

NATIONAL HISTORY

1st Kings

Thoughts come from a wide variety of sources. Some from messages I have heard from individuals, some from assembly Bible studies, some from home life and some from books I have read. The Holy Spirit is the Teacher who makes them real to me.

- "The Life Application Bible." Tyndale House and Zondervan
- "Zondervan TNIV Study Bible." Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI

1st Kings 1:1-10

INTRODUCTION

There is always a notable contrast between those who live for God and those who choose not to. The promise of the Lord to Solomon for faithfulness and righteousness in chapter 9 and verses 4 and 5 form the key to both books of Kings. There are always lessons for us to learn from the lives of those who have lived in the past. Wisdom is good, but genuine obedience to God is a higher good. Obedience to God should characterize our lives.

The years of David's reign were a God-centered, glorious time in Israel's history. The Lord had established the kingdom of Israel as He intended it to be as we look at it at the beginning of the book of 1st Kings. The two books of Kings were actually one book that was divided into two sections in 1448. The two books of Samuel and the two books of Kings give a whole history of the kingdom of Israel from the time of Samuel to the fall of the nation to the Babylonians. The divisions of the books may have been made arbitrarily, but they seem to be appropriate to the historical account. Likely these books were written during the time of the exile of Israel by someone like Jeremiah to remind the Jews of who they were, what they had done, and the consequences of their actions.

The Lord had made a covenant with Israel that regulated their conduct and maintained their identity as a kingdom. The welfare of the nation depended on their obedience to God and reliance upon Him for guidance and strength. When they were faithful to God, they prospered. This is not an account of social or political matters basically, but rather a review of covenant obligations and the results when there is failure to meet the terms of a covenant formed. The form of the covenants we make, are contracts. "It is better to not vow, than to vow and not pay." In marriage, in business, in buying and selling property, the contracts we make are covenants between two parties. Israel had made a covenant with God and for a long time had not lived up to their obligations. The book of 1st Kings is an account of their repeated failure to meet the terms of the covenant.

During the reign of the kings, those kings who supported and affirmed the covenant God made with the nation are given quite a lot of written attention. Those who were the worst offenders in failing to keep the covenant are also given a lot of attention as a warning to us to give understanding that sin brings severe consequences on a nation as well as on the leadership.

The ministry of the prophets during the time of the monarchy is emphasized as they were the emissaries from the court of the Eternal King to the court of an earthly king giving them warnings and exhortations. All of the books of the prophets fit into this historical account. Through the prophets before and during the exile, the people were told of the reason for their humiliation and captivity. They had ignored the covenant and broken its terms. There was always a hope given in relation to the future and those who would come after them. God's faithfulness can be counted on when His covenant terms are met.

At the end of David's life there is a little foreshadowing of things to come in the future because of failure. When we fail even in parts of our responsibility, there are consequences to come that we can foresee. Amnon had been killed by Absalom his half-brother. Daniel, David's second son may have died from some natural cause. Absalom died in rebellion and Adonijah seemed like the natural successor. Even Joab the general, and Abiathar the priest expected this kind of succession to the throne.

Old age brings a change of one's perspective and the world in which an old person lives becomes very small. Most of one's interests and concerns in later years are regarding their own well-being, health and survival. David was "very old" at seventy years of age. Caleb was strong and vigorous at eighty-five years of age. It may be that the rigors of living can make one person strong and another person weak. David's active mind, his emotional bent and his productive life may have worn out his body to the extent that his whole system was gradually shutting down. When that happened, he couldn't be bothered with the intrigue going on right in his own family.

It was in this setting that Adonijah made his move to become the king of Israel. He was good looking, youthful, self-confident, able to gather a following including Joab the leading general of the army, and a religious leader, Abiathar the priest. When he had gathered his followers to the special sacrifice, he did not include Solomon although he did all his other brothers. Neither did he include Nathan the prophet, and those who were obviously loyal to David. He knew David favored Solomon and intended him to succeed him on the throne of Israel. Those people had learned to consult with the Lord before taking action, but Adonijah wanted to do things his own way. It is a serious matter to take matters into one's own hands any time, let alone when we are conscious of acting in self-will for self-advancement. Self-exaltation will ultimately bring one down in disgrace and defeat.

We cannot take for granted the spiritual state of our children. Our best course is to be open about our faith as we talk with them so they know why we do what we do. We need to live consistently before them and seek to impart moral and spiritual character and guidelines for them to follow. To pass on those things requires self-discipline on my part as well as patience. It is possible for a servant-leader to be so involved in his or her service for God that we neglect our children. Time and energy are needed for me to fill my responsibilities for the benefit of my family. If I am not careful, I will use that time and energy for the wrong things.

David apparently did not set limits on his children nor give them serious boundaries which they could not cross. Adonijah wanted his own way no matter what his father wanted, or even what God wanted. Lack of discipline in childhood leads to undisciplined adults. Undisciplined adults who live without self-restraint may soon find themselves not only ruining life for other people but self-destructing. It takes time and patience to train, guide, control and teach self-discipline to children, but the end result will be an effective adult who can control themselves even in very difficult circumstances.

Unfortunately, some older well-meaning people use discontented young people to advance their own agendas. Joab was concerned with maintaining his position as the leader of the army rather than keeping the trust and favor of David, his king. Abiathar also must have had some ulterior motive that led him away from the man he knew God had chosen, to identify himself with a usurper. Even when years come upon us and we are anxious to leave the body and go to be with the Lord, we need to remember that as long as we are able we must tend to the Lord's people and His work without letting our guard down or being careless about our obligations.

1Kings 1:1. *"Now king David was old and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat."*

HE GAT NO HEAT.

I guess it's possible when I get old
That changes will come to me
And as the years pass, I will feel the cold
That creeps up quiet and unseen
My real prayer is that deep inside
I will always be reachable and warm
As a branch must in the Vine abide
My inner heat will stay at norm.

The things of earth and materialism
Have a way of pushing in
To divide asunder me from Him
And tempt me to overlook sin
It is easy to think I see it in others
But not think it has affected me
It's easy at times to condemn my brother
And the log in my eye never see.

Actually, the fact of the matter really is
I am no longer young
Stopping for a moment I think about this
What do I have when my life is done?
I am praying that I won't become foolish
Loosing all my credibility
For all of those years spent, I really wish
I had served God more faithfully.

"O God who knows what makes old men behave foolishly; I pray that by Thy grace, Thou will keep me from anything that will dishonor Thee. May I never do anything that would humiliate or embarrass my wife and family. I know there is a tendency in

old men to be very self-centered. May I always consider how my actions reflect on my Savior. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1Kings 1:5. *"Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him."*

SELF-EXALTATION.

Other brothers thought they'd be the one
To take over the leadership and sit on the throne
But self-exaltation ignores the fact when all is done -
In God's kingdom the way up is down!

This fact is true in all phases of life
Self-exaltation opens the door to strife
Even in the relationship of husband and wife -
God is determined to bring the proud man down!

There's a lot that is unseen but God knows the heart
An undisciplined person is off to a bad start
A self-exalted person cannot take the part -
Of one who can be trusted to lead.

It is wise to humble oneself under God's hand
One who seeks God's guidance is a very wise man
Other people will accept such leaders for they know he can -
Be trusted by God to lead them.

"Lord God, preserve Thy people from leadership that imposes itself on them in a self-exalting way. Give us humble and wise men to show us the way. Help me to be one of them. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1Kings 1:6. *"And his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, 'Why hast thou done so?' And he was also a very goodly man; and his mother bare him after Absalom."*

HIS FATHER HAD NOT DISPLEASED HIM.

An indulgent father who avoids taking control
Over the direction of his children is making a fool
Of himself and then in time to come, his children
Will act without discipline and even ignore him
Though they may not be able to express what they have missed
It is obvious to others, that to please them in this -
He left undone the fundamentals of guidance
So that when they are grown and no longer beside us
They have no guidelines to follow, no boundaries around
And fall into traps and yield to temptation's sound
People may flatter him because of good looks
And they have been deprived of education that doesn't come from books
But should have learned from parents before they leave home
So, they can act with integrity and prudence when temptations come.

"Father, I pray this morning for my family. May the things they learned from their mother and me be still functioning in their decision-making processes. May the guidelines we set, still have some influence on them as they teach and guide their own children. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Kings 1:11-53

SOLOMON BECOMES KING

Not everything is written down in the scriptures that has affected the historical account. Apparently, there had been a time when David had received word from the Lord that Solomon was to become king after him. However, it happened; David knew Solomon was to succeed him on the throne God had promised to continue, and on which our Lord Jesus Christ will be seated in the future. The oath David had made could not be changed because it had been witnessed by the Lord God.

It was a practice among Middle East tribes to eliminate all threats to the throne by killing those who would think they had a claim to it. Bathsheba was concerned that this would happen to her and her young son Solomon if Adonijah became the king. Nathan the prophet planned a way to bring the ailing old king to understand what needed to be done. By arranging the order of Bathsheba's visit and his own to follow, and by bringing a similar report of what was happening, David would see what had to be done.

Diplomacy is important in dealing with older people. Much of what they think about relates to the past, and present events are not really important to them personally. It takes wisdom to communicate clearly enough to get specific answers from them and still not be offensive. Nathan understood this so wisely staged both Bathsheba's inquiry and his follow-up to find out if David had privately sanctioned Adonijah's actions or whether Adonijah had acted on his own.

In a quick response of enlightened decision-making, David took charge of the whole matter. Solomon was to be king. He wanted them to do quickly what must be done to establish the throne by first of all having Solomon ride David's own royal mule. This was a visible, public proclamation of the fact that Solomon's succession to the throne was sanctioned by David. All the people would be able to see this and knew what that action meant.

The place of his anointing as king was probably where the ark was situated on Mt. Zion. Anointing oil was made of a special formula that was kept where the ark was. Zadok the priest representing the people to God, Nathan the prophet representing God to the people, and other leaders loyal to David were to be witnesses to the ceremony of Solomon being anointed king. The blowing of trumpets would have been heard for a long distance. That, along with the pipes the people played and the enthusiastic shouts of the people, was obviously intimidating to those seated with Adonijah at his feast when they found out Solomon was proclaimed king by the highest authority. When the news was given that he was king over Israel and Judah, a united-kingdom, those guests who had been looking for a place of authority under Adonijah quickly left him alone.

The expectation of the people of Israel was that the nation under the new king would be even more successful than when David was king. David himself worshipped in reverence on his bed because he had lived to see his son, Solomon, the new king on his throne. Adonijah feared that what he would have done to Solomon would be done to him, so he hung on to the horns of the altar in an attempt to place himself under divine protection. Later both Joab and Adonijah found that was a false hope. His only choice was to submit to Solomon's authority as the new king, or if he continued in opposition, he would die.

It is always very foolish to take matters into one's own hands without an understanding of the will of God in a matter. It is also unwise for us to leave unattended, things that obviously need to be done. It may make us uncomfortable to have to make decisions that offend some people, but we must commit ourselves to do that which is right no matter what the cost.

Some schemes are doomed to fail before they start and yet people get caught up in a net of wrong-doing. It is hard to admit that what we have been doing or supporting is wrong. To seek the help and mercy of God after failure has taken place is too late. We need to seek guidance and wisdom from Him before undertaking some project or plan we might have. Hind-sight often leaves us defeated and unwilling to admit to our mistakes. When that happens, we need to make a fresh start in fellowship with God and under divine guidance.

When one has been attacked, challenged and/or accused unfairly, to forgive that demonstrates more strength than retribution. Grace is a powerful force that has long-lasting effects. Trying to prove our own power and authority at the expense of others is self-defeating because it is motivated by fear and doubt.

1Kings 1: 48. *“And also thus said the king, ‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which hath given one to sit on my throne this day, mine eyes even seeing it.’”*

SONS.

Expectations: every father has them when each child is born. Is he going to be like her side of the family or mine? Will he look like his mother or his father? Will he be a good learner or will he be a bit slow? Can I give him what he needs with all the responsibilities I have in my life? How much time can I take from my work to give him the kind of instructions he must hear? He is not like his other brothers. He is an individual in his own right, but why can't he be like the rest of the family? Maybe this is just a phase he is going through. I'll get him the best tutors I can find. Why can't his mother get control of that boy?

Now this one is more like it. He is what I had hoped for. Smart? You better believe it. He has got all he needs and more. He seems to be more like me than the other boys. Well, of course I spend more time with him, but still, he's young and I am not quite so busy now. Things are going better at work and I can give him more time than I could give to the older boys. In fact, now that he is grown, I think he is the one to take over the business – the work that God gave me to do. He even thinks like I do.

Regrets: one couldn't get his mind out of the gutter. Too bad he had that weakness for girls. And to think he could do that to his own sister. Unbelievable! And the rebel – he was too good looking for his own good. He couldn't keep his eyes off of the mirror. Yes, it is true – he had the personality to go with it. I thought I could handle him. Who would've thought he would ever try to take over the whole business and leave me out in the cold? I should've started with him a whole lot earlier. Really, part of that whole rebellion was my fault because I should have seen it coming years before. Now? I am afraid he is in hell!

Now I'm frozen all the time. Can't seem to get warm at all. And that son of mine can't seem to get his eyes off of this girl who is helping me. I am afraid he has got some of his old dad in him – looking where he shouldn't. And this news – what am I to do? He's taking over just like his brother did. He wants it all now and he wants what he wants no matter what I might say. Come on - act now – don't wait. If you don't act now there will be a major war when the Lord takes me. It is obvious who God wants to lead this work. Now speak up and do it right – and do it right immediately!

Anticipation: he is the one for sure that God has chosen. Now do this right – make it public – make it quick – and make sure greatest number of people know what has happened before the other son can do anything about it. Solomon, my son: you are God's man. Act like it. Don't hesitate. You have what it takes because God gave it to you. How did it go I wonder? Did it work out the way I planned? It did? Praise God! He has done great things where of I am glad! Not often does one get to see his successor on the throne and live to tell about it. Yes, my body is cold, where is my parka? I need some more blankets. Where is that girl who is supposed to take care of me and keep me warm? Awww, David, don't be so fussed up. Solomon is on the throne. My heart is warm! He needs my advice. Give it to him quick while your mind is sharp. He is in danger and needs to know how to dealt with things. Someone go get Solomon, the king!

“It is not always easy, Father God, to know the best way to deal with these relationship problems. Help me to be firm but not hard; sensitive but not cowardly; faithful but not compromising; gracious but truthful. Give me the wisdom to look ahead and plan, and the sense to realize I need Thee, in order to do what is right in every situation. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Kings 1:1-12

THE CHARGE

The final words of a person's life are important. They may not be many, but are often full of meaning, wisdom and valuable instruction. A parent's final words to a son or daughter are not usually forgotten. In the scriptures a number of leaders gave final words we remember and are relevant to us today. Moses said to Joshua, "Be strong and of a good courage ... the Lord, He it is that goeth before thee; He will not fail thee; neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed." Joshua said, "Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you." Samuel said, "The Lord will not forsake His people for His great name's sake ... Moreover, as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." Final instructions need to be heard, listened to and be understood.

To "act like a man" is not a charge to be arrogant or take arbitrary control, but rather listen to what God says, and do what He requires. There are obligations relating to God's commandments and decrees that have to be fulfilled in order for a man to "prosper" in whatever he is doing. David's charge to Solomon was passing on what the Lord had charged him with. Individual responsibility and the benefits that follow are based on the condition of obedience to the commands of the Lord.

Walking in truth with "all" one's heart and soul is not a casual adherence to what we know is right. It is an enthusiastic acceptance of all it means to follow our Lord. In David's charge, Solomon was to be sure that God was at the center of his own personal life as well as the final authority in his role as king. David's line of kingship would go on and was fulfilled when our Lord Jesus Christ was born. "Of His kingdom there shall be no end."

Those who would follow David's line would reign as kings as long as they obeyed God. David had done this and was passing on to Solomon the things he had learned about his relationship with the Lord. Later the kings turned away from the covenant and the nation was exiled. But God is going to keep His promises to Abraham and David through the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are those who are willing to do anything to gain advantage over others, and in order to reach and keep that goal they are ruthless. They intend to get their own way and when they get where they want to be they will do almost anything to maintain that position. Joab wanted power and was willing to murder innocent people to protect the position he had and what he felt he accomplished. He assassinated Abner and Amasa.

He killed Absalom in spite of David's command to spare his son. Then he joined the conspiracy of Adonijah no doubt in view of holding his place under the reign of the new administration. He had no real concern for the will of the Lord or of David, but rather wanted to retain his own place of leadership as head of the army. Treachery begets treachery as Joab was soon to find out.

Barzillai on the other hand, had supported David and supplied him with needed goods during the rebellion of Absalom. Loyalty to the Lord and a willingness to serve and live in God's way are rewarded. Barzillai did not want honor for himself but wanted his son, Kimham to be one favored by the king. Self-serving does not suit well a person who has been called to be a servant of the Lord. To such a person, kindness can be shown and it will not go to his head. Shimei learned that when a person curses one who belongs to God, he is opposing God and will ultimately lose. Payday comes sooner or later in response to every act we commit.

David's advice to Solomon to deal severely and completely with the enemies within his own gate, was to take control of, and establish his throne. The advice he gave was legal and would secure his position against those who would potentially rise up against him. David's death concluded a life of good example and bad; of great victories and failures. We learn from him that sin has awful consequences, but when repentance is genuine forgiveness is assured.

Confession of sin from the heart is no light matter. God knows when it is real. He does not hold back forgiveness of sin, even though He knows we may sin again perhaps in another way. We learn from our own mistakes, and hopefully, from the mistakes of others. Consequences have to be faced when confession is not genuine, and forgiveness does not necessarily remove all the consequences of sin

1 Kings 2:2. *"I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man;"*

FINAL WORDS.

We all remember people from back in our past
Whose final words seem to be the ones that last
When they leave to go the way of all the earth
Those words in our memories are of special worth.

I wonder if at life's end, God gives unique wisdom
He seems to at times want to significantly use them
To give us some glimpses into what is ahead
And in that way remove separation's dread.

Many I once knew are now at home with the Lord
Some have summed up their lives in simple final words
With wisdom that comes through life's experiences
They can sum it all up with a few short sentences.

I don't know whether they have planned what those final words will be
Or if they knew how it would affect others like it affected me
Perhaps God has prepared them and put into their hearts
Final impacting words to give just before they depart.

By taking in truths and seeing things through God's view
It may be that I can get from him a personal preview
Of what would be suitable and final words I can say
To leave with those near me while I'm slipping away.

"I remember the words of my father, O God, as we spent a final time together. When George was called home, the final words he said seemed to have some real significance to him. We have responded in various ways to these words. The final words of the Lord before He left, have changed the lives and destinies of millions. Please keep me from saying anything foolish when that time comes. Perhaps You would prepare me to say something meaningful. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1 Kings 2:2. *"I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man; and keep the charge of the Lord thy God... that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself:"*

DO WHAT'S RIGHT – NOW!

It is not always easy to do what needs to be done;
Because the people you are dealing with don't care.
But understand this, not many people under the sun,
Can come alongside and your full burden bear.

Act before God when the decisions are hard.
It is not wise to put serious things off.
Just be sure you are right and clear before God,
So, His blessings you are able to have.

The problem with men who live for themselves,
Is, they are not really aware of their God;
They will compromise truth, and nearly sell their souls
If they think this will get them ahead.

Solomon acted, although the task was severe.
There was no way to pass these serious sins by.
Not all of God's people realize He always can hear,
And divisions are grave in His eyes.

To be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might,
Will lead us over some roads that are rocky.
Step up like a man, and take charge, lest there's strife,
That will damage God's work very badly.

Grace doesn't mean that I should ever sell truth,
Just to stay friends with the folks in the world.
I will have to stand up and make plain that the worth
Of things done must be backed by His Word.

“O Righteous God: when I sense there are issues that need to be dealt with and the personal cost will be great, give me the wisdom to act quickly and wisely. I think I know myself well enough that I would make serious mistakes without the positive assurance of Thy guidance. I am Thy servant. Do what is necessary to keep me in the current of Thy thoughts. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1St Kings 2:13-46

THE THRONE

Occasionally we will be approached by people with a proposition that, on the face of it, seems quite innocent and legitimate. But the person who comes, and the attitude they have, make us suspicious that there is more to this than meets the eye. When we are skeptical and uneasy about the matter it is a wise person who listens with caution to all that is said, the way it is said, and does not jump to a quick conclusion.

It seems like Bathsheba sensed the request of Adonijah was not all that he said it was. Her perceptive question reveals her apprehension. His insulting exaggeration that the people looked at him as king, was proof enough that his intention was to claim the throne by taking David's last wife as his wife, even though she was still a virgin. He was either ignorant of the law or was ignoring it by making such a request that carried with it a death sentence. Even though he said he knew Solomon was king by the will of God, it didn't seem to matter to him.

This attitude is quite prevalent today. Many know the moral standards of the Bible have not changed but willfully choose an immoral lifestyle in defiance to the word of God. There are people who think the socially accepted norms make an action okay. Even some professing believers seem to think cohabiting, consenting adults should be accepted as if they are married people. For some reason they think the only way they can determine if they should be married is to try out the "married life" before making any vows.

Solomon understood immediately what Adonijah's intent was and had to act quickly to deal with the conspirators. If Bathsheba was not aware of the significance of Adonijah's request we must have been a very naive person. More likely she agreed to Adonijah's request as a justification to have Solomon firmly establish his kingship by bringing about the execution of those who would challenge him. Adonijah was immediately put to death. Abiathar was banished even though he had been a loyal high priest under David. He made a bad choice when he supported Adonijah. Joab knew what would happen to him as a conspirator against Solomon. When he heard of Adonijah's death and Abiathar being banished because of being part of Adonijah's scheme, he knew he would be the next one to die.

Joab had not accidentally caused the death of Abner, Amasa and Absalom. In each case he was defending his own position in life by murdering his rivals before they could take his place. The horns of the altar could not save him because Solomon was justified in his action by the law. The curse on Joab's family because of his sin, and the fulfilling of the prophecy concerning Eli's family by the banishment of Abiathar, reminds us that the Lord does not forget or overlook sin. It must be punished.

We may think we will get away with wrong-doing and eventually all the consequences will just fade away before they fall on us. It may be that we have even been able to do some service that we thought was for the Lord. But we can be replaced if we start taking God and His people for granted.

Benaiah had served David well and he was willing and ready to serve Solomon. When we find a trusted person, who does what he does, "As unto the Lord, and not unto man," then we are well-advised to give them responsibility corresponding to their ability. Shimei also had been granted clemency under certain conditions, but took the instructions and prohibitions laid on him lightly. As a consequence, he too died under the hand of Benaiah as a rebel against the orders he had received.

Solomon's action in carrying out David's advice and executing justice, brought stability to the nation so there could be a peaceable reign. Not all problems we face are external opposition against the Gospel and the truth of God. Internal rebellion creates instability and can bring to an untimely end that which should have been strong.

There are times when we must take necessary steps that are not popular, in order to deal with internal matters. We do not like to have to rebuke and correct our brothers and sisters, but some things can not be avoided for the sake of the Lord's name, His testimony and peace among brethren. "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity... for there the Lord commanded the blessing; even life for evermore."

1Kings 2:3. *"And keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself:*

FINAL INSTRUCTIONS.

There are principles in life that are tried and proven
Stand up and be counted and apply yourself to them
Others will depend on you, so always be there
Stand strong and you will find they know you care.

Men don't quit when the pressure comes on
They stay at their post when all others are gone
People are confident in such a man they can trust
They do what is right not creating a fuss.

When God gives a charge there is a reason for it
I dare not for any reason ignore it or quit
It may seem too hard and the purpose not known
But He is my Lord and I am not left on my own.

His ways are always best but I will need to learn
Though I don't know the end of the road or what's around the next turn
I need to place my feet where He walked each step of the way
On the path of the Just One shining unto a perfect day.

The truths of God's Word are not just for information
He intends me to know and practice them in full consecration
To keep them means I must guard them from all who oppose
And apply them all my own life, not just at the close.

To keep these charges is my serious obligation
As acts of obedience, not to add to my salvation
These are conditional promises that my spiritual life will prosper
And I will be effective in whatever the situation offers.

God also gives unconditional promises that don't depend on me
He has plans and purposes that are unfolding continually
He promised an everlasting King on David's throne
And He has promised to me, He'll never leave me alone.

"May I respond faithfully to Thy charges, Father. May I always be ready to fulfill the obligations that arise by being strong, ready to defend, committed to holy living and to Thy truth. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st kings 3:1-15

LEARNING TO LEAD

It is possible, if one is so inclined, to learn a lot from those who are older than we are. They are of a different generation and times do change but life-principles that follow the word of God do not change. It is a wise young person who takes time to listen to parents and grandparents or other trusted older people, and ask questions as to how they lived and served the Lord.

Solomon was around twenty years old when he became king of Israel. His older brothers had families and some experience in life but low morals and few personal convictions. To be willing to do what we think is right is not always right. As a young man, Solomon made a terrible mistake in marrying Pharaoh's daughter. He may have thought it was a good political move but he never asked for counsel from God. To secure his southern border was one thing, but to bring an Egyptian princess to live in the city of David was quite another. God's standards are for our good. A person may be very nice and it may seem harmless to go to the extent of marrying an unbeliever, but when one third of our life that is spiritual is missing in our spouse, we will soon find that missing part is most essential.

The high place where idol worship had taken place in the past, were not the places of the Lord's choosing. The tabernacle had been set up on a high place at Gibeon but that was not where the Lord wanted sacrifices to be made. However, the people brought there sacrifices there and so did Solomon. To do a right thing in the wrong place does not make it right. It is never God's will we initiate our own way and place of worship.

Solomon did not meet the requirements of the law concerning legal worship. Perhaps being at the tabernacle at Gibeon motivated him to want to build the temple so the ark that was at Jerusalem and the other pieces of the tabernacle could be brought together. God may meet us and awaken us when we are in a place where we should not be. How gracious of God to speak to Solomon there with kindness and personal interest. There are times where we may do that which is wrong because we don't know any better. Then when God in mercy shows us what is right and what is His will and way, we must stop what was wrong and commit ourselves to do what He says.

God was willing to come to Solomon in a dream after he had done wrong in the offering of sacrifices in his own way. There right way was that the priests were the one's to offer the sacrifices. Doing things in our own way opens up the way for false teaching that leads people astray. Solomon's prayer to God was honored by God, but not the sacrifices. God did not even mention them to him.

Solomon understood the reason for David's success was because of God faithfulness to him, and David's true fellowship and fear of God. He knew David's position was an act of kindness on God's part and because of God's mercy. Now he wanted that for himself. He also knew his limitations at age twenty. He knew his need of God with him. He knew he was lacking in experience and discernment. His request was not that he sit back and let God work for him, but that God would work through him by giving him the needed wisdom and courage to lead the people of God. That is still a basic need in effective leadership.

Wise decision making is essential for those who God calls to His service. Submission to divine guidance is not acquiescence to circumstances or pressures put on us. It is moving forward in faith and confidence that "this is the way, walk ye in it."

In the lives of all of God's people, God and His kingdom come first. Eternal things are more important than temporal things. People are more important than things. Treasures in heaven are more important than material wealth. We are to live by divine principles rather than the guidelines of worldly men.

When God is first in our lives and has first place in all we do, then we will find our satisfaction the greatest. The Lord appreciated Solomon's request for discernment and an understanding heart so he would know how to do what was right and avoid that which is wrong. If God graciously gives us certain abilities and gifts, then it is our responsibility to use them in ways that will glorify Him.

It is possible to have wisdom, but lack the strength of character to act upon that wisdom. Our obligation is like that of Solomon. Walk in God's way; keep God's commands and be diligent in the service He has called upon us to do. The next time Solomon offered sacrifices of burnt offerings and peace offerings, it was in Jerusalem in front of the ark of God. It was there the presence of the Lord was situated until the temple was built there.

Even if we have done something wrong in our Christian life, let us face that wrong, repent of it and commit ourselves to that which we know is right. Humility, contrition and change opens up doors of service for the Lord as we act in faith in Him. He gives the needed wisdom, understanding and courage to act appropriately.

1Kings 3:1. *“And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh’s daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the Lord, and the wall of Jerusalem round about.”*

A BUILDER.

Is there a need for this building - can you precisely define it?
You need a place to live - just how will you design it?
For your own pleasure and comfort alone, or are there other reasons
You need such an edifice, more than comfort in cold seasons?

Build with a view to your calling of God
Make your house useful in the work of the Lord
You will find great satisfaction when there is room for others
And your house is open to your sisters and brothers.

How do I go about building the house of the Lord?
Is there a blueprint to follow when building without stone or boards?
What is the material I can gather and ultimately use;
So the house of the Lord is what God Himself did choose?

The materials are flesh and blood - living stones to add
To each other as upon the doctrine of the apostles we build
Christ is the Chief Corner Stone just as in the great Body
People are added locally to the on-going testimony.

“What are we to protect by building a wall?
Shouldn’t there be room for anyone at all?
Why put a barrier, we are all the family of man?
And if we let every one in, what could be the harm?”

Separation from sin is an obvious choice
In God’s things immorality is not to be given a voice
To compromise righteousness is to be just like the world
To give place to the devil keeps the banner of truth furled.

Builders need to follow the plan of the Designer
In personal life-building or when for God we go further
His House and the wall that will guard truth like a city
Is based on fundamental truth, not sentiment or pity.

“Help me O God, to be a wise builder: here in my home and in personal life; in the assembly and in public life and in the whole world at large where I am called to labor - give me holy discernment. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1Kings 3:3. *“And Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places.”*

“LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON.”

The father learned first-hand in the field
The son learned second-hand in the palace
The father learned from caring for his father’s sheep
The son learned from his father what was important to keep.

The father went to war to bring to the nation peace
The son had learned from his father his obligations to meet
The father loved the Lord with all of his heart
The son learned God’s authority right from the start.

The father had a problem with the opposite sex
The son saw the model, his generation was next
To fall under the spell of thinking power gives right
To do what they wanted under cover of night.

The father was a good ruler who generally lived a good life
The son went farther but didn’t give the same light

The father, for the most part, did things in God's way
The son went gradually farther and farther away.

The son started out walking in God's ways like his father before him
But he added to what God wanted and gradually succumbed to them
Who were strangers to grace and to God, without spiritual light
And the son, though wise, departed from what he was taught as right.

I learned from my father before me, lessons that work in life
"Don't get what you can't pay for; always do best for your wife
Don't be hard nor easy, moderation is a good characteristic to have
Avoid extremes either way and people will hear what you say."

"Work hard to provide necessities; give the Lord His portion from you;
Be kind to the poor and helpless; give reverence when reverence is due.
Pray a lot; read the Bible and learn that those who honor God He will honor;
Keep a little money for when needs arise; put your treasure up yonder."

"I thank Thee, Father God, for good examples of practical living who taught me. By Thy grace and wisdom, help me to teach others who follow behind me. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1Kings 3:5. *"In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, ask what I shall give thee."*

ASK WHAT I SHALL GIVE.

If God should ask of me some day,
"What do you want the most?"
I hope I would have the grace to say,
"Not something in which to boast."
But I would like to be like my Lord
And be able to know Him better -
Also, to be an able minister of His Word
Teaching the spirit of it, not just the letter.

I would like to be able to explain to others
The clear message of the Gospel
I'd pray the truths God has let me gather
Would help His people to prosper
If it were possible, I'd like to be
A soul-winner to the end of my days
For I would know throughout eternity
Many were led to Christ, the Way.

More often lately I've been caused to consider
The way one's life will ultimately end
I really would like if my heavenly Father
Some special grace to me would send
That I might be able to honor Him
Before friends and family
That in some way I might challenge them
By testifying of His grace to me.

"I thank Thee, heavenly Father, for giving me all these years of life that have been so good and meaningful to me. I am wondering if in some way it can be passed on. If there is some way this can be done, I believe I am ready. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Kings 3:16-28

PRACTICAL WISDOM

Deceitful hearts are something everyone knows about because everyone has one. However, most people are not very open about that problem because we want others to think well of us. The two prostitutes in the incident that first publicly demonstrated Solomon's wisdom opens our eyes as to how far a deceitful heart can go'

One of them obviously wanted to live without the responsibility of caring for a child. Who knows what would have happened to the second child if Solomon had given it to her? Likely it would have soon died just like her own did. The appeal to the king was a normal action on the part of a mother who was in danger of being investigated as to why her child died. Rumor and innuendo would follow the life a woman who lived as these two did. Deception and false accusation go closely together to hide a guilty person's sin. That practice is common to all of humanity because "the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked..."

When the sword was called for by Solomon, all of a sudden, things were no longer just a dispute. He had quickly made this a life or death matter. The whole matter was changed from a common problem to something as serious a life itself. A true mother wants her child to survive even if she has to die to make that happen. The cost of keeping her child alive supersedes anything and everything to that mother.

For that young man who was newly made king, to make that decision in the way Solomon did was radically different from the normal way of making and passing judgments. He bypassed the charges and countercharges and went immediately to the root of the matter. Which woman was the true mother of the child? The external evidence was not easy to see nor with which to make a sound judgment. It was not a common "he said, she said" judgment. By immediately going to the source of the problem - the human heart and emotions, he eliminated all the subterfuge and counter charges.

There are areas of judicial practice in which it is hard to determine right and wrong because human beings are quick to deceive even judges and law enforcement officers. To hear testimony from conflicting points of view is very common. To find the truth of a matter, a judge has to watch facial expressions, hear the tone of voice of each person, carefully observe body language and determine if deception and lies or truth are being told. More communication is nonverbal than verbal.

With this wise act and the decision made following it, Solomon not only settled the immediate problem, but set a precedent that made all the nation aware of the wisdom of their new king. That would keep people from making spurious charges and thinking they would get away with them. The wisdom of Solomon was one thing and was important to the rule of the nation of Israel, but more importantly, all Israel saw the "wisdom of God" was in him. His wisdom was a reflection of divine wisdom.

Ezra also showed the wisdom of God [Ezra 7:25] when he established an orderly society according to the laws of God. When Israel returned after the years in Babylon, it was necessary for the people to understand he had the authority to set up a judicial system again under divine direction. This was not only to govern in an orderly way but to be able to carry out punishment for disobedience.

The Lord Jesus made reference to the "wisdom of God" in Luke 11 verse 49. The word of God itself is called the wisdom of God as the source of true wisdom in every matter. The Lord Himself is the wisdom of God who has the right to expand on the scriptures and make them plain because He is the "Living Word."

Paul referred to the "wisdom of God" in contrast to human wisdom in 1st Corinthians 1:21,24 and in 2:7. He also referenced the wisdom of God being demonstrated to angels and demons through the church [Eph.3:10].

The lives and words of God's people are important to nations, to the Lord, to the Lord's people and the unsaved, and to angels, even when we gather publicly to worship and remember our Lord. "For this cause ought a woman to have power on her head because of the angels." When a child of God is available, humble and conscious of God with him or her, God can use that person to pass on His wisdom to those in our sphere of influence.

1Kings 3:6. *"And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day."*

TRUTH... RIGHTEOUSNESS... UPRIGHT HEART.

Truth is what I know to be an actual fact
It really isn't truth if the words are different from how I act
The truth of God is always right, there is no deviation
To walk with Jesus is to walk with Truth, He is God's salvation.

The way I testify to what I believe is shown in how I live
To live and walk righteously reveals what I really have

The only way this can be consistent is if God's righteousness is given
That is the way those who live around me know I'm going to heaven.

To know the truth and live it out, starts with an upright heart
This change of heart from being deceitful begins when the Spirit starts
To convict of sin, righteousness and judgment, then the soul is stirred
To seek relief by repentance of sin, then faith brings the new birth.

These three together form a unity that brings life to a dead spirit
Truth, righteousness and an upright heart affect all those who use it
God's mercy and His kindness to us are evident when we care
Enough for others' welfare that His grace to us, we share.

It is something to consider, those most impacted are close to us
Often it is through parents, children learn to curse or bless
May my children, and theirs too be people of understanding
May they be wise to rightly judge with grace and truth their will commanding.

Like Solomon of old, my work is to build for God
His ways were the statutes and the laws; mine obedience to God's Word
His worship was with great ceremony; mine worship from the heart
His wish was for understanding; mine not to from the Lord depart.

God gave him special wisdom; I'm just a common man
Solomon built great edifices; I just do what I can
But by the wisdom God gives me and my desire to please Him
I'll trust God to allow me to finish what He wanted me to begin.

"Father, I don't have any great and beautiful buildings to point to and say I built them. And I am only a simple man who has been called by Thee to speak Thy Word. So, I pray that some of the words I have spoken over the years, will help to bring Thy great building project to completion. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1Kings 3:7. *"And now, O Lord my God, thou hast made Thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in."*

EVALUATION.

Acting intellectually - but not intelligently.
Choosing spontaneously - he makes a strange affinity.
Deciding independently - choosing expediently -
Even those who love the Lord make mistakes.

Lying down silently after thinking prayerfully.
Dealings with God solitarily - listening expectantly.
Hearing now considerately - recognizing opportunity.
Those who love the Lord are ready to hear.

Thinking now spiritually - no longer independently.
Evaluating self honestly - knowing his inability.
Acknowledge God's sufficiency, His Lordship and His deity
Those who love the Lord listen to Him.

Asking in humility - addressing God reverently.
Assessing realistically his personal insufficiency.
Speaking to God respectfully - honoring Him with dignity.
Those who love Lord do not hide needs from Him.

He knows himself emotionally - can make his requests rationally.
Simplicity turns to maturity - now he makes decisions wisely.
Judgments are solved satisfactorily - he responds to God thankfully.
Those who love the Lord know their need of Him.

"Father God, I am so in need of wisdom. Questions come, needs arise, opportunities seem to be here - yet I am so often unsure. Please Father, grant me more wisdom as I get older and help to see all these things through Thy eyes. I so want to be sure this is Thy will. Help me to properly evaluate all the choices I have to make. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."

1st Kings 4:1-34

ORGANIZED LEADERSHIP

In any social setting whether it be a nation, a church, a family or even a marriage there must be some kind of ordered structure to keep chaos and confusion to a minimum. God has established an order we call "headship" in nations, assemblies and families. "The powers that be are ordained of God" keep nations in an order that preserves its citizens from acting independently to the detriment of the whole society. Elders are made by the Holy Spirit to "feed the flock of God." Husbands are the "head" of the wives to assume the responsibility of providing for the needs and guidance of the family.

Solomon designated areas of responsibility to eleven officials who were to take care of specific needs of the government. Twelve governors were to be managers overseeing the taxing and gathering of supplies from each of the twelve areas of the nation. Effectiveness in government depends on effectiveness in organization. To maintain this you need a wise man at the head of the government. Solomon was that man for his day and nation. Good organization helps people work in harmony and enables them to achieve the goal intended in the best possible way. When we serve the Lord our God, it is important for us to remember we are stewards of all that our Master has given us. It is our responsibility to do our work as well as we can and in a careful way as a wise person should.

Solomon was passed on a unified kingdom by David his father. During those years of David's reign, the kingdom of Israel was expanded. During the last part of his reign, and all through Solomon's reign, that unity was able to be maintained. Some of those who served under David, continued in their service in allegiance to Solomon. Azariah was the grandson of Zadok so apparently his father, Ahimaaz, had died. Azariah would succeed Zadok as the priest. Others are listed and their responsibility to Solomon was identified. No one person can do everything. Some people have abilities that make them efficient in certain areas of work. A wise leader learns what each person is capable of doing and designates the work to be done when that ability is used properly.

District and tribal governors would be able to keep track of all that was needed to maintain a military and support the growing civil service. Each one of the governors had eleven months to prepare for and provide for the needs of the central government by gathering what was necessary from their own district. Government service became a seriously large body of people who had to be kept by those of "forced labor." Some of these men were related to Solomon. The prosperity of the nation depended on the ability of Solomon to provide guidance and wisdom to the needs of the people. He had to pass judgments to keep order as well as provide guidelines for the future. Spiritual maturity isn't limited to the number of years a person has lived. It is discerned by how a person lives and what they have produced for God through using the gifts with which they have been entrusted by God.

The size of the kingdom of Israel reached to the limits God had promised Abraham. David had conquered those tribes around so the kingdom he handed over to Solomon extended from the Euphrates River in the north all the way south to Ezion Geber at the north end of the Gulf of Aqaba. The amount of food and supplies to support Solomon and those in his service was huge. The number of chariots he had was 1400 and two horses were needed for each one. Beside this he needed other horses for spares. Huge amounts of animal feed, was taken from the people and the extravagant living at the palace, beside the standing army, would take a great amount of supplies on a regular basis.

Because Solomon reigned over a peaceful nation, the efforts of the population was put into providing a good living for themselves and those who led them. Peace, prosperity and security are possible when there is not the great cost of warfare to be paid. When a nation is united and there is an awareness of God, and trust and obedience to Him is real, then that nation can peacefully prosper even though there are high taxes to be paid.

Solomon's wisdom was noted by the Lord Jesus Christ when He was here. He said Solomon's wisdom was great, "but a greater than Solomon is here. The understanding of Solomon in a wide variety of subjects is addressed in the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon as well as some of the Psalms. There were other wise men at that time who were well-learned and famous as teachers and counselors, but the wisdom given to Solomon by the Lord set him in a place by himself among those people.

If a person is quiet and consistent among God's people, do not discount their ability and wisdom. "It is better to close your mouth and be thought a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt." Usually the wiser a person is, the less they are going to flaunt their wisdom. They will be inclined to keep their counsel unless it is asked for. Many people think they know the answer to the problems, and they don't even know the question. Pay attention to the person who keeps his counsel until he is asked for an opinion or judgment. When he does give an answer, if he gives what the word of God says about a matter he is a true wise man.

He may give an explanation of the scriptural passage and apply it to the present circumstances. That kind of a person and his reply can be trusted.

The people of the Middle East learned a lot from Solomon and his observations of all that was going on around him. He understood nature and why things are the way they are. He also understood people and their reactions to life and he knew what they needed to hear to live properly.

If and when we are called upon to give some insight to a difficult matter, pray openly and out loud about the specific matter that has been brought to your attention. Consider carefully what the Bible has to say about that matter and subjects related to it. Get help, if possible from other reliable sources. Then form a precise and understandable statement regarding the matter using as few words as possible to clarify your conclusion.

1Kings 4:25. *“And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.”*

VINE AND FIG TREE.

It had finally come, the peace they longed for
The days of conflict were finally over
From one end to the other the country had rest
Everyone had full and plenty and there was some left over
We must remember, as those in the past
When given much - much is required
If the prosperity we have is going to last
That bounty is by God alone inspired.

The vine that brings lasting joy to the heart
Is not there just by random chance
The sustenance for growth that flows from it
Comes to fruit through the quiet branch
As a branch joined to the Vine
It is my responsibility
To remain at my post so others find
The abundant life is life eternally.

The fig tree bears its seasonal fruit
But it is functioning all year around
Similarly, I must apply myself to my work
And declare out the Gospel sound
When the time of visitation comes
I will know it is all from God
He has His plans and purposes
My work is to obey my Lord.

“I thank Thee, Father, for the harvest seasons. It seems like a lot of what I do is fruitless, but knowing Thee and Thy ways, at least in a measure, leaves me contented to keep planting and watering. I really would rejoice at being in a harvest field when Thou shalt save some precious souls. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1Kings 4:29. *“And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand on the sea shore.”*

LARGENESS OF HEART.

To understand so much of what God has done
Far excels what is natural to man
The breadth of understanding God gave Solomon
Would produce pride unless the Holy Spirit can
Be allowed full control and use that person
To bring blessing and peace to God's people
The Lord is still the same and for similar reasons
Gives a large heart to some that others might be full.

No one has everything that is needed
To fill up all the present demands
But God from His wisdom has gifts provided
That we might do all He commands
It is well that I listen and really hear
What other saints have done and can tell

The gifts God gave them to use, each one can share
And the work He wants done is done well.

How gracious of God to distribute such gifts
That His people can function together
He hasn't given one man all that is His.
Accumulated wisdom is revealed when we gather
We don't spend time settling the world's problems.
Our calling is that we all rise above
The things going on, for God only can solve them
Ours is to show we're His disciples by our love.

Solomon wrote proverbs that were inspired by God
We read them and through them we learn
How to apply them that we might live for the Lord
What things we are to keep, and what things to spurn.
People came to hear him and see what he did.
To them he was the wisest man on earth.
We belong to heaven and now we are bid,
To send there, all our treasures of worth.

**“Father, I pray that this day I will truly
set my affection on things above, not on things of this earth. In the name of the Lord Jesus
Christ, Amen.”**

1st Kings 5:1-18

LABOR AND MATERIAL

When David was the king of Israel, some leaders of other kingdoms were happy to interact with him realizing he had brought peace and stability to the region by the power of God. One who had done business with David when he built his own house was Hiram king of Tyre. He had a friendly relationship with David. The words "a lover of David" would be in a political sense regarding their international relationships.

David was not the one the Lord wanted to build the temple because he was a man of war, but he could prepare material to be available for Solomon because of his political friendship with Hiram. As we get older in life we begin to realize we are limited in what we can do, but we can prepare the way for those who will follow us by preparing them through teaching, through dealing with matters we know should not be put off any longer, and by using our influence to help them make connections with those with whom we have had good fellowship. That way a successor can be well prepared and well along in the work he will be doing even before he takes responsibility.

Hiram had provided material and workmen for David when he built his house. Now he does the same for Solomon when he builds the temple of the Lord. In Solomon's message to Hiram, he makes the point that David knew "the Lord his God" personally. Then he testified to Hiram that he too knew the Lord when he called Him, "the Lord my God." Jehovah was personal to Solomon as well as David. The faith of the faithful isn't automatically transmitted to the son. There has to be personal dealings with God in those who believe in Him. True faith in God is personal in each person who comes to believe in Him.

The older man, Hiram, was pleased with Solomon and appreciated his wisdom. He even testified to the fact that "the Lord" was real. Whether he was real to Hiram personally is not mentioned. It was not then, nor is it now for political reasons, uncommon for leaders of nations to acknowledge the religious traditions of other nations including the deities they might have in order to maintain peace and gain favor.

Cedar trees from Lebanon are still famous for their quality and the long-lasting wood products that are made from them. The cedars of Lebanon are used by people to illustrate things that are trustworthy, dignified, beautiful and of long duration and value. The sea-going fame of those from Tyre was known all through the years of ancient history. The ships of Tyre travelled the Mediterranean Sea carrying freight and people for centuries. Hiram had his people make rafts of the cedar trees and brought them to Joppa from which Solomon's people would take them to Jerusalem. The cedar and "fir" (probably a kind of juniper) trees were brought to Israel, and 3600 tons of wheat and 120,000 gallons of olive oil were given to Hiram in payment. The treaty between Solomon and Hiram maintained peaceful relations between these countries over which they ruled.

Forced labor claimed a lot of the time of the Israeli men who were levied by Solomon to work in Lebanon gathering material for the temple project. Ten thousand would go for a month and then they would come

home for two months. 30,000 men were involved in that part of the work. 70,000 men worked carrying materials and 80,000 were stonecutters in the quarries. The number of people involved in the temple project would have been around 200,000. The practice of forced labor ultimately produced a resentment that brought about civil unrest and a divided kingdom after Solomon died.

Solomon did understand the need of families to have a man to provide for them at home so he set up a rotating schedule to maintain family life. Family life is important no matter how busy we might be in our business. A successful businessman might be an unsuccessful father and husband if he doesn't provide more than money and provisions for his family. No matter how busy we might be, families need the leadership of a father. When we arrange our work schedules, we need to keep that in mind. There can be a negative impact on children when our time away from home is too long.

The high-grade stone cut from the hills and from under the city can still be seen in Jerusalem today. The size of the stones would have made transporting them very difficult and would have required a great number of people to move every one. A large project like building the temple would have required not only great amounts of material and manpower to get the material to the building site, but also a huge labor force to actually build the building. Skilled workers from Lebanon not only cut and hewed timber but also cut stones.

We are not involved in building a physical building when we are laborers in building the church, but many of the same principles apply as we are engaged in bringing material to the building site when we proclaim the Gospel, make disciples, baptize them and teach them to observe "all things whatsoever I have commanded you." "Lively stones" are cut out of "the rock from which we have been hewn" and each made to fit by the teaching, guidance and help we are willing to give in order to see "the vast building rise."

1 Kings 5:17. *"And the king commanded, and they brought great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house."*

GREAT STONES.

They're still there, these great stones
Hewed by hands over ³⁰⁰⁰ years ago.
Each one in their place laid there in silence
The noise of the cutting done just so.

When placed for the foundation,
Together they made a perfect place
For others to be added to ones yet to come:
The Master Designer gave each one his space.

These old stones were of highest quality.
From them a great building would rise.
They were chosen by one who would know
They would not weaken when pared down to size.

We are stones too, built on the apostles.
Their teaching from God we need to obey.
The Lord worked on them for several years;
Now we learn from what they learned to say.

In the local gathering there were foundation stones.
They were the first to build in this place.
Over a century has passed, all of them gone;
But what they taught still fills that space.

There are things I've done God called me to do.
I too have felt the chisel and saw.
Others now build on what we once started;
"Lord, pierce their ear with Thy heavenly awl."

"They are always on my heart, Lord. I was young when I first knew them. Now we all are old. But I believe the work of the Master on each of us has made us fit with those around us. When all is said and done, we all say, 'This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.' In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Kings 6:1-38

AN ENGINEERING AND ARTISTIC MASTERPIECE

It was 480 years after the children of Israel left Egypt and built the tabernacle in which the Lord's manifested His presence among them, that Solomon began to build the temple. The shape of the temple followed the same general pattern as the tabernacle only it was twice the size and permanent. When one approached the temple there was an outer courtyard where the altar and the laver were in place. Then there was the Holy Place with tables for the showbread (Bread of Presence), the golden lampstands and the altar of incense.

Farthest in was the Most Holy Place where the ark with the mercy-seat on it was sitting. Over the ark in the Most Holy Place in the temple, were two fifteen-foot high cherubim carved from olive wood and overlaid with gold. The wings of the large cherubim extended the full twenty-cubit (30 feet) width of the building touching the walls on each side.

The temple was a symbol of divine authority in which at this central location for worship and sacrifice, there would be those who guarded God's word and kept it intact lest people would sin by acting and worshipping independently as they chose. We have a sanctuary as well in which we are seated with Christ in the heavenly places. A scripturally gathered assembly is a place where God dwells in the midst of His people and is able to exercise authority when we submit to His word. The local assembly is a "House of God."

The temple was designed and then each piece made to perfectly fit before it was moved to the temple location and placed in the building. As each stone and piece of lumber was laid in place, there was no sound of a hammer, saw or chisel. Even the ledges that went around the outside of the temple were formed so that the three levels added to the outside of the building didn't need holes in the walls to attach them. Each believer is one who is "fitly framed together" in the church and testifies to the fact that God knows who belong where in this building of God made "without hands."

The temple was erected in reverent silence. It must have struck a sense of awe into the hearts of all the people who watched it rise in silence before their eyes. It was a symbol of the holiness of God. When He is among His people there is no need for raucous sounds and noise to produce worship. Rather there is an awesome reverence and respect for the One who is in our midst. Care, concern, honor and respect for God is expected when we come together as a company of His people.

Everything set in the right place, and the symbolic cherubim, knobs and flowers were made to follow in an enlarged way, the pattern God gave for the tabernacle. When a covenant is made with God, the focus is on our Lord with whom the covenant is made rather than on the king and leadership of men. The temple would remind those who came of the unchanging God with whom they covenanted as a nation. We too are a covenant people who need to give diligence to the One who has reconciled us to God.

Every part of the temple would also testify to the holiness of God in contrast to the seriousness of sin that would be demonstrated at the altar in front of the temple. When one has been forgiven of his sins, the way is open to approach to God with reverence and godly fear. The incense of true worship that ascends from redeemed souls is accepted because of the sacrifice Christ made when He died for us. We are now living stones "fitly framed together growing unto an holy temple in the Lord."

The promise of God to dwell in the temple among the people would have given assurance to them as long as they obeyed God's laws. They knew the law and knew it was the standard of personal and national life. They were not cut off from God because of failure, knowing there was forgiveness provided for their sins when in repentance they brought their offering to God. If we ignore God's word and abandon Him in our hearts, the consequences of disobedience follow. God does not ignore sin. He has provided a way for us to be forgiven. If we do not avail ourselves of that, we lose the sense of His presence and power with us.

All the carvings and symbols of cherubim were not depicting God in any way nor an attempt to make an image of Him, so they were not breaking the second commandment. They would remind all who saw them of an "innumerable company of angels" that are in the presence of God in heaven. The temple was like an outpost of heaven to which His people could come.

The temple was really a place for God to dwell among His people, rather than just being a place for the people of God to come and worship. The inside dimensions were not to accommodate as many people as possible because almost all of the people would be limited to the courtyard where the altar was. During the seven years when the temple was being built, the Lord's people would have been very aware of all that was going on. Every family would be affected in some way - either in providing labor or material.

The magnificent building would be talked about and wondered at because of its beauty and what it represented. Later on, the people got used to it and although it remained a place of national pride, many

forgot that the point of the temple being built in the first place was for a palace for God. It is a danger to us as well if we get used to the house of God today being just another church. When we miss the wonder of the house of God, we begin to take divine things for granted and the assembly becomes no more to us than a gathering place for us instead of where we gather "unto Him." There is place for human creativity and effort in the house of God as long as it is within the bounds of scripture. But that is only a little part of what it means to gather unto Lord Jesus Christ. When we are willing to be under His authority, our love and service for Him will be a joy to us and we will appreciate where we are and what we can do for Him.

1Kings 6:7. *"And the house, when it was in building, was made of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building."*

STONE MADE READY.

There was not sound of industry - no sound of change;
Only the voices of laboring men
The plans had been made - out of range
Of the site where God dwelt when done -
Were the harsh sounds of hammer, shovel and saw
Each used by hands of developing skill
From the forest and mines, from quarries came all
Ready to be joined, a purpose to fulfill.

The temple is rising as from different places and lands.
Material is being readied and then each piece added
To the dwelling places of God not made with hands
And living stones form together God's heart to gladden.
Some heard the Word read; many heard the Word spoken
Every one brought together in the house of the Lord.

We won't see the building until as the bride of the King
All of us live there in the Father's house.
Each person comes with their unique features to bring
Having been formed to fit as the Architect chooses.
As the Bride of the Lamb, or the Temple of God
The sheep of His pasture, or the City Foursquare;
All of the saints have been prepared by the Lord
And all will rejoice because God brought us there.

"I think today, Gracious God, of the work going on all over the world. I do not know much of the activities that are bringing people into the kingdom of God, but I pray You will prosper their work. I am rejoicing and anticipating the day when we are all together. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Kings 7

A HOUSE AND A TEMPLE

The palace of Solomon was not a house in the sense that it was only a dwelling place for him and his family. There were three stories to the palace as well as other buildings around it. The ground floor had the great hall where government business would be conducted and Solomon's throne was probably there. In that building there was also an armory where shields, swords and other weapons would be kept. The Palace of the Forest of Lebanon had four rows of cedar columns that extended 150 feet from one end to the other. These held up the cedar beams that held the roof of the building. Sound doctrine and the principles relating to living the Christian life protect and preserve the testimony and life of the house of God. We are built on the sound foundation of "the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone."

The whole building complex included Solomon's place of living, a house for Pharaoh's daughter and likely the harem. The Porch of Judgment (Hall of Justice), the great courtyard and the hall of pillars as well as whatever other buildings were needed would have made an impressive seat of government. It was a massive building project that took nearly twice as long to build as it did to build the temple for the Lord. The whole complex would have been beautiful as well as impressive but did not have the beauty of the temple.

Some of the limestone in that area was able to be cut with saws into the size the builders wanted. Limestone of some kinds get harder when it is exposed to the sun and elements. The intelligence of people in ancient times was such that they were able to create great architectural wonders without all of the equipment we have at our disposal today and believe is necessary to make such buildings. Even the ark built by Noah over a thousand years before the temple was a marvelous work of construction that seems very sophisticated in

its design. When God asks for something to be done, he gives the ability and wisdom to do it. We are not left high and dry to do the will of God. The human mind and will has not developed nor deteriorated because of the passing of time. The most worrisome happening in present day society is the moral deterioration that leads people to ruin their God-given intelligence with moral and chemical abuse.

What was important to God then is important to Him now. To a certain extent the decline in morality negatively affects the ability of those who engage in promiscuous living to accomplish what should be normally expected of them. Solomon did his greatest and most significant work in the early years of his reign. The book of Ecclesiastes reads like the musings of a jaded old man who looked at life through jaundiced eyes. Solomon didn't even live to old age because of getting away from what was important to God, and living for what was important to him.

Details in the last part of this chapter are given about the temple furnishings that indicate these were not just arbitrarily made to suit the artistic ability of Hiram. There was a purpose and design to everything that made it suitable to the temple and temple worship. Hiram's mother was from the city of Dan in the north part of Israel and was from the tribe of Naphtali by way of her first husband. Her son, Hiram, was from Tyre where he learned the skills needed by Solomon to do the work to which he was assigned. The results of that labor were quite spectacular as they followed the directions God gave. When we are doing things for our own benefit and pleasure, or are making a project related to our business, we can do it our way. When our labor, service and worship is for God, we must do it His way. In our spiritual life we need to know and follow God's instructions. To contradict, add to or take away from what God says, would not only be rebellious, but also insulting to Him.

There were two twenty-seven-foot pillars around eighteen inches through that were made for the entrance of the temple with chapiters set on top like a crown. In front of the temple was a laver big enough to hold around 12,000 gallons of water. There were movable basins on wheels that were made out of bronze. Tools for the service of the temple were made and each one would have been like a work of art in itself as well as being useful. In the Christian life we should not overlook the small things and consider them unimportant. It takes every person and every gift properly functioning to make the house of God the kind of place of worship the Lord intends.

Ten golden tables on which to hold the Bread of Presence, were made and put in the Holy Place. Five tables were set on each side of the room. Ten lampstands of gold we made as well and five of them were placed on each side of the Holy Place in the main hall. The temple and its furnishings were priceless works of art but more importantly, they were made for God. The house of God of which we are a part in a local church is priceless as well. God takes each individual and puts them in the place He wants to be used as He wants. The exercise of heart of each one enables the glory of the house to bear witness to angels (like the cherubim) and to people that God is in this place. When the temple was completed, all the treasure David had accumulated and stored were brought into the temple and was there for the glory of God.

1Kings 7:13-14. *“And king Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre. He was a widow’s son of the tribe of Napthali, and his father was a man of Tyre, a worker in brass: and he was filled with wisdom, and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass. And he came to king Solomon, and wrought all his work.”*

SKILL AND EXPERIENCE.

Some know a lot but don't like to work.
Some like to work but their skill is limited.
When wisdom and understanding come together,
The most difficult work can be initiated.

Skill may come from carefully watching others
When they use their knowledge for good
Repeating a task carefully over and over
Makes the resulting effort come out as it should.

Skill may be slow and can be easily discouraged
But coupled with experience there is inside
A real satisfaction when the result is enjoyed
And the laborer can have justified pride.

God uses what we are and can give what we need,
To finish a work done for His glory;
Not knowing exactly the end, in faith we begin
Trusting Him who knows the end of the story.

It is only right that I rise each day
With a sense of duty to do some work for Him;
Whether it is labor as a steward or learning some way
How to present truth and to deal with sin.

Hiram was known as a man of great skill
I know men who are skilled in the Word.
My place is a laborer with experience in the field
Using experience and a little skill for my Lord.

“Father, I know at least some of my limitations - maybe most of them. Help me to be content with what I can do, and encourage those more skilled to use it well. They need the benefit of my experience. Give me wisdom as to how to pass on what I know for Thy glory. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Kings 8:1-21

A DEDICATION

To dedicate a building does not affect or change the value of the building itself in any way. It establishes in the minds of people what the use of the building is to be, and sets it aside for that purpose. That affects us as to what can be done there and what uses would be inappropriate. The real aspects of dedication were stated by Solomon when he addressed the people and said, "Let your heart therefore be perfect with the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes, and to keep His commandments, as at this day."

The tabernacle was designed by God to be a portable place for His presence to be seen by the children of Israel as they journeyed to Canaan. Now there was a change because peace had come to the nation and the temple was designed to be a permanent dwelling place for God's presence to be known by the people. All of the representatives of the nation gathered in solidarity to bring the ark into the temple from its temporary place on Mt. Zion. Solomon waited to move the tabernacle and all its furnishings to the temple until the Feast of Tabernacles had come. No longer were the people dwelling in tents so the feast was a time when people gathered to remember where they came from and lived in temporary booths for a week. It was an appropriate time to conclude the tabernacle gathering and establish temple worship. The people of God today are in a temporary wilderness journey like "a pilgrim band in a foreign land who are marching from Calvary" to the place where we will "dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Some time previously Aaron's rod that budded and the pot of manna must have been taken out of the ark because at this time only the tables of stone were in it. The ark brought into the temple was a testimony to the presence of God there in the midst of His people. The carrying poles remained in the ark signifying the final move of the ark was still in the future. That was when it was taken into heaven according to Revelation 11:19. That probably happened when the Israelites were taken as captives to Babylon.

The cloud signifying the presence of the Lord in the tabernacle for the five hundred previous years, now moved to, and settled in, the temple. When the Lord is present with His people there is evidence of some kind. The work of the Holy Spirit is not able to be disguised when God's people are in fellowship with Him and each other. There is a unity that is "good and pleasant" As well when we worship and serve in unity, that is meaningful. When the Lord Jesus was here, He was "made flesh and 'tabernacled' among us." John wrote that "we beheld His glory ... full of grace and truth." God also dwells in the body of each believer which is the "temple of the Holy Ghost." We are able to glorify God in our bodies and spirits which are His.

Solomon realized that God now dwelt in the temple and called on all the people to understand what this meant. The desire of David was now fulfilled. A house for the Lord was now in place and the glory of the Lord in the cloud made plain the fact that God had moved in. The reaffirmation of the covenant made between the Lord and Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David were seen in the "dark cloud" of the divine Presence.

What God promises is always done. He told David the house would be built by David's son, not him and it happened just that way. The Lord did not choose a city in which to put His house but He chose a man with a heart for God to build it. Now the work was done. A building wasn't what made the temple the dwelling place of God. It was why it was built and for whom. The people among whom God wanted to dwell and with whom He had made a covenant made that place a building set aside for God. The same glory that came upon that building could be removed if God moved out. The presence and power of God today is not limited to a building, but "where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

Our buildings for church purposes are just that. The house of God is the people. It is in that place we find spiritual leaders who go before the people of God to lead us in His ways. Buildings are not the focus of God's attention. His power and presence are not confined in any way to a structure. It is up to us who are in the "house of God" to commit ourselves to the work of the Lord and continuing to build His house through faithful Gospel preaching and teaching of the word of God.

1Kings 8:10-11. *"And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord."*

THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

It happened before, now it has happened again;
The infinite God has chosen to dwell with men.
Not that it has limited Him in any way
That within walls men made He is obligated to stay.
But in an act of marvelous grace, He visibly manifested
His willingness to be in a place consecrated -
A place for His people to meet Him - there to bring
Offerings of their appreciation and their praises to sing -
A center of worship where they come together
Occupied with their Lord God whenever they gather -
They sense the value of fellowship with God and each other.
As the family of God, all the sisters and brothers
Each one gifted by God in some unique fashion
Gives back to the Lord some of what God Himself gave them.
The unity of those who gather there to Him
Multiplies the value when they offer as one,
The sacrifices of praise, thanksgiving and goods -
And God is publicly honored by us as we should -
Those looking on can see the reality and worth
Of worshipping the Father in spirit and in truth;
Though unseen by eyes, the evidence is clear,
God's presence is felt even when we are here.
And His glory is seen when we His Word obey;
Committing ourselves to Him in what we do and say.

"Holy God, who dwells unseen among the people: there seemed yesterday to be the sign of the cloud among Thy people who gathered here. The man who came for the first time seemed impressed to hear the Word of God honored and taught - not just some form followed. 'Hear Thou in heaven, forgive our sins, give us souls for Thy glory.' In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Kings 8:22-53

COMMUNICATING WITH GOD

When one person is the mouthpiece of a congregation of people with the Lord, there is an appropriate way to address God. A suitable position and careful words that are respectful indicates we are serious about the specific requests we make and the worship and intercessions we are expressing. Solomon stood before the altar with his hands upraised as an acknowledgement that access to the Lord God is because of an innocent substitute.

It is not a casual act when we approach the eternal God and speak to Him on behalf of others. Moses' raised hands put him in the position in which God could send plagues on the land of Egypt, give victory to Israel over the Amalekites, and others also lifted up their hands toward the Lord. When we pray publicly our hands are to be holy and our attitude that of confidence toward God and unreserved faith. The prayer of faith recognizes the Lord God as unique in His being, all-powerful in His authority, merciful toward mankind and compassionate toward those who fear Him. What He has said, He will do. His promises are always kept.

A covenant made with the Lord is sure and is verified by His own word and promise. When God acts on behalf of His people, it may be by arranging and directing the course of events. He makes things happen according to His choosing, and at other times responds to prayers by miracles. However, God chooses to act; the terms of a covenant He will keep. It is our responsibility to keep our side of the covenant with honesty, integrity, dignity and honor. Our children will hopefully take heed to our ways and walk before the Lord themselves.

The fact of the temple being filled with the cloud of God's presence in no way limited the omnipresent God to the temple. The visible evidence of the presence of God reminded the people of Israel that He was there to

assist and guide them in their national life. The heavens cannot contain God, let alone a building made by men. Yet God is willing to dwell in His people and among His people in "the house of God." God's presence transcends anything that men can make. Nothing can contain Him exclusively. It is a marvel of His grace that He condescends to live in His people.

It is another gracious act of God to hear the prayers of His people at any time. In a special way when His people gather together publicly as "the house of God" and pray in His Name, He is there to hear and answer. When there are charges of wickedness made but not enough evidence to affirm or reject the charges, we have to turn the whole matter over to the Lord. When prayer is made in faith, confession is real and forsaking of sin takes place because God is omniscient, then the truth of the matter is made known. Forgiveness can take place and restoration follows. When as a result of sin, enemies take over the nation; when prayer is urgent and the matter is confessed as a consequence of disobedience, God can justly forgive. Prisoners can be freed and restored to the land of their fathers because they have returned to the God of their fathers.

Crop failures because of drought endangered the whole nation when they got careless and forgot the Lord. To start taking God and His blessings for granted will lead to consequences that are beyond our control. God who is omnipotent can change the weather and restore that which has been lost because of pestilence, disease and those things that plague the people. When we confess and forsake sin, we will find mercy is ready to be granted by our heavenly Father.

Guilt is an emotion that is good for us when we sin. Grace and forgiveness are in God's heart and can be granted when repentance is genuine. When in His wisdom God brings some form of discipline upon His people to correct them, it is a blessing. When He gives instructions as to "the right ways of the Lord," it is also a blessing even though there may be pain and suffering needed to bring it to pass.

It is the Lord's intention that His people in whatever age they have lived and whatever place they live to be a light to those around us. Those from distant lands ("strangers from a far country") when they hear of the name of the Lord from us and put their trust in Him are blessed. The Lord hears our prayers of intercession and does what is needed that those who seek Him, find Him.

Solomon must have had some insight into the future because in His prayer he prayed for the people of Israel who were captives, to have a change of heart, repent and call upon the Name of the Lord. His prayer was for the captives to be returned to the land, but more importantly, to the Lord and the inheritance He had given them. Solomon's appeal at the first of his prayer was based on the covenant the Lord had made with David. At the end of the prayer his appeal has to do with the covenant the Lord made with Israel when they were at Mt. Sinai.

Faith in prayer whether it be intercession, supplication, thanksgiving, worship or adoration, brings us consciously before the Lord our God in confidence that His will for us will be done through us.

1Kings 8:23. *"And he said, 'Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above or on earth beneath, who keepeth covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all heart:'"*

NO GOD LIKE THEE.

The gods of men's making are much like themselves;
Some ugly, others strong - images sitting on shelves,
The One God, the True God is not dead - He's alive.
By Him we live and move, yes, even survive.
The opposition of evil that wants to take life away,
Or make we who believe in Him in some way to stay,
So those who know by nature there is a God who lives,
Will not believe in Him nor acknowledge all He gives.

The True God, the Living God who makes covenant with men -
Has made very clear he wants us to have fellowship with Him -
He forms covenants and keeps them even though when we fail
His mercy extends to us and of His grace we avail
Ourselves that we might repent and quickly to Him return -
Sometimes it is after our failures that best we learn
Our God is One of Love and His Faithfulness is great
He forgives our sins by blood when we with Him covenant make.

He is not limited to a temple, for the whole universe is His.

The place where we gather is where we come to praise
Him for His Person and the great work He has done.
When, in love, He provided our ransom by giving His Son.
How blessed it is to walk before Him and know that He knows
All about us and our lives when in His mercy He chose
Us to be His children - to live for Him, love Him, serve Him here
And enjoy Him forever and His divine nature share.

“O Holy God who has drawn near to men, I am struck with awe that Thy covenant gives me a whole new nature as well as a new life. Thy mercies are truly mine every day and Thy love and grace unailing. I bow my head in reverence and thanks. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Kings 8:54-66

INTERCESSION AND DEDICATION

Prayers of intercession are made when we understand, at least to a degree, the fact that there are problems and issues that arise in the lives of God's people and even nations that are greater than can be solved by men and women alone. Some people need God and don't even know it. We are told to "pray for kings and those in authority" who have the power to influence the course of a nation for good or bad. So in Solomon's prayer for the nation he prayed for several important things that would adversely affect the people if there was no divine intervention. This provides a certain pattern for prayers of intercession that can help us to be consistent with praying in the will of God.

The first request was for the Lord's presence to be with His people, and in that request is implied that they people would be conscious of the presence of the Lord with them [v.57]. There is a purifying effect when we realize that we are not out on our own in this world and that we can have confidence in the outcome of things when we know God is with us in the matter. The second request was that the people of the Lord would have the desire to do God's will in everything they would do. Obedience to God and assurance that what He is wanting from us is our true desire goes beyond mere acquiescence to hearty willingness. There is also a request for the honest desire and ability to do what God wants and act on the decrees that He gives [v.58]. A request for help in daily living [v.59] is a fundamental need in the lives of the Lord's people. Every day we live brings new needs and opportunities that are unique to that place and time. The awareness of God in the situation giving needed guidance places us in the best possible position and condition for success.

Then there was a final request for the message of Lord our God being the Savior of the world, to be declared to the ends of the earth [v.60]. In our day we pray for the preaching of the Gospel message to be successful and prosper wherever it is being proclaimed. That prayer is similar to the fundamental message of "Peace" being told to "all men everywhere" to "repent and believe the Gospel."

Solomon knew that day was a historic day in the life of the nation and what he said and prayed would be an affirmation of the covenants the Lord had made before to Moses, the nation of Israel and to David. Even after there was rest in the land of promise, there was land to be possessed which didn't happen until the reign of David. It was at that time the promises of the covenant were fulfilled because the terms of the covenant were finally met on Israel's part.

Behind the motivation to be faithful and obedient to the Lord, is heartfelt interest on the part of those who desire to serve Him. That which our forbearers experienced and did for the Lord is not what is needed from us. The terms of "covenant living" have to be made and acted upon by ourselves. The people of the whole world are affected by the faithfulness and testimony of those who are truly followers of the Lord. Counterfeit Christianity is rejected as relevant or important by those who expect Christians to show evidence of Christ's teaching and life to be able to be seen in them.

Commitment to the Lord will fill the hearts and minds of His people with a desire to do His will and obey His word. When that is a fact of life in us, it has a far-reaching effect that is far greater than we can imagine. It is not possible to over-emphasize the impact true Christianity lived out day by day in a consistent way, has on those who are still in spiritual darkness. That visible evidence is what makes people sit up and take notice of the reality of our risen Lord. When we reflect Him in the everyday things of life, people can identify with that and hopefully will desire to come to know Him.

The dedication of the temple was a national event that affected the whole nation. Great numbers of people came from all parts of the kingdom for the week-long dedication of the temple, followed by the week-long Feast of Tabernacles. The great number of animals sacrificed were so the whole nation at one time could

eat a common meal. Millions of people eating their portion of the sacrifices, were united in their awareness of the Lord God of Israel dwelling in the midst of His people in the new temple. Evidence of His presence was seen by the cloud and there would have been a reverential respect as well as joy at the assurance that God was with them. On the final day the people blessed Solomon and went home with joy and gladness for all that the Lord had done for them. It was on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, "the great day of the feast" the Lord Jesus Christ stood and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." We need to be aware of the fact that we can get used to important things if we forget the One who is important.

1Kings 8:45. *"Then hear thou in heaven their prayer and supplication, and maintain their cause."*

HEAR THOU IN HEAVEN.

It seems much easier when we have been faithful
When we are assured we are acting in His will;
When hearts and heads are bowed and we are thankful
That we know God in heaven hears us still.

But when there is a problem and we have sinned
We often need to again be reassured
That after true confession and the trespass is mended
Again, when we pray, we are heard.

When times of discouragement, defeat or despair
Have taken us prisoner, it still is true -
If we stop what we are doing and in heartfelt prayer
Turn to our God in heaven; He will answer that prayer too.

There are times when the blessings of life have stopped
And we wonder what we can do next -
Stop to consider God knows even our thoughts
I'm the one who God's mercy has vexed.

Wrong living brings want; wickedness and grief
Many times, we have gone our own way -
To forsake sin is right, and sincere repentance we seek
God in heaven will hear what we say.

When someone I meet does not know God -
Then I can for that person intercede
And pray that in some way I can speak of the Lord
So, he will become aware of his need.

There are battles to be fought but alone we'd fall
If the cause is righteous, God is there to hear
When in desperation I then on His name call
And find He is there my burden to bear.

I do believe God hears when we pray
Whether alone or in a large company -
It is a fact to remember that all I say
Is heard by Him who hears and also sees.

"Father in heaven, I believe Thou dost hear every word and knows every unexpressed need. I know I don't express myself as lot, but I thank Thee for the assurance of Thy omniscient wisdom. Not only what I speak, but unspoken requests are here before Thee. May this day be a day of communion with Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Kings 9:1-9

THE SECOND TIME

Early in Solomon's reign the Lord appeared to him at Gibeon. Now after the temple and his house were built the Lord appeared to him the second time. In between those two times we read the Lord spoke to him, so these two times may have been a theophany. There were times in the Old Testament account when this took place. It was a visible evidence of God appearing to men in a human form they could understand and identify with. Abraham certainly recognized the fact that the Lord was one of the three who appeared at his

tent door one day. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only One of the Godhead who has a visible form. "In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

On the other occasions when the Lord spoke to Solomon but did not "appear" to him, it was likely that a prophet came to him with a word from the Lord. The usual way was that "God in sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets."

The fact that His prayer was heard and his request was noted by the Lord indicates there is full access on our part to the Lord God, and full knowledge on His part of all that we do and the motive behind our actions. God knows us better than we know ourselves. More than that was the fact the Lord Himself consecrated the temple and put His name there. His attention was there and His heart was there. God knows and cares about all that happens in His house. The "house of God" is an assembly of believers who are gathered out to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not an insignificant body nor are the things we do in the house of God of our own choosing.

Integrity of heart, uprightness of life and obedience to the new covenant to which we are committed gives us the ability to experience the blessings associated with our spiritual life. The promises of God are there and are real. So are the consequences of failing to keep ours. To fall short of divine expectations puts us in a position of potential ridicule and the object of mockery as Christians. To have people speak disparagingly of Christians is not uncommon. If we give people reason to speak in that way, that is a serious sin on our part.

It is a grief to us to see a public testimony of an assembly fail because of division, disobedience and disregard for God's word. That is far different than when the demographics of a work make it impossible to continue functioning as a biblically gathered New Testament assembly. To do things our own way with no regard for sound teaching brings disaster. Biblically authorized practices and, to a lesser degree, traditions that have worked in an assembly also keep stability in a work. Each assembly has a culture that is unique to it and in which it has functioned for years. When we leave the pattern of New Testament teaching and the practices of an assembly that have worked, disintegration takes place and eventually an end comes to public testimony.

1Kings 9:2. *"That the Lord appeared to Solomon the second time, as he had appeared unto him at Gibeon."*

THE SECOND TIME.

When God repeats Himself, of this you can be sure
What He has said before, of this wisely take heed.
Do what He has commanded; have your motives pure;
His blessing in your life is a great need.

I must conduct myself before Him with faith,
Knowing my need of His strength is a must.
He has shown to me many times over, His grace,
And I would be foolish not to give Him full trust.

To walk in integrity, not just in form,
Is a need that has to be renewed every day.
That keeps me consistent so truth is the norm,
When people around see what I do and say.

His word is established so with uprightness of heart,
I have guidelines to direct me through life.
If I make it a practice each day at the start
To hear God's Word, then it keeps me until the night.

There are testing that come, God has allowed them
To see if I am true to His Word.
When those trials come, I can turn quickly to Him,
And again, acknowledge Jesus as Lord.

At the first time of meeting it seemed very easy
To answer with assurance and faith.
But the second time seems more serious, it's not self I am pleasing,
God is showing me the continual need of His grace.

“Father God, please keep me from being light-weight and casual about spiritual and eternal things. I want to be sober and upright in ways that can please Thee as a representative of Thy kingdom. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Kings 9:10-28

SUCCESS, OR THE BEGINNING OF FAILURE?

The twenty cities Solomon gave Hiram, were likely collateral; until Solomon repaid him for all the gold and material he got from him, to use in the building of the temple. If the towns were in payment for all Solomon got from Hiram, they would not be really all that useful to a king whose economic base was the sea-faring trade and shipping for which Tyre was well known. As far as the twenty cities that Hiram refused to accept, to him they were worthless -"Cabul." The term "brother" would have been a way of addressing one who leaders would consider their equal.

Solomon did not short-change Hiram in any way. More likely he paid him above and beyond that which he spent. The largess of the leaders of the Middle East was a source of pride to them. It was important to them to seem very generous and go farther than others in giving gifts [2Chr.9]. International trade between the tribal nations was flourishing during the time of Solomon's reign.

Both Israel and Egypt seemed to be the major nations to be reckoned with among all the other nations of the Middle East. Pharaoh's daughter becoming Solomon's wife was part of that alliance process that Solomon must have thought was necessary to keep peace. Yet Solomon's building projects throughout the kingdom must have been in view of defending the territory David had brought under Israeli rule. Those ancient building projects have been a great source of interest among archaeologists in recent years, as they give confirmation of the biblical accounts and serve to silence skeptics. The building projects Solomon was so concerned about would have been on major trading routes that crossed the Middle East.

The conscripts Solomon got from the people were likely all non-Israeli residents who were still living among the Jewish inhabitants of the land. There would have been a building of resentment because of this but it did not fester to the breaking point until after Solomon died. Opposition by the Canaanites to the Egyptians during the time of Solomon was crushed and the Egyptians claimed property the Canaanites had previously. Solomon maintained a standing army and had horses and chariots in various places prepared for war even though he was a man of peace.

When God's people focus their attention on the business practices of the world, and are constantly engaged in seeking to gain wealth and power, the spiritual life of a nation declines. Salt and light have to be obviously in use in order for them to be effective. It is important for us as God's people to do whatever we do "as to the Lord" and not just to increase our profits for merely personal reasons.

The three feasts Solomon made sure were kept: The Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles, was so there was still a semblance of spirituality among the people. When we use the things of God for personal advantage it will not be long before the generation following will get the picture that what I have and can get for myself is more important than what God gives me. Some people attend meetings in order to interface with others in view of making a business deal. Others to gain a foothold that leads to some kind of power.

Our spiritual obligations can look like worship outwardly for awhile, but soon the heart of man is revealed. Success is a wonderful thing when we recognize it is coming from God and we give God the credit and all the glory for the outcome. When we begin to think we are accomplishing this success because of our business acumen, skill and strategy, we are placing ourselves and the generation to come in a very dangerous position. Solomon started out humbly and wisely, but as time went by he relied on his wisdom rather than on God. There is nothing that can take the place of faith when it comes to pleasing God.

1Kings 10:1. *“And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to prove him with hard questions.”*

THE KEY.

The name of the Lord is not honored by most,
They do not consider God to be that important.
Some think of God as an idea or just a vague ghost
And never consider Him in their life or deportment.
But to those who have experienced His grace in their lives
He is the most significant Person of all.
Though He is not seen, our God is all-wise
And He hears our requests when we call.

The forms men design no matter how impressive and great,
Are just imaginary ideas they have about God.
The gold and silver; the trappings of office and state;
Really have nothing to do with the Lord.
The great buildings that rise with spires reaching to the sky
Miss the point of man's relationship to Him.
Those things, though impressive, that appeal to the eye,
Miss conveying the power and authority of His name.

His name means He exists, He is not an idea of men
To be used to keep order with threats.
His name was called "Jesus", when to earth He came
To bring light, life and in His name, we pray -
That gives authority to the requests we make.
When we speak in His name, we are reminded one day,
Every person will confess to the power of His name.

"O Holy God, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I bow my heart before Thee and praise Thee for the privilege of being gathered to His name. In His name I pray for the comfort of my sister in Christ who is dying; for the relief from pain for my brother in Christ; for the salvation of the man I was speaking to and for my family and their daily needs. Amen."

1st Kings 10:1-29

GOING FARTHER AWAY

When the queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon, likely she came as one leader of a country to another more or less as a competitor in extravagant living and abundance of wealth and prestige. When we hear of people who seem larger than life, we are consciously skeptical and a part of us wants to put them down or at least pare them down to our size. The wealth of the queen of Sheba and of Hiram king of Tyre was such that extravagant gifts of gold, huge amounts of exotic spices and precious stones did not make all that much difference to either of them.

However, when the queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem and saw all that Solomon had, she was greatly impressed. Then when she saw beyond the physical things and observed his servants and the way they attended to him; she was further amazed. When he answered all the questions she had with God-given wisdom and put all of what she saw and heard together, she said, "The half was not told me."

Many people have questions to which they want answers, but they often already have an opinion or the answer they want, and ask a question so they can say, "He (or she) said that," in order to deflect criticism from themselves. Others ask "loaded" questions rather than sincere ones to confuse and find fault instead of wanting a true answer. It is important for us to seek discernment when we are questioned, and make sure our answers do not conflict in any way with God's will.

Other leaders came to see Solomon and get his advice as his fame spread throughout the Middle Eastern nations. Solomon's desire for wisdom was good. The promise from God of riches and honor came to pass and Israel became an important nation under Solomon's leadership. But the way he used the riches he was given was for his own benefit rather than for the benefit of Israel. Much of what he got was through taxation on the people and was used to increase his own wealth and prosperity. Wealth and prosperity was seen in Old Testament times as evidence of God's blessing. People thought of them as a sign they were living right and doing right.

Unfortunately, some of God's people think the same today when in reality suffering and adversity are evidence of godly living according to the scripture. Our "treasures" are not to be here on earth but we are to lay them up in heaven. When God is guiding and controlling our lives is when we are living right. Wealth does not mean we are living right nor does poverty mean we are living wrong. It is the "Lord [who] gives and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Of all the blessings God has given us, the gift of eternal life and salvation from sin and for heaven is of greatest worth. Our Gracious Father has "freely given us all things."

Apparently, Solomon got used to extravagant living with all his riches and honor that came from God. "If riches increase, set not thy heart upon them." He got used to dealing with paganism and got on friendly terms with pagan worshippers. Consequently, he lost his perspective on who he was and on the people of God over whom was to rule in wisdom. He lost his understanding of why God had given him all of his

prosperity. Strangers and dignitaries were greatly impressed with his wisdom and honor, but he compromised and violated the written commandments of God regarding being a king.

An Israeli king was not to acquire horses for himself or for the people lest they go back to Egypt. They were not to go there for any reason. He was not to take many wives because he would be led astray by them emotionally and would turn away from the Lord. He was not to accumulate gold and silver in large amounts. He was to personally take the time to write down the words of the law himself so it would be impressed on his mind and he would then act according to the law. He was to take time to read the law every day so that he would recognize he was under divine authority as a servant [De.17].

Solomon ignored all of these commands of God and did exactly what the Lord had warned the people about when they wanted a king. He conscripted people to serve him and he taxed them to get more for himself [1Sam.8.] With all of his accumulated wealth and extravagant spending, Solomon never seemed satisfied. He "exceeded all" other leaders of his day in commerce, wisdom, power and wealth.

Fame and fortune have a way of claiming a person's time, talents, mind and ambition. When that happens our relationship with people is in danger of becoming equal in importance or even more important than our relationship with our Lord. The queen of Sheba recognized Solomon's wisdom and his God were connected. Even though she said appropriate words of praise about God, there is no evidence she was personally interested in Him. It is not uncommon for people to use the right words to say the right things because they want to please us. But conformity is not reality. People may recognize God as being real but have no interest in surrendering their will and lives to Him.

There comes a time when one who started out well with the Lord and prospered in the secular world, has to choose who they will serve. Solomon made the choice to go as far as he could in the world system and was successful in that pursuit. However, the consequences of that choice have affected Israel to this day. The principles of sowing and reaping still apply. When we sow, we reap. We reap what we sow. We reap more than we sow. This is true for both good and bad.

Those who live extravagant lives and are always seeking more things to satisfy the "natural man" or "carnal man" will never find true satisfaction in spite of all they possess. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth." Satisfied living comes only when we are wanting and willing to be guided by our Lord.

1Kings.10:24. *"And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart."*

IN HIS HEART.

It is not an accident, no aberration of nature, no strange mixture of the genes that made
this man Solomon so wise.
God had put it in his heart.
He was a man, like me, not some angel in human form; he had his tensions and studies and
family, he was wise because
God had put it in his heart.
His inclinations, his occupation, his preoccupations were like any other young boy his age,
but now so different and wise-
God had put it in his heart.
But why him, not the first born, or the best looking of the brothers; why this child whose
origins are tainted with scandal;
God had put it in his heart.
True, he was to be king, and king he became, but lots of kings come and go without this
man's wisdom and wealth and fame -
God had put it in his heart.
What is the secret to being such a repository of wisdom that all must say, "It's not ordinary
wisdom; It is beyond 'smart.' "
God had put it in his heart.
The answer is simple; it came at night; it's the result of a choice God gave him, "Ask what I
shall give thee." He asked,
God had put it in his heart.
What did he ask that led to such astounding results the world has never stopped talking
about it? It's not complicated;
God had put it in his heart.
Even in the dead of night, he knew his limitations; he knew their expectations; he knew he
needed what he did not have.
God had put it in his heart.

He needed understanding, he needed discernment, he needed to be able to judge wisely in matters large and small, and so
God had put it in his heart.
God gave him more, far more than he would or could ever imagine, a wise and understanding heart, then riches and honor.
God had put it in his heart.
But there are dangers, even when so much is given. Attractions are everywhere. Even when one so wise fails; Choices are still to be made, even when
God had put it in his heart.

“O God, May some of these choices this man so feeble and so foolish (this low person of lowly birth and yet by grace exalted to a King’s son) has made; be made in such a way that they aren’t just willful, self-serving choices. May they be choices made because I am ready to serve Thy people in Thy way in Thy time. May every choice, every decision, and every judgment be made with holy meditation and assurance of divine sanction through Thy Word - because God had put it in my heart. Amen.”

1st Kings 11:1-13

LED ASTRAY

Not everyone who starts out well in the things of God and is blessed with God-given wisdom in their early years, ends well as they get older. Solomon is an example of this tragic fact. Solomon was led astray by foreign women who practiced idolatry and worshipped the gods of men's ideas. The ideas of men are usually based on what makes people feel comfortable in their relationships rather than a commitment to God and His will. Solomon went so far as to build "high places" for the gods Chemosh and Molek to please all the women in his life. Consequently, he did evil in the sight of the Lord and the Lord was angry with him because his heart turned away from the Lord even though the Lord had appeared to him on two different occasions.

To compromise with worldly philosophies hoping to win people to Christ, not only fails to bring people to true faith in Christ, but it leads to apostasy - deliberately turning away from revealed truth. Solomon began taking matters of leadership into his own hands instead of trusting and obeying God. The women who came into Solomon's life turned his heart "after other gods" and led him to where his submission to God's will no longer mattered to him.

When one ignores the commands of the Lord, serious negative consequences follow. We are obligated not only to know and believe God's word, but to obey and follow it and apply its truths to our daily life and decision making. No matter how long we have been saved or how much of God working on our lives we have experienced, we are not immune to failure if we act on our own. Most people have one or more weak spots in which they are vulnerable to temptation and compromise. Solomon took for granted the wisdom God gave him and used it without consideration for the will of God. His weakness for personal pleasure and expediency led him down a path from which he never returned. If we know we are weak in our character or ability, we need to set a special guard before our minds and eyes lest our testimony for the Lord falls into ruin.

Perhaps at first Solomon resisted the pressures put on him when he was actively involved in the building of the temple - God's house. When he got to his own projects, he began to tolerate that which he once resisted. Then he rationalized away the danger in which he had put himself and the people of God. The compromises Solomon made to please his wives and in order to politically safe, soon led him to do "evil in the sight of the Lord."

If we think the way to spread the Gospel and the knowledge of God to win converts is to join the unconverted and do things to make our message popular, we make the same mistake modern evangelicals make when they blend worldly philosophy and practices with the word of God. Confusion, counterfeit converts and lost souls are the result. The steps people follow in doing these things leads to apostasy as happened to Solomon. By the time the next generation was in leadership there was no fear of God, no commitment to the word of God, and ultimately the nation was carried away as captives.

It doesn't take long for a nation or an assembly that had great potential to become "castaway." When great "worship centers" are established served by a staff of preachers and teachers become popular and appealing to the people of the world, it is impossible for it to be "a pillar and ground of the truth." Such places are attractive, perhaps intellectually stirring and certainly emotionally appealing to the senses. But God intends worship to be "in spirit and in truth."

The drama associated with the worship of Astoreth was attractive to the people of the world even when child sacrifices were made. It involved sexual sin as well which appealed to the ungodly. Chemosh was the national god of the Moabites so it was likely used as political leverage to keep people in bondage to the leaders. The Lord God had warned His people about this and unfortunately their king, Solomon, was leading them down this evil road.

God had appeared to Solomon twice but now the anger of God was toward him and the warning of the Lord came to him letting him know the consequences of his actions. We do not get away from God all at once. We first allow one "little thing" to go unchallenged in our lives and before long the "snowball effect" has taken place. Sin allowed to go unjudged spreads like a contagious disease. The sins we allow to happen, and soon accept as normal will cause the kind of trouble that cannot be stopped.

Solomon did not keep the terms of the covenant David and the nation had made with God. He didn't bother with the statutes that governed everyday life. Materialism, selfishness, idolatry and ungodliness that started with Solomon were allowed by God. Because of the moral and spiritual mudslide that affected the whole country, severe consequences brought the nation down. When sin takes place, it must be judged. If it is personal, confess and forsake it. If it is in an assembly, deal with it in a scriptural way. Sin in a nation has to be warned and spoken against lest the outcome bring that nation down to defeat and disintegration.

Solomon's reign began well and ended bad. It would have been blessed and have been a blessing if he had followed the terms of the covenant, the promises and followed divine guidance. If he had continued in the privilege of prayer like he prayed at the dedication of the temple, things would have been different. But he allowed and promoted rampant sin all around him and became corrupted by sin himself.

It is possible for us to start good and not follow through to the end. When that happens, we lose everything that counts for eternity. Faithfulness to our Lord in every part of our lives is our privilege and obligation. If we are unfaithful to our commitment to the Lord all we have is in danger of being taken away.

1Kings 11:3. *"And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart."*

TURNED AWAY HIS HEART.

Where is he? Why is he not here?
He was here at the beginning - has he no fear?
The God of his father, and his God too -
Dwells with His people and is not through
With the work He established at first with His people
And wants it to continue and for him to be faithful
In continuing what he started; and he started well -
He was a blessing unto many until he fell
Into temptations which he chose not to resist
And would not turn back to God nor cease and desist -
But soon found excuses to tolerate what was wrong -
He must have known the difference for he lost his song -
His conscience pricked deeply but he began to rationalize
The decisions he made so that a temporary prize
Would be his to claim; though he knew it was a passing fancy
Causing him to lose his character over something so chancy;
His heart was turned away by his pride and lust
And turned to other gods, none of which he could trust
For they were only figments of man's vain imagination
But they turned him away from the God of his salvation.
And because he turned away, many others did too.
The nation was ultimately condemned before he was through.
May God have mercy on me and help me to resist,
Lest I tolerate sin and not turn away from it.
Toleration follows weak resistance and then to rationalize
Turns one away from God, the good and the prize.

"Holy God my Father, let me learn never to succumb to the pressure of sinful temptation. Give me strength to resist sin, the wisdom to not tolerate it, and the common sense not to rationalize the awful outcome. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Kings 11:14-43

TURNED AWAY

The choices we make have consequences that are very far reaching at times. The more responsible a role one has whether it is in a family, an assembly or a nation, the farther one's influence for good or evil spreads. Solomon did not turn away from God all at once. His spiritual coldness began when he took the first step away by marrying the Egyptian princess. The first step away may not seem all that serious, but unchallenged sin soon spreads. When Solomon's heart was turned away, he soon turned to other gods. Then he turned to participate to the extent he built high places to other gods even though he had built the temple of the Lord. Then he turned away from God's word; turned to antagonism and murderous intent against one chosen by God; and ultimately his turning away from truth, righteousness and God led to his son turning away even further. How careful we must be when we are called by God to remain in close fellowship with Him. Our relationship as children of God is secure when we have accepted Christ as our Savior, but our fellowship with God must be maintained and nurtured through His word and fellowship with His people.

During the reign of David, the men of war of Edom were killed. Others were taken captive and others escaped to Egypt among whom was Hadad. The Egyptian Pharaoh was reluctant to have Hadad go back to Edom because Egypt had good relations with Israel - perhaps because of his daughter who married Solomon. Hadad's name is the name of a pagan god. Rezon took over the leadership of Damascus in Syria, and even though David's control over Syria left Solomon territorial control north to the Euphrates River, he did not control Damascus. Because of Solomon's compromising actions, the Lord raised up the men as adversaries to bring Solomon in repentance back to faith in the Living God. Compromise always has a sinful effect that cannot be stopped without true repentance and a turning back to God from the heart.

A third adversary was Jeroboam from the tribe of Ephraim who was an industrious supervisor of the laborers Solomon conscripted from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, the descendants of Joseph. A corridor of land that included Gezer which Pharaoh gave to his daughter, Solomon's wife, and the land of the Gibeonites who Joshua had left to them, separated the northern tribes of Israel from the tribes of Judah and Simeon. The Lord had intended the kingdom of David to be maintained but it was in danger of being destroyed because of Solomon turning away from God. For David's sake the Lord allowed David's descendants to continue to reign in Jerusalem. Sin that is not judged and departure that is not repented of has very negative effects on the generations following those who turned away in the first place. If we are not willing to follow the Lord, and maintain the heritage He has given us on His terms, we too will lead others to go in a path that will be felt for generations to come.

When Ahijah met Jeroboam and divided his garment into twelve pieces, Jeroboam knew what that meant. There would be strife between brethren. One man's action changed the course of the nation and the effects are still seen today. The same covenant terms that God had given to Solomon were given to Jeroboam. The status and power of David's kingdom was diminished but for David's sake it would not continue forever. When "David's Greater Son" comes to rule and reign, there will be a full recovery to the terms of the covenant. Zion will be the place from which He will rule the affairs of the nations. The Messiah will have a reunited kingdom and the house of David will not fail under the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Solomon apparently knew of Ahijah's prophecy but was so far away from God that he sought to kill Jeroboam in his resistance against the Lord. It may have been that Jeroboam was overly anxious to take over the northern kingdom ahead of God's timing, and had to flee to Egypt until Solomon died. The tragedy of turning away from the revealed will of God cannot be over-emphasized because its effects are so long-lasting. It is incumbent on us to make sure we are in fellowship with our Lord, and if anything arises or pressures come upon us to compromise the truth of God, we will not yield to them. The effects of turning away from God are felt all across the whole evangelical world today to the extent that many who claim to be children of God have never come in repentance to God. Some change their lifestyle a bit and others don't even bother with that, and still say they have been born again with no signs of new life in Christ.

On the other hand, some who have been saved by God's grace and have been given the relationship of a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ, do get away from God because of allowing a little sin in their lives to continue. Our confession of sin doesn't bring about forgiveness of sin. That has been secured in the work of Christ whose "blood cleanseth us from all sin." The confession of sin restores our fellowship with God so we can "walk in the light" with Him and enjoy the blessings of our salvation.

1 Kings 12:8. *"But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, and which stood before him:"*

BE A SERVANT.

Misunderstanding the role, you fill in life

Leads to unfortunate consequences often leading to strife
It can happen in nations, even between husband and wife -
Your main role is to be a servant to others.

To think leadership is your calling as an end in itself
Or to use it in some way to accumulate wealth -
Will end in not only you, but others being put on a shelf -
You neglected to serve your sisters and brothers.

God established leadership as a way to maintain orderly conduct
It is needed in homes and churches, even factories to make a product
Each needing a standard to go by that is not based on luck -
You are called to be spiritual fathers.

When you need counsel, ask it of those who care.
Over years of faithful service, they have already been there.
They know what works right and what burdens leaders bear -
You ask their counsel when you're together.

Good leaders know their role is to be the people's servant.
It is an honorable task in life given to those who earn it.
You can learn from older people by being quite observant -
You will learn wisdom that will stay with you forever.

Younger leaders need to learn that if you start off right,
People will follow you as a leader who is walking in the light.
Instead of being divisive their fellowship will be tight -
You have been a servant who succeeds in his endeavor.

“O Great Shepherd of the sheep: grant that those who go before Thy people will serve with the heart of a shepherd. Help them understand they are stewards of those for whom Thou hast paid the greatest possible price. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Kings 12:1-24

DIVISION!!

Trouble does not always come upon us unawares. For many years there had been an "us and them" attitude among the Israelites. Ephraim seemed to be the most influential tribe of the northern part of the nation and Judah the most influential in the south. Rehoboam must have sensed the potential problem so he went north to Shechem for his coronation and to set up the center of his government perhaps to seek to unify the people. It could have been that he was seeking to claim historical significance because that was where the Lord met Abraham and promised him the land as far as he could see all around him.

By its very nature division has a root cause that has been overlooked and left unresolved until it grows into a serious problem. Jealousy of some kind is usually its source. Pride demands supremacy and humility often lets it happen. Grace left unbalanced by truth leads God's people to leave sin unjudged if we are not careful. Truth without grace to balance it becomes hard and calloused to the extent that people can become resentful and ignore the righteous demands of our Lord.

David began his reign in Israel over the northern tribes. The representatives of those tribes came to meet Rehoboam at Shechem to seek some deliverance from the pressures they were under when Solomon was king. Jeroboam recently returned from Egypt was their spokesman. The discontent of the people over high taxes, the drafting of laborers and military forces that Solomon had imposed to support his opulent lifestyle, left a deep bitterness in the people. As Solomon's pride and extravagance increased, and the political pressures led him to take multiple idolatrous wives, the burdens on the Israelites increased, until when Rehoboam became king, they had had enough.

Not everything that has been passed on to us is good, nor are we obligated to do what older people tell us if it is not biblically based. We want this generation and the ones following to "set their hope in God," not in being successful in the eyes of the world. The expectations people may have of us is not the basis of our motivation to "live godly in Christ Jesus." What we do in life is to be for the glory of God and the blessing of others. Responsibilities and opportunities may be passed on to us by others and it is up to us to use them in ways that are directed by the Lord. Divisions can come quickly when a new generation arises to take leadership among God's people.

Authority in the assemblies of the people of the Lord and in the kingdom of God in general, is given for service, not for self-promotion and personal advantage. Solomon had finished his life with full and plenty, with fame and popularity in the world, but with confusion and chaos in Israel and his own home. Rehoboam was left with a very discontented nation of people to lead who were disillusioned with the royal family. He asked for advice it is true, but he did not carefully evaluate the advice given. He must have given government positions to his friends and those of his own age as soon as he took the throne. Older men were there to advise him but for some reason he took the advice of the younger men and rejected the counsel of the aged.

When advice is asked for and given, determine if it is realistic and consistent with scriptural principles. If the advice is fair, positive, workable and will be an improvement and the direction is clear, then follow the advice. If you are uneasy about the advice given because it seems too hard or too slack, go no further but wait on God to open the way before you unmistakably.

Rehoboam's answer to the people of a harsher and more aggressive rule was contrary to the principles of the covenant of the nation with God that are written in Deuteronomy 17. The people had been warned by Samuel what would happen when they had a king - and it happened. The rebellion of the northern tribes was not condoned nor was the foolishness of Rehoboam. Some things are a natural response to the actions of those who act outside of the will of God. God allows events of our own choosing to bring about the effect that can be expected when we act in the flesh. Division among God's people is one of those awful effects.

One wrong act leads to another and the result of self-will is not only divisive, but in the case of Rehoboam's decision, it led to the murder of his tax man and the flight of Rehoboam himself to the city of David, Jerusalem. Some decisions we make come back to bite us severely and it is very hard to admit to making a mistake and take steps to put the problem right.

Rehoboam didn't learn from his mistake and was about to make a more serious one involving an invasion into northern Israel. However, God spoke through His servant and the bloodshed was avoided temporarily. Until the cause of division is faced and fixed, instability among the people of God will remain.

IN HIS HEART

What are you doing? Don't you understand -
True worship is in God's ways - not the will of man?
To say you worship in your own way is an arrogant decision.
Worshipping in God's way is the divine condition.

To act independently is to usurp the role of God.
Worship and service are to be according to His Word.
Compromise and presumption lead to error in the end.
Error brings consequences that both God and men will send.

Learn from those in the ancient past who made this grave mistake.
They lost all God intended for them when their own way they did take.
Confusion and rebellion tracked those leaders all their days,
And instead of a unified nation, they went their separate ways.

There is no spiritual reason for convenience to be the reason,
We decide to try to do God's will in our own "convenient season."
Possibly we think our actions affect ourselves only alone -
But generations yet to come will be affected by what we've done.

1st Kings 12:25-33

HE DEVISED

Convenience compared to command in the things of God is a problem among Christians today in a way that is similar to the Israelites in the past. Political concerns often affect spiritual commitment when Jesus Christ is not Lord in actual fact in the life of a believer. Rather than seeking the Lord's guidance and will in a matter, even when dealing with a problem of injustice and/or unfairness, a child of God who looks at an event or an issue through the eyes of the world will make a mistake that may never be rectified.

Jeroboam apparently had great leadership potential when he was a young man and God was willing to use him for His own purposes. However, Jeroboam took things into his own hands and acted on his own. That which could have been a great opportunity, both for him and for those he led, was ruined by his scheming

ways. "He thought to himself" - not went to the Lord for guidance. "He fortified Shechem" - a place of his own choosing. "He lived there," and "he went out and built up Peniel."

Acting independently of divine direction, even when it came to a seemingly sensible decision to build up a strategic city, left Jeroboam without the support of the Lord. A great opportunity for the good of God's people can be lost by making a decision, even a small one, in the energy of the flesh. Carelessness in one matter leads to the consequences of error even though we may later try to correct it. To assume the authority over that which God does Himself, leads to serious mistakes that can hinder the work of God for generations.

It may be because of youthful inexperience, not pride, that Jeroboam "thought to himself" or "said in his heart" he would lose that which God said he would have. For whatever reason, he listened to bad advice and made the two calves of gold. It is not an uncommon practice today to seek to combine paganism and the worship of God. Pagan practices are noisy, appealing to the flesh and popular because they make people feel good about themselves. Such practices have been associated with idolatry all over the world for generations. Now these practices have found their way into church services and are called "worship" under a "worship leader." Like ambitious, presumptuous Jeroboam, the loyalty and interest of convenient religious practices are sought by those who ignore the word of God.

In Jeroboam's day they professed to worship God, but in their own way, and in their own place at a time that was convenient for them. This practice led to even Bethel (house of God) becoming notable as an idolatrous, wicked city that was condemned by the prophet Amos. This practice still is wrong. It is not at our convenience nor in our own way we "worship the Father in spirit and in truth." Both "spirit" (of people) and "truth" (of God) are involved in worship. Solomon started this whole problem and by the time Rehoboam and Jeroboam took leadership of the divided kingdom, the people of Israel were accustomed to this compromised religion.

Both Dan in the north, and Bethel, twelve miles from Jerusalem, had "high places," and all that went on there was an abomination to the Lord. To abandon spiritual principles for practical expediency is a device Satan has used effectively down through the ages to this present day to hinder the work of God.

1st Kings 13

CHANGING TIMES

It is inevitable as generations pass, things that were once practiced and believed, are no longer considered important or even necessary by the new generation and the society in which they live. Those who know the Lord, follow Him and are guided by the Holy Spirit through the word of God, cannot follow the path of society if it discards and disregards God's word. The Lord sent a prophet, a man of God from Judah, to Jeroboam with a prophetic message. Even as he told the message, the altar split and the ashes poured as a foreshadowing of the long-term prophecy three hundred years later. God knows what is going on now in our lives and is able to give indications of the seriousness of sin to us even before the main event takes place.

There had been no miracles recorded since the time of Samuel, but in this chapter a number of miracles took place authenticating the prophetic words that revealed God's displeasure at what was happening among His people. Jeroboam's arm stuck out like a stick and his hand shriveled up as the altar broke and the ashes spilled on the ground. When a person thinks they are in control of a situation, they need to be sure they have not imposed their own will and way into an area of service God has not given them. To change divine orders and to insert man's ideas into the worship of the Lord is almost like daring God to do something about it. God has His own way of dealing with those who would usurp His authority.

In grace God listened to His man who interceded for Jeroboam. Jeroboam knew who "the Lord your God" was, and also knew he was out of line with the Lord. The healing response from the Lord should have moved Jeroboam to repentance. Perhaps his invitation to the prophet to come to his home was an attempt to regain the prestige he would have lost with the people when his withered hand stuck out in front of him on his stiffened arm. Even when consequences follow bad judgment and wrong choices, it is hard for us to admit our guilt, and humble ourselves in true repentance that brings correction and change. If the invitation was accepted it would have indicated that everything was alright. Outward actions and forms do not always indicate inward repentance and change. That is evident when guilt and wrong are admitted and forsaken. How displeasing it is to God when apostate worship takes place at the house of God!!

The "old prophet in Bethel" probably had proclaimed God's word faithfully in times past, but he remained in Bethel where he was content to be associated with the changing practices of the changing times. He no longer spoke for God and was willing to lie to the man of God from Judah to undermine the message God had given. When our work for the Lord makes people uncomfortable, we need to be on our guard. There are

those who are willing to deceive those who want what is right by claiming the authority of age and experience. Any contradictory message that comes from the position of "I think," one's imagination, or "that will make the people uncomfortable," needs to be carefully examined in the light of "thus saith the Lord," in the scriptures of truth. All the man of God said and did at Bethel was negated when he disobeyed God's instructions. His public act for personal interest undermined the respect for the divine authority behind all he had said and done. We must disregard what others claim to be messages from God if it contradicts what the Bible says. Avoid hearsay and trust the word of God.

What a startling awakening it must've been when the old lying prophet predicted what would happen to him because of disobedience to the word of the Lord. In changing times, the responsibilities to "try the spirits" or "test the teachings" of others is of great importance. How important it is that we take seriously all that God says, even when something is taught by an apparently spiritual believer that goes against the tried and proven instructions of the word of God.

The old prophet knew how far he had strayed, so when he buried the one who had delivered a true message but failed personally, he gave instructions to bury him beside that man. He had delivered a lying message and wanted to be known as one who was true personally. There is really no way to make amends for deliberate and fatal deception. The practice of lying and deception has become very common, and even acceptable, in these changing times. One's word cannot be relied on for the most part, and one's handshake and promise to most people is not binding.

Jeroboam's disobedience brought the downfall of spiritual worship in the northern kingdom of Israel. The evil practices he had started, he continued, even after the miracle of the withered hand and stiff arm, and the recovery. Instead of Levites only as priests, he allowed anyone who wanted to be a priest, to take a counterfeit priesthood. In these changing times many "choose to be a minister" rather than being set apart by the Lord "for the work that is set before them." In such cases, those people have made the work of the Lord a person's own chosen occupation instead of a "call from God."

1Kings 13:8. *"And the man of God said unto the king, if thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread in this place:"*

CONFLICTING MESSAGES.

I must always remember God does not change
Even His Word is settled forever.
Sometimes His commands to others seems strange
To alter them in any way I must never
For any reason attempt to change it for any other
Person who gives a conflicting message -
It would be wrong - even though he is a brother,
For God is the Author of every passage.

When I've been given a task to perform
By the Spirit of God through His Word -
And the pressure is on me to the world to conform

I am in danger of leaving the will of the Lord:
It is important that I never hesitate or deny
The charge that He gave me so clear -
To do so leaves me open to consequences that I
Am not able to overcome or bear.

The subtle voices of men are only just that -
Often, they are used by an evil enemy
To turn me from God's purposes by trying to attract
Me to abandon truth, for a large company.
When a message I hear is different from what
I heard when God gave it to me at the first -
I need God's grace to preserve me from that:
It is God Himself, for whom I hunger and thirst.

"O All-Knowing God: I am praying here today that I might give a true interpretation and useful application of Thy Word tonight. May the truths Thou hast laid on my heart be passed on in a clear and understandable way. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Kings 14

THE FALL OF A NATION

A God-given heritage does not guarantee a successful future. A family, an assembly - even a nation - can fall into sin and all its consequences in a very short time. When people do not want, nor are willing, to bow to a greater authority than themselves, their religious activity is made to fit their lifestyle rather than the other way around. Deception had become second nature to Jeroboam and he thought his wife could disguise herself and not be known by the prophet Ahijah. A wrong understanding of the holiness and omniscience of God is one of the characteristics of modern-day idolatry.

When a leader attempts to mislead others into doing what he wants, that reveals his own consciousness of guilt. There may be protestations of faith in the Lord, but confusion follows when God is considered to be a mere magical power. The King of kings and Lord of lords is not a mere force, but the Supreme Person of the universe. We need to remind ourselves, and others over whom we have any influence, of this fact.

When Jeroboam sent his wife to the prophet under false pretenses in his anxiety over the illness of his young son, the outcome was that he was made aware of the disaster the Righteous, Holy God of Israel would bring on his whole family because of his actions. This mind-set comes as a result of idolatry in which, at the expense of what is right, one seeks approval for what they want. It reduces our humanity to where we act like animals. Physical desire and passion rules. Pleasure becomes the reward rather than righteousness. Sacrifice becomes a punishment instead of a holy privilege. God is replaced by human made gods like materialism, fame, money and pleasure. Changing societies change the values by which humanity has maintained normal effective living, and the standards of righteousness God gives in His word are discarded as unreasonable, unrealistic and obsolete to modern day living.

In a righteous people, as Israel was intended to be, God wants people to help others, to seek peace and appreciate it. Our enthusiasm and passion is to direct our lives to the building up of others, not for selfish reasons. Sacrifice and praise are directed to our Lord and His honor, rather than success and personal gain being the object of life. A person, a family, an assembly or nation cannot long survive unchecked evil.

Jeroboam and his whole family, except for one innocent child who had not reached the age of conscious sin, would be rejected. Even more would be affected by Jeroboam's sin because he made Israel to sin. One of the results of evil leadership is the awful consequences it brings on others. Jeroboam drove Israel from "following the Lord and made them sin a great sin" [2Kgs.17:21]. A man of great promise whom God calls to lead His people can bring irreversible consequences on the people of God by compromising truth and mixing it with error.

After Jeroboam died and his son Nadab had a brief reign of about a year, Baasha ruled as Ahijah prophesied. Instability in the leadership of Israel led the whole nation to be "like a reed shaking in the water." It is a grievous disservice to those who follow when leadership in a family and an assembly, like that of a nation, turn away from the normal, tried and proven values which were passed on to us from the scriptures. Records were kept by those whose work it was to maintain a historical account of the nation. Revisionist histories have been written by those who want to reject the morals and standards by which we have lived for many years. Behind that is the desire to excuse ourselves from our own evil practices by putting a negative light on those who have wisely guided in times past in righteous ways.

Similar practices of religious departure took place in Judah under the rule of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. There were "high places, images and groves" on which were placed idols on "every high hill" and every large tree. The Canaanite practice of sexual perversion in the name of religion took place in that same generation. In our lifetime the nation has embraced as right and normal, that which had been condemned in the past because it undermined the standards of morality by which we have lived and prospered. This nation too will fall when the foundations of normal human living are removed. "If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do?"

The strength of Judah was gone and only five years after Solomon died, the Egyptian army came and took the treasures Solomon had made. Power, glory and wealth can be quickly lost under corrupt and immoral leadership. When the fear of God is gone from a family, and the truth of God from an assembly - when the standards of God are gone from a nation - everything has lost its value and is useless, no matter how valuable it may seem to us at the time.

1Kings 14:9, 30. *"But hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back:" "And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all their days."*

IN 20 YEARS.

A lot of things can change in 20 years or less
What a nation once looked up to and thought it was the best
Was lost when the next generation rose up and began to lead
And commitment to God and His Word they chose not to heed.

It happens today in many different ways
In nations and churches - even families stray
From what they learned when younger and found old-fashioned
Now in less than 20 years they have rejected them.

Only when trouble or some unsolvable problem
Arises do they stop to try and ask God to help them.
Usually their plans do not take God into consideration
And in 20 years or less there is spiritual desolation.

The solid foundation of truth on which they were built
Have been left unused and now they build on sand and silt
In the past 20 years or so the nation founders
And the generation to come is by deceit impounded.

The same thing holds true when a company of God's people
Abandons the truth; when they are numerically feeble
The temptation to turn from truth to calm their fears
Leads a church to lose character in less than 20 years.

In a family where the parents read the Bible and prayed,
Their children decided to that habit they will no longer stay
So the spiritual dimensions of that family shrivels and dies
In 20 years or less there is darkness and sighs.

“O Father God, the past 20 years have left our nation weak and in financial ruin; our assembly struggling because the young folks left for what they thought was better, but our family is still intact. I pray for a return to Thee and Thy truth. May the next 20 years if the Lord tarry, bring revival in every part of our life. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Kings 15.

HOSTILITY

It seems to be an unavoidable consequence to departure from God, His standards, His truth and His will, that evil practices increase. Right along with them comes hostility against those who do not wholeheartedly agree with each other. There was ongoing warfare between Jeroboam and Rehoboam that continued on to Abijah's three-year reign. He won a decisive victory over the northern tribes under the leadership of Jeroboam, but even so he never stopped the evil of idolatry mixed with the worship of the Lord. Apostasy continued during Abijah's short term as king of Judah.

Downward trends in worship and the spiritual life of a nation lead to moral deterioration. The decline of morality in turn leads to increasing lawlessness that leads to changing laws to suit the desires of evildoers. The changing of laws leads to the destruction of the standards by which people have lived in peace, and those who are committed to righteousness find themselves the objects of hostility because they will not adapt to the changing social mores of a worldly system.

Lest we totally despair of life being lived for the Lord, God does have those He can raise up from the most unexpected sources. David's great, great grandson, Asa, must have heard accounts of the life of David and he had sense enough to trace the deterioration of the nation under Solomon, Rehoboam and Abijah his father. The Holy Spirit is not limited in His power, and when a usable vessel is willing to be used by God in obedience to God, that leads to the path of peace. To attend regularly the services of a local church and to assent to what is going on is not enough. Those things that are contrary to the will and word of God must be removed. To continue actively in that of which God does not approve nor sanction, only maintains spiritual confusion. A watered-down Gospel message and/or a stepped-up entertainment practice in the name of the Lord does not change anything. Removal of temptation from our lives is essential. Asa did that in Judah, although in his old age "his feet became diseased."

It is possible for one to do that which pleases the Lord for most of his life and still fail in old age. Old age may bring foolishness which we allow because of an unguarded temperament. A hardness in one's spirit may make an old person cantankerous and critical of all those who look at things through eyes other than their own.

Baasha assassinated Nadab the son of Jeroboam bringing an end to Jeroboam's seed as the Lord had made plain to him when he turned the people of God away from the Lord. There were skirmishes and chronic hostility between Israel and Judah constantly during the reign of Baasha and Asa, rather than full-scale warfare. Baasha took back territory Abijah had taken, so Asa paid Ben-Hadad to get that territory back. Apparently, Asa either had not learned to trust God, or wasn't willing to act in faith in God. To act in faith and rely entirely on God in times of hostility may seem to some people foolish or unrealistic.

The brief reign of Nadab is a lesson to us to not take for granted anything that has been passed on to us. We do not deserve the mercies of God nor do we merit His saving grace nor His keeping grace. Because we know what is right and think we can handle things okay, does not mean this is true. To continue doing the same things as those before us does not make it right. Hostility against others on our part, creates a spirit of hostility that can bring down our own testimony to where what we believe and hold because it has been passed on to us, is actually despised by other people.

Not all change is good is another lesson to be learned. Change for change's sake is valueless. Any changes in practices should be superior to that which was previously accepted practice. Jeroboam and Nadab both did evil, and Baasha rebelled and killed Nadab. However, he did evil in the same way as those who were before him. There was no improvement in Israel and the hostility between Israel and Judah continued. Jeroboam's descendants suffered and died because of the sins of Jeroboam. Sin has to be judged wherever it is found, but when one's sins lead others to doing wrong, the consequences of leading them astray are to the greatest extreme. The privilege of leadership is great and the responsibility of passing on truth is far greater than we think. What we say and do has eternal consequences.

1Kings 15:11, 23. *"And Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did David his father."
"The rest of all the acts of Asa, and all his might, and all that he did, and the cities which he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? Nevertheless, in the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet."*

A CANDLE.

Years of departure, failure and grief
The light is extinguished, darkness reigns -
But wait! A young man remembered history
A time of wonder, of conquest - then peace;
And determines in spite of lost glory -
To change himself: then lead his people right.

Through eyes somewhat blurred by the sins of his fathers -
He moves to remove the obvious, the immoral, the ungodly,
And all that is associated with that must go -
Even his grandmother's favorite sin:
And the name of the Lord is once again exalted -
In himself first, then in worship, then in the nation.

The real light is dim, though artificial light glares.
All over the colorful lights are reflected - by fog.
Among the shadows and darkness of false day
Is still shining - the candle of truth, it has not gone out.
And where it sheds its light, the counterfeit fades.
Truth in its weakest time still shines the brightest.

I stop and look around - up and down each street.
Subtle lights shine through colored glass to create
A mood; a sensual attraction to entice me -
Beckoning to move from where the candle glows,
To where I can find emotion, companionship with those
Who are not moved by what is true, but what they see.

So, I turn and walk away alone; and then notice two or three
Coming in the same direction, looking ahead and there we see
The glow of light coming from the candle of God's truth -
Both day and night it shines above man's light, showing its worth

And I realize there is no acceptable substitute for God's revealed will
As I make my way to where His candle is burning still.

“Father, I am contented to stay where Thou hast placed me. May I reflect some of Thy holy light. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Kings 16

WORSE AND WORSE

Even in the worst of times God has those through whom He speaks to His people. Warnings and instructions are often ignored when they do not agree with the accepted practices and desires of those to whom they are given. This is not new by any means. Prophets of old again and again were sent to warn the people but they would not listen. Hanani, the father of Jehu the prophet, was a prophet himself who had been imprisoned for rebuking Asa. Jehu came from Judah to Israel with a warning message to Baasha that because of his evil leadership, his whole family would suffer the consequences just like the family of Jeroboam.

There is a sad, dark pattern of events as each king of the northern tribes, Israel, came into the place of leadership. Because of Jeroboam's grievous sin in making the golden calves and setting up a worship center that was not of God, he died a violent death. His son Nadab sinned in the same way as his father and was soon killed by Baasha. Baasha continued the pattern of evil and his whole family was cut off. His son, Elah, was king for two years when he was killed by Zimri when he was drunk while his army was laying siege against a Philistine city. Zimri, a leader in the army, took over being king and eliminated all the family of Baasha as well as his friends. Zimri died by suicide when he burned the palace with him in it. Omri, "captain of the host" was the one from whom Zimri fled when he committed suicide. He was even worse than the leaders before him. Ahab, his son was even worse than his father.

The downward course of evil does not level off at some acceptable place and time, but historically and practically is not stopped until a nation is no more. Rome is another example to us of what unchecked evil in leadership can do to the population at the time and a nation as a whole. Modern day nations follow the same path, and now this nation is doing the same thing. Families and churches also will disintegrate when those who lead set the wrong example. In a family, a father has about fifteen years to set the course of his children. When they leave home, they will usually practice some of what they have seen modeled in their early years. To that they will add or take away practices of their own.

Shrewd capable leaders can affect the outward practices of those who follow them, but their spiritual condition is seen and taught when they are open and consistent in their own personal testimony of faith in God. All of the learned skills one may have do not change the heart. When a hard-hearted, cut-and-dried leader, guides others, that attitude and the accompanying actions will usually be transmitted to those who take their place.

Ahab went beyond the worship of the golden calves and brought into the "worship of the Lord" the worship of Baal. In an effort to please Jezebel his wife who came from Phoenicia bringing her false religion with her, he elevated the worship of Baal to official status at the beginning of his reign as king over the northern tribes.

Righteous, divine anger was aroused in the Lord God of Israel against those to whom He had been so gracious, longsuffering and kind. For any of the Lord's people of any time and any place to think they can do what they want and God will accept that, they need to learn again that our God does not change. His standards remain, His character and His actions are always consistent with each other. No matter what people may do "in His name," unless it is consistent with God's word and His will, it is evil - and evil will be eventually dealt with by divine authority.

Samaria, the city Omri built to be his capital, gave him some military advantage because it was situated on a hill making it easier to defend. Politically and religiously it gave Omri and Ahab after him advantages, not because they cared about the spiritual condition of the nation, but because it gave them a royal city with which the people could identify. It put the people farther from God's divine order and put more power into the hands of the king. The momentum evil and self-will builds is so great that death is the only way to stop its course. It may start in the leadership but soon the whole nation is affected. Spiritual separation followed by a declining moral order then claims the life of the nation, church or family.

Five hundred years earlier, Joshua pronounced a curse on anyone who rebuilt Jericho into a fortified city. "According to the word of the Lord" this was done in defiance to the Lord, and Hiel's sons died, either in the

construction work or as a sacrifice to Baal worship. We may think an edict or promise from God that happened so long ago it is of no importance now. All of God's promises are "Yea and Amen" and must be counted on to take place and be considered when we make decisions.

1Kings 16:30-31. *"And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it were a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel that daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him.."*

IT CAN GET WORSE.

We look around at evil and say, "It has gone too far.
There is no way things can get worse than they already are."
But even though the hearts of many do evil every day -
There are evil thoughts and deeds that go beyond what words can say.

We look back and remember dark days in history,
And think there is no way it can be worse than these.
For people then burned children to idols, a holy God they scorned,
But now in the country where I live, children are killed before they're born.

We look ahead, and in a sense, fear what the future will bring.
And wonder if there is any worse evil from the heart of man to spring.
What will really happen when sin becomes a thing so light -
That for reading the Bible and praying there comes a fatal fight.

We look within at our own hearts, and find there, treachery
And there is also the danger of becoming like what we see.
The only hope at all I have is to fix my eyes on Him,
Who at the great cost of His own life was my substitute for sin.

We look up to heaven and say, "O Lord, how long
Will it be until You come to take us to Your home?"
The thought that the Lord could come today, my heart does purify,
As I think, that any moment now I will meet Him in the sky.

We look into the Bible and there are lessons there to learn
Sin has terrible wages that everyone will earn
Who choose to make light of things that are important to God
For those who take such a path in life, it was better, if they were never born.

"O Righteous God, the dangers are here now of people making light of thy truth, Thy ways and Thyself. I ask that today and every day, I will be found to be a faithful watchman in the night. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Kings 17

LIGHT IN DARKNESS

Even when the political and religious life of a nation is increasingly more sinful, the true spiritual life of God's people is there when they act and live by faith. The kings of Israel were getting eviler in their leadership with each succeeding king. There were no priests of God, only the false priests of Baal who were leading the people into pagan darkness. But mixed among the population were those who were almost overlooked, and it seemed like they didn't even know there were so many. There was among them Elijah who thought he was alone. It was very appropriate that his name means "Jehovah is God" because that was the essence of his message to Israel.

Elijah was the first of a long line of prophets who for three hundred years were sent to rescue the people of Israel and Judah from the moral and spiritual decline, and darkness into which they had fallen. Idolatry associated with Baal worship is similar to the hold humanism and materialism has on people in our day. The piety, righteousness and faithfulness associated with those who seek to live for God, sets them apart from most of the population.

When the crisis times come brought on by the departure of people from the fundamental standards of moral conduct and obedience to the basic laws of humanity, those who are committed to obeying the Lord will stand out and have to speak up. Elijah vigorously opposed in word and deed the worship of Baal and those who engaged in that worship. He began with going right to the top - to Ahab the king. His message was the same as the Lord gave Moses: national apostasy will be followed by nationwide drought [De.11:17; 28:4]. It

was not only divine judgment from God, but was also a demonstration of the powerlessness of Baal, the god of fertility.

Elijah was not to stay around and "rub salt into the wounds," but was to absent himself from the evil that was going on and leave the consequences of sin in the hands of the Lord. Too often people try to step in and determine that punishment for sin has gone on long enough, rather than wait for evidence of real repentance and the change repentance brings. By Elijah being absent, the judgment of God was intensified and confirmed to the people of Israel.

When we walk with the Lord in fellowship with Him, and are faithful to the work He has given us to do for Him, we can expect God to do for us whatever is needed in His own time and way. Who ever heard of birds, that live on flesh and whatever they can find, to deliver both meat and bread to a man twice a day, without eating it. The miracle of the supply of food never diminishing was a miracle of creation. The Creator was again creating that which was needed by the power of His word.

The same authority that sent Elijah to bring the message of judgment to the king and the nation, told Elijah to separate himself from that place and those people. The absence of the prophet confirmed and intensified the judgment. God does not only respond to evil with words, but also with actions. When evil persists and repentance does not happen, then we withdraw in order to leave people isolated from God and His blessings, and let the Lord deal with the matter in His own time and way. That happened in the church at Corinth when the Lord had to deal with sin in the assembly Himself apart from human action. "For this cause, many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep."

It was a miracle that in a nation that was responsible to provide for the prophets, the Lord provided the food Elijah needed by the actions of ravens (unclean birds) that normally would have devoured food of any kind. The source of food is not mentioned, but mysteriously, twice a day the ravens appeared with the needed food. To eat meat twice a day was usually the fare of kings and wealthy people. Elijah had food from the table of the Lord God.

God has ways of providing the help we need from sources which we least expect. His provisions go way beyond our expectations and preconceived ideas of the solutions to problems. In hopeless situations and bitter trials, God is there to do that which He knows is right and for our ultimate blessing. He may use that which we consider unclean, or a person we would never expect, to do His will on our behalf.

The "word of the Lord" that sent Elijah to Cherith, later sent him to Zarephath in Sidon where Jezebel had come from. That was right where the religion of Baal was being promoted and from where it had come to Israel. Even in that dark place, God had a widow who believed "the Lord thy God liveth." We would be surprised if we knew those who fear the Lord in the most unexpected places. Elijah acted by faith in the "word of the Lord." Now this widow acted in faith in the "word of the Lord" through Elijah. There is no template we follow when we live by faith. Our faith is in a living Person, not a process. Faith is the step we take between a promise and assurance. Obedience is the first action of a solution when we act by faith.

"The barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord..." Every meal the widow made was an act of faith. The barrel didn't fill up, it just didn't empty, nor did the jar of oil. They just didn't go empty even though she was "scraping the bottom of the barrel" each time she prepared a meal. God allowed their faith to flourish every time they ate. The troubles were not over, but the Lord was with them every day through the difficult times of famine. The basic provision was there and was provided for those three people only. They were not given enough to feed other people. Sin has its consequences and they have to be faced by an evil nation and evil leadership. However, in the worst of circumstances, the Lord is there to go through the trial with those who trust Him.

Even in the lives of those who live by faith, tragedies may happen. When our faith is tested to the utmost, we need to totally depend on the Lord as each trial comes. One act of faith is not living by faith. But even as we go through difficulties that increase in intensity, God gives us the opportunity to act in faith that increases in proportion to the need we perceive. When being given the basics, we need in an unusual way, or needing to act in faith when we do the same thing over and over again, or when tragedy comes - it is faith in our God that takes us through every situation victoriously. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

1Kings 17:16. *"And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah."*

LIVING BY FAITH IN A DARK DAY.

The nation had turned away from God - there was absence of rain.
The fields were barren, the brooks were dry, the people were in pain.
But among them all though not standing out, were those who did believe -
And to the Word of the Lord they did respond and His blessings they received.

The blessings of God may to others seem small - just some simple food.
He knows what is best for us - could give a banquet if He would;
But what is best is what is appropriate to meet the present need -
Some flesh to eat, some bread to strengthen our souls this way to feed.

Even though there seems to be departure on every hand -
And the darkness of unfaithfulness sweeps across the land -
There are those here and there, whose lives are very simple,
But God knows where each one is and cares for all His people.

When saints, though unknown, in some place meet, they have this in common;
Their heavenly Father in whose name they greet is the One who there has brought them.
They share their faith and the food they eat; they realize they're one
In faith and hope, in charity - and they belong in the same home.

A widow woman, a young child, a prophet - there's a common bond.
One has a need, the other meets it, they share what they have found.
Their faith is strengthened, their joy increased and their lives are intertwined.
And all rejoice in the grace of God and the fellowship they find.

“Father of all grace and goodness: the life of other believers when shared with mine is a cause of great contentment and blessing. Bless Thine inheritance I pray, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Kings 18

THE CHALLENGE OF FAITH

There are varying degrees of faith in the people of God. Even a very little act of faith is able to please God, but it is not uncommon for people of faith to hide that when there is serious opposition. Ridiculous, angry opposition united against us is often the reason we do not come out in to the open as to our faith compared to other believers who are not so intimidated by opposition and can endure conflict. There is no difficulty understanding why some of the prophets during the reign of Ahab were hidden in caves and fed by Obadiah. After many of their fellow prophets were killed by Jezebel's people, it is likely they were marked men.

About halfway through what was usually a seven-year drought, Elijah got a specific message from the Lord. Even though there had been no repentance on the part of Ahab nor the whole nation, God moved in grace towards them. Grace is not something that is earned or deserved in any way. It is an act of benevolence on the part of God to bring about that which is delightful and good for us.

Ahab was fearful lest his army became weak and the nation become vulnerable to attack from the enemies of Israel. His many horse to pull his chariots and the mules needed to support his troops were essential to his defense. He was more concerned about political situation of his kingdom than the people for whom he was responsible. Obadiah ("servant of the Lord") was in a dangerous position because, even though he was in charge of Ahab's palace, if Jezebel knew he was a dev out believer in the Lord, she would have had him killed. To go public with out faith is no popular among those who live for the world, the flesh and the devil. Elijah's boldness of faith and Obadiah's faith are contrasted, but both were real. God's people are not all alike. We do not need to criticize each other nor to make comparisons. It is just our responsibility to do what the Lord has placed in our hands in the best possible way. The Spirit of the Lord was in control of the whole event.

Unbelievers usually look for someone to blame for their problems rather than face their own guilt. They have to be openly faced with their responsibility for the problem their sin has brought upon them. On those occasions the more precise we are with our words, the better the understanding on the part of the guilty party. Elijah made it plain to Ahab who was responsible for the present problem in which the whole nation was found. They were all guilty of abandoning the word of the Lord. When leaders of people pass on their opinion of a matter, it is not long before others are affected by their words and influence. They in turn will do the same and the spiritual infection quickly permeates the whole society.

Dealing with an important matter that has a negative effect on a lot of people usually has to be done in a public way. Too many people were involved personally in the departure from the Lord's commands, and too many had followed the Baals, to not face them all with the sin they had committed. Elijah had the people

come to the place where Baal worship was strong. When we act in faith, we see beyond obstacles to our Lord who has "all power in heaven and in earth." The wavering between two opinions" had to be stopped. Theological compromise is in vogue today and has to be challenged by fundamental truth. To accommodate to wrong beliefs and practices in the worship and service of God simply to make it more acceptable to people is a deceptive practice and tactic of Satan.

A great Problem has arisen in "modern Christianity" in which those who once knew what it meant to "buy the truth" at a high price, have surrendered to "Christian intellectuals" who mix biblical truth with their own reason and logic that is attractive to the natural man. They choose to make a "private interpretation" of scripture to suit their opinions of a passage or a recorded event. Taking the Bible literally and conducting life by its standards is not acceptable to those who are condemned by its unchanging truth. "No man can serve two masters."

The challenge on Mt. Carmel was a classic indictment of compromise. Elijah's challenge to Baal's prophets left no grounds for vague interpretations. To make predictions that are open to personal opinion and interpretation is misleading and deceptive. There was no way to avoid the consequences of this challenge of faith. But the people of Israel had enjoyed the sinful pleasures of Baal worship and the benefits they thought they had from following Ahab's idolatrous worship. It is easy to drift into complacency when something is pleasant and easy and make no serious demands on us. That is characteristic of counterfeit religion.

The raving and dancing of the false prophets of Baal was a wild and futile effort that drew sarcastic remarks from Elijah who knew the difference between the false and the true. All of the fanciful ideas and practices of compromised truth and counterfeit Christianity are only bringing mockery and contempt in our day. Many unbelievers form opinions of the Christian faith from the various extreme practices of both conservative and liberal Christianity. Those who are undecided sometimes even convert to other humanistic religions because the reality of biblical Christianity is missing. The striving for power, status, material possessions and appearance becomes the objective of those who embrace modern idolatry. There are no real answers - no real wisdom or guidance for life when false gods are the objective of human endeavor.

The fallen altar was rebuilt by Elijah with twelve stones symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel still being under the eye and authority of the Lord God of Israel, not just those tribes under the leadership of Ahab. In spite of divisions, God is looking for the recovery of all His people. The twelve barrels of water poured over the altar and offering reaffirmed the same thing. This proof that no trickery was involved in Elijah's actions left no doubt in the minds of the people that God answered Elijah's prayer by fire. The crater in the ground was all that was left of the offering, the altar, the water and the ground after "the fire of the Lord fell." The demonstration of divine power removed all hesitation from the minds of the people as to who was the God of power and authority. Perhaps Ahab stayed there because of fear of what Jezebel would say or do. Perhaps he was still wavering between two opinions until after Elijah finished praying for rain. When the prophet ran past him and told him rain was coming and kept ahead of him for the sixteen miles to Jezreel, quickly changed his mind and headed for home.

The "effectual fervent prayer" of Elijah teaches us still that such praying "availeth much." A mind and heart of faith; actions of faith; produce the prayer of faith, and God acts according to His divine purpose. We are aligned with the will of God when we pray in faith. That challenge is perhaps the most important one of our day. We become cognizant of the will of God when we are in communion with Him and communicate with Him on a consistent and constant basis.

The challenge of faith is always before us. In every situation in life, it is the actions and assurance that God is working in these dark days of departure. that encourages those who want to please God to press ahead in faith with what they are doing. We may think we are standing alone, but God has His people, most of whom we will never know, shedding light in this world. Our commitment to our Lord and His word is probably the strongest testimony we have to pass on the "light of life."

1Kings 18:21. *"And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word."*

BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS.
A critical place for a mind to be found,
Is between two opposing thoughts.
One will help us to conform to all around
The other tells me I should not.
I need to make a decision soon,
Others wait to hear my voice.

Serious consequences before me loom
It is time for me to make my choice.

The alternatives are plain to be seen -
One is very hard, the other is expedient.
One allows me to be every man's friend,
The results of it are very convenient.
The other is a difficult, upward path,
And means I will often walk alone.
Both are easily within my grasp -
One leads up to God; the other always leads down.

The time to make the final decision has come.
God and men for my decision now wait.
I know this will affect not only me, but some
Who wonder even now why I seem to hesitate.
It is clear to me God's will is this way,
The other is the way of the world.
My decision is this; I'll obey what God has to say,
My flag of allegiance to my Lord is unfurled.

"I understand Father, there are different ways people measure success, I want to be numbered with those who confess Thee like Joshua did, 'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.' In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Kings 19

YOU'RE NOT DONE TILL YOU'RE DONE

The rage of Jezebel toward Elijah was because she could not control him and he was a constant thorn in her side. Her prophets told her what she wanted to hear and their false predictions would have been of praise and glory in her future. Their role was to set the king and queen up as gods and to make sure their leadership of the nation continued. With the death of those false prophets, she was determined to vent her anger of Elijah and then kill him. He was the one who predicted gloom and doom for Israel, and he was the one who kept her from doing what she wanted. She was a bitter and dangerous enemy of Elijah and he knew it.

There are varying degrees of resistance to the Lord and His people. Some are merely indifferent to spiritual things but they do not want to have anything to do with "God or religion." Others have a latent antagonism that expresses itself on occasion. There are some who are bitterly opposed to the truth of salvation by grace alone without the addition of their own works, because it makes their independent opinion and their efforts of no avail. The teaching of eternal security to others is so abhorrent that one even said, "The teaching of eternal security is right from the pit of hell." We need to remember "We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers. Against spiritual wickedness in high places."

Elijah was not a coward nor was he afraid to die, but he was so discouraged that under the influence of Jezebel, the people of Israel seemed to have no chance of turning back to God. They acknowledged God but that is not true repentance and faith in Him. The victory on Mt. Carmel was one thing. For Jezebel's religious system to be eliminated and the nation to truly turn to God, was another. There are times when revival seems to be coming or maybe even to have started following some dramatic or tragic event like 9/11 in the United States. But unless there are truly changed hearts, the awakening is short-lived.

It is not uncommon for discouragement and fatigue to follow great spiritual victories in the lives of God's people. We have examples like Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Peter and Mark to warn us of situations in which we have experienced God working through us in a special way and yet soon after there are times of discouragement and/or failure. That may lead to defeat of which we are not yet aware because of the danger of fatigued flesh. The Lord Jesus had His disciples to "Come apart and rest awhile." How kind of God to give opportunity to rest before reminding us of the importance of our mission and the need to return to the work. The angel of the Lord provided food and water to strengthen and refresh Elijah so he could go on a journey of nearly two hundred miles, travelling day and night for forty days. At the "mount of God" where Moses met with God, God spoke to His servant Elijah.

It is likely that Elijah went all that way for his own reasons: probably to get as far away as possible from Jezebel, and to die in the place where the word of God was given to Israel in the law. In remarkable grace God enabled Elijah to go forty days and nights without food like Moses before him and the Lord Jesus after him. The three of them met together many years later on a mountain in the sight of Peter, James and John.

Our God often can turn that which seems like an act of misguided willfulness into a time of blessing. Looking back at those times we wonder at the longsuffering of God and are so grateful that He didn't deal with us in the way we deserved.

Elijah didn't directly answer the Lord's question, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" Instead he gave a dissertation of his own activities and implied that he was the only one left who cared about God's will and the covenant He made with Israel. Self-pity can diminish what one has done, because it implies, we accomplished the desired result on our own. Self-pity can defeat us. By its nature self-pity dilutes the victories God has done through us because it exalts us rather than giving all glory to God. There are many of God's people we will never know about, until we get to heaven. They are faithfully serving the Lord in the calling He has given them. Each one of God's people has an individual responsibility to do what they do "as unto the Lord."

When Elijah was rested enough and ready to listen, the Lord was ready to speak to him and again commission him to fulfill the work set before him. The great wind, the earthquake and the fire were all a message to Elijah that God would judge Israel in His own time and way. The gentle whisper was what was needed at the moment when God was showing grace to His rebellious people and His discouraged prophet. It is always wisdom to use appropriate measures at appropriate times to bring about the desired results. We are prone to go too far or not far enough unless we hear God's voice in the quietness of a moment in which we are humbled enough to listen to His word without speaking.

Those moments of divine revelation can change us for a lifetime and make us to be effective in our service for God. The significance of divine guidance cannot be overestimated. When we know what our Lord wants from us, and what He wants to do through us, then we can confidently step out again and go forward in spite of our relapse of faith. A very important part of the servant's task is to make sure others are able and willing to pick up and carry on the work in which they were once engaged. God had prophets in training, ready to step out and do what God wanted in the work of the Lord. He had seven thousand faithful people He "reserved" who would not "bow the knee" (kiss the Baal) or submit to that which was wrong. There may be only a few among those who claim to be children of God who have not surrendered their convictions to the pressures put on them to conform to that which is popular.

Elijah was told by God to anoint a king in an enemy country who God was going to use to bring about external punishment on the nation. He was also to anoint Jehu, Ahab's military leader, to bring the internal punishment God was going to use to correct the wrong behavior of the nation. It would be Jehu who would deal with those who worshipped Baal. Elijah's undone work included anointing a successor to himself. Elisha ("God saves; God is salvation") had Elijah's cloak thrown on him as a testimony that the transfer of divine authority was going to be placed upon him and that soon he would have the responsibility of prophetic leadership. When Elisha was ready for that work, the cloak was left for him when Elijah was taken up in a chariot of fire. The first act of commitment on Elisha's part was to finish completely his ties to his source of wealth and independence. No longer would he be an independent farmer. From then on, he was called of God to speak for God and depend on the Lord for everything. The slaughter of his animals, for an offering of thanks and a feast to be shared by the people around, testified to all who were there that Elisha had been chosen by God to be His prophet. The true service of the Lord is not an add-on to the closing of an independent life, but a complete cutting off of self-support. It then becomes a testimony of trust in the Lord alone. Service that is done only at our personal convenience is not what is expected of those who speak for God.

1Kings 19:4. *"But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, it is enough; now, O Lord take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers."*

LOST CONFIDENCE.

Things might not always work out the way we had planned.
Even though we've had victories in this promised land -
This is not heaven, there is much evil around
We need to remember even where there's sin, grace did much more abound.

When God has allowed us to see evidence of His great power;
And His blessings in many ways upon us He did shower -
Yet His plans may seem to allow those who live in sin,
To overcome righteousness and let evil win.

If things don't work out just remember who we serve
God is still God and He has promised to preserve

A testimony for His name's sake although it might be small,
There are still those who serve Him, and on His name call.

I had thought there might be many thousands saved,
And there would be a large number obey the word He gave.
But now I know this is not always true -
The God of the universe does not overlook the few.

Some I had high hopes for, didn't stay all the way -
I believe they are saved but because of enticements they did stray.
Yet they have not bowed to the pressure of apostasy,
And God is able to use them though they're not here with me.

It is important that I remember it is by God's grace alone
That God's work is completed, not by what I have done.
I can be thankful He has allowed me a small part
In His great redemptive work, so in confidence, again I start.

“Father God, I praise Thee for letting me be a part of what Thou art doing in my generation. I have suffered the arrogance of self-confidence, but now I am committing myself to “trust in the Lord” and put no confidence in man, particularly myself. My confidence is in Thee alone to be glorified in anything I might do. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Kings 20

"COUNTING CHICKENS" TOO QUICK

The Middle East has been a hotbed of strife, intrigue and unrest since the time Israel was led out of Egypt by the Lord. Alliances made between tribes and nations do not last very long. Those in one generation who lived at peace with each other, by the time the next generation came to maturity were avowed enemies. Peace made between nations and people is not a lasting peace until true peace with God has been made. By nature, human beings want to be in control of their own lives and destiny, and resent interference - even by God.

Apparently, Ahab and Ben-Hadad had been allies at one time ("he is my brother," v.32) but that did not stop the Arameans from seeking to conquer and subjugate Israel. Ahab was willing to give his wives and children, plus his gold to Ben-Hadad to keep the peace. He was not willing to surrender what he considered his personal possessions. Both Jewish nations had experienced what happens when people turn away from God's revealed will. To look at people and things through only natural eyes, demeans people and makes things of far more value than they really are.

Ahab's answer to Ben-Hadad's threat was similar to a saying we have in our day, "Don't count you chickens before they hatch." The psalmist wrote, "My times are in Thy hand." James wrote, "You ought to say, 'If the Lord will, we shall do this or that.' " To make a boast about what we are going to do, may be very different from the result after a matter is concluded. Ahab was a moral and spiritual failure, but on this occasion, he acted like a king. The Lord saw that and gave directions to him through a prophet. Ahab followed the directives and the result was a victory for Israel even though they were up against an army much greater in size. There was no question in the mind of Ahab when he was spoken to by the prophet, that there was more opposition to come.

Opposition against the Lord's people today by the world, the flesh and the devil may seem to lessen at times, but it will never cease until the Lord reigns. In fact, we must expect it to increase in intensity as we draw closer to the end of the age. "Evil men and seducers will wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." Whether evil comes in open opposition or the subtle deception of spiritual wickedness, it will come. Commitment to sound doctrine and those who practice it, is being opposed because it condemns that which is false and not of God. Suffering for what is right in times of apostasy or deliberate rejection of the truth, cannot be avoided.

The idea of idolatrous men was that God is limited in His authority and power. Their opinion was that He was only the god of the hills, not a god of the valleys. A similar opinion is quite common today in those who have a god of their own imagination. People will say, "I don't think God would do that." Some will say, God would never condemn a person to hell for that, otherwise everyone would be in hell." The "works religion" put the destiny of people in their own hands rather than in God's. Many consider sin only to be that which they personally think is sin, and that even though they sin daily, it is only what they consider serious sin to be of

serious consequences. In His own way and time, God will vindicate His truth and deal with those who set their opinions against the revealed word of God.

A victory by Ahab's army and a collapsed wall that killed 27,000 made it plain to those who opposed the Lord God of Israel, that they were in a battle with the Supreme Authority against whom they had no chance to win a victory. There was no question that Ahab knew the Lord had acted on behalf of Israel, and yet he still wanted to do things his own way and spare the enemy leader who he should have dealt with once for all. To accommodate to those who openly defy God is to choose the wrong person. "The friendship of the world is enmity with God." Even though smooth placating words are spoken to bring down our defenses, we should have the sense to know that a person who has never been born again cannot please God. Ahab gave up even more than Ben-Hadad expected when he spoke of him and an "old ally." A defeated enemy who is treated as a friend is a danger to peace and security.

Because the Lord has favorably worked on our behalf one time, does not mean he will not judge our sin and overlook our failure and wrong-doing. To know what is right and not do it is as serious as to know what is wrong and do it. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." The method the Lord used to speak to Ahab when he spared the life of Ben-Hadad, was to demonstrate by example, and then use words to explain the message. The more of our senses we use to pass on a message of truth, the more impressed it is on the mind of the people.

Ahab sinned in his official responsibility as king of Israel, so the sentence passed on to him from the Lord was that both he and the people who he was supposed to lead would suffer defeat, humiliation and death. This came to pass under the leadership of Jehu and then Jehoahaz. When we see evidence of the greatness of God as He works His will around us, we should gratefully respond to His working and the victories He won for us, by our worship, thanksgiving and obedience. To ignore what God does, or accept it as what we deserve, will bring disaster on us. As God works for us, we should obey Him and dedicate ourselves again to Him in faith and joy.

1Kings 20:11. *"And the king of Israel answered and said, tell him, let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off."*

SELF CONFIDENCE.

To boast of what I will do before starting the task,
Is to take credit for nothing more than a breath or a gasp.
It is foolish to claim a victory before the war begins.
Ill-formed self confidence doesn't successfully fulfill our plans.

Confidence in self alone is often self deceit.
It leads me to make some promises it is impossible for me to keep.
It can undermine my credibility as false boasting does -
It makes my personal ability the reason for my cause.

Men who trust in man, have confidence in the wrong place.
A task is not accomplished because I have a brave face.
Self confidence is only as good as my weakest link.
If I have made bold boasts, I had better stop to think.

I couldn't breathe the next breath if God didn't give it to me.
There's no way to visualize the unknown if it is impossible for me to see.
My words would be stuck inside if God didn't give lips and tongue,
So, any boast I might make is only a discordant song.

A lot can happen between here and the task ahead.
Self confidence can quickly fade away and my heart be filled with dread,
Unless I concede this to be a fact, without God I am nothing.
And failure is inevitable if it is only in self I am trusting.

A little bit of humility can go a long, long ways.
It is hard to trust a person only by what he says.
When one acknowledges his weakness and relies only on God's strength,
There can be a goal reached far more lasting than I could ever think.

"O God who knows the inward man before You: please keep me from vain boasting of things done or planned. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Kings 21

TREACHEROUS, ABUSIVE, BRUTAL BEHAVIOR

When a downward trend has been set, and people get used to defying normal, decent behavior, there is no stopping the moral mudslide that overtakes them. They begin to treat those who follow the righteous law of God as if they are at fault for the consequences of sin that befall a nation. To leave unjudged evil to work its havoc on people, opens the door for abusive actions against people like Naboth who still recognized the supreme authority of the word of God. Naboth knew the land passed on to him from his ancestors was given to them, and him, by the Lord. It was the Lord's land and he was given this trust to preserve for his family's inheritance after him. The sale of inherited property to those outside the family was prohibited [Lev.25:23-28]. When we realize that all we have and claim for our own use really belongs to the Lord, we are motivated to maintain it and use it in ways we know would please "the Lord of heaven and earth."

Before Israel had a king, the Lord had warned the people of Israel that a king would expropriate their land and claim their vineyards for themselves. This event illustrates one such time and how treacherous and brutal those who claim authority over common people can be. The abuse of people and of power still goes on when those in authority claim "the law of eminent domain" gives them the right to take what they want according to their own interpretation as to what is for the good of the majority. When things didn't go the way Ahab wanted, after a prophet had predicted a fatal sentence would come on Ahab, he was angry and bitterly rebellious. It was in a fit of temper that he reacted against Naboth when he was refused the vineyard of Naboth. Never underestimated the depth of treachery and deceit people have against divine authority. The natural man, is an enemy of God and will go a long way in defiance against the Lord.

Ahab knew the law. Jezebel apparently did not or else ignored and rejected it. Treachery happens when the covetous actions of a sinful person go unchecked. Covetousness is one of the moral sins that must be judged and dealt with in the assemblies of God's people. To want what others have and take steps to get it, is a behavior that has to be changed. Discipline for such actions has to be serious enough that the sinning person never does it again, and others who are tempted to do something similar will not do it.

The treacherous scheme Jezebel devised looked legal in the way it was carried out. The law was twisted to suit the desired outcome. This practice is common in our country where frivolous law-suits and subtle legal procedures are used to manipulate people and get what covetous people want. Some things may seem to be legal but when investigated, can be found to be a perversion of the original intent of the law. When we are challenged by man-made laws, we need to be sure they do not contradict the law of God. In such cases where there is a conflict between the two, "We ought to obey God rather than man."

According to the law of God, the false charge laid against Naboth was a capital crime. By manipulating people and the law, Jezebel was responsible for the death of an innocent family. Her design was to not only claim the vineyard, but to eliminate any prior claim Naboth's sons might have. So, both the father and the sons were stoned to death. When a person benefits from the abusive, brutal, treacherous actions of another person, they too are guilty. To deny responsibility of the consequences laid on an innocent person by just standing by and doing nothing, or by willing compliance, is an act of guilt.

There is a lesson to be learned and remembered, that any and all actions we commit are observed by God. He knows what is behind everything we do and why we were willing to do it. Not only is the motivation known by Him who knows "The thoughts and intents of the heart," but the outcome we desired may be allowed, and the consequences such an action will bring. Elijah gave Ahab the dire prediction of his actions and the fact that what he had done would affect his family forever. Even though he considered the prophet his enemy, he believed what Elijah prophesied. His deep repentance and humility were evident when he fasted and dressed in sackcloth. In spite of all the evil and wrong he had done; God was merciful to him and to a certain degree reduced his punishment by waiting until his son was ruling before dealing with the evil.

Envy, hatred and anger make it almost impossible to see the evil in ourselves, and so we blame others for that which happens to us. We cannot avoid the fact that we are responsible for that which comes on us and how we respond to it. We are not able to avoid the consequences of our own actions. To place blame on others does not solve any problem nor does it bring a conclusion to our negative attitudes. When a person humbles before God and turns in repentance to Him, He draws near in grace that is undeserved and forgives our sins.

1Kings 21:3. *"And Naboth said to Ahab, the Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee."*

THE INHERITANCE OF MY FATHERS.
For generations the Bible has been open -
The children learned from those now gone before.

Our family has learned it is God who helped them -
It is the same today as in days of yore.

Reverence for God and respectful fear,
Were taught us from our earliest days.
We knew that God was always near -
Through the older ones we learned to walk in His ways.

Our inheritance was not just in money
But in things of much higher worth.
We learned God was with us in poverty or plenty -
We were taught the just will live by faith.

I have walked over lands where my forefathers walked,
And now much of it is owned by others.
They labored hard by day, and then at night they talked
Of the life of faith passed down by their fathers.

I have tried to pass on to those coming after me
The value of a spiritual inheritance.
Now that I am older I'll just wait and see
If what I modeled to them made any sense.

I know they'll be different, the world is a different place,
But fundamental values will always stay the same.
It is my daily prayer that together we'll see God's face -
And with wonder we'll see all who before us came.

“O God of all grace, and Father of all who believe: bless our inheritance; save all the children. Help them to guide their children and children's children in the ways of the divine inheritance we received. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Kings 22

GOOD START - BAD END

The unity of Israel under the reign of David was a time of blessing and the nation had peace as Solomon started his reign. By the end of the book of 1st Kings, the nation was divided by civil war, the most wicked of the kings, Ahab, was ruling the northern ten tribes, and Jehoshaphat had his son Jehoram marry Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. The attempts of men to bring peace and prosperity to a nation by forming a compromising alliance without divine authority is doomed to failure. Confusion caused by compromise and the on-going sinfulness of people who are led by wicked men, gives the enemy of souls a free hand to bring people down to hell. Occasional wrong-doing gradually turns into a way of life. Then an evil lifestyle affects others until the whole nation is infected with sin that only the judgment of God can deal with.

The Assyrian threat and attacks against Israel had stopped for three years. When Jehoshaphat went to visit Ahab, Ahab saw an opportunity to get back Ramoth-Gilead that had been given him by Ben-Hadad by treaty and then taken again by invasion. Jehoshaphat whose name means, "The Lord judges/rules," was willing to assist Ahab in this venture for some reason. Keeping peace based on an alliance with that which is wrong, is never in the mind of God no matter how expedient it may seem to us at the time. "What fellowship hath light with darkness" makes it plain that it is never right to set aside God's word to please those who are enemies of God. The twelve times Jehoshaphat is named in this account while Ahab is named only once, emphasized the fact that it is the Lord who rules and judges in the affairs of men. Those in authority are not in charge of the history of a nation.

Four hundred false prophets still remained after the four hundred and fifty were slain at Mt. Carmel. Satan has a lot of people under his control who will say what people want to hear, not necessarily what is the truth. Jehoshaphat was not willing to go into battle without hearing the word of God about the matter. After hearing the predictions of victory from four hundred prophets who agreed in their desire to please the two kings, He still wanted to hear what a prophet of the Lord would say. There is a principle that works in decision making that helps us to be careful: "When in doubt - don't." A person of faith can discern between those who tell the truth and those who want to please the majority. However, when we know what is right, if we disregard that and ignore God's warning message, there are consequences to be paid.

The two Jewish kings, each sitting on a throne on the elevated threshing floor by the city gate, sought to impress the people with their position of leadership, their unity, and then their plan of going against Syria. The decision was already made by the two kings who paid attention to the "lying spirit" in the self-serving

false prophets. When Micaiah, the prophet of the Lord, was called, he sarcastically mimicked the predictions of the false prophets. Even Ahab could sense that Micaiah was pretending and demanded a true prophecy so the prophet did so even though it was totally contradictory to what the kings had heard and wanted to hear. When truth hurts us or makes us uncomfortable, we may seek a reason to try to ignore it and reject it. That does not change the truth in any way. It will not change the outcome either. Micaiah's honest warning was rejected by both kings, and even when a false prophet slapped Micaiah on the face, he remained true to the word of the Lord. The dire consequences the prophet of the Lord gave were taken seriously - but rejected. We cannot make people repent and believe the Gospel, but we can warn them and leave the results and consequences to the Lord. Some people would rather live by a known lie than accept a true message that does not show them in a good light.

Micaiah's prophecy was given with divine authority as he told by illustration how the Lord would bring his predictions to pass. His imprisonment with only bread and water to sustain him did not stop God's man from saying what was right and giving a final warning. To understand the way evil works and how God allows it, we need to remember that God is good and evil came into the world because of man's sin. Sin and its consequences are man's fault. When people say, "Why does God allow sin and evil to run rampant in the world?" they are challenging God to do something about the consequences man's actions have brought on himself. A time is coming in the future when God will bring about "A new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." God is stronger than the powers and actions of evil. He did not create evil but has control over it and will use it to bring to pass His will in judgment in the same way He uses that which is good. God hates evil and will some day do away with it forever. But He allows it at times now to bring deserved judgment to evil-doers. We may not understand all the "whys and wherefore's" of the working of the Lord, but we do have confidence that He is in control of people and events.

Ahab sought to avoid detection by having Jehoshaphat dress in his clothes, but the "bow at a venture" carried out the prophecy, and Ahab died that evening and Jehoshaphat lived because he wore Ahab clothes. When the word of the Lord is given about a matter it can be counted on to come to pass. Ahab's blood was washed out of the chariot and the dogs were there to lick up his blood as Elijah had prophesied. The reign of Ahab was a dark day in Israel's history.

At the same time in Judah, Asa, who was followed by his son Jehoshaphat led those tribes in the right ways of the Lord for the most part. But there was a fundamental mistake made when sacrifices and incense were burned in the wrong places. To do much of what is right does not excuse doing that which is wrong. We are always thankful for those who do right, but still cannot go along with what is wrong no matter who does it. Making alliances with Ahaziah the son of Ahab, was not right, and going into the shipping business with him was not right for Jehoshaphat. All of the expense they went to was for naught when God had a storm wreck the whole project. Our motives might seem good when we seek to engage in a project, but we need to be sure God is in it rather than it being just a scheme devised for profit between two consenting parties.

The sad history of the "historical drift" of the nation of Israel should be a lesson to us to call a halt in our lives when we know things are going wrong. Then repentance of sin and turning to God in genuine faith can bring about the desired result, and save an individual, an assembly and a nation.

1Kings 22:8. *"And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, there is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, let not the king say so."*

YET ONE MAN.

The word is out, yet there is one man
Who is willing to tell the truth.
Others don't like it because they want things different,
To go against the crowd is more than it's worth.
So, to please those who lead and those who follow them,
They're willing to tell a lie, after all what is so bad
About pleasing a leader and keeping back from him
A truth that will make him and his people sad.

So often there are those who are afraid of the frown of men,
That they won't tell the truth that comes from God.
I am thankful that generally there is yet one man,
Who has instilled in him a holy fear of the Lord.
When others fall silent; in his firm and quiet voice
He speaks the truth and tells its final consequence.
He lays before the people who have to make a choice,
The Word of God and spiritual common sense.

I have known such men, and know some even now
Who in spite of the times, will the trend oppose.
They know they won't be popular but they will not bow
To what is wrong, no matter what the others chose.
I would like to think I could be such a man
As would stand fast, and promote God's truth.
I have made a resolve to do what I can
To help others learn what obeying God is worth.

"I know there are faithful men and women, Father God, who stand for, and live by, the truth of Thy Word. However, the majority of people around us seem to want what is popular and can be measured by numbers to be successful. Be merciful to those who know better, and strengthen those who are faithful I pray: in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."