uzziah realizes that and for that reason makes a fortress of the city. A place of worship is therefore also a protected and therefore safe place.

The tools of war are “invented by skillful men”. It requires a special ability to devise a spiritual defense system for attacks on the center of Christian life, the worship of the Father. This defense system is found in the Word of God. If we arm ourselves with God’s Word, we will see the attacks coming and we will also know how to repel them. Every believer must know his own weaknesses and be particularly vigilant there.

All the activities of Uzziah that we have seen before, give him a fame that is widely known. He owes this not to himself and his efforts, but to the LORD who “marvelously helped” him. That has brought him to a height of fame and power. The last words of verse 15b, introduced with the word “until”, are a turning point and herald a dramatic change.

Verses 16-18 | Uzziah Becomes Proud

16 But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. 17 Then Azariah the priest entered after him and with him eighty priests of the LORD, valiant men. 18 They opposed Uzziah the king and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful and will have no honor from the LORD God."

Man often does not know how to deal with adversity or prosperity. Uzziah forgets that he owes his prosperity and strength to the LORD. When he has become strong, his heart becomes proud (verse 16). And "pride [goes] before destruction" (Pro 16:18b). Pride leads to destruction. Uzziah believes that he can enter the sanctuary and behave as a king-priest. Authority and power in the realm of the kingship given to him by God leads to the temptation to be able to exercise authority and power in a realm that God has not given him.

In his audacity he moderates himself to the fact that he can burn incense. This happens in the sanctuary. He does so without having received any instruction from God. On the contrary, it is contrary to God's statutes. God has determined that only priests may enter the sanctuary. God's Word says he acts "corruptly". Uzziah's sin is different from that of his father and grandfather. Joash and Amaziah have transgressed by idolatry, removing, as it were, themselves from the sanctuary. Uzziah, on the other hand, enters the sanctuary and thereby becomes an offender. We are always inclined to fall into extremes.

Uzziah is sooner in the sanctuary than the priests. But the priests, under Azariah's request, follow him (verse 17). They are called "valiant men". Men who stand up for the glory of God are valiant men, especially when they stand up against the most powerful man of Judah. No man, however distinguished, should be allowed to grasp what God has not given him.

The pride of Uzziah manifests itself in the field of service to God. We can compare that with the revolt of Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Num 16:1-3). Uzziah places himself on a pedestal. This is happening today everywhere

in Christianity where Christians adopt a religious position and conduct themselves in a religious manner, without taking into account God's regulations.

Boldly, the priests oppose Uzziah the king (verse 18). They point out to him what the LORD has determined about the incense. He should not go into the sanctuary and command him to leave. That he is there proves that he is unfaithful to the LORD. They will not be misled by all the good things Uzziah has done for the LORD. These good things are no excuse for the priests not to point out to Uzziah his unfaithfulness.

That is a lesson for us. We are inclined not to blame one who has done much good. But it is not about how we look at someone and his actions, but about how God judges certain actions. There is praise for the good, and there is admonition for the wrong.

Verses 19-21 | Uzziah Becomes a Leper

19 But Uzziah, with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged; and while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the altar of incense. 20 Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he [was] leprous on his forehead; and they hurried him out of there, and he himself also hastened to get out because the LORD had smitten him. 21 King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death; and he lived in a separate house, being a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the LORD. And Jotham his son [was] over the king's house judging the people of the land.

Uzziah is furious at the priests who reprimand him (verse 19). There he stands, with the censer in his hand and planning to do something beautiful. If he is busy there with a religious act, something he feels good about, he is told by a few 'sharpeners' that he may not do this! He, the great man, blessed by God! Where do they get the audacity from? For him, the priests are people who take the Bible far too literally. They leave you no room to experience faith in your own way.

Uzziah cannot be persuaded. In reality he resists God's statutes. While he erupts in anger against the priests, leprosy breaks out in him, on his forehead. The forehead speaks of the thinking of man, his mind. It symbolizes

that the mind rules over the things of God. It represents the over-estimation of human reason in serving God.

Uzziah has his own thoughts about what he can do in the service of God and follows these thoughts. The conditions under which the leprosy breaks out are described in more detail. It happens “before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the altar of incense”. The circumstances in which he sinned make his sin very serious.

God could have smitten Uzziah with all kinds of illnesses or even death, but He smites him with leprosy. Leprosy is a picture of the sin that breaks out in man. In the Old Testament we encounter three persons with whom leprosy breaks out. First there is Miriam. She moderates herself to have the same authority as Moses (Num 12:1-10). We also see it with Gehazi. Gehazi is not satisfied with being a servant; he wants to be lord (2Kgs 5:20-27). Here we see it with Uzziah. In all three cases, pride plays a role.

The chief priest Azariah hurry him out (verse 20). Also “all the priests”, with Azariah, turn against Uzziah. This is also how it should be if in the church’s own self-will becomes public. All members of the church, all of whom are priests, should have the same aversion to sin as the Lord Jesus, the true Chief Priest. Because of the location Uzziah also realizes that he has committed a foolishness. He does not resist his eviction, but participates in it by rushing to leave the LORD’s house.

Azariah means ‘the LORD is my help’. Uzziah means ‘the LORD is my strength’. The name of his father Amaziah means ‘whom the LORD has strengthened’. The name of his mother Jechiliah (verse 3) means ‘fortified by the LORD’. Everything with Uzziah speaks of the power of the LORD. If he had remained aware of this and had not relied on his own strength, he would not have had to live in separation until the day of his death (verse 21). He is deprived of the service to God and also of fellowship with the members of God’s people (Lev 13:46). During this time of separation, he was able to think a lot about what he had done, in order to come to terms with God.

Verses 22-23 | The Death of Uzziah

22 Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first to last, the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, has written. 23 So Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him

with his fathers in the field of the grave which belonged to the kings, for they said, "He is a leper." And Jotham his son became king in his place.

For the rest of Uzziah's history, the chronicler does not refer as usual to the archives of the kings, the book of the kings of Israel and Judah, but to what Isaiah wrote about him (verse 22). Isaiah investigated the long reign of Uzziah and described it. In the book of Isaiah, the Holy Spirit has only written down from that description what is useful for us to know.

When Uzziah dies, he is buried in a place resulting from his leprosy (verse 23). He is not buried with the kings, but "in the field of the grave which belonged to the kings", probably an adjacent field. His son Jotham becomes king in his place.

In the year of Uzziah's death Isaiah, one of the greatest prophets of Israel, is called to his service (Isa 1:1; 6:1). On that occasion Isaiah sees the glory of the LORD, that is the glory of the Lord Jesus (Isa 6:1; Jn 12:41). In the light of that glory is not only Uzziah, but the whole people and also Isaiah unclean. But there is also reconciliation (Isa 6:5-7).

We can find a lot in the book of the prophet Isaiah about the time that comes in Israel after Uzziah's death and about the spiritual state of the people. The prophet Hosea also preaches at that time and his prophecy also sheds light on the spiritual condition of the people (Hos 1:1).

2 Chronicles 27

Verses 1-9 | Jotham King of Judah

1 Jotham was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jerushah the daughter of Zadok. 2 He did right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Uzziah had done; however he did not enter the temple of the LORD. But the people continued acting corruptly. 3 He built the upper gate of the house of the LORD, and he built extensively the wall of Ophel. 4 Moreover, he built cities in the hill country of Judah, and he built fortresses and towers on the wooded [hills]. 5 He fought also with the king of the Ammonites and prevailed over them so that the Ammonites gave him during that year one hundred talents of silver, ten thousand kors of wheat and ten thousand of barley. The Ammonites also paid him this [amount] in the second and in the third year. 6 So Jotham became mighty because he ordered his ways before the LORD his God. 7 Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, even all his wars and his acts, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah. 8 He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. 9 And Jotham slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David; and Ahaz his son became king in his place.

Jotham succeeds his father Uzziah. He is twenty-five years old when he comes on the throne (verse 1) and then exercises the kingship for a period of sixteen years. It is not improbable that he shared the first part of his kingship with his father Uzziah during his leprosy and thereby was unable to exercise the actual reign.

The name of his mother and her origin are also mentioned. She must have been a woman who feared God and raised Jotham in the fear of the LORD. Throughout the entire period of his reign responsibility Jotham has done what is right in the sight of the LORD (verse 2). In fact, Jotham is one of the few persons in the Bible from whom we read nothing bad. From him we read only good things.

Therefore, if it says that he has done “according to all that his father Uzziah had done”, it refers to the first part of the reign of Uzziah. It is expressly stated that Jotham did not follow his father in evil. He did not enter the temple of the LORD, which his father did, and thereby indicates that he was warned by his father’s wicked example. He imitates his father in good, not in evil (cf. 3Jn 1:11a).

The people do not follow Jotham in the good. While Jotham has been warned by the wrong example of his father and God’s judgment on it, the people “continue” their pernicious practices. The word ‘continue’ is important. They don’t start to sin in the days of Jotham, but they continue with what they are already doing. It shows perseverance in sin, despite the warnings of prophets like Isaiah, Micah and Hosea and good examples of kings in their good days. The sinful condition of the people is sharply denounced by Isaiah (Isaiah 1-2).

Just like his father Uzziah in his good years, Jotham is also a builder and a warrior (verses 3-5). His first edifice, the upper gate, has to do with the house of the LORD (verse 3). Probably the upper gate is the connection between the palace and the temple, between the residence of the king and the residence of the LORD. It is indeed important that the connection is good. That is his first concern. That is how it should be with us.

His other buildings are cities, fortresses and towers (verse 4). Cities are living communities and castles and towers are to protect against hostile forces or predatory gangs. It is important that we enjoy fellowship with brothers and sisters and therefore do not forsake our own assembling together (Heb 10:24-25). Standing alone, we are an easy prey for the enemy. We must also always be vigilant, so that we do not become prey to the thinking of the world (Col 2:8).

Building and strengthening are good activities. We are responsible for building ourselves up on our most holy faith (Jd 1:20a). At the same time, there is a danger that we will rely on our buildings. The prophets warn of a building of walls and towers without trust in the LORD (Isa 2:15; Hos 8:14). In all our activities we should never forget that the true power and protection only comes from God.

Besides being a builder, Jotham is also a warrior (verse 5). He subdues the Ammonites and imposes taxes on them. He receives these three consecutive years, probably the last three years of his reign. The one hundred talents of silver, which Amaziah lost due to a wrong investment (2Chr 25:6-9), return here.

Every victory we achieve for the Lord produces both a direct result and a long-term result. Through every victory we become spiritually stronger and that works as long as we remain dependent on the Lord.

We see that with Jotham. It keeps going well with him. He strengthens his position, both internally and externally. This happens because he does everything in the knowledge that he lives before the LORD, his God (verse 6). The LORD is "his God". In this case this indicates that he has a personal relationship with God. It can't be otherwise but he is a man of prayer. He constantly asks the LORD how he should order his ways.

That also applies to us. Personal contact with the Lord in prayer is the secret of strength in our lives. Only then will our ways be directed toward Him and He can bless them. The ancestors of Jotham later went wrong because they have forgotten to live from that personal relationship with the LORD and from there to walk the path of faith.

With this observation, the chronicler has come to the end of his description of Jotham's life. The rest of Jotham's history can be found in the archives of the kings of Israel and Judah (verse 7). Under "all his wars" we can include those against the Ammonites (verse 5) and possibly also those against Syria and the ten tribes (2Kgs 15:36-37). The account of "his acts" will have been encouraging for the God-fearing Israelites to read. For these are acts which he has done "before the LORD his God" (verse 6). It is always good to read biographies of men and women who have lived before the Lord.

Then it is repeated what has already been said in verse 1 (verse 8). It emphasizes the value of this life for the LORD. After this valuable life, of which we only have a few events in Scripture, Jotham "slept with his fathers" (verse 9). He is buried "in the city of David". There he is, still, waiting for the resurrection that will take place at the coming of the Lord Jesus.

Jotham is succeeded by his son Ahaz. This son is an evil man. He doesn't resemble his father at all. We will see that in the next chapter.

2 Chronicles 28

Verses 1-4 | Ahaz King of Judah

1 Ahaz [was] twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do right in the sight of the LORD as David his father [had done]. 2 But he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel; he also made molten images for the Baals. 3 Moreover, he burned incense in the valley of Ben-hinnom and burned his sons in fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had driven out before the sons of Israel. 4 He sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills and under every green tree.

Ahaz succeeds his God-fearing father Jotham as king (verse 1). He is then twenty years old. He reigns as long as his father, sixteen years old (2Chr 27:1), but the contrast with his father is enormous. Just as nothing wrong is said of Jotham, nothing good is said of Ahaz. However, his life is not compared to that of his father Jotham, but to that of “David his father”. It is not written of Ahaz that he does what is evil in the sight of the LORD, but that he does not do what is right in the sight of the LORD. David did. David is the man after God’s heart, while God finds nothing in the life of Ahaz that is a joy to His heart. Ahaz completely lacks the good.

Jotham has ordered his ways before the LORD, but Ahaz walks “in the ways of the kings of Israel” (verse 2). He rejects his father’s good example. The wicked kings of Israel, of whom not one does good in the sight of the LORD, are the examples that appeal to him. But that is not all. “Moreover”, so on top of that, he makes idols for the Baals. Ahaz cancels the covenant with the LORD. His sins accumulate. He burns incense to the idols. He does so “in the valley of Ben-hinnom”. From the name of the valley and the practices that take place there, the name Gehenna, hell, is derived (2Chr 33:6; Mk 9:43).

He also serves the Baals in a gruesome way by sacrificing his sons to them (verse 3). With this Ahaz completely follows in the footsteps of the heathen peoples who commit these atrocities. The LORD has driven out the nations

of the Gentiles before the eyes of the Israelites, and with them has shown His people His abhorrence of those nations, and their practices. That Ahaz unites himself with what God abhors by accepting their atrocities again is a great and gross insult to the LORD. His idolatry is so general that he makes any place he considers suitable for it a place where can be sacrificed to the idols (verse 4).

We may be surprised and wonder how it is possible that such a God-fearing father has such a godless son. There is no easy answer to that. We see it more often. David has had rebellious sons like Absalom and Adonijah. Even today there are God-fearing believers who have children who live in revolt against God.

Sometimes there are demonstrable errors in upbringing, partly due to a lack of self-restraint, as with David. We must learn from that. But sometimes it cannot be explained. We must learn to accept that and not think that we can explain the causes. If we know those cases, the best response is that it brings us to prayer for them and their parents.

It is certain that each child has its own responsibility in the choices it makes. If the child makes wrong choices, the parents should not be held liable. God does not do that either. Everyone is punished for his own sins, the parents not for those of the children and the children not for those of the parents (Deu 24:16).

Verses 5-7 | The Discipline of the LORD

5 Wherefore, the LORD his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Aram; and they defeated him and carried away from him a great number of captives and brought [them] to Damascus. And he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who inflicted him with heavy casualties. 6 For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah 120,000 in one day, all valiant men, because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. 7 And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, slew Maaseiah the king's son and Azrikam the ruler of the house and Elkanah the second to the king.

The unfaithfulness of Ahaz brings the discipline of God upon him (verse 5). God is here called "his God". That is not because Ahaz has any connection with God, but because God does not give up His rights to His land and His

representative in that land. Ahaz can deny these rights, but God does not give them up therefore. That is precisely why He brings discipline upon him and his people (Amos 3:2). He exercises this discipline by giving him into the power of the king of Aram or Syria and the king of Israel.

Syria and Ephraim have joined forces to make themselves strong against Assyria. God uses this reprehensible alliance of the ten tribes with Syria as a disciplinary rod for the two tribes. A large group of prisoners is taken by the king of Syria to Damascus. The king of Israel inflicts a heavy blow on Ahaz. Ahaz has chosen to walk in the ways of the kings of Israel (verse 2) and now experiences what that brings. Whoever connects with wickedness, experiences wickedness.

Pekah, king of Israel, has the opportunity to kill 120,000 men in Judah in one day (verse 6). That so many men, who were also “valiant men”, and that in one day, are killed, shows the speed and fierceness of this judgment of the LORD. Pekah is able to do this because Judah – that is king and people, “they” – has forsaken the LORD. This does not mean that Pekah and the ten tribes are in connection with the LORD. They are just as independent from the LORD and just as ungodly. But Judah has a greater responsibility, because the LORD still dwells in His house in Jerusalem in their midst. The departure of both kingdoms from the LORD has led to this unprecedented drama of brotherhood.

One man from Pekah’s army receives a special mention. That is “Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim” (verse 7). Zichri is called “mighty man”, but in a different sense than for example the mighty men of David. The mighty men of David have become mighty men in a battle for David and against the enemies of Israel. Zichri is a mighty man in the eyes of the people.

He kills three people who belong to God’s people. He does so from a strategic point of view. The people he kills have a close relationship with the king. It concerns a family member, a ruler of the house and the prime minister. The death of these men will have smashed Ahaz’s last hope for some support in his immediate surroundings. On that support he relies, for there is no thought with him of the LORD.

In Isaiah 7 we read the purpose of the attack by Syria and Israel. That is to dethrone Ahaz and appoint a Syrian king over Judah, a certain “son of

Tabaal" (Isa 7:6). There it also appears that Ahaz is very much in a tight spot. It seems as if the house of David is over. Then Isaiah comes to him. Ahaz may ask for a sign. His answer is false, hypocritical (Isa 7:10-13). He has long hoped for Assyria. There is no desire whatsoever with him to ask the LORD for help.

Then comes the prophecy, not for Ahaz, but for the house of David, about the virgin who conceives (Isa 7:14). This is what we see fulfilled in Matthew 1 (Mt 1:18-23). In that dark history God thus lets the light of the future shine. In Christ Who according to the prophecy by Isaiah is born of the virgin, the lamp for David's house remains lit.

Verses 8-11 | The LORD Speaks to the Israelites

8 The sons of Israel carried away captive of their brethren 200,000 women, sons and daughters; and they took also a great deal of spoil from them, and brought the spoil to Samaria. 9 But a prophet of the LORD was there, whose name [was] Oded; and he went out to meet the army which came to Samaria and said to them, "Behold, because the LORD, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, He has delivered them into your hand, and you have slain them in a rage [which] has even reached heaven. 10 Now you are proposing to subjugate for yourselves the people of Judah and Jerusalem for male and female slaves. Surely, [do] you not [have] transgressions of your own against the LORD your God? 11 Now therefore, listen to me and return the captives whom you captured from your brothers, for the burning anger of the LORD is against you."

The Israelites have already killed 120,000 men (verse 6). Now they also take 200,000 "women, sons and daughters" as prisoners (verse 8). It is noticeable that it says that they carry away "of their brethren". It is a brother-people. From them the Israelites also take a great deal of spoil which they take with them to Samaria. Judah suffers an enormous loss of people and goods. Deviation from the LORD never results in profit, but always in loss. The fact that all this is happening among brothers makes the matter even more tragic. In fact, the winners are also losers. That is clear from the sequel.

There comes a prophet from Samaria, Oded (verse 9). It is remarkable that he is there, in the center of godless Israel. He goes to the army that is on his way to Samaria with the prisoners and the spoil. The prophet has no pleasant message for them. He does not come to congratulate them on their victory, but to point out their sins in God's Name and to announce judgment to them. It is a testimony of great courage to speak in this way to a people in a rush to victory and to call upon them to become humble because of their own condition (cf. Deu 9:5; Rom 11:20-21).

Oded reminds the Israelites that they owe the victory only to the LORD's anger with Judah. The prophet strongly admonishes them about the way in which they have dealt with Judah. They raged in such a way that the cries of their victims raised to heaven. And as if all this were not enough, they also subjected the Judeans and the people of Jerusalem to themselves to use them as male and female slaves (verse 10a), something the LORD explicitly forbids (Lev 25:46b). Do they have no idea how much they themselves are guilty toward the LORD their God (verse 10b)?

Oded tells the ten tribes that the wrath of the LORD rests upon them. God has used them as a rod to punish Judah. But the anger of God also comes over the rod of discipline when they act as they see fit. We see this also in Assyria, for example, which is used by God as a disciplinary rod against Israel. That people will also be judged because of their unfaithfulness to the LORD (Isa 10:5-19).

After his serious words, Oded calls on them to listen to him and to do what he says (verse 11). They must bring back to Judah the prisoners "whom you captured from your brothers". They must do so because the LORD's burning anger is against them. The LORD is very wroth with their revenge. They did bring His discipline over Judah, but they did not take Him into account in its execution, nor did they take into account their own sinful practices. They did it in pride and bloating.

For us, this is a lesson if we have to point out a mistake to someone personally or if discipline is required in the church. We must then be aware that we are not better and also should not exercise discipline in a haughty attitude (Gal 6:1; 1Cor 5:2).

Verses 12-15 | Reaction to the Word of Oded

12 Then some of the heads of the sons of Ephraim — Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai — arose against those who were coming from the battle, 13 and said to them, “You must not bring the captives in here, for you are proposing [to bring] upon us guilt against the LORD adding to our sins and our guilt; for our guilt is great so that [His] burning anger is against Israel.” 14 So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the officers and all the assembly. 15 Then the men who were designated by name arose, took the captives, and they clothed all their naked ones from the spoil; and they gave them clothes and sandals, fed them and gave them drink, anointed them [with oil], led all their feeble ones on donkeys, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brothers; then they returned to Samaria.

Rarely has the admonishing word of a prophet been heard so quickly and so radically. The word of God through the prophet hits four men (verse 12). They are family heads of Ephraim, whose names the Spirit mentions. He does this because what they do is so valuable to the LORD (cf. Lk 10:30-37; Mt 25:31-40; Rom 12:20). In those wicked ten tribes there appear to be men who are open to God’s Word. They are among the “7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal” (1Kgs 19:18). They turn against those who come from the army and, following Oded, have the courage to speak to them about their condition against God.

The four men underline what Oded said and supplement it with their confession of guilt (verse 13). There already has been sinned much, there is already much guilt and the burning anger is against Israel. Should they add even more by bringing their brothers as prisoners from Judah to Samaria?

The four men also find direct hearing. The armed men do not oppose, but give all the spoils out of their hands and give them to the officers and all the assembly (verse 14). They react in an unexpectedly consenting way that is completely unusual for soldiers who have the spoil in their hands. Such surrender can only be the work of God’s Spirit. It is a bright spot in the history of the ten tribes.

The Spirit works even further in the hearts. A number of men, indicated by their names (verse 15) – certainly including the four men mentioned (verse

12) – act as true ‘good Samaritans’ (Lk 10:30-35). We can safely call their merciful treatment of prisoners of war unique.

The nudes are dressed and shod with clothes and footwear from the booty. They give them food and drink. The wounded are treated with oil (cf. Eze 16:9). Those who are too weak to walk are “led on donkeys” and transported. They treat their prisoners with remarkable gentleness. So all prisoners come back to their brothers in Jericho. Then the ‘good Samaritans’ return to Samaria.

We can learn from this. Our mission is to do our enemies well and treat them with gentleness rather than do them evil and hurt them. It is our task to pray for them (Mt 5:44-45) and to overcome evil in them through good (Rom 12:20-21). If we do, we will be perfect as our “heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). We may feel that this is not the case. It is not about our feelings, however, but about what is right in the sight of the Lord. If we do what is right in His sight, our feelings will join in. He will fill our hearts with His love.

Verses 16-19 | Further Discipline of the LORD

16 At that time King Ahaz sent to the kings of Assyria for help. 17 For again the Edomites had come and attacked Judah and carried away captives. 18 The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the lowland and of the Negev of Judah, and had taken Beth-shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, and Soco with its villages, Timnah with its villages, and Gimzo with its villages, and they settled there. 19 For the LORD humbled Judah because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had brought about a lack of restraint in Judah and was very unfaithful to the LORD.

Ahaz cannot be brought to an acknowledgment of his sins by discipline, nor by the just granted proofs of grace. “At that time”, that is the time when he is threatened by the king of Syria and the king of Israel, he does not resort to God, but seeks support from the kings of Assyria (verse 16). There have also come Edomites who have defeated Judah and carried away captives (verse 17; Oba 1:11; Joel 3:19). The Philistines also report (verse 18). They invade several places and live there.

Ahaz's behavior causes God's people suffering enormous losses of territory and freedom. The same goes for the lives of people who deviate from God. They lose their blessings and freedom. They may think they are living in freedom because they experience life according to God's will as a yoke. However, they will experience that living without God is a life in slavery of sin.

The LORD stands behind all this. He humbles Judah (verse 19), because Ahaz, the leader of his people, precedes the people in breaking his faith with him. The whole policy of Ahaz is aimed at preventing the people from serving God. This is a great dishonor to Him. He cannot leave such actions unpunished. Ahaz, however, does not allow himself to be moved by anything to "humble himself under the mighty hand of God" (1Pet 5:6). We will see that in the sequence.

Verses 20-25 | Further Unfaithfulness of Ahaz

20 So Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria came against him and afflicted him instead of strengthening him. 21 Although Ahaz took a portion out of the house of the LORD and out of the palace of the king and of the princes, and gave [it] to the king of Assyria, it did not help him. 22 Now in the time of his distress this same King Ahaz became yet more unfaithful to the LORD. 23 For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him, and said, "Because the gods of the kings of Aram helped them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me." But they became the downfall of him and all Israel. 24 Moreover, when Ahaz gathered together the utensils of the house of God, he cut the utensils of the house of God in pieces; and he closed the doors of the house of the LORD and made altars for himself in every corner of Jerusalem. 25 In every city of Judah he made high places to burn incense to other gods, and provoked the LORD, the God of his fathers, to anger.

The request of Ahaz to the kings of Assyria to help him (verse 16) has a counterproductive effect (verse 20). The king of Assyria does come to Ahaz, but that is not to help him. On the contrary, he puts Ahaz in a tight corner. He is a new enemy of Ahaz, the umpteenth. Ahaz empties the house of the LORD, his own house and the houses of the rich princes, to get the king of Assyria on his hand (verse 21). It is all in vain. He remains alone in his misery with all the enemies that make his life very difficult.

It also has no effect on its relationship with the LORD. His need does not drive him to the LORD. He continues with his unfaithfulness to Him (verse 22). In his folly he even resorts to the gods of Damascus and sacrifices to them (verse 23). He simply replaces the God of Israel with the idols of Syria.

The Holy Spirit mentions the foolish reasoning he follows. He argues that the gods of the kings of Syria help them to victory. That is why he also wants to secure their support by sacrificing to them. To make these sacrifices Ahaz even copied the altar of Damascus (2Kgs 16:10-13). How far a man can deviate from God.

And Ahaz is not alone in his deviation from God. All Israel follows him in this. Someone who deviates from God, and certainly if it is someone who has a leading position in God's people, never goes that way alone. We can also think of parents in relation to their children. Ahaz is a warning example for all who give a slate thing, in whatever context.

Ahaz is completely in the power of the devil. This is the case with people, especially religious people, who do not allow themselves to be corrected in any way by God, not by His Word and not by dramatic events. Like Ahaz, they run on the road to and from destruction. Nothing can slow them down. Through their, what they call, traumatic experiences with God, they have had it all with Him. Everything that reminds of Him is removed from their lives and surroundings. Instead, they look for it in alternative ways of believing. Everything is good, as long as it is not the God of the Bible. This is the way Ahaz works.

Ahaz has completely done with God. He gathers the objects of the house of God with which He is served, and cuts them into pieces (verse 24). Away with it. It must also be made impossible for others to enter God's house. So, close those doors. Not that he has finished with religion, but he does decide for himself how he experiences it. It must be possible to express your religious emotions wherever you need it. Therefore he "made altars for himself in every corner of Jerusalem". Away with the narrow-mindedness of the LORD.

What he does in Jerusalem, he does in every city in Judah (verse 25). Everyone must be able to "burn incense to other gods". That is also open-minded.

ed. He is not interested in God's judgment on this matter. However, the Spirit makes the death bell to ring: he "provoked the LORD, the God of his fathers, to anger". With these serious words the chronicler concludes his description of the life of Ahaz, a life in which he has been unable to discover anything positive.

Verses 26-27 | The Death of Ahaz

26 Now the rest of his acts and all his ways, from first to last, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. 27 So Ahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, in Jerusalem, for they did not bring him into the tombs of the kings of Israel; and Hezekiah his son reigned in his place.

The description of the rest of the history of Ahaz and his ways can be found "in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel" (verse 26). We don't know that book. This is not necessary, because what we have read about Ahaz in the previous verses, draws him out in full. All his deeds and ways described in that book, which is unknown to us, are only more of the same. The wicked life of Ahaz comes to an end. When he dies, he is buried in Jerusalem. However, there is no tomb of honor for him. He is not buried in the graves of the kings of Israel.

After this concluding remark the chronicler places the son of Ahaz, Hezekiah, before our attention. Hezekiah becomes king instead of Ahaz. In the next four chapters (2 Chronicles 29-32) we will see the great grace of God. That grace is that God has given a king as wicked as Ahaz a son as God-fearing as Hezekiah and the blessing He gives His people with that.

2 Chronicles 29

Introduction

Hezekiah, who is discussed in this chapter and the next three chapters, is the God-fearing son of an ungodly father. By the providence of God he has escaped that his father sacrifices him to the idols (2Chr 28:3). In Hezekiah we have a wonderful example of a revival. He shows the energy of faith, while in a later revival under Josiah in the last chapters of 2 Chronicles we will see a deep respect for the Scriptures.

The history of Hezekiah is a striking example of revivals that have also taken place in the history of Christianity. But it is not so much an example of a revival which is about the conversion of sinners, but about the conversion of Christians, of lukewarm, sleepy Christians who are awakened again. We see these revivals in the reformation of the sixteenth century and the reveille of the nineteenth century. In the reformation of the sixteenth century the emphasis is on the preaching of the Word of God. We see that, in picture, especially with Josiah. In the revival of the nineteenth century the emphasis is on the worship of the Father and the Son because of the work of the Son on the cross. We see that, in picture, especially in Hezekiah.

In the history of Hezekiah the house of God is central. We see

1. the cleansing of the house of God (2 Chronicles 29);
2. the participating in the house of God (2 Chronicles 30);
3. the provisions for the house of God (2 Chronicles 31);
4. the protection of the house of God (2 Chronicles 32).

In the revival under Hezekiah we can distinguish seven phases:

1. The reopening of the temple (2 Chronicles 29:3).
2. The consecration of the Levites and priests (2 Chronicles 29:5-15).
3. The cleansing of the temple (2 Chronicles 29:16-19).
4. The sacrifices required for the dedication of the temple (2 Chronicles 29:20-30).
5. Additional sacrifices as an expression of the joy of Hezekiah and the whole people (2 Chronicles 29:31-35).

6. The celebration of the Passover (2 Chronicles 30).
7. The cleansing of the whole country (2 Chronicles 31).

Verses 1-3 | Hezekiah Becomes King

1 Hezekiah became king [when he was] twenty-five years old; and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name [was] Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah. 2 He did right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done. 3 In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them.

With the reign of Hezekiah, a time of blessing for the people begins that will last twenty-nine years (verse 1). The grace of God underlies this time, in which He undoubtedly allowed the mother of Hezekiah to play an important role. Her name, Abijah, means ‘Yahweh is my Father’. She is the daughter of Zechariah, which means “Yahweh remembers”. These names show the spiritual atmosphere in which Hezekiah has been raised.

The result is that Hezekiah “did right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done” (verse 2). The life of Hezekiah reminds in everything of the life of David, the man after the heart of God. Hizkia immediately shows what his heart goes out to. The first thing he does is to open again the doors of the house of the LORD (verse 3), which his father Ahaz closed (2Chr 28:24). A decisive testimony of a newly converted person is a wonderful testimony of the authenticity of conversion (cf. Acts 9:20; Col 1:6).

Hezekiah not only opens the doors, but also repairs them. He doesn’t, so to speak, throw the whole thing open so everyone can walk in easily, but also gives the doors their function again. A door should open for those who have a right to enter and should remain closed for those who are not allowed to enter. We can apply this to the service of the church, the house of God now. All those who belong to the church may participate in the service of the church. Those who do not belong to the church or members of the church who do not judge sin in their lives may not participate in it.

Verses 4-15 | Consecration of Levites and Priests

4 He brought in the priests and the Levites and gathered them into the square on the east. 5 Then he said to them, “Listen to me, O Levites. Consecrate your-

selves now, and consecrate the house of the LORD, the God of your fathers, and carry the uncleanness out from the holy place. 6 For our fathers have been unfaithful and have done evil in the sight of the LORD our God, and have forsaken Him and turned their faces away from the dwelling place of the LORD, and have turned [their] backs. 7 They have also shut the doors of the porch and put out the lamps, and have not burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel. 8 Therefore the wrath of the LORD was against Judah and Jerusalem, and He has made them an object of terror, of horror, and of hissing, as you see with your own eyes. 9 For behold, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this. 10 Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that His burning anger may turn away from us. 11 My sons, do not be negligent now, for the LORD has chosen you to stand before Him, to minister to Him, and to be His ministers and burn incense." 12 Then the Levites arose: Mahath, the son of Amasai and Joel the son of Azariah, from the sons of the Kohathites; and from the sons of Merari, Kish the son of Abdi and Azariah the son of Jehallelel; and from the Gershonites, Joah the son of Zimmah and Eden the son of Joah; 13 and from the sons of Elizaphan, Shimri and Jeiel; and from the sons of Asaph, Zechariah and Mattaniah; 14 and from the sons of Heman, Jehiel and Shimei; and from the sons of Jeduthun, Shemaiah and Uzziel. 15 They assembled their brothers, consecrated themselves, and went in to cleanse the house of the LORD, according to the commandment of the king by the words of the LORD.

After opening and repairing the doors, Hezekiah brings in the priests and the Levites and gathers them into the square on the east (verse 4). Opened and repaired doors include a consecrated priesthood and Levitehood. The doors of God's house can be open, but not for the flesh or the natural man, for they cannot serve there. Only the believer in his character of priest and servant (Levite) may enter. The fact that they are on the square on the east means that they are on the side where the sun rises. It is the side that speaks of a new day, a new beginning, of hope for the future.

The events that then take place in this chapter can be summarized as follows:

1. First the Levites start working (verses 5-15),
2. then the priests (verse 16).

3. Together they do the work, which they finish on the sixteenth day of the first month (verse 17).
4. They report the result to Hezekiah (verses 18-19),
5. who then arranges the festive inauguration of the temple (verses 20-36).

When the priests and the Levites have gathered, Hezekiah addresses the Levites (verse 5). They must begin to consecrate themselves and then they must consecrate the house of the LORD. Consecration means to separate or detach from general use and to give it a special purpose. So the Levites must first become aware that their service is especially dedicated to the LORD and that this also applies to the house of the LORD. Because present uncleanness stands in the way of consecration, the uncleanness must be removed.

This also applies to our lives and to the church. We cannot live holy lives if there is uncleanness in our lives. This uncleanness must first be removed from our hearts and lives by confession and self-judgment. Then we are fit to be used by the Lord in His service.

Hezekiah tells how it was possible that uncleanness could have entered the sanctuary. It is due to the unfaithfulness of "our fathers" (verse 6). They have forsaken the LORD, so that they have had no eye for his dwelling place. They have lived with their backs to the LORD (cf. Eze 8:16; Jer 32:33). Other things have filled their field of vision. When there is no longer any contact with the Lord, the church as His dwelling place also disappears from our interest. We will no longer have an eye for that.

It is not only the case that there is no longer an eye for God's dwelling place, but their actions were aimed at rendering God's dwelling place unusable. First, the doors of the porch are shut (verse 7). When doors are shut, this means that worshippers are excluded. He points out that the lamps are put out, which means that the light of the Word and the Spirit does not shine. Also the incense they have not burned, that is to say that there is no prayer (Psa 141:2). If no more burnt offering is offered to the God of Israel, it means that the Person and the work of Christ are forgotten as the only basis to approach God.

We can make an application to our body, for the body of the believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 6:19). If we “cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit” (2Cor 7:1),

1. the doors of the entrance to God open again,
2. the lamps of the testimony to the outside are put on again,
3. the incense of prayer rises again and
4. the burnt offerings of worship are brought again.

All this is the result of a revival in our personal lives.

Hezekiah is aware that because of the condition of God’s house “the wrath of the LORD was against Judah and Jerusalem” (verse 8). He acknowledges that the LORD had to surrender Judah and Jerusalem to be “an object of terror, of horror, and of hissing”. Does this not also apply to Christianity? Because of the great unfaithfulness of Christians and the frequent and far-reaching deviation from God’s Word, has not Christianity also become an object of hissing? Instead of attracting people, people are divested. The many quarrels, allowing sinful teachings and practices and seeking earthly and worldly things instead of God’s things are all things that have destroyed the church of God as a testimony to Him.

Many have been killed by the sword (verse 9). Others, the weak, the vulnerable, have been in captivity (2Chr 28:8). All deviations from God’s Word and the forsaking of His temple cause great losses of members of God’s people. Today we see local churches bursting apart by imposing on the church innovations that find no ground in God’s Word. We must return to God’s Word.

Hezekiah wants to make a covenant with the LORD (verse 10). Ahaz has gone so far, that every bond with God has been cut through. Hezekiah restores that bond. He does so according to a purpose of his heart. The heart of Hezekiah is directed toward this; he is fully directed toward the LORD and His will. Here he turns again to the Levites, whom he now calls “my sons” (verse 11). By this he emphasizes the privilege that they may serve as ‘sons of the king’ the LORD. He reminds them that the LORD has chosen them “to stand before Him, to minister to Him, and to be His ministers and burn incense” (cf. Num 8:14; Deu 33:10).

Hezekiah's words are heard. From the three families of the Levites – Kahath, Merari and Gerson – men stand up (verse 12), as well as from the three families of the singers – Asaf, Heman and Jeduthun (verses 13-14). The Levites also include their brothers (verse 15). They come “according to the commandment of the king”, which is based on the higher authority of “the words of the LORD”, that is the Word of God. The king's commandment is already binding; by listening to it, they also act according to the will of God. Before starting work, they first consecrate themselves. Only then do they start working with the temple. This is also the right order: first be on guard for yourselves and then for all the flock (Acts 20:28; 1Tim 4:16).

Verses 16-19 | The Consecration of the Temple

16 So the priests went in to the inner part of the house of the LORD to cleanse [it], and every unclean thing which they found in the temple of the LORD they brought out to the court of the house of the LORD. Then the Levites received [it] to carry out to the Kidron valley. 17 Now they began the consecration on the first [day] of the first month, and on the eighth day of the month they entered the porch of the LORD. Then they consecrated the house of the LORD in eight days, and finished on the sixteenth day of the first month. 18 Then they went in to King Hezekiah and said, “We have cleansed the whole house of the LORD, the altar of burnt offering with all of its utensils, and the table of showbread with all of its utensils. 19 Moreover, all the utensils which King Ahaz had discarded during his reign in his unfaithfulness, we have prepared and consecrated; and behold, they are before the altar of the LORD.”

Then the temple is cleansed (verse 16). Anything that is contrary to what God has said is removed. All objects for the service must be cleansed and rectified. In great diligence Hezekiah continues in an explosion of zeal. He also works radically. The dirt is brought to the brook in the Kidron valley to make sure it will be gone. If it was buried in a field, there is a chance that it will be excavated again (cf. 2Chr 15:16; 2Kgs 23:12).

They start inside, in the house, and end in the porch (verse 17). God always works from inside to outside and not, as man often does, from outside to inside. God is not satisfied with a beautiful appearance. He is concerned with an appearance that is a reflection of the inner. God begins with what

is closest to Him (Eze 9:6; 1Pet 4:17a). We also see this in the book of Revelation, where first the local churches are judged (Revelation 2-3) and then in the following chapters the world and Israel (Revelation 6-19).

When the priests have cleansed the house of the LORD, they come to the king to report (verse 18). He gave them the assignment and they carried it out. They have cleansed the whole house of the LORD. They mention two objects in particular: the altar of burnt offering with all the accompanying utensils and the table of showbread with all the accompanying utensils.

That the burnt offering altar has been cleaned means that the daily burnt offering can be brought again. The burnt offering represents the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on the cross which is in its entirety to the glory of God. On that basis God can dwell with His people (Exo 29:38-46). The cleansing of the table of showbread means that the people are again presented in their unity to God, a unity based on the work of His Son. For us it is the unity of the church that is connected with the Lord Jesus. That consciousness returns when the church is cleansed of uncleanness.

The Levites also tell of “all the utensils which King Ahaz had discarded during his reign in his unfaithfulness” (verse 19). They “have prepared and consecrated” them and placed them “before the altar of the LORD”. They have made the old usable again and put it where it belongs. Placing it before the altar speaks of the fact that we always connect rediscovered truths about the house of God with Christ and His work on the cross. The characteristic of a revival is that the old, “what was from the beginning” (1Jn 1:1), is restored, and not that anything new is created. After the cleansing has been completed, the house does not remain empty (cf. Mt 12:44), but is filled with what is of God.

Verses 20-36 | Rededication of the Temple

20 Then King Hezekiah arose early and assembled the princes of the city and went up to the house of the LORD. 21 They brought seven bulls, seven rams, seven lambs and seven male goats for a sin offering for the kingdom, the sanctuary, and Judah. And he ordered the priests, the sons of Aaron, to offer [them] on the altar of the LORD. 22 So they slaughtered the bulls, and the priests took the blood and sprinkled it on the altar. They also slaughtered the rams and sprinkled the blood on the altar; they slaughtered the lambs also and sprinkled

the blood on the altar. 23 Then they brought the male goats of the sin offering before the king and the assembly, and they laid their hands on them. 24 The priests slaughtered them and purged the altar with their blood to atone for all Israel, for the king ordered the burnt offering and the sin offering for all Israel. 25 He then stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with harps and with lyres, according to the command of David and of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for the command was from the LORD through His prophets. 26 The Levites stood with the [musical] instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. 27 Then Hezekiah gave the order to offer the burnt offering on the altar. When the burnt offering began, the song to the LORD also began with the trumpets, [accompanied] by the instruments of David, king of Israel. 28 While the whole assembly worshiped, the singers also sang and the trumpets sounded; all this [continued] until the burnt offering was finished. 29 Now at the completion of the burnt offerings, the king and all who were present with him bowed down and worshiped. 30 Moreover, King Hezekiah and the officials ordered the Levites to sing praises to the LORD with the words of David and Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with joy, and bowed down and worshiped. 31 Then Hezekiah said, "Now [that] you have consecrated yourselves to the LORD, come near and bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the house of the LORD." And the assembly brought sacrifices and thank offerings, and all those who were willing [brought] burnt offerings. 32 The number of the burnt offerings which the assembly brought was 70 bulls, 100 rams, and 200 lambs; all these were for a burnt offering to the LORD. 33 The consecrated things were 600 bulls and 3,000 sheep. 34 But the priests were too few, so that they were unable to skin all the burnt offerings; therefore their brothers the Levites helped them until the work was completed and until the [other] priests had consecrated themselves. For the Levites were more conscientious to consecrate themselves than the priests. 35 There [were] also many burnt offerings with the fat of the peace offerings and with the libations for the burnt offerings. Thus the service of the house of the LORD was established [again]. 36 Then Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced over what God had prepared for the people, because the thing came about suddenly.

The day after the cleansing Hezekiah arises early (verse 20). It will be a long day, full of activities. When the Levites and priests have done their work, it is the turn of "the princes of the city". Hezekiah gathers them to

go to the temple. They all willingly go along and bring sacrifices at the house of the LORD (verse 21). What is happening here is, as it were, a new dedication of the temple service, as it happened by Solomon (2Chr 5:6), a temple service that has been so neglected since then.

Three times seven animals are offered as burnt offering, bulls, rams and lambs, and seven male goats for a sin offering. The various kinds of burnt offerings speak of different aspects of the work of the Lord Jesus as a burnt offering (Lev 1:1-17), while the number seven speaks of the perfection of that work. The fact that it is three times seven indicates that the triune God is involved in this work: the Father has given the Son, the Son has given Himself and has done everything in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The sin offering of seven male goat is for the reconciliation of the king and the princes ("the kingdom"), the priests ("the sanctuary") and the people ("Judah"). The number seven indicates perfection. The sins are many and the period in which they were committed is long. The sin offering is with a view to the past, the burnt offering is with a view to the future. They are sacrifices for the whole people, not just for the few who are present. The unity of the people may not have been visible to the people for two centuries, but for God and Hezekiah this unity does exist. Everything happens in the awareness of the unity of God's people.

The blood of the bulls, rams and lambs is collected by the priests and sprinkled on the altar (verse 22). The chronicler emphasizes the blood of each of the animals by mentioning their blood separately. It speaks of God's special appreciation of the blood. Blood covers the sins and works reconciliation. "Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb 9:22b).

What happens to the animals for the sin offering is described in even more detail and therefore more emphatically (verse 23). The chronicler involves the reader in every handling. The reader watches as "they brought the male goats of the sin offering". The eyes of both the king and the assembly are on the goats for the sin offering. Then the involvement becomes even greater, because both the king and the entire assembly lay their hands on the sin offering. By this act they make themselves one with the sin offering (Lev 4:4,15,24,29; 16:21), by which, so to speak, their sins switch over to the sin offering.

Then the priests come into action (verse 24a). They alone are authorized to slaughter the male goats. For us, believers of the church, all of whom are priests, it means that we must have a priestly mind to be able to empathize with the death that Christ had to die for the sins of His people, the church. The blood of the sin offering is offered on the altar, as is the blood of the burnt offering. Blood is life and is therefore only for God (Lev 17:11).

The blood of sacrifice is for reconciliation, which is to cover the sins of the people, so that the people do not have to die, but can stay alive. The New Testament teaches that the blood not only covers the sins, but also takes away the sins, it cleanses from sins (1Jn 1:7b). In the Old Testament the covering is done in view of the perfect sacrifice that would still be made, while in the New Testament the sacrifice is actually made (cf. Rom 3:25-26).

Hezekiah has understood that atonement cannot be limited to a part of God's people (verse 24b). It is not only for Judah, but "for all Israel" as it says twice. In the next chapter we will see more details about this, where the celebration of the Passover is concerned. We too must remember that the work of Christ is not only for those with whom we come together, but that it is accomplished for all who belong to the church.

Now that the sacrifices have been brought and the relationship with the LORD has been restored on the right basis, there is room for expressions of joy (verse 25). Hezekiah also works here according to the commandment given "according to the command ... from the LORD through His prophets" and which was executed by David. In verses 25-30 it says four times that Hezekiah does something in accordance with what David has done or said. This indicates that Hezekiah does not organize a new religion or an adapted religion. He acts according to what God has previously revealed to David. He goes back to what is from the beginning.

For the expressions of joy the Levites are stationed with instruments of David (verse 26). The priests are given trumpets. When they all stand in place and have the instruments ready, Hezekiah orders to offer the burnt offering on the altar. At the same time as the sacrifice is brought, the song for the LORD is started under the accompaniment of the instruments of David, the king of Israel (verse 27).

This gives a wonderful picture of the service we are allowed to perform as a holy priesthood. As soon as we occupy ourselves with the Lord Jesus and His work and tell God about it, it is inevitable that our hearts will spring up with joy. Communion with the Father and the Son gives complete joy (1Jn 1:3b-4). Then there is worship, what we see in the people who worship (verse 28). This worship is not an emotion of the moment, but remains after the sacrifice is made (verse 29).

Then Hezekiah and the officials order the Levites to make new expressions of joy (verse 30). These expressions are not newly invented, but old expressions that are experienced in a new way. In the same way we can regularly sing the same songs. Our feelings will, if all goes well, always be new, always fresh. The more we engage with Christ and His work, the more our worship will deepen. We will often use the same words to express our worship, but which reflect still deeper feelings.

After the necessary sacrifices come the voluntary sacrifices (verse 31). They are a real representation of the state of the hearts. It is the climax of the revival, in which also sacrifices and thank offerings are brought. The thanksgiving is a peace offering, that is a meal offering in which is participated by God and the priest and every member of the people who is pure (Lev 3:11,16; 7:11-12,19,31). The joy that is enjoyed is expressed in the sacrifice of praise (Heb 13:15). In addition, there are, as it were automatically, voluntary burnt offerings, which express worship.

All sacrifices and consecrated things brought are counted (verses 32-33). For God, every sacrifice counts. Compared to the sacrifices Solomon brought, Hezekiah brings little. But a revival is a return to the *principles* of God and not to the *circumstances* of the beginning. We should not compare the time of Hezekiah and what he does with the time of Solomon, but with the time of his father Ahaz.

Unfortunately, many priests do not show up (verse 34). In a revival not everyone participates. However, a revival does not depend on the number that participates. It is only a handful. Not the quantity, but the quality is characteristic for a revival.

Because there are too few priests, they are unable to skin all the burnt offerings. To skin means that the inner, the inward, becomes visible. In

the burnt offering it speaks of the inner feelings of the Lord Jesus that are present with Him as He accomplishes the work to the glory of God. What He feels within, we can read in the book of Psalms.

There are not many Christians today who are able to “skin the burnt offering”. But fortunately there are Levites. They help the priests. They did so until the other priests had also cleansed themselves. In this way God provides for the shortage of priests. He makes sure that the priestly service can continue.

The Levites can be seen as a picture of the teachers the Lord Jesus gave to teach His church. Through their teaching the believers are helped to gain a better understanding of and insight into the Lord Jesus and His work and what the results are (Eph 4:11-13).

The burnt offerings also include the fat of the peace offerings (verse 35). Just like blood, fat is only for God. Fat speaks of energy, the best. In His life on earth Christ has used all His energy to glorify God. Everything He has is for His God. He does so with joy, of which the libation speaks. The libation is a sacrifice of wine that is poured over the main offering. Wine represents joy (Jdg 9:13).

With this, the service of the house of God is restored. Hezekiah and all the people rejoice over this (verse 36). Their joy is especially for God, for what has happened has been brought about by Him. No one has been able to think of or process this. The situation is hopeless. The people are completely lost under the leadership of Ahaz. What has now happened under Hezekiah has been done by God, completely suddenly. To Him be the honor!

2 Chronicles 30

Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the celebration of the Passover. The Passover is to be celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first month according to the LORD's decree (Lev 23:5). However, Hezekiah is still busy with the consecration of the temple. That work is only finished on the sixteenth day of the first month (2Chr 29:17). But Hezekiah knows the provision that the LORD has made to celebrate it on the fourteenth day of the second month in case it is not possible to celebrate it at the appointed time (Num 9:10-11).

In the Passover that Hezekiah celebrates, we find a special aspect. He wants each and everyone of the ten tribes realm to have the opportunity to celebrate the Passover. There is still time enough to invite them and Hezekiah uses that time for that too. Constitutionally he is king only about Judah. Spiritually speaking, however, there is no dividing wall, but it is one people. That is why Hezekiah not only invites Judah, but he invites all Israel.

After celebrating the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread is also celebrated. When this feast is celebrated, it is decided to add another seven days of feast. The people are so impressed by the revival that God has given so unexpectedly (2Chr 29:36) that they want to enjoy this special event for as long as possible.

Verses 1-12 | Invitation to Celebrate the Passover

1 Now Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover to the LORD God of Israel. 2 For the king and his princes and all the assembly in Jerusalem had decided to celebrate the Passover in the second month, 3 since they could not celebrate it at that time, because the priests had not consecrated themselves in sufficient numbers, nor had the people been gathered to Jerusalem. 4 Thus the thing was right in the sight of the king and all the assembly. 5 So they established a decree to circulate a proclamation throughout all Israel from Beersheba even to Dan, that they should come to celebrate the Passover to the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem.

For they had not celebrated [it] in great numbers as it was prescribed. 6 The couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with the letters from the hand of the king and his princes, even according to the command of the king, saying, "O sons of Israel, return to the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, that He may return to those of you who escaped [and] are left from the hand of the kings of Assyria. 7 Do not be like your fathers and your brothers, who were unfaithful to the LORD God of their fathers, so that He made them a horror, as you see. 8 Now do not stiffen your neck like your fathers, but yield to the LORD and enter His sanctuary which He has consecrated forever, and serve the LORD your God, that His burning anger may turn away from you. 9 For if you return to the LORD, your brothers and your sons [will find] compassion before those who led them captive and will return to this land. For the LORD your God is gracious and compassionate, and will not turn [His] face away from you if you return to Him." 10 So the couriers passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun, but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them. 11 Nevertheless some men of Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. 12 The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the LORD.

“Now” (verse 1), after the cleansing and consecration of the temple in the previous chapter, Hezekiah wants to celebrate the Passover. For this he invites all Israel and Judah. He invites Ephraim and Manasseh – by which he meant the entire ten tribe realm – in writing. He sends couriers on the way with letters calling upon the ten tribes to “to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover to the LORD God of Israel”. The letters are not ordinary letters, but official letters. They do not contain a request, but an assignment.

Hezekiah came to this invitation after consultation with “his princes and all the assembly in Jerusalem” (verse 2). The content of the consultations is the date of the celebration of the Passover. The Passover cannot be celebrated in the first month, because the fixed day, the fourteenth day of the first month (Lev 23:5), is passed. On that day he is still busy restoring the temple. The possibility of keeping it in the second month is now being considered in the consultation. The law regulates this possibility (Num 9:10-11). The question is whether it is possible, that is to say whether the

priests have consecrated themselves in sufficient numbers and whether the people will gather in Jerusalem (verse 3).

We are faced with the question of whether we are in practice holy priests. We may know we are in position (1Pet 2:5), but if in practice there is no holy priesthood, no spiritual sacrifices can be brought. The other condition for a proper celebration of the Passover – that the whole people is gathered – raises the question of whether, at the celebration of the Supper, of which the Passover is a picture, we have the whole people of God in our mind. Is everyone welcome who belongs to the people of God and is clean?

The outcome of the consultation is that it is decided to keep the Passover in the second month (verse 4). As for the cause of the consecration of priests, we see farther in the chapter that priests have consecrated themselves (verses 15,24). About the gathering of the people at Jerusalem a decree is established that a proclamation should circulate “throughout all Israel from Beersheba even to Dan” (verse 5a), that is, from the extreme south, where Beersheba lies, to the extreme north, where Dan lies. Everyone must come to Jerusalem “to celebrate the Passover to the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem”.

The unity of God’s people can only be expressed in Jerusalem, for there stands the altar of the LORD. Jerusalem is the only lawful place to bring offerings (Deu 12:5-6). There is no other place or altar where God and His people can meet.

In the New Testament the Supper is the counterpart of the Passover. Besides a memorial meal commemorating the death of Christ, the Supper is also an expression of the unity of God’s people. We see that unity expressed where believers celebrate the Lord’s Supper at the Table of the Lord. Spiritual sacrifices are brought there. The Passover is a *memorial* meal, a *unity* meal, and a *sacrificial* meal. In this chapter we find in the picture the great significance of this for us.

The call to the ten tribes to come refers back to the beginning, “as it was prescribed” (verse 5b). It has been not celebrated for a long time in the prescribed manner. This does not mean that it has not been celebrated for a long time, but that it has not been celebrated for a long time as a feast for the LORD in Jerusalem. It may have been celebrated by families in the

houses, but that is not God's intention. So it is not God's intention today that every family or church celebrates its own supper. God's desire is that the Supper be celebrated as an expression of the unity of the church where every member of the church is welcome.

After the consultation and the agreements, "couriers" are sent out (verse 6). They are not just messengers, but 'couriers', which shows that there is an urgent need. These are important things. The couriers go through all Israel and Judah. The first thing they say to the Israelites is not that they should all come to Jerusalem according to the prescription, but that they should repent. They must first come to the LORD.

It is not in the first place about an outer return to the old customs, but about an inner return, a return of the heart, to the LORD. First the LORD must be recognized in His rights and only then can they celebrate the Passover.

In the words of the couriers there is also hope. If they repent unto the LORD, He shall return to them that have escaped from being exiled, and have been left in the land by the Assyrians. Here we see that the kingdom of ten tribes has already been led away in exile (1Kgs 17:1-6). The words that the escaped hear from the mouths of the couriers are intended as encouragement to the remaining ones, who have seen many of their loved ones taken away by the Assyrians.

The couriers warn the remnant of the ten tribes that they do not follow the bad example of their fathers and their deported brethren (verse 7; cf. Psa 78:8,57). Their unfaithfulness has led to the destruction they can see for themselves. When they look at this destruction and think about what it came through, they won't persist in evil stubbornly (verse 8), will they? Let them yield to the LORD, and then come to his sanctuary.

The expression "yield" is literally "give a hand". It is a special expression and occurs only here in relation to the LORD. Giving a hand has, among other things, the meaning of reconciling with the other. That is certainly the case here. It means the acknowledgment that the judgment is deserved. Giving a hand can also mean surrendering or entrusting yourself to the other person to lead you and no longer govern your life yourself.

If there is reconciliation and surrender to God, there is also the right mind to come to the sanctuary and serve the LORD their God. For God there

will be no more reason to maintain His burning anger, and He will turn it away from them. If we give our hand to the Lord, we are in the right mind to come to Him in the sanctuary and can also serve Him. Instead of taking His displeasure upon us, we will rejoice His heart.

Except that repentance to the LORD has blessed consequences for themselves, it also has blessing for others (verse 9). If they convert to the LORD, that is to say, return to Him, and obey Him, He shall cause those being led captive to return to them. He will then give compassion to their brothers and their sons “before those who led them captive and will return to this land”.

This indeed is a special promise. It only matters if they see their own sins and repent and if they believe that the LORD can work the heart of the Assyrians so that they let the captives go. The second depends on the first. If the hearts of the people bow before God, God will bring about restoration of His people in the land.

Thus the couriers of Hezekiah go with the invitation from city to city (verse 10). However, with a few exceptions, they are laughed to scorn and mocked. This is more often the fate of royal messengers who invite to a Divine feast (cf. Mt 22:3-7; Lk 14:16-24; Acts 28:24). Mocking is a special form of unbelief. It is a form of self-justification if unbelief cannot find a reasonable explanation for its attitude (Neh 2:19; Mt 9:24; Psa 22:8; Acts 17:32). Yet there are some men that humble themselves (verse 11). It concerns some from Asher (Lk 2:36), Manasseh and Zebulun. They are going to Jerusalem.

In Judah is unity by “the hand of God” (verse 12). He works that unity, or, as it literally says, He gives them one heart, as a result of the humiliation in the previous verse. Humility is the prerequisite for experiencing unity. It is our calling “with all humility” to be “diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:2-3). If all who belong to a local church are truly humble, the unity will be great. God will take care of that.

In verse 8 there is talk of the man who gives the hand to the LORD. Here in verse 12 there is talk of “the hand of God” which is at work. Man must give God his hand and then he notices that God uses His hand. Here we see what we so often encounter in Scripture, the combination of man’s

responsibility and God's actions. We should not try to combine the two sides, because we cannot. God can do that. He is God for that.

Verses 13-22 | The Feast of Unleavened Bread

13 Now many people were gathered at Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month, a very large assembly. 14 They arose and removed the altars which [were] in Jerusalem; they also removed all the incense altars and cast [them] into the brook Kidron. 15 Then they slaughtered the Passover [lambs] on the fourteenth of the second month. And the priests and Levites were ashamed of themselves, and consecrated themselves and brought burnt offerings to the house of the LORD. 16 They stood at their stations after their custom, according to the law of Moses the man of God; the priests sprinkled the blood [which they received] from the hand of the Levites. 17 For [there were] many in the assembly who had not consecrated themselves; therefore, the Levites [were] over the slaughter of the Passover [lambs] for everyone who [was] unclean, in order to consecrate [them] to the LORD. 18 For a multitude of the people, [even] many from Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun, had not purified themselves, yet they ate the Passover otherwise than prescribed. For Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the good LORD pardon 19 everyone who prepares his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though not according to the purification [rules] of the sanctuary." 20 So the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people. 21 The sons of Israel present in Jerusalem celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread [for] seven days with great joy, and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day after day with loud instruments to the LORD. 22 Then Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed good insight [in the things] of the LORD. So they ate for the appointed seven days, sacrificing peace offerings and giving thanks to the LORD God of their fathers.

The invitation is done. It has been heard by many. There is "many people", "a very large assembly", gathered at Jerusalem (verse 13). God also expects His people to come together now. He warns His own not to forsake their "own assembling together" (Heb 10:25). In the New Testament God's people come together among other things to pray (Acts 4:31), to receive instruction (Acts 11:26) and to break bread (Acts 20:7). Meetings are an indispensable element in the life of the believer. He who thinks he does

not need fellowship with and education by other believers, will grow in a spiritual imbalance.

Although the invitation concerns the celebration of the Passover (verse 5), we read here that they have come together to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. That does not mean that it is now suddenly another feast. It's the same feast, but with a different accent. The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread form a whole and are even identified in Luke 22: "Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was approaching" (Lk 22:1). The Passover cannot be celebrated without the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Feast of Unleavened Bread supposes that all that is unclean has been removed on the basis of the Passover (cf. 1Cor 5:7-8).

This is what we read next: everything that is contrary to the service to the true God is removed (verse 14). This is about removing uncleanness out of the city of Jerusalem, while 2 Chronicles 29 is about removing uncleanness out of the house of God. Daily life takes place in the city. To really celebrate the Passover, daily life in all areas must be cleansed.

After everything that obstructs the celebrating of the Passover has been removed, the Passover lamb is slaughtered on the day indicated by God (verse 15). The priests and the Levites are now able to perform their service during the Passover. They were ashamed of their laxness and consecrated themselves in time. They also bring burnt offerings, expressing the fact that they can only do their service on that ground. God cannot tolerate a priest in His presence to be engaged in holy things if that priest does not lead a consecrated life. One excludes the other.

The priests are in the right place where they perform the acts prescribed for them in "the law of Moses the man of God" (verse 16a). Moses is emphatically called "the man of God". In times of decay, it comes down to being a man of God. The title 'man of God' appears in the New Testament only in the first letter to Timothy and the second letter to Timothy (1Tim 6:11; 2Tim 3:17). It is of special value to God that in a time of decay, a time when His rights are not taken into account, there are men, men and women who take His rights into account by keeping to His Word.

The blood of the Passover lamb is taken by the priests from the hands of the Levites and sprinkled (verse 16b). Sprinkling means that the object on which the blood is sprinkled is covered by it. The blood covers and removes what is unclean before the eyes of a holy God. Priests know its value. The fact that they took the blood “from the hands of the Levites,” shows that they learned its value through the teaching of the Levites.

The Levites have also taken on the task of slaughtering the Passover lambs for those who are not clean (verse 17). There are also many who are not clean. Many of them come from the ten tribes (verse 18). They are not barred, but are not suitable for slaughtering the Passover lamb themselves.

It is not self-evident that people who have not cleansed themselves are spared. They are spared, because Hezekiah prays for them. The decay and ignorance are so great that they no longer know what fits the purity of the altar.

The application for us is in connection with the Lord’s Table, of which the altar is a picture. It may be that someone celebrates the Supper, but that he does not have sufficient insight into its meaning due to a wrong spiritual education. Then he will not be barred from the Supper, but others will express the appropriate thanks and worship for him.

In view of the uncleanness Hezekiah calls upon “the good LORD”. This is another special expression. God is often called ‘good’, but the name ‘the good LORD’ is only found here. Hezekiah appealed not so much to His goodness as to Himself as to the good One. He does not make this appeal for indifferent Israelites, for those who play fast and loose with God’s holiness. He does it for “everyone who prepares his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers” (verse 19). First is looked at the heart. God “desires truth in the innermost being” (Psa 51:6).

That does not mean that practice does not matter. It certainly matters and must also be brought into line with the Word, but that is not emphasized here. There is a balance between God’s grace and God’s holiness. If we know God’s principles, we must act accordingly, and we gracefully must take into account ignorance.

The prayer of Hezekiah is answered by the LORD and He gives healing (verse 20). The healing He gives does not have to be the healing of a phys-

ical disease, a disease that would also be the result of their sins. There is no reason in the text to think of this. Perhaps we could think of healing the pain of the soul caused by the memory of sins committed (Psa 41:4), or of healing of the wandering from behind the LORD (Jer 3:22; Hos 14:5).

The cleansing is followed by great joy lasting seven days (verse 21). Separation to God is not a sad thing. Sin causes sadness and misery. The people are in Jerusalem, the place God has chosen to dwell there. The LORD and all that is of Him are a source of joy for his people. There is seven days great joy. This joy is expressed every day. The LORD is praised day by day. Thus every day of our lives may be filled with thanks to our God and Father (Eph 5:20).

Hezekiah expresses his appreciation for the work of the Levites (verse 22). They have shown their good understanding of the LORD's service through their deeds. In the same sense, the Lord Jesus appreciates all the work of His servants aimed at bringing His church to the celebration of the Supper in a manner consistent with His Word.

If healthy teaching is given by the teachers and the church assumes it, it will awaken the spiritual appetite. It's an appetite that doesn't sink. For seven days the sacrifices of the feast are eaten. The consequence of this is that peace offerings are brought, that is to say, that it promotes and strengthens fellowship with other believers. It all ends in praise of the LORD, Who gives all this to His people.

Verses 23-27 | Another Seven Days of Feast

23 Then the whole assembly decided to celebrate [the feast] another seven days, so they celebrated the seven days with joy. 24 For Hezekiah king of Judah had contributed to the assembly 1,000 bulls and 7,000 sheep, and the princes had contributed to the assembly 1,000 bulls and 10,000 sheep; and a large number of priests consecrated themselves. 25 All the assembly of Judah rejoiced, with the priests and the Levites and all the assembly that came from Israel, both the sojourners who came from the land of Israel and those living in Judah. 26 So there was great joy in Jerusalem, because there was nothing like this in Jerusalem since the days of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel. 27 Then the Levitical priests arose and blessed the people; and their voice was heard and their prayer came to His holy dwelling place, to heaven.

After the seven days of feast, new consultations take place (verse 23; verse 2). This time it is about whether they will add another seven days of feast to the seven days of feast they have already celebrated. They decide to do so, because Hezekiah still has sacrifices that he makes available (verse 24). Also the leaders, following Hezekiah, make sacrifices available. There is also a large number of priests who are in the right condition to occupy themselves with these sacrifices.

The impressions of the Feast of Unleavened Bread are so overwhelming that it is decided to extend the feast voluntarily. What is prescribed gets a voluntarily followed up, because doing what is prescribed gives such great joy. Then the heart desires to continue with that. It wants to hold on to that joy. We see it with “all the assembly of Judah” and with “all the assembly that came from Israel” and also with the sojourners from both these areas (verse 25). Everyone is happy.

The joy is great because this Passover is such a special Passover. It is a Passover that has not been celebrated in this way since “the days of Solomon” (verse 26). We will see that the Passover celebrated under Josia is even more exceptional. That is because it is not so celebrated “since the days of Samuel the prophet” (2Chr 35:18) and thus goes even further back than the days of Solomon. This means that it is even more impressive than what is happening here under Hezekiah. And that already is so special.

The last activity in connection with this great feast is reserved for the Levites. They stand up and bless the people on behalf of God. For this blessing they first addressed God, Who answers their prayer (verse 27). In this situation there is, as it were, a direct connection between God’s holy dwelling in heaven and God’s holy dwelling on earth. Heaven rejoices with the joy on earth. Heaven and earth unite, as will be perfectly the case in the realm of peace, when God’s will is done on earth as in heaven (Mt 6:10).

2 Chronicles 31

Introduction

In 2 Chronicles 29-30 we see what is brought to God. In this chapter we see what is brought to His servants. Caring for the house of God also means caring for those who serve in it.

Verse 1 | The Land Cleansed

1 Now when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah, broke the pillars in pieces, cut down the Asherim and pulled down the high places and the altars throughout all Judah and Benjamin, as well as in Ephraim and Manasseh, until they had destroyed them all. Then all the sons of Israel returned to their cities, each to his possession.

After the cleansing of God's house (2Chr 29:16-17) and God's city (2Chr 30:14), the whole land, God's land, is now cleansed and brought into conformity with the purity of God's house (verse 1). In all the cities of Judah the idols are removed. There is a great cleansing. Then all the Israelites return to their homes and there can be real peace.

We learn here, so to speak, that Christ in the church is the same as Christ in the family and in daily life. Both in the church and in daily life there should be no room for idolatry, for things that capture our time and attention in a way that does not do justice to our devotion to the Lord. Revival is not only something for the meeting, but has to do with the life of every day.

Even in Ephraim and Manasseh is demolished, cut down and destroyed what has to do with idolatry. The zeal to remove what is to dishonor of the LORD extends to areas that do not fall under the direct responsibility of Hezekiah. Yet he does feel responsible for it.

So it is with us when we have to deal with children of God with whom we do not meet regularly as a church. They belong to the church of God. We will point out to them, out of love for the Lord Jesus and out of love for them, things that are not good and help them to bring their lives into conformity with God's Word.

Verses 2-4 | Hezekiah Appoints the Tasks

2 And Hezekiah appointed the divisions of the priests and the Levites by their divisions, each according to his service, [both] the priests and the Levites, for burnt offerings and for peace offerings, to minister and to give thanks and to praise in the gates of the camp of the LORD. 3 [He] also [appointed] the king's portion of his goods for the burnt offerings, [namely], for the morning and evening burnt offerings, and the burnt offerings for the sabbaths and for the new moons and for the fixed festivals, as it is written in the law of the LORD. 4 Also he commanded the people who lived in Jerusalem to give the portion due to the priests and the Levites, that they might devote themselves to the law of the LORD.

After the cleansing is completed, Hezekiah's concern goes to the service of the priests and the Levites (verse 2). They must resume their usual services "by their divisions, each according to his service". In the course of time great disorder will have come into it. Hezekiah appoints each to the task which suits him to accomplish it.

The service of the priests and the Levites is "for burnt offerings and for peace offerings, to minister and to give thanks and to praise". This is a wonderful service. We are priests and servants. This we are not for ourselves, but for God and His church. As priests we bring God the burnt offering, that is, we speak with Him about the Lord Jesus in His full devotion and surrender to Him. That's the basis of all the blessings we have received. We also bring peace offerings, which means that we seek fellowship with God, with the Lord Jesus and with all the members of God's people who are pure.

As Levites we are given by God as a gift to the priests (Num 18:6). Through the teaching of God's Word we may know how to sacrifice as priests. We may also pass on that teaching and serve others by teaching them how best to perform their priestly service. That is, we share with others what we have discovered from the Lord Jesus in God's Word. That will lead all to give thanks and praise the Lord.

It is about the service for the LORD "in the gates of the camp of the LORD". That indicates that the service takes place in a closed environment, closed to hostile elements and directed at the LORD, in the consciousness of His presence. They are *His* camps.

King Hezekiah gives “of his goods” for the burnt offerings for all occasions “as it is written in the law of the LORD” (verse 3). God has prescribed daily, weekly, monthly, and annual burnt offerings. The Lord Jesus gives us out of His fullness what we need to worship God. No particular days or occasions have been set for our worship. God’s Word calls us to continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God (Heb 13:15). We may worship the Father at any time.

After Hezekiah himself has set a good example (cf. 2Thes 3:7,9), he can command that the inhabitants of Jerusalem also give their portion (verse 4). The portion that the people give is for the livelihood of the priests and the Levites. They can therefore fully “devote themselves to the law of the LORD” without the care for their livelihood (cf. 2Tim 2:4). To devote oneself to the law means that they master the law and then to teach what they have learned from it to the people. The Word of God must be studied and applied, first in one’s own life and then in that of others (cf. Ezra 7:10).

Verses 5-7 | An Abundance of Sacred Gifts

5 As soon as the order spread, the sons of Israel provided in abundance the first fruits of grain, new wine, oil, honey and of all the produce of the field; and they brought in abundantly the tithe of all. 6 The sons of Israel and Judah who lived in the cities of Judah also brought in the tithe of oxen and sheep, and the tithe of sacred gifts which were consecrated to the LORD their God, and placed [them] in heaps. 7 In the third month they began to make the heaps, and finished [them] by the seventh month.

The order of Hezekiah spreads (verse 5). Here we see the word at work (cf. 1Thes 2:13; Acts 6:7a). It ends up in the hearts of the Israelites, and that is where the willingness to give works. An abundance of “the first fruits” is provided, and they bring “in abundantly the tithe of all” (cf. Exo 35:21; 1Chr 29:9).

The contributions come from all the cities of Judah (verse 6). Nobody stays behind. Everything is first consecrated to the LORD their God, and then given to the priests and the Levites. God comes first. What we give to others will only be of service if we first give it to the Lord and get it from Him and then pass it on.

The tithes that are brought begin in the third month, at Pentecost, when the barley harvest is brought in (verse 7). In the seventh month, the month of the Feast of Booths, the feast of the collection of fruits (Exo 23:16b), they are ready. Everything that the field yields is brought in. The making of heaps of gifts means that the contributions are put in order. This prevents chaos and maintains the overview. It is like with the multiplication of the loaves by the Lord Jesus. He also brings order to the crowd by having them sit in groups of fifty and a hundred in the grass (Mk 6:39-40).

What is happening here gives us a picture of a revival with sight on the blessings of the land (Deu 8:8; 12:6). It speaks of the fact that we see our task and to show what those blessings are. This happens when the people of God have been busy collecting the fruits of the land, that is to say have been busy with the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. That is what the heart can be focused on in daily life. This benefits the priests and the Levites.

The priest in us, that is, our priesthood, can only function properly when we have knowledge of the blessings of the land and have enjoyed them. What we as ordinary members of God's people are during the week is reflected in our priestly service in the meeting. It is the Israelite in us, as a picture of what we are in daily life, who, so to speak, sustains the priest and the Levite in us. This means that our priestly service and our Levite service, that is to bring sacrifices as priests and serve with our spiritual gifts as servants, cannot be higher than what we have seen in the daily life of the Lord and His blessings.

Verses 8-10 | Praise and Abundance

8 When Hezekiah and the rulers came and saw the heaps, they blessed the LORD and His people Israel. 9 Then Hezekiah questioned the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps. 10 Azariah the chief priest of the house of Zadok said to him, "Since the contributions began to be brought into the house of the LORD, we have had enough to eat with plenty left over, for the LORD has blessed His people, and this great quantity is left over."

The effect of the voluntary gifts of the people is that Hezekiah and the leaders praise the LORD and His people of Israel (verse 8). The LORD and His people are mentioned here in one breath. This is because in the volun-

tary giving of the people God becomes visible as the voluntary Giver. Here the people answer to Whom He is. That is why the people can be praised together with the LORD.

After the spontaneous praise for the heaps he sees, Hezekiah questions concerning the heaps (verse 9). He wants to know where they come from. He does not remain by the impression of the sight, but asks for the origin. The high priest Azariah tells him about it (verse 10). It has to do with the contributions that the people began to bring into the house of the LORD. From the moment the people started to do so again, the priests had enough to eat. And not only that, there is also plenty left over.

God is a God of abundance (Phil 4:18-20). He blesses His people. We can only pass on what He has given (1Chr 29:14b). When that blessing is passed on, it produces even more blessing. So is God. He challenges us to test Him (Mal 3:10). If we accept that challenge, we will experience His abundance. He owes no one anything, for He is faithful to His Word.

For us it mainly concerns our spiritual gifts. These are enjoyed in abundance by us when we commit ourselves to God's house, the church. Everything we invest in it will produce a lot of spiritual fruit. It is important that we pass on spiritual nourishment to our fellow believers. We don't lose that, but it increases on the contrary.

Verses 11-14 | Storerooms

11 Then Hezekiah commanded [them] to prepare rooms in the house of the LORD, and they prepared [them]. 12 They faithfully brought in the contributions and the tithes and the consecrated things; and Conaniah the Levite [was] the officer in charge of them and his brother Shimei [was] second. 13 Jehiel, Azariah, Nahath, Asahel, Jerimoth, Jozabad, Eliel, Ismachiah, Mahath and Benaiah [were] overseers under the authority of Conaniah and Shimei his brother by the appointment of King Hezekiah, and Azariah [was] the [chief] officer of the house of God. 14 Kore the son of Imnah the Levite, the keeper of the eastern gate, was over the freewill offerings of God, to apportion the contributions for the LORD and the most holy things.

When Hezekiah sees the abundance, he says that rooms must be prepared in which the abundance can be stored (verse 11). In those rooms

are brought “the contributions and the tithes and the consecrated things” (verse 12a). That happens “faithfully”. In the service for the Lord – every believer has a service – faithfulness is the most important quality (1Cor 4:1-2). Some Levites mentioned by name are responsible for the supplies and they in turn can only act “by the appointment of King Hezekiah, and Azariah the [chief] officer of the house of God” (verses 12b-13).

We can apply this to local churches. Local churches should be storerooms where the truth is preserved and upheld (cf. 1Tim 3:15b). The supply can be served to God’s people to promote their spiritual growth. Serving with supplies is the task of the teachers given to the church by the Lord Jesus (Eph 4:11). Their service is aimed at teaching believers how to behave in the house of God (1Tim 3:15a).

There is also a Levite, Kore, the son of Imnah, whose place of service is mentioned (verse 14). Kore is “the keeper of the eastern gate”. As gate-keeper he keeps what is entrusted to his care (cf. 1Tim 6:20) to give it to the right persons. That he is keeper at the eastern gate, means in picture that he lives in the expectation of the rising of the Sun of righteousness, that is the coming of the Lord Jesus. Looking forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus is a great incentive to manage and distribute the spiritual goods entrusted to us.

Verses 15-19 | The Priests and the Levites Get Their Portion

15 Under his authority [were] Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah and Shecaniah in the cities of the priests, to distribute faithfully [their portions] to their brothers by divisions, whether great or small, 16 without regard to their genealogical enrollment, to the males from thirty years old and upward—everyone who entered the house of the LORD for his daily obligations—for their work in their duties according to their divisions; 17 as well as the priests who were enrolled genealogically according to their fathers’ households, and the Levites from twenty years old and upwards, by their duties [and] their divisions. 18 The genealogical enrollment [included] all their little children, their wives, their sons and their daughters, for the whole assembly, for they consecrated themselves faithfully in holiness. 19 Also for the sons of Aaron the priests [who were] in the pasture lands of their cities, or in each and every city, [there were] men who were designated by name to distribute por-

tions to every male among the priests and to everyone genealogically enrolled among the Levites.

Kore has his own task, but does not perform it as a loner. There are others who are “under his authority ... to distribute faithfully” (verse 15). Here again there is talk of ‘faithfully’ (verse 12). These men act as “the faithful and sensible” stewards (Lk 12:42). Whoever acts faithfully, will act before the Lord and without regard to persons. We see that with these helpers of Kore. They distribute to their brothers, both to the great and the small, or to the elderly and to the young.

The fact that there is no distinction between older people and young people when it comes to their portion of the gifts does not mean that there are no exceptions. All those who are in the cities of Judah get what they need to live from. However, priests in active service do not receive from them. They receive their portion while they do their service in the house of the LORD in Jerusalem (verse 16). Also the children of three [as it reads in Hebrew] years and older, who they have taken with them to Jerusalem and are with them for the time of their service, get what they need (cf. 1Sam 1:23).

It is important that in the distribution only the real priests get a portion. In order to determine this, the genealogical registers are consulted (verses 17-19). Someone could register as a priest in order to receive some of the collected gifts, without really being a priest. However, he will be discovered if his name does not appear in the genealogical register. Only those who are real priests are enrolled in the register and can receive a portion of the collected tithes.

In verse 17 we see another difference between the priests and the Levites with regard to their registration. The priests are registered “according to their fathers’ households” and the Levites “by their duties [and] their divisions”, while their age also plays a role. The service of the priests is directed to God, the service of the Levites to the people of God.

We can apply this to us as members of the church of God. In our relationship to God, we are all priests and may sacrifice Him, regardless of our age. In our service in the midst of God’s people, we all have different tasks, which require a certain spiritual maturity to perform.

The registers also contain “all their little children, their wives, their sons and their daughters, for the whole assembly” (verse 18). In these different distinguished groups we can see spiritual growth as a priest and Levite. It is like with the family of God, which consists of fathers, young men and little children (1Jn 2:12-18). There are stages in spiritual growth. But at whatever stage one is, he is a member of the family of God and shares in the blessings this brings.

The priests and Levites who do not live in the cities are not forgotten during the division (verse 19). Although they are not directly involved in the service in the house of God, they receive their portion if they are designated by name among the priests and genealogically enrolled among the Levites.

Verses 20-21 | Hezekiah Acts With All His Heart

20 Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah; and he did what [was] good, right and true before the LORD his God. 21 Every work which he began in the service of the house of God in law and in commandment, seeking his God, he did with all his heart and prospered.

Hezekiah is working “throughout all Judah” (verse 20). He has in mind the whole people of God for whom he has direct responsibility. He does not favor a certain class. He does so because he is not busy before the eye of men, but before the eye of the LORD. Therefore he does what is “good”, he only does good things; he does what is “right”, he does justice; he also acts “true” or truly, there is no hypocrisy with him, he does nothing secretly.

What Hezekiah does is only a beginning (verse 21). The atmosphere of his service is “the house of God”. He is committed to understanding “in law and in commandment”. He does that “seeking his God” which is to get to know His will. He knows God as “his God” and from this relationship he is concerned with what He has said.

This contains important indications for us. We can only know the will of God through His Word which He has given to His church. To get to know His will we need to have a personal relationship with Him and actually experience it. In everything Hezekiah does, he acts with all his heart. That is the only way, also for us, to do something and to have prosperity.

2 Chronicles 32

Introduction

In the previous chapters the faithfulness of Hezekiah is shown. There we see his religious reforms. In this chapter we see his political performance. Here also come the tests. There are three of them:

1. the invasion of Sennacherib;
2. his disease to the verge of death;
3. the embassy of Babel.

In the first and second tests he remains standing, but in the third test he fails.

The history described in this chapter also occurs in 2 Kings 18-20 and in Isaiah 36-39. There the events are described in much more detail, while here we have a summary.

Verses 1-8 | Measures of Hezekiah Against Sennacherib

1 After these acts of faithfulness Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah and besieged the fortified cities, and thought to break into them for himself. 2 Now when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come and that he intended to make war on Jerusalem, 3 he decided with his officers and his warriors to cut off the [supply of] water from the springs which [were] outside the city, and they helped him. 4 So many people assembled and stopped up all the springs and the stream which flowed through the region, saying, "Why should the kings of Assyria come and find abundant water?" 5 And he took courage and rebuilt all the wall that had been broken down and erected towers on it, and [built] another outside wall and strengthened the Millo [in] the city of David, and made weapons and shields in great number. 6 He appointed military officers over the people and gathered them to him in the square at the city gate, and spoke encouragingly to them, saying, 7 "Be strong and courageous, do not fear or be dismayed because of the king of Assyria nor because of all the horde that is with him; for the one with us is greater than the one with him. 8 With him is [only] an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles." And the people relied on the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.

The previous chapters have described events that bring joy to both the LORD and His people. In those chapters Hezekiah's faithfulness to its domestic policy has been demonstrated. He has cleansed the temple, city, and land of idolatry and provided facilities to ensure that God's service is maintained in His house and land.

After all these events, the stage changes. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, appears far on the stage, that is, in the land of God (verse 1). He invades Judah. Sennacherib is the king of a rapidly growing empire. The Assyrian army occupied Samaria and the northern part of Israel from the fourth to the sixth year of Hezekiah's reign (2Kgs 18:9-12). Now he enters Judah. After the proofs of Hezekiah's faithfulness, we see that in Sennacherib he is confronted with the powers of darkness.

This does not happen because God must discipline His people, because the people are dedicated to Him. God has another purpose with this invasion and that is to test the faith of Hezekiah. It is always beautiful when dedication to the Lord and His house comes, as evidenced by the removal from our lives of things that prevent it. But the life of faith also has other aspects than our service in the house of God. One of those aspects is that we live in a hostile world. We are being put to the test by the world. Then it becomes clear how we react to attacks from the enemy that come at us from outside.

Sennacherib sets his sights on the cities of Judah and he also sets his sights on Jerusalem (verse 2). If Hezekiah notices this, he consults with his officers and his warriors to cut off the supply of water from the springs which are outside the city (verse 3). The first measure he takes against Sennacherib's attack concerns the water supply. His first concern is that of drinking water. They work with all their might to cut off the springs and the stream, i.e. to hide them (verse 4). The water should not come into the hands of the Assyrians, but should remain at the disposal of the inhabitants of the city (verse 30). Water speaks of the Word of God in its cleansing and invigorating power. This is the first thing you need to have at your disposal in times of testing.

If the water supply is secured, it will give Hezekiah courage to take the next step. This concerns the restoration of the walls, the strengthening of the Millo and the making of weapons and shields (verse 5). All these ele-

ments have to do with defense. The walls are a static, immobile defensive belt; the weapons and shields speak of a dynamic, mobile defense.

We can apply this as follows. There are rock-solid certainties in our faith, such as salvation through faith in Christ and the eternal salvation that comes with it. When the enemy attacks, we must always draw back behind the 'wall'. However, the enemy also attacks when we seek the will of the Lord. Then we must use 'the shield of faith'. This means that we say that we entrust ourselves to Him Who is never mistaken, even though sometimes we do not know what to do or why we have ended up in a certain situation. The abundance of weapons and shields speaks of the abundance of defenses against enemy attacks.

After Hezekiah himself has taken courage, he also speaks to the hearts of the military officers he has appointed over the people (verse 6). Speaking to the heart means speaking to comfort (cf. Rth 2:13). He calls them together in the square at the city gate. He speaks to them insistently: "Be strong and courageous, do not fear or be dismayed" (verse 7; cf. Deu 31:23; Jos 1:9). They do not need to be impressed by the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him.

The enemy can seem powerful when they compare it to themselves. But they should not do that. They have to look at who are with them. Those who are with them cannot be seen with the natural eye. The heavenly hosts under the command of the LORD of the hosts are perceivable only through the eye of faith. Hezekiah sees them, just like Elisha sees them, while his servant only sees the powerful enemy. Elisha then says: "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (2Kgs 6:16), words spoken here by Hezekiah to the military officers.

Hezekiah also points out that Sennacherib relies on nothing but "an arm of flesh" (verse 8; cf. Jer 17:5). With this he indicates that the power (the arm) of Sennacherib is no more than 'flesh', that is to say weak and transient. Then he points out that on the side of Israel stands the LORD as the mighty Helper and Warrior. What can an insignificant man do against the Almighty God? Compared to Him, the power of Sennacherib disappears into nothingness.

How powerful words are is shown by the fact that the people “relied on the words of Hezekiah king of Judah”. Words are not value-free or neutral. Exchanges of words did result in violent confrontations. We can do both good and evil with words, promoting as well as ruining a work of the Lord. It is important that we as believers speak words that do good, words which benefits the other, something that encourages (Zec 1:13). That is how Hezekiah speaks.

Verses 9-19 | Sennacherib Insults the LORD

9 After this Sennacherib king of Assyria sent his servants to Jerusalem while he [was] besieging Lachish with all his forces with him, against Hezekiah king of Judah and against all Judah who [were] at Jerusalem, saying, 10 “Thus says Sennacherib king of Assyria, ‘On what are you trusting that you are remaining in Jerusalem under siege? 11 Is not Hezekiah misleading you to give yourselves over to die by hunger and by thirst, saying, “The LORD our God will deliver us from the hand of the king of Assyria”? 12 Has not the same Hezekiah taken away His high places and His altars, and said to Judah and Jerusalem, “You shall worship before one altar, and on it you shall burn incense”? 13 Do you not know what I and my fathers have done to all the peoples of the lands? Were the gods of the nations of the lands able at all to deliver their land from my hand? 14 Who [was there] among all the gods of those nations which my fathers utterly destroyed who could deliver his people out of my hand, that your God should be able to deliver you from my hand? 15 Now therefore, do not let Hezekiah deceive you or mislead you like this, and do not believe him, for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people from my hand or from the hand of my fathers. How much less will your God deliver you from my hand?” 16 His servants spoke further against the LORD God and against His servant Hezekiah. 17 He also wrote letters to insult the LORD God of Israel, and to speak against Him, saying, “As the gods of the nations of the lands have not delivered their people from my hand, so the God of Hezekiah will not deliver His people from my hand.” 18 They called this out with a loud voice in the language of Judah to the people of Jerusalem who were on the wall, to frighten and terrify them, so that they might take the city. 19 They spoke of the God of Jerusalem as of the gods of the peoples of the earth, the work of men’s hands.

Hezekiah has just finished his preparations or there the servants from Sennacherib come to Jerusalem (verse 9). They speak the words of Sennacherib (verse 10a). These are very different words from the ones Hezekiah has spoken. Hezekiah supported the people of God with his words (verse 8), but Sennacherib wants to undermine and take away the trust of the people in Hezekiah and the LORD by his words (verse 10b). If he can erode their confidence, they will lose courage and become an easy prey for him.

Sennacherib reminds the people through his servants that Hezekiah surrenders them by his policy to die by hunger and by thirst (verse 11). Hezekiah deceives them by making them believe that the LORD their God will save them from his hand. What a folly of Hezekiah! They see with their own eyes what Hezekiah did with "His high places and His altars" (verse 12), don't they? Hezekiah has taken them all away and the LORD has not put a stop to it. Then it must be clear to them what a worthless God that is, Who cannot even stand up for Himself? Here we see that for the foolish unbelief of Sennacherib the LORD is no more than one of the many idols that the people have served.

Sennacherib wants to incite the people by pointing out to them what Hezekiah has taken from them and that he has limited their religion to one altar. But Sennacherib knows nothing of the hidden sources that the faith knows. Even today, people of the world and even in Christianity will say that it makes no sense being faithful to God and His Word. According to Sennacherib, serving the one God is meaningless. By the way, to him God is nothing more than an idol, from whom his altars have been taken away. But even though God's power is not openly present at this time, Judah must know from his own history how God has always stood up for his people against powerful enemies.

In prideful, haughty language Sennacherib asks if they don't know what he and his fathers have done with other peoples (verse 13). In brag he asks a next question and that is whether the gods of those peoples were able to prevent him from conquering those countries. In his third question, he argues that none of the gods of the countries that his fathers banned managed to save his people from his hand. Therefore, as he brags, their God will not succeed in saving His people from his hand (verse 14). Here

Sennacherib not only reduces God to an idol, but he speaks in contempt of Him as one of the slightest idols.

After this list of facts, the conclusion may be clear (verse 15). The people should not be deceived by Hezekiah and not be inspired by what he says. Hezekiah is a liar. They should not believe him. The facts are clear, aren't they? He points out once again – he doesn't tire of repeating it – that no one god has managed to protect his people and kingdom against the attacks of the Assyrians. All these peoples have been conquered by them. If those gods did not succeed, then certainly not their God.

The chronicler leaves it at this as far as the words that Sennacherib addressed to the people are concerned. His servants have spoken still other words "against the LORD God and against His servant Hezekiah" (verse 16; 2Kgs 18:19-35). Again and again Sennacherib in his arrogance slanders the God of heaven and earth by comparing Him to his handmade gods of wood and stone. He also slanders His servant. He calls Hezekiah a deceiver. This is also said of the Lord Jesus (Jn 7:12; Mt 27:63). It is an honor for Hezekiah to share as a companion of God in the reproach that the enemy inflicts upon Him (cf. Psa 69:10; Lk 10:16).

If the desired effect of his words is not achieved, Sennacherib tries to get the people down by means of letters (verse 17). These letters contain the same story. He repeats it again and again. Always saying the same thing does well in politics. The people will be brainwashed by it and will finally accept the lie as truth.

Sennacherib insults "the LORD God of Israel" by continuing to repeat that "the God of Hezekiah" will not be able to save them from his hand, nor will the gods of other nations. His servants support the message of the letter by loudly calling out their threats to the people of Judah (verse 18). They want to break the resistance of the people through intimidation and then take the city.

Verse 19 summarizes how Sennacherib spoke about God. His conception of God will be fatal to him. The effect is the opposite of the goal Sennacherib has with his mocking language. The insult of the opponents makes God turn against these enemies, just as the prayer of His people makes Him work for His people.

Verses 20-23 | The LORD Delivers Hezekiah and Jerusalem

20 But King Hezekiah and Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, prayed about this and cried out to heaven. 21 And the LORD sent an angel who destroyed every mighty warrior, commander and officer in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned in shame to his own land. And when he had entered the temple of his god, some of his own children killed him there with the sword. 22 So the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria and from the hand of all [others], and guided them on every side. 23 And many were bringing gifts to the LORD at Jerusalem and choice presents to Hezekiah king of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations thereafter.

In verse 20 we see two people praying (cf. Mt 18:19). They cry out to heaven, while the threat of the enemy on earth is great. By doing so they look beyond the threatening to Him Who stands above every threat. On one side two people praying, on the other side an enormous army. The two gain the victory, because on the side of those two is the LORD.

Prayer is heard immediately (verse 21). In a nutshell, the chronicler tells us what the LORD does. He sends “an angel who destroyed every mighty warrior, commander and officer in the camp of the king of Assyria”. Can it be simpler? Can it be more radical? The simplicity makes it great. The radicality makes that the problem is solved. What a great encouragement this is for the prayer meeting and the prayer.

Sennacherib drips off like a beaten dog. He is openly disgraced. When he comes home, the fool enters his god’s house to bow down before him. There he undergoes, over which he has insulted the LORD. His god cannot save him from the sword that kills him there while he is lying before that god. To complete his embarrassment it is mentioned that the sword is being handled by “some of his own children”. God uses what he has produced to judge him. Thus will God deal with all braggers.

“So the LORD saved” (verse 22). “So” means through judgment. Salvation is pure and only God’s work. There was no human hand involved. Also the consequence, “guided ... on every side”, is His work. The LORD is honored for this, as is his representative Hezekiah (verse 23). Hezekiah is a type of the Lord Jesus in His office in the kingdom of peace (cf. Rev

21:24). So it is always with kings when they reign well. Then they will be overloaded with honor and wealth by the kings of the nations.

Verses 24-26 | Hezekiah's Illness

24 In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill; and he prayed to the LORD, and the LORD spoke to him and gave him a sign. 25 But Hezekiah gave no return for the benefit he received, because his heart was proud; therefore wrath came on him and on Judah and Jerusalem. 26 However, Hezekiah humbled the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not come on them in the days of Hezekiah.

Hezekiah gets ill (verse 24). He fell ill “in those days,” that is, in the days when the king of Assyria challenged him. His illness is a new test, but a test that drives him out in prayer to the LORD. The LORD speaks to him and promises healing, as we know from the description in 2 Kings, where we are also told about the miracle sign (2Kgs 20:1-11).

In this one verse the chronicler summarizes the illness and healing of Hezekiah. He emphasizes the interest the LORD has in him and his circumstances. While Hezekiah is powerless in the face of the enemy and is close to death in his illness, he knows he is supported by God's care.

After his healing he fails (verse 25). He does not remain dependent. He forgets that he owes everything to the LORD, both his healing and his prosperity. He exalts himself because of his treasures and becomes proud. Pride is the primal sin. Even a God-fearing man like Hezekiah can become entangled in this sin. He has disposed of the idolatry from the land, but now he becomes his own idol. By this the LORD is put on a side track.

His pride causes wrath on him and on Judah and Jerusalem. Then Hezekiah sees his sin and humbles “the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (verse 26). Thus God for the days of Hezekiah refrains from bringing His wrath upon them.

Verses 27-33 | Prosperity and Death of Hezekiah

27 Now Hezekiah had immense riches and honor; and he made for himself treasuries for silver, gold, precious stones, spices, shields and all kinds of valuable articles, 28 storehouses also for the produce of grain, wine and oil, pens for

all kinds of cattle and sheepfolds for the flocks. 29 He made cities for himself and acquired flocks and herds in abundance, for God had given him very great wealth. 30 It was Hezekiah who stopped the upper outlet of the waters of Gihon and directed them to the west side of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all that he did. 31 Even [in the matter of] the envoys of the rulers of Babylon, who sent to him to inquire of the wonder that had happened in the land, God left him [alone only] to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart. 32 Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah and his deeds of devotion, behold, they are written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. 33 So Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the upper section of the tombs of the sons of David; and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem honored him at his death. And his son Manasseh became king in his place.

The treasures and possessions of Hezekiah are measured broadly (verses 27-29). He owes all this to God. They are a reflection of the splendor of the great Son of David. Hezekiah takes care of safe places for all the treasures, so that the precious does not get into the hands of the enemy.

Spiritually, it means that he is careful not to give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw pearls before swine (Mt 7:6; 15:26). All the treasures of God's Word, the whole counsel of God, are for the whole church (Acts 20:27) and for no one else. The same goes for the water supply that Hezekiah secures when Jerusalem is threatened by Sennacherib (verse 30; verses 2-4). He has prosperity in all his work.

Then comes the test of God leaving him (verse 31). The reason is the visit from Babylon. God leaves Hezekiah to see how he deals with this visit. Will he give Him the honor of the wonder they come to ask him about? God can sometimes leave a believer to himself, to withdraw from him. He knows what is in the heart of the believer, as He knows it of the people (Deu 8:2). But it has to come to light and Hezekiah has to see for himself. Hezekiah must know that pride lurks in his heart. He has seen this and humbled himself therefore (verse 26).

God sometimes has to teach us a lesson. With this in mind, we may pray: "Do not lead us into temptation" (Mt 6:13a). If we fail, it is our fault; if we remain standing, it is God's grace. It is the same as being lost and being saved.

The chronicler has reached the end of what he wants to tell his readers about Hezekiah. What else Hezekiah has done, especially his “deeds of devotion” (2Chr 35:26), is described in the vision of Isaiah and in the books of the kings of Judah and Israel (verse 32; Isaiah 36-39). The vision of Isaiah refers to the book of Isaiah (Isa 1:1).

Although Hezekiah failed in the test at the end of his life, his life as a whole was characterized by piety, fear of God. This is also reflected in his burial. That he is buried “in the upper section” is more than just a description of the location. It indicates that his way was a way up, a way up to the LORD. At his death, “all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem honored him”. They will remember his favors. How good it is to remember at the funerals of leaders what the Lord has given to His people in them.

The son who succeeds Hezekiah, Manasseh, is a very different ‘leader’.

2 Chronicles 33

Introduction

After the revival under Hezekiah about which is written in the previous chapters, there are two more great histories: one of Manasseh and one of Josiah. The first history is that of Manasseh and tells the story of the conversion of an individual human being. In the whole Old Testament there is not a more striking history of conversion than that of Manasseh. The other history is that of Josiah and tells of the reform of an entire nation. In these 'epilogue' we see what the grace of God can do.

Verses 1-9 | Manasseh King of Judah

1 Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. 2 He did evil in the sight of the LORD according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD dispossessed before the sons of Israel. 3 For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he also erected altars for the Baals and made Asherim, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. 4 He built altars in the house of the LORD of which the LORD had said, "My name shall be in Jerusalem forever." 5 For he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. 6 He made his sons pass through the fire in the valley of Ben-hinnom; and he practiced witchcraft, used divination, practiced sorcery and dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him [to anger]. 7 Then he put the carved image of the idol which he had made in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever; 8 and I will not again remove the foot of Israel from the land which I have appointed for your fathers, if only they will observe to do all that I have commanded them according to all the law, the statutes and the ordinances [given] through Moses." 9 Thus Manasseh misled Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the sons of Israel.

Manasseh is born during the fifteen years of extra time Hezekiah received (2Kgs 20:6). When he is twelve years old, he becomes king (verse 1). Manasseh is an extraordinary wicked king. The fact that God tolerates him for so long – he reigns no less than fifty-five years, from 697-642 BC – shows the patience of His grace.

Manasseh breaks a double record. No king has ruled as long as he has, and no king has been as wicked as he is. His name means ‘to make forget’. With this he is a model for the people, who also forget God (Jer 2:32). While it is written of his father that “he did right in the sight of the LORD” (2Chr 29:2) it says of Manasseh that “he did evil in the sight of the LORD” (verse 2). The contrast with his father manifests itself in everything. Through the actions of Manasseh, God’s land is inundated with the atrocities of the heathen nations, which the LORD has driven out before the eyes of His people.

Manasseh quickly undoes all his father’s reforms (verse 3). It seems that he has made haste with that. What his father has broken down, he rebuilds. The idol altars are erected again. Manasseh surrenders himself with heart and soul to idolatry.

It is getting worse. He even dares to build idol altars in the house of the LORD (verse 4). With this he grieves the LORD deeply. We hear the pain of the LORD resound in the quote of what he said about his house: “My name shall be in Jerusalem forever.” In the courts of the house of the LORD Manasseh builds altars for all the host of heaven, that are the stars (verse 5).

And it can be even crazier. He lets his sons pass through fire, as his grandfather Ahaz did (verse 6; 2Chr 28:3) and focuses on occultism. He surrenders to the powers of darkness. This is not limited to a personal activity, but he promotes occultism by dealing with mediums and spiritists.

He does everything he can think of to provoke the LORD to anger. His next action is to put a self-made idol in the house of God (verse 7). It is in a terrible way contrary to the intent of God with His home. God has spoken out clearly against David and Solomon about His house. It is the house where His Name shall dwell forever. But Manasseh doesn’t care about God’s intentions.

A reminder is given of the condition to remain in the land (verse 8). Manasseh doesn't mind at all. If he has thought about it at all, he ignores everything God has said. He does not care about God or His commandment. He leads Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray, so that they have sinned worse than the nations which the LORD has wiped out of the land (verse 9). People who confess to belong to God's people sometimes do things for which unbelievers are ashamed (1Tim 5:8; 1Cor 5:1). The history of Manasseh is, in short, that of Israel itself.

Verses 10-17 | Manasseh Humbles Himself

10 The LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention. 11 Therefore the LORD brought the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria against them, and they captured Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze [chains] and took him to Babylon. 12 When he was in distress, he entreated the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. 13 When he prayed to Him, He was moved by his entreaty and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD [was] God. 14 Now after this he built the outer wall of the city of David on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entrance of the Fish Gate; and he encircled the Ophel [with it] and made it very high. Then he put army commanders in all the fortified cities of Judah. 15 He also removed the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the LORD, as well as all the altars which he had built on the mountain of the house of the LORD and in Jerusalem, and he threw [them] outside the city. 16 He set up the altar of the LORD and sacrificed peace offerings and thank offerings on it; and he ordered Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel. 17 Nevertheless the people still sacrificed in the high places, [although] only to the LORD their God.

The LORD doesn't remain silent, and speaks to Manasseh through his prophets (verse 10; verse 18; 2Kgs 21:10-15). But Manasseh is not listening. Therefore the LORD has him captured by the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, whom He sends to Manasseh (verse 11). Heavily handcuffed he is taken to Babylon, which is still a vassal state of Assyria at the moment.

Now by what has happened to him, Manasseh gets so distressed that he entreats the LORD his God (verse 12). There is a total change in his attitude

towards God. That is conversion. First he does everything to provoke God to anger. Now he tries to appease God. The anger of God was brought upon him by all his atrocities. He cannot earn back God's favor by doing some good deeds now, but only by humiliating himself deeply before Him. That is repentance. Conversion and repentance belong together.

Manasseh prays to God, and God is moved by his entreaty and hears (verse 13). That is God. He listens to the supplications of a penitent sinner. For He has promised that He will listen if a man humbles himself (2Chr 7:14). Then Manasseh returns to Jerusalem, meaning the LORD brings him back there. What happens here with Manasseh will happen with Israel in the future. Israel returns to the land at their national conversion.

Manasseh is not only spared and receives grace himself, but he is also enabled to restore much of what he has previously corrupted (verses 14-16). He is given the opportunity to show the fruits of his conversion (cf. Lk 3:8-14). He begins by improving the defense of Jerusalem and the fortified cities of Judah (verse 14). He builds an outer wall around Jerusalem and put army commanders in all the fortified cities of Judah.

Then he cleanses in the house of the LORD that he has so greatly desecrated (verse 15). What he placed in his rebellion against God in and near the house of the LORD of idols and idolaters, he removes in submission to God. He throws everything outside the city.

After his breaking down of what promotes idolatry, there is room to restore what he in his rebellion against God has broken down from the house of the LORD (verse 16a). He rebuilds the altar of the LORD. He then brings peace offerings and thank offerings, thereby testifying of his gratitude toward God.

After showing that his conversion is real, he orders Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel (verse 16b). You can only ask something of someone else if you have set a good example yourself. Manasseh must first prove that he serves the LORD. Now that this is the case, he can also call upon his people with authority to do the same. The Lord Jesus is always and in everything the perfect example. After He has washed the disciples' feet, He instructs them to wash each other's feet (Jn 13:14-15).

Manasseh has been able to undo much of what he introduced of idolatry before his conversion, but not everything (verse 17; verse 22b). We see this also in the history of Josiah who still breaks down a lot (2Chr 34:1-7). The people continue to value the high places in order to sacrifice there. It can be said that they sacrifice only to the LORD their God, but the desire for specially consecrated places remains.

This is also evident in Christianity. There may be a desire to honor only the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, but this is often linked to outer things, such as a church building, certain clothing, and candles. As a result, religion becomes more a service to sentiment, feeling, than to God. Today it is often more about how it feels than whether it is true.

Verses 18-20 | The Death of Manasseh

18 Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh even his prayer to his God, and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of the LORD God of Israel, behold, they are among the records of the kings of Israel. 19 His prayer also and [how God] was entreated by him, and all his sin, his unfaithfulness, and the sites on which he built high places and erected the Asherim and the carved images, before he humbled himself, behold, they are written in the records of the Hozai. 20 So Manasseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house. And Amon his son became king in his place.

For the rest of Manasseh's acts, the chronicler refers to other documents. The first document is 'the records of the kings of Israel'. It contains "his prayer to his God" (verse 18). It also contains "the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of the LORD God of Israel". The prayer of Manasseh to God and the words of God to Manasseh are recorded. These two, the prayer and the Word of God, form the life of a man in his relationship to God.

The second document is "the records of the Hozai" or "the records of the seers" (verse 19). It contains, as in the document mentioned above, "his prayer". The fact that his prayer is mentioned twice – together with the mention in this chapter (verse 13) three times in total – shows how important God considers his prayer to be. This is underlined by the remark "[how God] was entreated by him". It is not about the fact alone, *that* God was entreated by him, but it says *how* God was entreated by him. This is

indicates more the way Manasseh has prayed and God's benevolent acceptance of his prayer.

However, the second document also contains "all his sin, his unfaithfulness, and the sites on which he built high places and erected the Asherim and the carved images, before he humbled himself". Manasseh has set the pen of the historians in motion. There is a lot to tell about him, both for good and for evil.

The beauty of the account we have of the conversion of Manasseh in holy Scripture is that no sinner needs to despair. Conversion is possible for the greatest sinner. At the same time, every sinner must be aware that a precise record is being made of all the deeds he has done. This also happens with all the words that people have spoken to him in the Name of the Lord to address him about his sins. If repentance does not come, all this will testify against him before the great white throne (Rev 20:11-15).

The final remark of the chronicler about Manasseh is about his death (verse 20). When he dies, he is buried in his house, which is in the garden of his house (2Kgs 21:18). It is not clear why he is not buried with his fathers. His son Amon succeeds him as king.

Verses 21-25 | Amon King of Judah

21 Amon [was] twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. 22 He did evil in the sight of the LORD as Manasseh his father had done, and Amon sacrificed to all the carved images which his father Manasseh had made, and he served them. 23 Moreover, he did not humble himself before the LORD as his father Manasseh had done, but Amon multiplied guilt. 24 Finally his servants conspired against him and put him to death in his own house. 25 But the people of the land killed all the conspirators against King Amon, and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his place.

Amon, the son of Manasseh, becomes king when he is twenty-two years old (verse 21). He reigns only two years in Jerusalem. That is enough to get to know him as one to whom the general characteristic of the kings of Israel applies: "He did evil in the sight of the LORD" (verse 22). He shows that he learned nothing from his father's conversion. He does the sins that his father did before his conversion.

He sacrifices to the idols his father made. Perhaps Manasseh did remove the idols in his restoration, but did not destroy them. It may be that there have been so many of them that he has not been able to destroy them all. Sometimes we can't undo everything we've done wrong in earlier years.

Amon follows his father in evil and not in good. He does not humiliate himself as his father has humiliated himself (verse 23). As a result, he makes his guilt ever greater. It says emphatically "Amon" does it. It is this Amon, the man who occupies such a privileged and at the same time responsible place in God's people.

Amon does not die a natural death. He is the victim of a conspiracy of his servants, who kill him in his own house (verse 24). Unlike Manasseh, he is not given the opportunity to convert later in his life. No one knows the day of his death. It is therefore important to tell people that every day can be the last and that conversion should not be postponed until tomorrow.

God uses the sense of justice of the people of the land to prevent the land from sinking into anarchy. The people of the land act according to the law and kill the conspirators (verse 25). Then they make the son of Amon Josiah king instead of his father.

2 Chronicles 34

Introduction

What characterizes the revival under Josiah is the great emphasis on the Word of God. The book of the law, the Word of God, is rediscovered. This causes a great shock to Josiah. We can see that in the Reformation, which creates the break with Rome. Despite the Reformation, much remains that is contrary to Scripture. A new Reformation is needed, for their “deeds” are “not found ... completed” (Rev 3:2).

Verses 1-7 | Josiah King of Judah

1 Josiah [was] eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. 2 He did right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of his father David and did not turn aside to the right or to the left. 3 For in the eighth year of his reign while he was still a youth, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, the carved images and the molten images. 4 They tore down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and the incense altars that were high above them he chopped down; also the Asherim, the carved images and the molten images he broke in pieces and ground to powder and scattered [it] on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. 5 Then he burned the bones of the priests on their altars and purged Judah and Jerusalem. 6 In the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon, even as far as Naphtali, in their surrounding ruins, 7 he also tore down the altars and beat the Asherim and the carved images into powder, and chopped down all the incense altars throughout the land of Israel. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

Josiah, when he is only eight years old, becomes king in place of his wicked father Amon (verse 1). It is a great miracle that a boy like Josiah grows up in the house of the wicked Amon. However, in the first years of his reign everything will have remained in the line of his wicked father, because he is still too young to do anything himself. Yet from an early age he grew up in the things of the LORD.

Being young and staying in or being interested in the sanctuary are more often found together in Scripture. We see this for example also with Josh-

ua, Samuel and Solomon. In Josiah we see a sensitive heart that is subject to the Word and a conscience that takes into account the thoughts and the will of God.

Josiah means 'supported by the LORD' or 'for whom the LORD cares' or 'given by the LORD'. He reigned thirty-one years, from 640-609 BC. That is in the end time of Judah, eight hundred years after Moses and four hundred years after David. As said, his father, Amon, was a wicked man. Possibly Josiah has only experienced his grandfather Manasseh in his good times and that has had a blessing in his life. Besides his mother, Timothy also owes much to his grandmother (2Tim 1:5). Grandparents can contribute substantially to the development of their grandchildren.

The general characteristic of his life is that he does what is right in the sight of the LORD (verse 2). The LORD looks at him with pleasure. Here he sees one who reminds of David, the man after His heart. No spiritual helper is mentioned, as once with Joash (2Chr 24:5). It seems that Josiah has a personal relationship with God.

A child who becomes king is not directly a proof of God's grace, but rather a judgment about the faithlessness of the people (Ecc 10:16a; Isa 3:4). However, if God gives a wise child, it is better "than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction" (Ecc 4:13). Josiah is such a wise child. He is wise because he fears the LORD.

His walk is compared to that of his father David, as is also mentioned of Hezekiah (2Chr 29:2). He is balanced in his faith and serving the LORD. He does "not turn aside to the right or to the left" (Deu 5:32). It is always a great danger for every child of God that he deviates either to the right or to the left.

We deviate to the right when we apply the truth of God's Word without love; we deviate to the left when we only talk about love without applying the truth of God's Word. It is important that we have a walk in which we do not fall into sectarian narrow-mindedness on the one hand, which is to deviate to the right, and carnal freedom on the other hand, which is to deviate to the left.

In the eighth year of his reign (verse 3a), he is then sixteen years old, he makes the personal choice to seek the God of his father David. The child-

hood years are then over. There is growth to adulthood. At the important age of sixteen he begins to seek God. He does not seek God as a sinner, but as someone who consciously wants to involve Him in all his activities.

First Josiah walks in the ways of his father David (verse 2). Now he begins to seek the God of his father David. With young people it is first the example that makes them walk, then they look for the source of strength for that walk. The example of David refers Josiah to God. Thus, the walk of the elders must refer to the Lord Jesus. Then young people will not go looking for the elderly, but for Him.

In the twelfth year of his reign (verse 3b), when he is twenty, he begins to clean up. This is probably not possible earlier because of his dependence on others. When he begins the cleansing of the land, the book of the law has not yet been found. This indicates that someone who lives with the Lord has the desire that things are in agreement with Him. Conscience is then practiced in His presence and feels what is right, without an explicit word from God's Word. What happens, however, is completely in agreement with it.

Then the Holy Spirit gives an account of the courageous deeds of Josiah (verses 4-7). Josiah wants to cleanse Jerusalem and Judah from places that express contempt for the center God has chosen. He will be surrounded by people who cannot appreciate his work. In any case, he will not receive much support. And although the people do not oppose him, their hearts are not with him either. It is a work of individual faith.

The variety of objects that Josiah destroys (verse 4) gives an impression of the arsenal of deceptions that Satan has to make God's people unfaithful to his God. Often we, too, have to tidy up several things from our lives in order to make room again for the Lord Jesus. If one form of evil has entered our lives, it provides an opening for other forms of evil.

Josiah seeks God first, then he goes to work. It is important for young believers to have a relationship with the Lord Jesus in secret and to be taught and brought up by Him. Only when this is present an open task can be performed. First the roots must be driven deep into the Word of God, then the growth and the bearing of fruit will come. This is what Josiah needs, because he has an enormous work to do.

In Hezekiah this cleansing takes place at the end of his reign as the consequence of the inner cleansing. Josiah begins with the outer cleansing. Thereby he proceeds more thoroughly than his grandfather Manasseh after his conversion, for he not only breaks but also pulverizes. He destroys everything that is contrary to God's statute that there is only one altar, His altar, and that there is only one house, His house. These are things that tolerate no competition. There is no compromise in holy things for Josiah.

He sprinkles the ashes of the idols upon the graves of the idolaters. It is an example that when someone dies, his works follow him in judgment (cf. 1Tim 5:24; cf. Rev 14:13). It is not over with death. By burning the bones of the priests on the altar (verse 5) he fulfils the prophecy of the man of God from Judah (1Kgs 13:2).

The second phase of his cleansing is that he even goes to cities of the ten tribes (verse 6), while those tribes have already been deported. Only a handful of people will live there. However, for him it is also the holy land. He breaks all the incense altars "throughout the land of Israel" (verse 7). It speaks of him cleansing the whole personal, daily life.

In addition, we see that, just as with Hezekiah, every sectarian thought is strange to him. For us, New Testament believers, the unity of the church, the one body, is the starting point of coming together and living together. That foundation is not limited to those who think alike, but is for everyone who belongs to the church. Josiah has a message for the whole people, not just for Judah. Whom we can still reach with God's Word, we may show what that Word says about the church.

Josiah does not come with a message that feels good. He comes to eradicate the altars! He doesn't come with a cheap message. He comes to tell them what is contrary to God's Word. He tells them all this, even though he doesn't have a Bible, because the Bible won't be found until later. Yet he can tell them all this because he is aware of God's holiness.

Verses 8-13 | Care for the House of the LORD

8 Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah an official of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the LORD his

God. 9 They came to Hilkiah the high priest and delivered the money that was brought into the house of God, which the Levites, the doorkeepers, had collected from Manasseh and Ephraim, and from all the remnant of Israel, and from all Judah and Benjamin and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 10 Then they gave [it] into the hands of the workmen who had the oversight of the house of the LORD, and the workmen who were working in the house of the LORD used it to restore and repair the house. 11 They in turn gave [it] to the carpenters and to the builders to buy quarried stone and timber for couplings and to make beams for the houses which the kings of Judah had let go to ruin. 12 The men did the work faithfully with foremen over them to supervise: Jahath and Obadiah, the Levites of the sons of Merari, Zechariah and Meshullam of the sons of the Kohathites, and the Levites, all who were skillful with musical instruments. 13 [They were] also over the burden bearers, and supervised all the workmen from job to job; and [some] of the Levites [were] scribes and officials and gatekeepers.

In these verses we see the third phase of the revival and that is the restoration of the temple. After the cleansing, what we can call negative, something is removed, now comes the restoration, what we can call positive, something is built up. We are “in the eighteenth year of his reign” (verse 8). Josiah is then twenty-six and no longer a new convert (1Tim 3:6). He can take care of the temple. Josiah has his own relationship with God, who is called “his God”.

He who knows and loves God in this way also loves His house. Such a person will listen to the instructions about his behavior in the house of God. Restoring the house of God has to do with behaving in God’s house in a way that befits Him of Whom the house is and Who has set His rules of conduct for His house (1Tim 3:15). Confusion in the house of God is the result of people making rules. Where that is the case, it must be corrected.

This behavior in God’s house concerns all of us. Correcting what has gone wrong is the concern of all. For example, the Levites collected money from all over the land to restore the temple (verse 9). The house of God is not the property or the care of a small group in Judah.

This also applies to us. The spiritual health of a local church depends on what the individual members contribute. If everyone provides a good contribution, the temple as the dwelling place of God will be fully dedicated to God again.

Faithful people go to work to restore the house of the LORD. There are two kinds of executors (verse 10). There are executors who supervise and there are executors who repair and restore. These two categories can be recognized in the New Testament in the overseers or shepherds and the teachers. These executors provide the craftsmen and builders with the necessary materials (verse 11).

The temple has fallen into decay. The kings of Judah are responsible for this (verse 11b). For us, the temple is a picture of the church (1Cor 3:16) and of the body of the believer (1Cor 6:19). From both must be removed everything that contradicts Him Who dwells in it, that is God the Holy Spirit. After the cleansing of the land - daily life - the meeting of the believers as a church and the heart of the believers must be cleansed.

The materials are hewn stones and wood. In the stones we can see a picture of the believers, which are called "living stones" (1Pet 2:5). They are incorporated into the temple. It indicates that believers are being taught about their place in the church. The wood is used for "the joints". Here we can see a picture of the growth of the believers in connection with other believers.

The wood is also used to "decorate" decayed houses. This points us to the way we think. As kings – that is what we have become by faith (Rev 1:6) – we have to have an eye for the open spots in our thinking. It is about recognizing the danger that evil powers from the heavenly places influence our thinking. That is why we must put "the helmet of salvation" (Eph 6:17) on our heads, on our thinking.

The decay of God's house has been caused by man's unfaithfulness. Only faithful people can provide a valuable contribution to the restoration of God's house (verse 12). The apostle Paul is such a faithful worker. He can say that the Lord "considered me faithful" (1Tim 1:12). Timothy is also such a faithful worker. Paul calls him his "faithful child in the Lord" (1Cor 4:17).

The leaders are Levites "who were skillful with musical instruments". Here we see a beautiful harmony between the service to God - honoring Him in a melodious way – and the service to the saints – leading them in their occupation of God's house. These Levites with their melodious music

are especially connected with “the burden bearers” and “all the workmen from job to job” (verse 13). Heavy burdens and all kinds of work become lighter when we think about Who we are doing our work for. When the Lord Jesus stands before us in our work, we become happy and thankful that we may serve Him. We then experience the truth of His words: “My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Mt 11:30).

Levites do not only give guidance. There are also those who are directly involved in the ministry as “scribes and officials and gatekeepers”. Some write down everything that happens, others supervise the building, and others guard. It is the tragedy of Christianity that the overseership has become a status above other believers. We see this in the church hierarchy in both protestantism and roman-catholicism. Overseers have a task in the midst of or among God’s people and not above them (Mt 23:9-10; Acts 20:28; 1Pet 5:2-3).

Verses 14-18 | The Book of the Law Found

14 When they were bringing out the money which had been brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiyah the priest found the book of the law of the LORD [given] by Moses. 15 Hilkiyah responded and said to Shaphan the scribe, “I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD.” And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan. 16 Then Shaphan brought the book to the king and reported further word to the king, saying, “Everything that was entrusted to your servants they are doing. 17 They have also emptied out the money which was found in the house of the LORD, and have delivered it into the hands of the supervisors and the workmen.” 18 Moreover, Shaphan the scribe told the king saying, “Hilkiyah the priest gave me a book.” And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.

The fourth phase in the revival is the finding of the book of the law. This discovery is made while they are busy with the money for the house of the LORD (verse 14). When we are busy with the interests of God’s house, God will open our eyes to His Word, that is, He will speak to our hearts through His Word. The Word is going to live for us.

The finder of the book, the priest Hilkiyah, gives the book to Saphan with the words: “I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD”

(verse 15). In the application to us, this testimony can be recited by many. Many believers have discovered the truth of God's Word through teaching in the local church. This is the customary 'finding place' of the Word. In the church the Word is proclaimed and explained. It does not mean that the church teaches, because the teaching is given by the teachers whom the Lord Jesus has given, while everyone who listens to it has to examine the Word to see whether those things are so (Acts 17:11).

"The apostles' teaching" is taught in the first church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:42). In one of the first churches of the Gentiles in Antioch, teaching is also given for one year from God's Word (Acts 11:26). Teaching God's Word in a church is important in order to grow in faith. This in no way excludes the personal study of God's Word, but rather promotes it.

Saphan takes the found book of the law to Josiah (verse 16a). First he reports on the work (verses 16b-17). He reports of the servants that they do obediently what they have to do. That is a beautiful testimony. Hopefully it can also be testified of us before the Lord Jesus and others that we are doing what is "delivered into our hands" (cf. 1Tim 4:15). It is important that we work with what the Lord has entrusted to us. This is noticed by others.

After the account of the faithfulness of the workers, Saphan tells Josiah about the book that the priest Hilkiah has given him and begins to read from it (verse 18). It is the first time in his life that Josiah hears God's Word. Here he comes for the first time into contact with the power of the Word, which has a tremendous effect on him. How important it is for us every time we read God's Word to do it so, as if it were for the first time. Then we will experience the power of it each time and it will have the same effect that it has on Josiah.

Verses 19-22 | The Effect

19 When the king heard the words of the law, he tore his clothes. 20 Then the king commanded Hilkiah, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Abdon the son of Micah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying, 21 "Go, inquire of the LORD for me and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book which has been found; for great is the wrath of the LORD which is poured out on us because our fathers have not observed

the word of the LORD, to do according to all that is written in this book.” 22 So Hilkiah and [those] whom the king had told went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, the keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter); and they spoke to her regarding this.

When Josiah hears the Word of God, he is immediately impressed (verse 19). Josiah shows the true spirit of the Reformation. He who has been touched by the Word will ask what he should do (Acts 2:37). If the Word of God comes to us and we see that there are things in our lives that are not right, let us not respond as Josiah’s son, Jojakim, does. He cuts the Word into pieces, he tears the Word and not his clothes (Jer 36:23-24). Josiah reacts differently. He tears his clothes. The Word works in him (1Thes 2:13).

The Word given eight hundred years ago by Moses (verse 14) has lost nothing of its power. It has its full effect on Josiah. That is because Josiah bows down before it. He does not say: ‘This is no longer of our time, it has nothing more to say to us.’ No, it convinces him and he knows it still has its full meaning.

Josiah takes immediate action. If God’s Word comes to us and we are aware of it, it will move us to action. Josiah wants to know what the LORD wants and gives some servants the command to go and consult Him (verses 20-21a). We read his motivation (verse 21b). Josiah sees that God must judge because of the unfaithfulness of the people. That unfaithfulness is the result of not paying careful attention to God’s Word. Because judgment is spoken of, it may be they have read from the book of Deuteronomy (cf. Deu 31:16-19; 32:16-43).

The judgments are no reason for Josiah to be down. There is a way of restoration. He knows this can be pointed out to him by the prophetess Huldah (verse 22). The spiritual strength lies with a woman, as in the time of the Judges with Deborah (Jdg 4:4-5). If that is the situation, it means that God’s people have deviated far from Him.

Huldah lives in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter, probably in an inconspicuous house, perhaps in what we call a “terraced house”. She is married to “the keeper of the wardrobe”. Garments speak of our customs, what people see of us. Doesn’t this speak of how the Word of God is to become

visible in our lives, that Christ is manifested in our lives? It is God's intention that we adorn the doctrine of God our Savior through in every respect of our lives (Tit 2:10b).

Verses 23-28 | Message From Huldah

23 She said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Tell the man who sent you to Me, 24 thus says the LORD, "Behold, I am bringing evil on this place and on its inhabitants, [even] all the curses written in the book which they have read in the presence of the king of Judah. 25 Because they have forsaken Me and have burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore My wrath will be poured out on this place and it shall not be quenched.'" 26 But to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus you will say to him, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel [regarding] the words which you have heard, 27 Because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place and against its inhabitants, and [because] you humbled yourself before Me, tore your clothes and wept before Me, I truly have heard you," declares the LORD. 28 Behold, I will gather you to your fathers and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, so your eyes will not see all the evil which I will bring on this place and on its inhabitants.'" And they brought back word to the king.

Huldah begins her message by pointing directly to the origin of her message (verse 23). What she says are not her words, but the words of "the LORD, the God of Israel". That can only be said by someone who really speaks the words of the LORD. Unfortunately, it often happens today that those words are uttered by people who are only seeking their own benefit (Eze 13:7).

Huldah addresses the words of the LORD to "the man who sent you to Me". Josiah is spoken of as a 'man', not as a king. In the presence of the LORD there is no place for the importance of man.

In verse 24 Huldah pronounces the words "so says the LORD" for the second time. Now they are the introduction to what the LORD is going to do and why he is going to do it (verse 25). Although Josiah restored the temple, the people did not convert to the LORD from their hearts and with

repentance for their idolatry. The people have forsaken the LORD, and therefore the judgment is unavoidable.

Then she has a personal word for Josiah (verse 26). She notes that Josiah sent his servants “to inquire of the LORD”. Such actions are greatly appreciated by the LORD, and He notes them with joy. The personal word for Josiah is introduced with the words Hulda has already spoken twice before. The LORD not only appreciates the fact that Josiah wants to inquire of Him, but He also sees the mind of his heart (verse 27; cf. 1Kgs 21:20-29). The mind of Josiah became manifest when he heard the words of the LORD. It has brought him to humble himself before God. Of this he has shown the outward sign in the tearing of his clothes and weeping before God. A heart that has grown soft before Him also shows that softness and humiliation. We can tear our clothes and cry without real repentance. With Josiah everything is real.

For this reason the LORD Josiah gets a personal promise (verse 28). That promise is that he will see nothing of all the mischief that the LORD is going to bring upon Jerusalem (cf. Isa 57:1-2 ; 2Chr 32:26). Before the judgments come, Josiah will be united with his fathers by the LORD, and will be buried in peace. We can apply this to the rapture of the church from the earth before God will let His judgments come over the earth (Rev 3:10 ; 1Thes 1:9-10).

When Huldah has finished speaking, the servants report Josiah. This brings him to act again. From this we see that Josiah accepts the words of Hulda as the words of the LORD. She has said “so says the LORD” three times and Josiah acknowledges that.

Verses 29-33 | Reaction of Josiah

29 Then the king sent and gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. 30 The king went up to the house of the LORD and all the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests, the Levites and all the people, from the greatest to the least; and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD. 31 Then the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the LORD to walk after the LORD, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all

his heart and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant written in this book. 32 Moreover, he made all who were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand [with him]. So the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. 33 Josiah removed all the abominations from all the lands belonging to the sons of Israel, and made all who were present in Israel to serve the LORD their God. Throughout his lifetime they did not turn from following the LORD God of their fathers.

The effect of the divine message on the heart of Josiah is that he leads the whole people to renew the covenant relationship with the LORD. He calls all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem to come (verse 29). Then he, the king, goes first to the house of the LORD (verse 30). All the people, in all their ranks and of all ages, follow him.

Josiah reads the whole Word that is found. He takes the time for it, and so do the people. Again it is emphasized that the book “was found in the house of the LORD”. The time before the final judgments is characterized by organizing meetings around the Word (Heb 10:25). Everyone, young and old, always needs the Word, but especially in times of crisis. The house of the LORD is not only the place of worship but also the place of teaching (cf. Lk 21:37a).

After reading in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant, the king stands “in his place” (cf. 2Kgs 23:3), where we may think of the platform made by Solomon (2Chr 6:13). First Josiah himself makes a covenant before the LORD (verse 31). In doing so he commits himself to follow the LORD and to obey Him with all his heart and with all his soul. Then he involves Jerusalem and Benjamin in the covenant (verse 32) and also obliges everyone who dwells in Israel to serve the LORD (verse 33). The origin of the revival is in the heart of Josiah. The people are obliged by him to take a stand and to serve. The difference between the heart of Josiah and the heart of the people becomes clear after the death of Josiah.

It is always Josiah who acts for the people. He brings all of the twelve tribes under his authority into that covenant. However, it only works for as long as he lives. In the book of Jeremiah it becomes clear that the reformation of Josiah only did an outward work in the lives and homes of the members of God’s people. That the people do not deviate is not a matter of their hearts.

They are hypocrites. In reality they are far away from the LORD (Jer 3:10). Josiah therefore represents in his person the remnant that remains faithful in a time of apostasy.

Yet an outward restoration is better than no restoration. An outward restoration has an impact on public life. We see that Josiah removes all abominations from Israel. As long as Josiah's inspiring leadership is there, the people follow. After his death it becomes clear how even his own family has not been touched by God's Spirit. Good kings are a picture of the great Son of David. In them we also see examples of true spiritual leadership to bring the people to a walk in agreement with God.

2 Chronicles 35

Introduction

The last two chapters show a high point and a low point and a ray of hope at the end. The climax is the celebration of the Passover by King Josiah. The low point is what Jehoiakin and Zedekiah, the sons of Josiah, do. A pious father and wicked sons. Yet 2 Chronicles ends with a beginning of an ascending line. In the last verses new hope rises through the faithfulness of God.

Verses 1-6 | Preparation for Celebrating the Passover

1 Then Josiah celebrated the Passover to the LORD in Jerusalem, and they slaughtered the Passover [animals] on the fourteenth [day] of the first month. 2 He set the priests in their offices and encouraged them in the service of the house of the LORD. 3 He also said to the Levites who taught all Israel [and] who were holy to the LORD, "Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel built; it will be a burden on [your] shoulders no longer. Now serve the LORD your God and His people Israel. 4 Prepare [yourselves] by your fathers' households in your divisions, according to the writing of David king of Israel and according to the writing of his son Solomon. 5 Moreover, stand in the holy place according to the sections of the fathers' households of your brethren the lay people, and according to the Levites, by division of a father's household. 6 Now slaughter the Passover [animals], sanctify yourselves and prepare for your brethren to do according to the word of the LORD by Moses."

Verse 1 is a summary of what is described in verses 2-19. The celebrating of the Passover follows from what Josiah read in the found book of the law and the covenant he made with the LORD to act according to all the words of the book of the law. Josiah celebrates the Passover on the day appointed by the LORD (Lev 23:5). Our obedience works in the same way. Paul has also been told by the Lord how the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated (1Cor 11:23). We celebrate it according to His directions on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).

Just as with Hezekiah, we also find the weakness of the priests. They must be resurrected to do their service (verse 2). We also see this in Christianity, where many believers are not aware of their priesthood and therefore do not do priestly service. We would do well to encourage those believers to take up their priestly duties in the house of God. The Father seeks for them (Jn 4:23).

The house has been cleansed. Now the objects that belong there can be given their own place again. Josiah tells the Levites to put the ark back in its place (verse 3). It seems that the ark is no longer in its place because of former unfaithfulness. The Levites are said to teach "all Israel". What the Levites do corresponds to the teaching of teachers in the church. The goal of their teaching must be to give the Lord Jesus the place that belongs to Him. A divine service in the church is only possible if the Lord Jesus can take His rightful place, a place of rest and authority in the midst of His own.

Josiah also says to the Levites that they must serve the LORD their God and His people Israel. God must occupy the first place in their - and also in our - service. It is not man and his needs that are central, but the Lord and His interests. God's people must be served in line with this and directly related to it.

After pointing out to the Levites their connection to the ark and their service, Josiah tells them to prepare themselves (verse 4). This preparation means that they must prepare themselves for their service. In doing so, they should not rely on their own insights or initiatives. Their responsibilities are described by David and Solomon. If they act accordingly, they will be occupied to the honor of God and will be protected against acting arbitrarily, which would cause new disorder.

Everything must be carried out exactly according to Scripture. Every time the chronicler points this out. In verses 3-4 he refers to Solomon, in verses 4,15 to the writing of David, in verse 18 to Samuel, and in verses 6,12 to the word of the LORD by the mouth of Moses. The latter is a fine example of inspiration. At the same time, the word of Moses is perfectly the word of God. That word is the standard for Josiah.

When the Levites have prepared themselves, they must stand in the holy place to perform their task for the benefit of the lay people, literally “the sons of the people” (verse 5). It is true that to the Levites is spoken about the sons of the people as “your brethren”. The Levites, together with the common people, are members of God’s people.

For us it means that we take our place in the church in submission to the Word, so that we can meet the Lord Jesus there. We are all there together as brothers and sisters. For us there is no distinction as instituted by God in Israel, a distinction between priests and Levites and the common people. The New Testament believer is a priest, a Levite and an ordinary member of the people at the same time. However, we can apply these distinctions to different aspects of our being a Christian, such as worshipping God, serving the believers, and being a Christian in daily life.

The Levites are commissioned to slaughter the Passover animals and sanctify themselves (verse 6). When we are occupied with the Passover, which for us is the Lord Jesus (1Cor 5:7b), we must realize that we are occupied with holy things. Josiah instructs the Levites to prepare Passover animals also for their brethren and to do so as it is written down in God’s Word by Moses. For us it means teaching our fellow believers by means of the Word of God what it means to engage with Christ as our Passover.

Verses 7-9 | The Passover Offerings

7 Josiah contributed to the lay people, to all who were present, flocks of lambs and young goats, all for the Passover offerings, numbering 30,000 plus 3,000 bulls; these were from the king’s possessions. 8 His officers also contributed a freewill offering to the people, the priests and the Levites. Hilkiah and Zechariah and Jehiel, the officials of the house of God, gave to the priests for the Passover offerings 2,600 [from the flocks] and 300 bulls. 9 Conaniah also, and Shemaiah and Nethanel, his brothers, and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Jozabad, the officers of the Levites, contributed to the Levites for the Passover offerings 5,000 [from the flocks] and 500 bulls.

Here the Passover becomes a sacrificial feast. Josiah and the leaders contribute offerings. In verse 7 we read that the great gift of Josiah comes from his own possessions. The making available of sacrifices shows in picture that Christians not only bring their own appreciation of Christ as a sac-

rifice, but that through their teaching teachers and leaders also provide other believers with ‘sacrificial material’.

Sacrifices are constantly added to the sacrifices, new sacrifices are constantly being provided (verses 8-9). This indicates that our spiritual sacrifices are constantly being renewed. If that does not happen, our spiritual sacrificial service becomes formalism, it becomes a routine. That is why it is important to read about the Lord Jesus in God’s Word, so that there is more and more thanks and worship for Him in our hearts.

Verses 10-16 | Preparing the Offerings

10 So the service was prepared, and the priests stood at their stations and the Levites by their divisions according to the king’s command. 11 They slaughtered the Passover [animals], and while the priests sprinkled the blood [received] from their hand, the Levites skinned [them]. 12 Then they removed the burnt offerings that [they] might give them to the sections of the fathers’ households of the lay people to present to the LORD, as it is written in the book of Moses. [They did] this also with the bulls. 13 So they roasted the Passover [animals] on the fire according to the ordinance, and they boiled the holy things in pots, in kettles, in pans, and carried [them] speedily to all the lay people. 14 Afterwards they prepared for themselves and for the priests, because the priests, the sons of Aaron, [were] offering the burnt offerings and the fat until night; therefore the Levites prepared for themselves and for the priests, the sons of Aaron. 15 The singers, the sons of Asaph, [were] also at their stations according to the command of David, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun the king’s seer; and the gatekeepers at each gate did not have to depart from their service, because the Levites their brethren prepared for them. 16 So all the service of the LORD was prepared on that day to celebrate the Passover, and to offer burnt offerings on the altar of the LORD according to the command of King Josiah.

Now that the priests, the Levites, and the service are prepared, the Passover can be celebrated. All take their places according to the commandment of the king (verse 10). So they stand there at the right time, in the right place, with the right sacrifices and the right mind of heart. When we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, it must also be done as the Lord Jesus said, in the place where He is, in the way He wills and in the right mind. We have to understand that the Lord’s meal is not an ordinary human meal. If we

consider that, it will save us from the misconduct that Paul must admonish the Corinthians about (1Cor 11:20-21).

The slaughter of the Passover lamb is a serious matter (verse 11). The death of an innocent, spotless animal and the sprinkling of blood are reminders of what was necessary for the redemption of the people out of Egypt. It is a picture of the great sacrifice of Christ through Whose blood we are redeemed from the power of sin (1Pet 1:18-19). The skinning is done to sacrifice certain parts of the sacrifices to the LORD and to give other parts to the people to be eaten (verse 12).

The parts of the sacrifice are treated in different ways (verse 13). The Passover lamb is roasted, and the holy things that are for the people are boiled in various objects (Exo 12:8-9; Deu 16:7). After their preparation, the meat is speedily carried to the celebrating people, after which the meal can begin.

What is roasted is exposed to the fire. This is seen in Christ Who has been in the fire of God's judgment. The cooking of the parts of the sacrifice given to the common people is an expression of the people's appreciation of the work of Christ. That appreciation means that God's people feed on Christ.

The priests have been so busy sacrificing the burnt offerings that the Levites must prepare the Passover lamb for them (verse 14). Here we see a beautiful cooperation in the service for the LORD. As said before, today we know no distinction between priests and Levites. All believers are priests before God and all serve Him also as Levites with the different task each one has. As Levites we are busy to do our priestly task all the better, to become better worshippers.

In verse 15 the celebration of the Passover is extended with singing. At the first celebration of the Passover, at the exodus from Egypt (Exo 12:1-12), there is no singing. Singing is part of the Supper. We remember the Lord and proclaim His death. At the same time, we are glad that He has done it and that the work has been accomplished through which God has been glorified and we have been saved and have received so many blessings. We cannot help but praise and honor Him for that. The cup of the Supper is therefore referred to as "the cup of blessing which we bless" or "the cup of praise for which we praise" (1Cor 10:16a).

The gatekeepers remain at their post. As they faithfully perform their service, they receive their share of the Passover lamb “because the Levites their brethren prepared for them”. Here we see that while we are busy before the Lord, we can feed on Him. There is a danger that through our zeal we may forget to feed on the Lord. He is the true strength for our service.

Verse 16 is the conclusion of the previous part. To speak of “all the service of the LORD “ means that it is not a service of men. It is a service by men. However, they must do their service in the prescribed manner. It happens “on that day”, the day determined by the LORD when the Passover is to be celebrated. It also happens “on the altar of the LORD” and not on an altar of men. Finally everything happens “according to the command of King Josiah”. Josiah is the God-fearing leader who gives his people the right instructions. It is also necessary today that the leaders among God’s people give the people the right directions from God’s Word.

Verses 17-19 | A Special Passover

17 Thus the sons of Israel who were present celebrated the Passover at that time, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days. 18 There had not been celebrated a Passover like it in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet; nor had any of the kings of Israel celebrated such a Passover as Josiah did with the priests, the Levites, all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 19 In the eighteenth year of Josiah’s reign this Passover was celebrated.

There are also Israelites present at the celebration of the Passover, i.e. members of God’s people from the Ten Tribes (verse 17). They should be all men of Israel, for according to the command they should go to Jerusalem three times a year, among other things to celebrate the Passover (Exo 23:14-17; Deu 16:7-17). Unfortunately this is not the case. Even today, many do not come to the place where the Lord Jesus is in the midst of the church to honor Him there.

The Passover is followed by the celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a feast that lasts for seven days. The connection between the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread is very close and occurs more often (Lk 22:1; 1Cor 5:7-8). The meaning is that our life must be in accordance

with our eating of the slain Lamb. Our whole life - seven is the number that indicates a complete period - must be 'unleavened', i.e. free from sin, of which the leaven is a picture.

The Passover that Josiah celebrates is of a higher spiritual level than that of Hezekiah. The Passover celebrated by Hezekiah has not been so celebrated since the days of Solomon (2Chr 30:26). The Passover celebrated by Josiah even surpasses that Passover. To find a comparison for celebrating such a Passover, the chronicler must go back much further, to the days of Samuel (verse 18). This means that throughout the time of the kings, the Passover has not been celebrated in the way Josiah does now.

God in His grace can give such glorious things that have not been there for a long time. Josiah celebrates an unprecedented Passover, also because he by far is not as rich as his predecessors and yet makes such sacrifices and provides for the whole people. We must not restrict God and deny Him revivals. Across all the unfaithfulness of the people, He can give in His grace a restoration that reminds us of the beginning.

Josiah celebrates the Passover in the eighteenth year of his reign (verse 19). He has then cleansed the land and the house and ordered the restoration of the house of the LORD (2Chr 34:8). At the end of the description of his celebration of the Passover, the connection between a sanctified life and the house of God, on the one hand, and salvation from the death of the Lamb, on the other, is emphasized.

Verses 20-27 | The Death of Josiah

20 After all this, when Josiah had set the temple in order, Neco king of Egypt came up to make war at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah went out to engage him. 21 But Neco sent messengers to him, saying, "What have we to do with each other, O King of Judah? [I am] not [coming] against you today but against the house with which I am at war, and God has ordered me to hurry. Stop for your own sake from [interfering with] God who is with me, so that He will not destroy you." 22 However, Josiah would not turn away from him, but disguised himself in order to make war with him; nor did he listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, but came to make war on the plain of Megiddo. 23 The archers shot King Josiah, and the king said to his servants, "Take me

away, for I am badly wounded.” 24 So his servants took him out of the chariot and carried him in the second chariot which he had, and brought him to Jerusalem where he died and was buried in the tombs of his fathers. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. 25 Then Jeremiah chanted a lament for Josiah. And all the male and female singers speak about Josiah in their lamentations to this day. And they made them an ordinance in Israel; behold, they are also written in the Lamentations. 26 Now the rest of the acts of Josiah and his deeds of devotion as written in the law of the LORD, 27 and his acts, first to last, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah.

After Josiah has finished restoring God’s house (verse 20), another act of him is described by the chronicler. This act will be his last, because Josiah will be killed in it. It is an act of war. The connection between the mention that his work concerning the house is finished and his acting against Neco is perhaps that he no longer sees any challenges internally and shifts the field of his interest to events outside his land.

Be that as it may, it is always a dangerous moment when we have come to the completion of a particular work for the Lord. We should then remain dependent on Him and not look for challenges in areas where He has not called us. It is important that we remain in the field of work that the Lord has entrusted to us (cf. 2Cor 10:13). Josiah should not have interfered in the politics of the world. The disputes between these empires are none of his business (Pro 26:17 ; 20:3). It is also a mystery why he did this.

In 609 BC Neco, the king of Egypt, sets out to fight. It is not clear whether he is engaged in battle with Assyria or whether he is on his way to help Assyria in its struggle against the rising Babylonian empire (2Kgs 23:29). As a matter of fact, it is not so important. It is about Josiah’s attitude to what is happening outside his land and how he responds to warnings not to interfere in matters that do not concern him.

When Josiah meets Neco to fight against him, Neco lets warn him not to do so (verse 21). He clearly says this time he isn’t out for war with Judah but that he is going against a house that is waging war against him. Neco appeals for this fight to a command of God Who also said to him that he has to hurry. He emphasizes once more to Josiah that his actions mean obstruction of God. Neco knows God at his side. If Josiah stands in his way

to prevent him from carrying out his task, it will be to his ruin. God will then ruin him.

The words Neco speaks are very remarkable. Did God really command him to take up the sword against an enemy empire? Or is it the case that Neco speaks about his own god he consulted and that he says what he told him? We do not have to exclude speaking of the true God to the heathen Neco. It may be that God has spoken to him in some way hidden from us (cf. Gen 31:24). We can see a confirmation of this in the following verse, where his words to Josiah are referred to as “the words of Neco from the mouth of God” (verse 22).

The fact is that God warns Josiah through Neco not to interfere in this battle. We see here that a believer reprimands an unbeliever for his actions as a believer. Being a Christian has consequences and sometimes we are reminded of this by people of the world. It will be wisdom to listen to them. God may want to make things clear to us through an unbeliever. He can make use of an unbeliever (Jn 11:51) and even a donkey (Num 22:28-31).

However, Josiah does not let himself be warned and goes into battle. In doing so, he disguises himself, which reminds us of Ahab who did the same (2Chr 18:29). This shows that Josiah is not in the way of faith. Just as the disguise did not protect Ahab, the disguise of Josiah does not protect him from death. The archers shoot him (verse 23). God knows how to hit him. Josiah realizes that he is badly wounded and orders his servants to take him away. Because his own chariot may have been disabled, the servants transport Josiah on the second chariot, the spare chariot (verse 24). They take him to Jerusalem, where he dies and is buried.

The sadness about Josiah’s death is great. All of Judah and Jerusalem mourn over him. Jeremiah makes a lament about him (verse 25). This doesn’t mean the lamentation after which his Bible book is mentioned. The book of Lamentations is written on the occasion of the fall of Jerusalem, which takes place twenty-two years after the death of Josiah. Zechariah also speaks of a lamentation and that refers back to this lamentation about Josiah (Zec 12:11).

The singing about Josiah in lamentations continues for a long time. There is even an ordinance made in Israel to do so. For that purpose the lamen-

tations are written down. They can always be consulted when the grief for the loss of this king needs to be expressed. The people may feel that he has been their last hope for prosperity and that with his death all hope for blessing has disappeared. What remains is the expectation of the judgment on Judah and Jerusalem.

The chronicler does not conclude his description of the life of Josiah with his failure, but with a remark about "his deeds of devotion" (verse 26). He points out his pious deeds, his deeds "as written in the law of the LORD". Only if deeds are in accordance with the Word of God can they be seen as 'deeds of devotion'. It is not about human goodness, but about goodness as God also demonstrates it.

All the deeds of devotion of Josiah which the chronicler did not include in his account can be found "in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah" (verse 27). What is written in those books concerns his whole life, from "first to last". Thus there is a complete description of the life of one of the most God-fearing kings of Judah. For us, only what is of use to us is included in Scripture.

2 Chronicles 36

Introduction

In this chapter we first find the reign of three sons and a grandson of Josiah who are successively king of Judah. They all have double names:

1. Joahaz/Jehoahaz (or Sallum, 1Chr 3:15-16), son of Josiah, verses 1-4;
2. Jehoiakim (or Eliakim), son of Josiah, verses 5-8;
3. Jehoiachin (or Jeconiah or Coniah, Jer 22:24,28; 24:1; 37:1), son of Jehoiakim, verses 9-10;
4. Zedekiah (or Mattaniah), son of Josiah, verses 11-16.

The description of their reign is brief. It is as if the chronicler is in a hurry to come to the end, in order to point out a new perspective.

During the reign of Zedekiah the destruction of Jerusalem takes place (verses 17-21). God's patience with His people has ended.

However, this is not the end of the book. In the last two verses the writer points to a new beginning. God allows through Cyrus the possibility that the Jews who were deported into exile can return to Jerusalem (verses 22-23).

Verses 1-4 | Joahaz King of Judah

1 Then the people of the land took Joahaz the son of Josiah, and made him king in place of his father in Jerusalem. 2 Joahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. 3 Then the king of Egypt deposed him at Jerusalem, and imposed on the land a fine of one hundred talents of silver and one talent of gold. 4 The king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. But Neco took Joahaz his brother and brought him to Egypt.

After the death of Josiah the people take the initiative and choose a successor (verse 1). This is not the eldest son, Jehoiakim, but a younger son, Sallum, who takes the name Joahaz. He reigns for only three months (verse 2). He reigns that short period of time by the grace of the king of Egypt, who deposes him after three months (verse 3). Here we see the result of Josiah's

failure by interfering in a battle of the king of Egypt (2Chr 35:20-24). Josiah interfered with Egypt and was overwhelmed by it.

The king of Egypt also imposes a heavy fine on the land that must be paid by all the people (2Kgs 23:35). As a result, the whole population feels the yoke of domination. This must have been a huge difference with the favors they enjoyed under Josiah.

Now the king of Egypt decides who becomes king (verse 4) and not the people of the land (verse 1). The power of the king of Egypt is also shown by the fact that he gives another name to Eliakim he made king (cf. Dan 1:7). It seems that Joahaz has caused the displeasure of the king of Egypt, because he is taken to Egypt. There he also died (Jer 22:10-12).

Verses 5-8 | Jehoiakim King of Judah

5 Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and he did evil in the sight of the LORD his God. 6 Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against him and bound him with bronze [chains] to take him to Babylon. 7 Nebuchadnezzar also brought [some] of the articles of the house of the LORD to Babylon and put them in his temple at Babylon. 8 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim and the abominations which he did, and what was found against him, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah. And Jehoiachin his son became king in his place.

After Joahaz, Jehoiakim reigned eleven years (verse 5). The characteristic of his reign is that “he did evil in the sight of the LORD his God”. More information about this can be found in the book of Jeremiah. He is an arrogant, selfish man, who is completely indifferent to the LORD (Jer 36:21-31). He is a tyrant who abuses his power to oppress and extort. He has imposed enormous taxes on the people to live a life of indulgence (Jer 22:13-17).

After Egypt, Babylon comes to power in Jerusalem (verse 6). Nebuchadnezzar goes up against Jehoiakim to take him, bound with bronze chains, to Babylon. It is not clear whether Jehoiakim has arrived there. It is assumed that he was allowed to stay in Jerusalem because he swore allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar. However, with this arrival of Nebuchadnezzar the first deportation to Babylon takes place (2Kgs 24:14; Jer 52:3-16; Dan

1:1-3). This is the beginning of the seventy-year exile of Judah (Jer 29:10), which lasted from 606-536 BC.

The king of Babylon also takes some articles from the house of the LORD to Babylon (verse 7). There he places them in “his temple”. In this way he mixes the things of God with his idols. He does not bring his pagan gods into the house of God, but takes the objects of God’s house to his own pagan idolatry. This is an illustration of what has taken place in the history of Christianity through the ages. First, pagan practices are brought into the church. Later, things from God’s Word are introduced into the idolatrous practices of a worldly religion, which we see especially in roman-catholicism.

The remarks with which the chronicler concludes his description of Jehoiakim’s life are not particularly flattering. He doesn’t have a good word left for him. He summarizes the life of this king with the words “the abominations which he did” (verse 8). He doesn’t say a word about his death and burial. Jeremiah tells us that this man was given a burial of a donkey, that he was thrown away as a cadaver (Jer 22:19; 36:30).

Verses 9-10 | Jehoiachin King of Judah

9 Jehoiachin was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem, and he did evil in the sight of the LORD. 10 At the turn of the year King Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him to Babylon with the valuable articles of the house of the LORD, and he made his kinsman Zedekiah king over Judah and Jerusalem.

Jehoiachin becomes king when he is eight years old (verse 9). He reigns only three months and ten days. He is young and reigns short, but the judgment of him is as negative as that of his predecessor. Also “he did evil in the sight of the LORD”. Nebuchadnezzar puts an end to his reign by bringing him to Babylon “at the turn of the year” (verse 10). Here the second deportation takes place.

Together with that deportation “the valuable articles of the house of the LORD” are taken away (verse 7). Nebuchadnezzar gradually robs the temple. Thus the confessing Christianity is in the process of robbing the church of its truths. This is done by giving a different content to biblical

expressions. Repentance is then no longer a turning to God with repentance for sins, but, for example, the letting go of a habit that hurts someone himself or others, a change in social behavior.

Nebuchadnezzar makes his power felt by making Zedekiah king over Judah and Jerusalem. Zedekiah is not Jehoiachin's brother, but his uncle. He is a son of Josiah and the brother of Jehoiachin's father.

Verses 11-14 | Zedekiah King of Judah

11 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. 12 He did evil in the sight of the LORD his God; he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet who spoke for the LORD. 13 He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who had made him swear [allegiance] by God. But he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD God of Israel. 14 Furthermore, all the officials of the priests and the people were very unfaithful [following] all the abominations of the nations; and they defiled the house of the LORD which He had sanctified in Jerusalem.

Then Zedekiah becomes king of Judah (verse 11; 2Kgs 24:18-20; Jer 37:1). Zedekiah means 'the LORD is my righteousness'. Zedekiah does not honor his name, for he tramples on the righteousness of the LORD. As a result he shall experience that righteousness personally. He is the last king of Judah.

Zedekiah is a weak figure and an evil man. He also "did evil in the sight of the LORD his God" (verse 12). He does not humble himself before the prophet Jeremiah. This can be said, because Jeremiah speaks "for the LORD", literally, "out of the mouth of the LORD" (cf. Jer 1:6-9; 37:2). Zedekiah does let him come, but does not listen to his words.

That he ignores the word of Jeremiah means that he lives in rebellion against God. The result is that he rebels against Nebuchadnezzar, breaking the oath that Nebuchadnezzar made him swear (verse 13; Eze 17:13-19). This gives him a unique mention. It is said of him that he both stiffened his neck and hardened his heart. Such a combination appears only here in Scripture. He has a stubborn neck and a toughened heart. By deliberately hardening his own heart, he deprives himself of the chance of conversion.

Wickedness is not limited to Zedekiah. It is 'so king, so people'. All the leaders of the priests and the people were very unfaithful (verse 14; Ezekiel 8-11). They join in the abominations of the pagan people and defile the house which the LORD has sanctified for himself in Jerusalem. They transgress in all things that the LORD has abhorred. They take over the whole form of life of the Gentiles.

We see in this end time of Judah a striking picture of the end time of Christianity in which we live. Christians increasingly live in a way that resembles that of people who live without God. The last days are characterized by loving oneself and loving pleasure more than God (2Tim 3:1-5).

Verses 15-21 | Nebuchadnezzar Destroys Jerusalem

15 The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent [word] to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; 16 but they [continually] mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy. 17 Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or infirm; He gave [them] all into his hand. 18 All the articles of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his officers, he brought [them] all to Babylon. 19 Then they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all its fortified buildings with fire and destroyed all its valuable articles. 20 Those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, 21 to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete.

At a certain moment the measure is full. Before God lets the judgment come, He lets hear again how much effort He has made to spare His people and His dwelling place (verse 15). Again and again He has called the people to return to Him through His messengers. The expression "again and again" indicates the necessary urgency of the message. God has made

haste. He has not been slow or sparse in His attempts to urge them to turn back. None of this has been effective.

It is striking to read about “His people and His dwelling place”. It is about what is His. His judgment of what is His concerns Him Himself. He does not judge aloofly. It touches Him Himself deeply. That is why He has done everything He can to keep it from coming this far.

The rebellion of God’s people and their leaders is evidenced by their reception of His messengers (verse 16). All the effort of God to bring His people back to Himself has been answered with contempt and scorn (cf. 2Chr 30:10; 2Pet 3:3). People always mock those who come with a message from heaven that they do not like. Religious people in particular react in this way.

Then God can no longer postpone the judgment and gives His people and also His dwelling place to the enemy. He makes the king of the Chaldeans rise up against them (verse 17). Judgment comes to all age groups who are responsible for their actions (cf. Rev 19:18; 20:12). There is no regard for persons with God.

According to the historians, Nebuchadnezzar goes up against Jerusalem on January 15, 588 BC. On 28 July 586 BC the city falls. On 14 August the temple is burned (verse 19). Before this happens, the treasures are robbed from God’s house and brought to Babylon (verse 18). These will be the treasures left over from the previous two lootings (verses 7,10).

This time also the treasures of the king (2Kgs 20:15-17) and his princes are robbed and taken. All the palaces of the princes in which they have lived their lazy lives, with everything in them, go up in flames.

God makes everything happen because there is nothing more desirable in the temple for Him. He gives His temple to the Gentiles (Psa 79:1; Lam 2:1,7; 4:1; Jer 51:51). We see the same when the church reveals her “Laodicea spirit” (Rev 3:14-22). There is also nothing in it that pleases Him. Therefore, He will give up Christianity, which culminates in the great Babylon, to judgment (Rev 17:15-18; 18:1-2,19).

All who have not been killed are taken by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon to serve him and his sons as servants (verse 20). The judgment is total, the

humiliation complete. Yet the rejection is not final, but temporary. There is talk of a “until”, i.e. “the rule of the kingdom of Persia”. Persia is the kingdom through which God judges Babylon and to which He then gives world dominion (Dan 5:28).

What happens as soon as the Persians have world domination and therefore authority over Judah and Israel, we will see in verses 22-23. First it is said how long the exile will last and that is, after “the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah”, seventy years (verse 21; Jer 29:10; 25:11; Dan 9:2,24-27). This period of seventy years is counted from the first transportation to Babylon.

The fact that the exile lasts seventy years is not coincidental. The people are driven out of the land for seventy years to let the land enjoy its sabbaths. God has set a perfect time for the land to come to rest after all the idolatry the people have committed there (Lev 26:34-35,43a).

When those years are fulfilled, the LORD fulfills His word and brings the people back to His land and to His city and to His house. We see the fulfillment in the books of Ezra and of Nehemiah. The next two verses, the last two of this Bible book, prepare us for this.

Verses 22-23 | Return to Jerusalem

22 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia—in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah—the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom, and also [put it] in writing, saying, 23 “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!’”

At the end of this book in these verses a ray of hope lights up of the return of a remnant. In the Hebrew Bible, Chronicles is the last book of the Old Testament. The Hebrew Old Testament concludes with this word of hope, the expectation of restoration. If these verses were missing, the reader could be overwhelmed by a feeling of despair at the end of the book.

These two verses show that the last word is not the judgment of God, but that after the judgment there is a new beginning. They describe the beginning of the fulfillment of the promise in verse 21. A revival or restoration is always the work of God. That is why we read that He stirs up the spirit of Cyrus. He does this right at the beginning of His reign, "in the first year". As soon as the period of seventy years is over, the LORD immediately goes to work to fulfill His promise, which He has made through Jeremiah.

The name of Cyrus has been mentioned by the LORD a hundred and sixty years before (Isa 44:28). God brings through him, who is called "His anointed" (Isa 45:1), the judgment of Babylon (in October 539 BC). Cyrus acknowledges that he is God's servant and that he owes his dominion over all kingdoms to "the LORD, the God of heaven" (verse 23). He also acknowledges that God has commanded him "to build Him a house in Jerusalem". The house is to be built for Him and not for the Jews.

God's house today, the church, is also not a house where people determine the service, but God Himself. The church should not strive to be interesting and useful to the world outside. The church should not make itself attractive to the world, but to its bridegroom, Christ. In the local church today, the question sounds more and more: How do people get the most out of the church? The only question that matters, however, is: How does God get to His right?

Cyrus does two things. First, he gives everyone who belongs to God's people, whoever they may be, the freedom to go to Jerusalem and build God's house. In the second place he wishes every one who goes the company of "the LORD his God" on his way. The first is a call in a way that exercises the conscience of every one who professes to belong to God's people. No one is forced to go. The second means that every one who goes up cannot or does not have to do so in his own strength, but that the LORD goes with him.

Spiritually this word is now being fulfilled for us. Anyone who confesses to belong to the church of God, may return to the principles that God's Word tells us about the church. In practice this will only happen by those who have been exercised in their consciences, while at the same time realizing that there is no power in them, but that the Lord is with them.

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