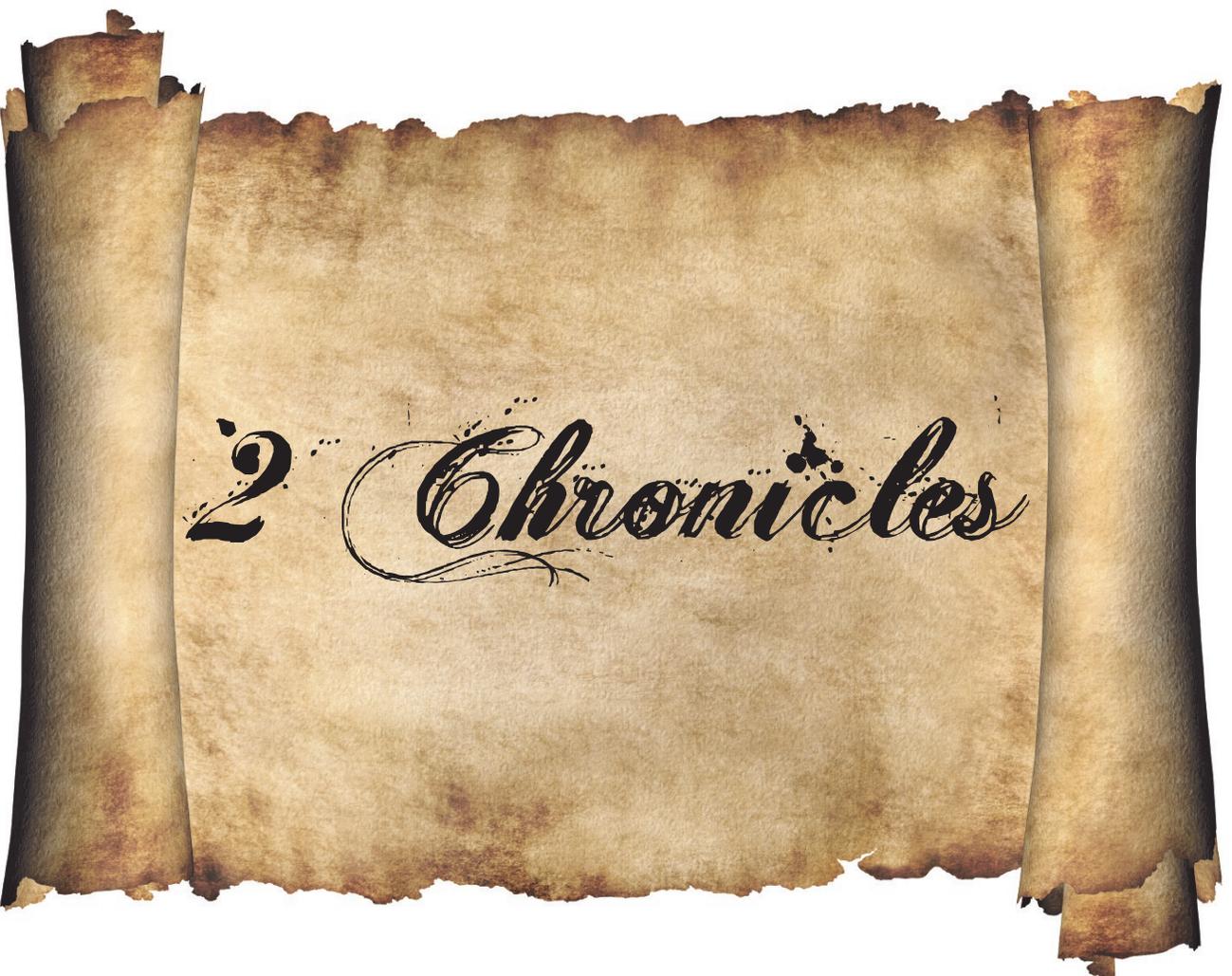


GENESIS ROAD PRESENTS...



2 *Chronicles*

a look at the picture of God
in every chapter of
the 14th book of the Bible

Chapter 1

GOD DOES NOT DESTROY HIS ENEMIES.

I think this is one of the neatest stories in the Bible. Solomon asks for what is most important—and ends up receiving everything that is most important as well as all the “perks.” It always reminds me of what Jesus told His disciples: “But seek first [God's] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matt 6:33)

Actually, it seems like we just went over this story (and we did, in 1 Kings 3). But here was something that really jumped out at me this time 'round: “God said to Solomon, ‘Since this is your heart’s desire and you have not asked for wealth, possessions or honor, *nor for the death of your enemies*, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you.’” (vs 11-12)

Solomon had not asked for the death of his enemies. He had not wished harm on those who had done wrong to him. And this was singled out by God as something *praiseworthy*. He made particular mention of it. And I think He made particular mention of it because it’s a reflection of what He is like.

God was pleased that Solomon was the kind of man who didn’t want to destroy his enemies, because *God* is the kind of person who doesn’t seek to destroy His enemies either. He returns good for evil. He metes out *mercy* instead of punishment. If He was a bloodthirsty avenger, He would recog-

nize and admire that same characteristics in His creatures. Instead, He praised Solomon for not taking the route of revenge.

Chapter 2

GOD IS THE GREATEST.

After Solomon became king, the first thing he set out to do was build a temple for God. As you might remember from the story in 1 Kings, Solomon enlisted the help of Hiram king of Tyre for building materials and skilled craftsmen. He wanted the temple to be the most glorious, most elaborate sanctuary ever built for a god on the face of the Earth—and indeed it was.

Tyre was a heathen nation. They worshiped Baal, but were apparently willing to help Solomon build his temple anyway. I found Solomon's word to King Hiram interesting: "Now I am about to build a temple *for the Name of the Lord my God* . . . The temple I am going to build will be great, because our God is greater than all other gods. But who is able to build a temple for him, *since the heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain him?* Who then am I to build a temple for him, except as a place to burn sacrifices before him?" (vs 4-6)

Solomon's belief that even the highest heavens couldn't contain his God would have probably been a shocking statement to Hiram. The belief among most heathen nations was that the temple (s) that were built for their gods actually contained their gods, perhaps even confined them.

But Solomon didn't stop there. He even went so far as to say that this grand, glorious building (that was going to take him seven years to complete and be the most opulent temple on the face of the Earth) was only going to be a temple for the *name*

of his God. For his God could not be contained or confined, and *His name alone* would require such an extravagant dwelling place.

All of this was Solomon's way of affirming that God is, indeed, the greatest. And He is. There is no other like Him in the entire universe. There is no one so kind, no one so good, no one so upstanding and just. Unlike heathen gods who are fickle, temperamental, and arbitrary, the one true God is constant, holy, and righteous. Though He cannot be contained within His creation, He has humbled Himself to even become *one with* His creation, in order to redeem and save us. Indeed, He *is* the greatest!

Chapter 3

GOD IS BEAUTIFUL ON THE INSIDE.

All I saw in this chapter was gold, gold, gold. Gold on the floors, gold on the ceilings, gold on the walls. Gold, gold everywhere. It must have been something to walk into that dazzling temple, with every surface sparkling and shining. It must have been incredible to walk into the Most Holy Place (if you were the high priest) and see the wings of the sculptured cherubim spanning the room from wall to wall.

But of all the descriptions of gold overlays in the temple, did you notice that *none* of them were on the outside? The chapter described the porch and its pillars, but never mentioned that any gold was used there. That seemed a little odd. If you were building your temple on a mountain, wouldn't you also want to layer the outside in gold, so it could glisten in the sun and be seen for miles around?

But, the fact that all the gold was reserved for the interior of the temple made me think of this verse from Isaiah: "He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him." (Isa 53:2)

Perhaps the golden interior of the Lord's temple was a symbol of the beauty that resides *inside* the heart of God, and its plain exterior was symbolic of the fact that God doesn't use gimmicks to attract us to Him. He wants us to be drawn to Him because of the pure beauty of His character—His honesty, love, compassion, and justice.

Perhaps it was Solomon—who began his reign by being concerned about his own personal integrity—who understood that God's true power lies in His character. He does not draw us to Himself by displays of strength and majesty, but by the wonder of *who He is*. He may, like Solomon's temple, even appear plain and unassuming on the outside. But step one foot inside and, just like looking into God's heart, all you'll see is beauty. Everywhere you turn, glory. Everywhere you look, pure gold.

Chapter 4

GOD IS THE GOD OF EVERYONE.

Depending on which translation of the Bible you use, today's chapter was about Hiram (aka Hiram), the man who handcrafted all the objects in the temple of the Lord. From the altar to the basins to the sculptures to the lampstands and tables, Hiram put his stamp of handiwork on everything. What an incredible honor—to be chosen out of everyone in Israel for such a task! Hiram must have been the most skilled craftsman around.

What I especially liked about this is that Hiram was half Israeli and *half Gentile*. So that means that the man who handcrafted every object for use in the temple of the Lord was *not* someone who could claim to be one of God's "elite" chosen—in the sense that the Israelites often thought of themselves. By the time Jesus was born, the religious leaders in Israel espoused the idea that they *alone* were God's chosen people, worthy of salvation. Jesus had to remind them otherwise.

And, right from the beginning, God was including Gentiles in the work of salvation by using Hiram to craft the objects for the temple. This is a lesson we would do well to remember: *No* group of people—no nationality, no religion, no denomination—has a corner on God. He is the God of *everyone*. He doesn't have exclusive clubs and elitist groups. His arms stretch far and wide enough to take in all who will come to Him—no matter where they have come from.

In John 10, Jesus said that He knows His sheep and His sheep know Him. He also said that not all

of these sheep were in the same fold, but when the time is right, they will all be gathered together—one flock with one shepherd. So, it's probably best to not get in the habit of looking down on any other sheep—especially those that you think are outside the walls of your particular fold. God is the God of everyone. The question is, do *you* know the voice of that particular Shepherd?

Chapter 5

GOD'S PLANS ARE PARAMOUNT .

I heard this quip recently: *Wanna hear God laugh? Tell Him your plans.* I've heard that before, and it always makes me chuckle (although I *do* believe that God wants to hear what's on our minds). But I think it's true that we sometimes have our days and weeks planned out so intricately that we forget about God and the plans *He* has for us. And even if we remember, often we try to somehow fit *His* plans into the plans we already made for ourselves.

That's the one thing I loved about this chapter. It laid out in great detail the elaborate pomp and ceremony that Solomon had planned for the opening of the temple in Jerusalem. First, there was a multitude of sacrifices—so many that the number could not be recorded. Then, the priests brought the ark to the temple, and there was music and singing. And then this: “Then the temple of the Lord was filled with the cloud, and *the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud*, for the glory of the Lord filled the temple of God.” (vs 13-14)

God's glory was so great, His presence so intense, that the priests couldn't even carry out their plans. They had to stop. They had to yield to the presence of God. I think there is a real lesson for us here. It's not that it's bad to make plans—Solomon had made a great many plans for the opening of the temple. And it's not that we shouldn't carry out our plans—the priests were taking part in what was a glorious celebration, honoring to the Lord.

But the lesson is that when God shows up, we must remember that *His* plans are paramount. Es-

pecially when we sense that there is a conflict between what *we* had planned and what *God* has in mind, it is best for us to give way to the Lord and submit to His thoughts and plans. When we do that, we will find that God's glory shines forth in our lives just as it shone forth in the temple that day.

Chapter 6

GOD DEALS WITH US INDIVIDUALLY.

Today's thought is a simple one and uses these verses as a jumping-off place: "Forgive, and deal with everyone according to all they do, since you know their hearts (for you alone know the human heart), so that they will fear you and walk in obedience to you all the time they live in the land you gave our ancestors." (vs 30-31)

This was something Solomon said during his dedicatory prayer to God at the opening of the temple. And I think it's a very insightful glimpse into how God deals with us. First of all, He knows our hearts. He knows everything about us—even more than we know about ourselves. Second, He's the *only* one who has this information. Nobody else knows the human heart except God.

And that's why He's in the unique position of being able to deal with us as individuals. Notice that the verse says *deal with everyone according to all they do*. Solomon didn't pray that God would deal with all people *equally*—because all people *aren't* equal! Instead, God deals with everyone according to what they do. He approaches each person as an individual, just as parents with five children approach each of their children as an individual when it comes to parenting.

We are all different people with different needs and different problems. And I'm so thankful that we serve a God who deals with us according to our individual circumstance. Because He knows us like nobody else can, He can help us like nobody else can.

Chapter 7

GOD SEES US AND HEARS US.

God sees you. God hears you. Have you ever found those things hard to believe? Has it ever felt like you were alone and abandoned instead? Like no matter how much you were hurting or how hard you were crying out, there was just nobody “up there” to listen to you? 2 Chronicles 7 would like you to know that those feelings aren’t reality.

In 2 Chronicles 7, God *Himself* says that He is in tune with His children: “Now my eyes will be *open* and my ears *attentive* to the prayers offered in this place. I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there *forever*. My eyes and my heart will *always* be there.” (vs 15-16)

This was really an unprecedented thought in Old Testament times. Sure, every culture and nation had their god (or gods), but they all seemed to have a little trouble in the communication department. I’m sure you remember the story in 1 Kings 18 about Elijah and the prophets of Baal. They all met on the top of Mount Carmel to find out—once and for all—who was the true God. And, despite hours of begging, pleading and self-abuse, never a word was heard from Baal.

In contrast to all these false gods, the *real* God came *personally* to His people time and time and time again. 2 Chronicles 7 is only one such example. But I can’t think of a more poignant example, especially where God says that *His heart* will be with His people forever.

No matter where you are today or what life is throwing at you, please remember that *God sees you. God hears you.* And not only that, but *His heart* is with you. Even when it feels like you’re all alone, the reality is that there is no cry of yours that goes unheard by God. There is nothing that happens to you that He doesn’t see *and feel*. Today—and forever!—you have His heart.

Chapter 8

GOD REQUIRES AN UNDIVIDED HEART.

Although I am the one who decided on the title of this blog, I feel the need to ask you to read until the end—especially if you might take immediate offense at the title. There are a lot of ideas floating around out there about what God “requires” us to do before He will accept us. Sacrifices to be made, penance to be paid. This is not how I am using the word *requires*. So, if you’ll bear with me for a moment, I’d like to explain what I mean.

This chapter gave us insight into Solomon’s first step down a path that eventually took him away from the Lord (and into misery): “Solomon brought Pharaoh’s daughter up from the City of David to the palace he had built for her, for he said, ‘My wife must not live in the palace of David king of Israel, because the places the ark of the Lord has entered are holy.’” (vs 11)

The Lord had given Solomon a lot of wisdom when it came to dealing with the people of Israel. However, it seems he chose *not* to exercise that wisdom in his personal life. The first woman he married was Pharaoh’s daughter. Israelites were forbidden to marry heathen women (although many did it anyways). But it’s unfortunate that King Solomon also chose to follow this practice. He was obviously aware that his choice of women wasn’t the most suitable, since he wouldn’t let her go into places that had been consecrated. He knew she came from a heathen land that served many false gods. He knew she didn’t believe in the God of Heaven.

Perhaps what Solomon underestimated, however, was the binding effect of marriage—that whole “two become one flesh” thing. He thought he would be able to intertwine his life (which was centered around God) with someone whose life was *not* centered around that same God. But he was wrong. He didn’t realize that our hearts can’t remain forever divided.

Jesus said it Himself: “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.” (Matt 6:24) A heart that is divided won’t stay that way for long. Eventually, it will take a side. It will become *undivided*.

And that’s exactly what happened to Solomon. For he didn’t marry just *one* heathen woman. He married a lot of them, and the writer of 1 Kings revealed the outcome of that: “King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh’s daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, ‘You must not intermarry with them, because *they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.*’ Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and *his wives led him astray*. As Solomon grew old, *his wives turned his heart after other gods*, and his heart was *not fully devoted* to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. So

Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done.” (1 Kgs 11:1-6)

His wives turned his heart after other gods. Solomon learned the principle of what Jesus said. Nobody can serve two masters. Eventually, one of them will win out, and in Solomon’s case, it was the false gods worshiped by his wives.

In order to serve God, we must have an undivided heart. God requires it—not because it’s some arbitrary rule He made up out of jealousy, but because *that’s the way it works*. We cannot serve *anything* with a divided heart. We cannot serve two masters. Solomon realized that he couldn’t “have his cake and eat it, too.” His wives turned him away from God, but if the book of Ecclesiastes is any indication of what Solomon learned about the consequences of trying to live life outside of God, it seems he had a change of heart later in his life.

So, God requires an undivided heart—not because He won’t accept us if we don’t have one, but because it’s *impossible* for *us* to follow *Him* without one. We must choose the master we’re going to serve. And serving that master—whether it’s God or Satan or money or lust or whatever—can only be done with an undivided heart. There’s no other way.

Chapter 9

GOD ALWAYS GIVES MORE.

There's no doubt about it. The Queen of Sheba was totally smitten with Solomon. Everything about him and his kingdom took her in—the palace, the temple, the banquet, and especially his wisdom. She had been expecting to see great things on her visit to Solomon, but she wasn't prepared for what she actually found when she got there: "She said to the king, 'The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. But I did not believe what they said until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half the greatness of your wisdom was told me; *you have far exceeded the report I heard.*'" (vs 5-6)

Solomon was the most famous king who ever lived. It's obvious that his reputation had extended beyond the borders of Israel for thousands of miles. Yet, this stunning reputation wasn't even *half* the story. As the Queen of Sheba found out, when God bestows His blessings, He always gives *more* than what we can expect or imagine. If He promises wisdom, it will be the kind of insight and wisdom that would stun even the most brilliant thinkers. If He promises wealth, it will be the kind that makes the rich look poor. Whenever God gives, He always gives *more* than we even think is possible.

The Queen was overwhelmed with her visit to Israel. In response, she gave Solomon lavish gifts of gold, spices, and precious gems. A lot of the things she gave to him were things that had never been seen before in Israel. What she gave him was probably only second to what *God* had given him!

But, in another twist, I *loved* the fact that Solomon turned right around and did something that God would do: "King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired and asked for; *he gave her more than she had brought* to him." (vs 12) Here, I think we *definitely* see a reflection of the character of God. Not only does He always give us more, but He always gives us more than *we* brought to *Him* in the first place.

Even when we think we're bringing Him the most lavish, precious gifts, He is always able, willing, and *eager* to give us more. There is no way we can *out-give* Him. No matter what we have to bring to Him, He is always waiting with *more*.

Chapter 10

GOD'S GIFTS CAN BE SQUANDERED.

Today's chapter reminded me somewhat of the story of the Prodigal Son—you know, the foolish boy who squandered the riches of his father's estate. And since we looked yesterday at what an outrageous giver God is, I thought it might be prudent to add a P.S. today—that all of God's gifts come with freedom. That means, if we are foolish enough, we can squander them all. What God gives, He doesn't force us to keep or use wisely. We are free to do with His gifts what we want.

When Rehoboam succeeded his father as king, it didn't take long to discover that he had inherited *none* of Solomon's wisdom. In fact, one commentator (Dilday) observed that “with *a dozen rash words*, Rehoboam, the bungling dictator, opened the door for *four hundred* years of strife, weakness, and, eventually, the destruction of the entire nation.” It didn't take very much to totally destroy everything his father had built in Israel. His reign ushered in a phase of rebellion that split the nation, a rebellion from which it never recovered.

With all his wisdom and insight, it seems that Solomon foresaw this possibility, although it's unknown whether he had his own son in mind when he wrote these words: “I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because *I must leave them* to the one who comes after me. *And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish?* Yet *they will have control* over all the fruit of my toil into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun.” (Eccl 2:18-19) It seems Solomon accurately foretold the fate of Israel.

Rehoboam took everything his father had built and wasted it. He took all of the gifts God had blessed his family with and squandered them. And, although it may be hard for us to believe, God allowed him to do it, and He also allows *us* to do it. He does not cease to be generous, even if He knows we will squander what He has given us. He gives because *He is a giver*, not because He will force us to use those gifts in a way that is pleasing to Him. He doesn't determine outcomes. He doesn't dictate *our* behavior. He only determines *His* behavior.

God gives us the freedom to take what He's given us and abuse it, if we wish. We can destroy His gifts, if we wish. There's part of me that still doesn't understand that, just as I don't understand why the father of the Prodigal Son would finance his journey into the far country. The only thing I can say is that God loves to give, and He loves to give *with no strings attached*. Accepting His gifts doesn't turn us into puppets. We are free, as Rehoboam was, to squander it all . . . if we're that foolish.

Chapter 11

GOD IS WORTH EVERYTHING .

Let's face it. Rehoboam got off to an *awful* start as king. He alienated just about everyone that *could* be alienated. Then, he tried to start a war in order to get back the land and tribes that he had lost. God warned him against doing that, and at least he was smart enough to listen to that advice.

But after he returned to Jerusalem, an interesting thing happened: "The priests and Levites from all their districts throughout Israel sided with him. The Levites even *abandoned their pasturelands and property* and came to Judah and Jerusalem, because Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them as priests of the Lord when he appointed his own priests for the high places and for the goat and calf idols he had made. Those from every tribe of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the Lord, the God of Israel, followed the Levites to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to the Lord, the God of their ancestors. They strengthened the kingdom of Judah and supported Rehoboam son of Solomon three years, following the ways of David and Solomon during this time." (vs 13-17)

One thing is for sure: the Levites and the people who came with them to Jerusalem endured *a lot* to get there. Their desire to be in the place where God was and to offer sacrifices to Him was more important than everything else. It was stronger than their distaste for Rehoboam and the way he had so badly handled the situation. It was more important to them than the possibility of angering *their* king, Jeroboam. Not to mention that the journey to Jerusalem would have been long and

difficult, especially since the kingdom had been split into two separate and marked territories.

They had to want to get to Jerusalem more than anything else.

They knew a secret about God: that He is worth *everything*. Unfortunately, that truth is often just words for us. We may believe that God is worth everything, but I bet none of us are in a position to actually have to give up *everything* in order to be His disciple. We live in relative luxury, getting to "have our cake and eat it too." We don't have to choose between our property and God. Most of us don't have to choose between our families and God.

But there may come a day when we do. And if that day comes, I hope we remember the Levites. I hope we have come to know God so well that we will know that there is *nothing* on this Earth that is more important than Him. He is worthy of *everything*. If we don't have Him, we truly have nothing—even if we "have it all." He should always be our number one priority!

Chapter 12

GOD USES ADVERSITY TO EDUCATE US.

One of the things that never ceases to amaze me is the idea we have that our lives here on Earth *should be* easy and relatively painless. We must have this idea buried deep somewhere in our minds, for it seems that when any of us face adversity or crisis, we react with shock. *How could this happen to me?* Next, we focus our energies on how to get out of the unpleasant situation.

As Christians, we know there is a day coming when there will be no more sorrow and no more tears . . . but it's *not today!* In this world of evil, we should pretty much *expect* trouble—especially if we are followers of Christ. But, whether we are Christians or not, nobody escapes pain in this life.

The question of how God relates to pain and suffering is one that has been asked and answered (in a myriad of ways) over centuries, and is in fact still being asked and answered. I think it's reasonable to say that God never intended for there to be hardship and suffering. His plan was only one of beauty and goodness. It was *we* who screwed things up in that regard. So now that God is faced with an evil world, what is His response to it?

Certainly, that question involves a much larger and more complex answer than we can find in a short blog, but today's chapter from 2 Chronicles provided a brief glimpse into how God interacted with the suffering of His people when they were under the reign of King Rehoboam. The people had abandoned God, and they had been attacked and captured by the Egyptians: "When the Lord saw

that [the leaders of Israel and the king had] humbled themselves, this word of the Lord came to [the prophet] Shemaiah: 'Since they have humbled themselves, I will not destroy them but will soon give them deliverance. My wrath will not be poured out on Jerusalem through Shishak. They will, however, become subject to him, *so that they may learn the difference* between serving me and serving the kings of other lands.'" (vs 7-8)

Wow. Did you find that as interesting as I did? God may not have inspired the Egyptians to attack Israel. But once it had happened, God said that He was planning to use this awful situation to *educate* the Israelites. By being abandoned to the heathen Egyptians, by being forced to live as slaves under Shishak, God would help them understand what a good thing they had thrown away. Hopefully, they would be less likely to abandon God in the future.

You see, in the last chapter, we read about how Rehoboam fortified many of the cities in Judah. He did this in order to withstand attacks by the enemy. But he misunderstood the source of his strength. It was not in the bars and walls. It was in *the Lord*. When the Israelites in Judah turned their backs on God, the people who lived in the fortified cities became little clusters of sitting ducks. *God* was the source of their strength—not the walls.

And no matter where or how adversity comes to us in this life, I believe God uses it in the same way—to educate us. Just as the Israelites needed to learn that their strength was in God and not in stone, we

have similar lessons to learn. That our stability is in God, not in a paycheck. That our security is in God, not in a government pat-down program. That our peace is in God, not in making sure we insulate ourselves from disaster. That our hope is in God, not in our ability to control all of life's circumstances.

So, though it is hard, next time you face a crisis, don't be so quick to try to get out of it. Instead, ask God what He wants you *to get out of it*. He is eager to teach us so many things. Are we willing to learn?

Chapter 13

GOD INSPIRES WITNESSING .

One of the things in Christianity that I find so curious is the “witnessing education” that goes on from time to time in churches. You know what I’m talking about, don’t you? Those classes or workshops that purport to teach you about how to witness for Jesus. How to tell others about your faith. I’ve never understood the reason for these classes. Well, perhaps there’s a better way to phrase that. If, in the church, we are cultivating a real relationship with the living God, I’ve never understood the *need* for these classes.

When I talk about the subject of witnessing, I usually refer to the Gospels. I mean, did you ever see Jesus give a witnessing seminar to someone He’d had an encounter with? Did He ever have to tell people how to tell others about their experience? On the contrary, He was usually trying to *keep people quiet!* When people came into contact with Jesus, when they encountered the living God, the *first* thing they did was run out and tell everyone they could find. Witnessing was not a problem.

So, since I usually point to the Gospels to illustrate that point, it was ever so refreshing to see it illustrated right here in the Old Testament. In the previous chapter of 2 Chronicles, the Lord gave the tribe of Judah over to the Egyptians in order to educate them on what it was like to have *Him* as their God versus being subject to a heathen king.

And, what do you know? It worked! At least for a little while, they got the lesson. And what did they immediately do? *They told the other Israelites about the*

lesson they had learned through their experience: “Don’t you know that the Lord, the God of Israel, has given the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants forever by a covenant of salt? . . . And now you plan to resist the kingdom of the Lord, which is in the hands of David’s descendants. You are indeed a vast army and have with you the golden calves that Jeroboam made to be your gods. . . [But] God is with us; he is our leader. His priests with their trumpets will sound the battle cry against you. People of Israel, *do not fight against the Lord, the God of your ancestors, for you will not succeed.*”

If the people of Judah had learned anything, it was the lesson that fighting against the Lord doesn’t lead to success. They had had an encounter with the living God, and they were ready to tell others! This is witnessing, plain and simple. And God inspires that witnessing, just by seeking us out and interacting with us. So if we’re wondering about how to witness, it could be that we really haven’t had an encounter with God. Once we’ve been in His presence, it is very, *very* hard not to tell others about Him!

Chapter 14

GOD GIVES US REST.

I loved this verse from chapter 14: “Let us build up these towns,” [Asa] said to Judah, “and put walls around them, with towers, gates and bars. The land is still ours, because we have sought the Lord our God; we sought him and he has given us rest on every side.” (vs 7) The Israelites in Judah had not yet forsaken what they had learned in Egyptian captivity—that God is the very best King there is.

When we seek God, we will find rest *on every side*. Rest is the very first thing He gave us, providing a whole day of rest to Adam and Eve the day after He created them. And, just in case we would forget, Jesus reminded us that to find rest, all we had to do was come to Him: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matt 11:28-30)

When we need rest, when we need peace, there is only *one* place to go. And when we go to God, we will not only find rest, but we will find rest *on all sides*. God isn’t just out to give us a little peace, He is out to give us *total* peace. He wants us to rest in Him, to trust in Him, and to put our faith in what He knows is best. He just wants to give us rest.

Chapter 15

GOD WANTS TO BE WANTED.

In some ways, I wanted to title this blog *God is not a stalker*. But, I guess I *do* believe that God is a stalker—in the sense that He will pursue us, leaving no stone unturned in winning us back to Him. *But*, if we ultimately want to have nothing to do with Him, He will eventually leave us alone.

I love it whenever I see plain talk in Scripture. And today, this is the message about God I found in 2 Chronicles 15: “The Spirit of God came on Azariah son of Oded. He went out to meet Asa and said to him, ‘Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. *The Lord is with you when you are with him*. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you.’” (vs 1-2)

So straightforward! First, God reassures us that if we are willing to be in a relationship with Him, He will *always* be with us. In fact, as Paul wrote in Romans 8, there is *nothing* on Earth that can separate us from God if we choose Him. He will never leave us. He will never abandon us. He will be with us when we are with Him.

But . . . if we abandon Him, He will abandon us. At first, this might sound like some sort of threat. *Do things My way, or I’ll disown you*. On the contrary, God has made it abundantly clear that the only thing *He* wants is to have a relationship with us. He became flesh and lived among us for that very purpose! *He* is not the one who does the disowning. *We* do. God’s statement that He will forsake us if we have forsaken Him is not a threat, but a statement about how highly He values our freedom.

You see, people who really *are* stalkers don’t like to be ignored. Often, you hear stories of how jilted friends and lovers become absolutely *obsessed* with the objects of their affection and, unless the relationship is restored (even under threats and duress), the stalker may eventually do harm to the person he is stalking.

But if we decide that we want to walk totally away from God forever, there will be no need for us to get a restraining order. He will acknowledge and *accept* our decision. Instead of harming us if we reject Him, He will say *okay* and give up. He allows *us* to make the choice about whether there will be a relationship or not. Even though *He* wants a relationship with us more than anything, if we say *no*, He will respect that.

That is one of the ways that I believe our basic human nature reflects God’s character. We all want to be wanted. We all want to be loved. *And so does God*. But how many of us want to be loved because we have *forced* the other person into a relationship? How many of us would like to live out our days knowing that our spouse says “I love you, honey” because they’re afraid of what we’ll do to them if they don’t say those words?

God doesn’t want that kind of “relationship” any more than we do. He wants to be loved because we have chosen to love Him. He wants to *be wanted*.

Chapter 16

GOD HELPS THOSE WHO SEEK HIM.

I'm sure you've heard this famous saying: *God helps those who help themselves*. A popular idea, but is it true? King Asa's experience in 2 Chronicles 16 would seem to contradict the idea. For what was Asa doing, but helping himself? "In the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah and fortified Ramah to prevent anyone from leaving or entering the territory of Asa king of Judah. Asa then *took the silver and gold out of the treasures of the Lord's temple* and of his own palace and sent it to Ben-Hadad king of Aram, who was ruling in Damascus. *'Let there be a treaty between me and you,'* he said, 'as there was between my father and your father. See, I am sending you silver and gold. Now break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so he will withdraw from me.'" (vs 1-3)

In response to this robbery from the temple, the Lord sent the prophet Hanani to relay His disappointment to the king. Instead of relying on God (as he had when he was in battle with the Cushites and Libyans), Asa had decided to try to solve the problem with King Baasha on his own, and he quickly found out that those who help themselves don't always get God's help. In fact, helping ourselves by trying to control situational outcomes sometimes places us beyond God's help.

The need to control and solve our own problems is an epidemic, a part of our sinful condition. Surrender doesn't come naturally to us, but as Hanani reminded Asa, "Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and horsemen? Yet *when you relied on the Lord, he delivered*

them into your hand." (vs 8) In other words, God doesn't help those who help themselves; He helps those *who seek Him*.

The consequences of *not* seeking God are often disastrous. In this case, Asa's self-help destroyed the peace he and his people had been enjoying: "For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and *from now on you will be at war.*" (vs 9)

A few days ago, we saw that when we seek God, He gives us peace and rest on all sides. And here we see that when we *don't* seek Him, we're left in the hands of those we've relied on instead—and when we put our hope in anyone other than God, it leads to turmoil and unrest.

So, the next time you're tempted to help yourself, don't. Instead of trying to take charge of that problem you'd like to solve, take it to God. Seek *His* advice. Ask for *His* help. I promise you, He's got solutions for your problems that you can't even imagine. And when you take your problems to Him, you'll find out very quickly that He helps those who seek Him.

Chapter 17

GOD NEEDS YOU.

One thing I noted about this chapter was the number of devoted people who were in Judah at the time. King Jehoshaphat was, of course, devoted to the Lord. The text points out that he even “removed the high places and the Asherah poles from Judah.” (vs 6) Then there were the Levites who traveled through the nation, teaching the people about God from the Book of the Law. And then, toward the end of the chapter, there was mention of all the fighting men who surrounded the king, including “Amasiah son of Zikri, who volunteered himself for the service of the Lord.” (vs 16)

At this time in Judah, it seems like everywhere you turned, there were people devoted to the Lord. And what really made an impression on me was the *range* of occupations that were included. For instance, we would certainly say that the priests and Levites were working in “the service of the Lord.” The tasks they were given were directly related to the spirituality of the nation. Of course that’s God’s work! And even the king, it could be said, was engaged in the Lord’s service. After all, it seems like the spiritual temperature of the nation was highly dependent upon the leadership of the king.

But what about Amasiah son of Zikri, who “volunteered himself for the service of the Lord”? He was a fighting man, a soldier. He wasn’t reading or interpreting the Scriptures for people. He wasn’t

assisting in the temple, offering sacrifices for people and proclaiming to them the forgiveness of God. How is it that his work was considered the Lord’s work?

Charles Spurgeon once wrote, “There is no lawful occupation in which a man cannot thoroughly serve the Lord. It is a great privilege and blessing to be set apart to the work of winning souls; but we must never separate that work from all the rest of the callings of life, as though *it alone* were sacred, and all the rest were secular and almost sinful. Serve God where you are.”

God has a work for us to do—no matter who we are, where we are, or what occupation we’re engaged in. It’s not like God has certain occupations set aside that only qualify as “His work,” and if we want to dedicate ourselves to His service, we must pick one of those occupations. No, the Lord’s work happens when we dedicate *ourselves* to Christ, regardless of our occupation. When we are devoted *to Him*, He accomplishes His work in and through us.

God needs you. His work doesn’t only require pastors or literature evangelists. He also needs teachers, taxi cab drivers, accountants, grocery store clerks, social workers, politicians, and plumbers. He needs people from all corners of the world and all walks of life to reach out and touch other people from all corners of the world and all walks of

life. So, don't make the mistake of compartmentalizing occupations as either "sacred" or "secular." If you will volunteer yourself for the service of the Lord, as Amasiah did, you will find that God will make sacred work of your occupation—no matter what it is.

He needs you!

Chapter 18

GOD MAKES DECEPTION IMPOSSIBLE.

Ahhhh, back to one of my favorite stories in the whole Bible. Micaiah, the prophet with the hot mouth. But as I read the story once again, something new jumped out at me. The dialogue between the two kings was very interesting, *particularly* the things said by Ahab king of Israel.

When Jehoshaphat advised Ahab to seek the Lord for counsel, and the “prophets” gave the go-ahead, Jehoshaphat’s reply was, “Is there no longer a prophet of the Lord here whom we can inquire of?” (vs 6) Obviously, Jehoshaphat wasn’t buying the “go-ahead” from the other prophets. Somehow, he knew that it was wrong to go into war. But he wasn’t the only one.

King Ahab suggested that the only true prophet left was Micaiah, and he was summoned. When the king asked him what they should do, Micaiah (having been coached that he should go along with the thumbs-up) replied that the king should go into battle. And what was Ahab’s reply? “How many times must I make you swear to tell me *nothing but the truth* in the name of the Lord?” (vs 15) In other words, Ahab knew *exactly* what was right and wrong.

He was certainly not deceived. And so, the more intriguing question to me is, why would he do something he knew was wrong? Well, I guess that’s a really dumb question. After all, most of the wrong things that are done in this world are done by people who know full well that they aren’t the right things to do.

And that’s why I believe God has made it impossible for us to be ultimately deceived. First, He gave us a conscience. Second, He has sent His Spirit into the world to convict us of right and wrong. And third, He sends third-party corroboration (in this case, Micaiah) in case we are left with any doubts.

God was the very first person to come up with the idea of informed consent. He believes in our freedom to choose so much that He doesn’t leave us stumbling around in the dark, wondering which way to go. And He certainly doesn’t leave us prey to overpowering deceptions that can ultimately whisk us off down the wrong road without our knowing. If we choose the wrong, it will be because, in the end, we have *chosen* it. With God, deception is impossible!

Chapter 19

GOD IS TRULY JUST.

I was recently having a conversation with friends about justice. Particularly about our “justice” system and whether it correlates to God’s definition of justice. I don’t believe so, and I’ll tell you why. In this world, we are typically limited to a style of “justice” that is more retributive than anything else. For instance, if one person murders another, the only option available to us is to inflict some sort of punishment on the perpetrator for their wrongdoing—whether that be prison time or even sentencing them to death.

But God’s justice is restorative. I believe that *His* kind of justice in such a case would be the resurrection of the murdered person and an attempt to rehabilitate—if possible—the perpetrator. Often, we even attempt the rehabilitation, but we don’t have the option of bringing someone back from the dead. Therefore, we’re sort of limited in the amount of true justice we can achieve. (Having said that, I don’t have any qualms about punishment/discipline for crimes. A person should be held to account for wrongdoing.)

In this chapter of 2 Chronicles, however, God’s justice is described in even more detail: “Consider carefully what you do, because you are not judging for mere mortals but for the Lord, who is with you whenever you give a verdict. Now let the fear of the Lord be on you. Judge carefully, for with the Lord our God *there is no injustice or partiality or bribery.*” (vs 6-7)

The Hebrew word translated “injustice” there simply means unrighteousness, or wrongdoing. So, God doesn’t do what is wrong, He doesn’t show partiality or favoritism, nor is He corrupt. He can’t be bought off. One of the interesting things in this description, for me, is that God shows no partiality.

This is another big difference from the trend in our system of “justice.” Especially with the advent of “social justice,” it seems that one of the ways we try to achieve justice is through partiality—whether it’s partiality toward a particular economic class, race, gender, or religion. We perceive that a certain group of people have been wronged by society at large, so they often receive special treatment in our courts and legislatures.

But this isn’t God’s justice. He shows no partiality. That means no favoritism toward the rich. And it also means no favoritism toward the poor. (In fact, He typically doesn’t even define *rich* and *poor* in the ways we do. See Revelation 3:14-22.) It means He is not partial to whites or blacks, nor is He partial to Muslims or Christians. He always does what is right, no matter what. He operates on the basis of *true* justice.

Chapter 20

GOD KNOWS WHAT TO DO .

This chapter contains what has to be one of the most moving expressions of trust in God to be found in the Bible, contained in the middle of Jehoshaphat's prayer: "But now here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, whose territory you [God] would not allow Israel to invade when they came from Egypt; so they turned away from them and did not destroy them. See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance. Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. *We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.*" (vs 10-12)

We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you. Isn't that awesome?! First of all, I think it's awesome that a leader—particularly a leader of a great nation—would publicly confess that he doesn't know what to do. Especially in our modern society, with its politics of power and position, to admit that you don't have a solution to a problem would be a *death knell* to your political career. (Then, just imagine if a politician said, "I don't know what I'd do, but I'm trusting God to help me." Mercy!)

And that brings us to the second point of this confession: Jehoshaphat may not have known what to do, but he certainly knew where his help was going to come from. Even though *he* didn't have the answer, he knew *God* did. And he was determined to wait on God (and inspire his whole nation to wait on God) until the help arrived. And, of course, if

you read the rest of the chapter, you know that God most certainly helped His people avoid what would have been a devastating battle with nations who were much stronger than they were.

God knows what to do. Why is that always so hard for us to remember? We, on the other hand, often have *no clue* what to do—although we are unwilling to admit that to ourselves, let alone to others. In fact, don't you just wonder how much different things would be in this world if we would humbly admit before God that we have absolutely no clue how to solve the problems that sin has caused?

God, people are starving to death in Africa. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.

God, one out of every five pregnancies in the U.S. ends in abortion. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.

God, violent crime seems to be spiraling out of control in our world. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.

God, countless children are abused every day by their parents—who were abused themselves as children. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.

What if we asked God—*really* asked Him—for His help and guidance? What if our country's leaders did that? What if our church's leaders did that? What if *we* did that?

One thing I believe for sure: we'd find answers.
Because God *has* them, and He has never shown
Himself to be unwilling to help us when we ask
Him. God knows what to do. Let us fix our eyes
on *Him!*

Chapter 21

GOD'S POWER STRUCTURE IS BASED ON SUBMISSION.

Over the last several chapters of 2 Chronicles, I've noticed an interesting trend. See if you can spot it in this passage from today's chapter: "Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years. He followed the ways of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, for he married a daughter of Ahab. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. In the time of Jehoram, Edom rebelled against Judah and set up its own king. To this day Edom has been in rebellion against Judah. Libnah revolted at the same time, because Jehoram had forsaken the Lord, the God of his ancestors." (vs 5-6, 8, 10)

Have you noticed that when the kings of Judah were submitted to the Lord (such as Jehoram's father, Jehoshaphat, was), the surrounding nations were submitted to Judah? And when the kings of Judah revolted against the Lord (such as Jehoram did), the surrounding nations revolted against Judah? I think that's more than just a coincidence, don't you?

Of course, some might say that being subjected to war instead of enjoying peace was some sort of punishment from God for Judah's disobedience. But I don't think it's as punitive as that. I'm not saying that God doesn't discipline us when we do the wrong thing—of course He does!—but I also think there's something to grasp here about God's power and how it involves submission.

God had chosen the Israelites for a special mission—to be His ambassadors to the surrounding

heathen nations. For the most part, the Israelites failed at that mission. It seems like they could never remain faithful to God long enough to be any sort of a lasting positive influence on their neighbors.

However, there were isolated pockets of time in Israel's history when they *were* surrendered to God. There were times when they actually trusted in God and didn't try to just use Him as a good luck charm. During those times, the nation was prosperous. During those times, there was peace in the land, as the surrounding nations—who were often hostile to them—submitted themselves to Israel's rule.

When Israel was submitted *to God*, the surrounding nations often submitted *to them*. I think one of the main reasons for that is because when Israel was submitted to God, it was *safe* for others to submit to them. When Israel had submitted themselves to God's holy influence, they could be trusted to be wise leaders of the nations around them also.

However, when they decided they'd had enough of God's ways and rejected Him and His methods, the heart of the nation was often filled with corruption, bribery, and greed. At those times, it would *not* have been safe for them to lead themselves—let alone any of their neighbors!

God's power structure is based on submission, not force. When the Israelites (in this case, Judah) were submitted to Him, the surrounding nations submitted to them and there was peace. And I think the

same thing is true for us on a personal level. When we are submitted to God, His power reigns in our lives and subdues the sinful passions that might otherwise enslave us. However, when we are *not* submitted to God, those same passions can flare up with a ferocity that astounds us.

I don't know about you, but there are things in my life that I would like to get rooted out! But it's often so tempting to try to root them out on my own, in my own strength—to try to “go to war” with my sin and subdue it by force. But that's not how things are overcome in the kingdom of God. In His kingdom, power comes through submission, not force. It is only in submitting to Him that we will find the victory over the sin that surrounds us.

Chapter 22

GOD IS A SAFE PLACE.

And once again, we find ourselves back to a familiar story from the time of the kings in Israel: “When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she proceeded to destroy the whole royal family of the house of Judah. But Jehosheba . . . took Joash son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the royal princes who were about to be murdered and put him and his nurse in a bedroom. . . [Jehosheba] hid the child from Athaliah so she could not kill him. *He remained hidden with them at the temple of God* for six years while Athaliah ruled the land.” (vs 10-12)

He remained hidden with them at the temple of God. I thought this was a beautiful little nugget in the midst of a horrendous story. The “queen mother” has gone berserk, killing everyone in her whole family, but one of the young princes was stolen away and hidden in the temple, his life spared.

Do you ever feel like the world is going berserk? Certainly it feels that way when a crisis comes into your life. But even if you’re not in the midst of a personal crisis at the moment, what is happening to our world? In the last several weeks and months, there has been crazy weather disasters, crippling fears of worldwide economic meltdown, and random bursts of violence. It seems like everywhere you look, things are in upheaval and chaos.

That’s why I *love* that the story of Joash reminds us that *God is a safe place*. When the world is falling apart around us, when sin is threatening to tear us to bits, we can flee to the shelter of the Almighty.

We can hide ourselves in Him and find peace and security—when there is precious little peace and security to be found.

What does “hiding ourselves in Him” mean? To me, it means that we know and understand His character of love well enough to know that whatever comes to us in this life is *okay*. He knows what He is doing, and He has promised to work in all circumstances of our lives to bring blessing to us and those around us.

So we don’t have to figure out all the crazy Athaliahs of the world. We don’t have to try to come up with solutions to the chaos and craziness. Instead, we can flee to God. We can rest in Him, our safe place. We can trust Him to do just what is right in His own time and hide ourselves in Him for as long as it takes.

Chapter 23

GOD DETHRONES EVIL.

The wicked queen Athaliah had ruled over Judah for six years, and I bet it was an awful six years. Just imagine living in a land where the person in charge had arrived at that position by murdering *her own family*. If she could treat her own relatives with such cold brutality, how do you think she would treat strangers? The fact that “all the people of the land rejoiced” after Athaliah was killed would suggest that they were very happy to be out from under her thumb.

The covenant that God had made with the tribe of Judah promised that a descendant of David would sit on the throne forever. Athaliah thought she had destroyed all the descendants of David—and so did everyone else. That’s how she got away with ruling for six years. Nobody knew that there were any alternatives. Little Joash was hidden away in the temple for safekeeping, and only a couple of people knew he was there. Until it was time for him to be crowned king, all the citizens of Judah thought they were stuck with a wicked queen.

Imagine what a surprise it must have been when Jehoiada brought Joash out of hiding, revealing to the priests, Levites, and captains that there was *indeed* a living heir to the throne. They must have been totally shocked! (And relieved.)

I think something similar happens in our lives. Often, we live under the bondage and slavery of sin, controlled by lusts, addictions, or sinful habits. We may even think that *we* are in control of these problems—not realizing that, in reality, *they* are in

control of us. But we don’t have to live under the tyranny of sin, just like the residents of Judah didn’t have to live under the tyranny of Athaliah. There was a legitimate king ready to advance to the throne of Judah, and there is also a legitimate King ready to reign in our lives.

When God is revealed, and when we welcome Him to sit on the throne of our hearts, He dethrones evil. Evil can no more exist in His presence than Athaliah could remain on the throne alongside Joash. No matter how long we have lived under the tyranny of sin, God is willing to liberate us. We may now be in bondage to sin, but we don’t have to stay that way. When we invite God to reign in our lives, He will dethrone all the evil that lurks in our hearts.

Chapter 24

GOD DOES NOT ALWAYS PROTECT US.

I heard a very good sermon recently about how God sometimes protects us in an *ultimate*, eternal sense by *not* protecting us physically in the here and now. This, of course, can be a very difficult concept for us to understand and grasp. We tend to want that “instant gratification” sort of protection, and quite often, we’re shocked and grieved when we don’t get it.

I wonder if that’s what Zechariah felt like: “Then the Spirit of God came on Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest. He stood before the people and said, ‘This is what God says: “Why do you disobey the Lord’s commands? You will not prosper. Because you have forsaken the Lord, he has forsaken you.”’ But they plotted against him, and by order of the king they stoned him to death in the courtyard of the Lord’s temple. King Joash did not remember the kindness Zechariah’s father Jehoiada had shown him but killed his son, who said as he lay dying, ‘May the Lord see this and call you to account.’” (vs 20-22)

King Joash had run off the rails. He started out so well, so promising. All the years that Jehoiada lived, Joash did “what was right in the eyes of the Lord.” (vs 2) But after Jehoiada’s death, Joash’s reign went terribly wrong, and he actually killed the son of the man *who saved his life*. Jehoiada had risked his own life for six years by hiding Joash from Athaliah in the temple, but Joash had either forgotten about that or didn’t care any longer.

When Zechariah went to confront him about what he was doing, he wasn’t doing a foolish thing . . . or even acting on his own. The Bible says “the Spirit of God came on” him. In other words, he was following the Spirit’s direction in his life. He was doing something God wanted him to do. Doesn’t it seem odd, then, that he ended up on the wrong end of a pile of stones?

It seems that way to us, doesn’t it? We expect that when we follow God, *good* things should happen to us. After all, isn’t that what we teach our children? We tell them that to follow Jesus brings joy and peace—and it does, but it often *doesn’t* bring protection in this life. In fact, when we are *really* following the Lord, we are probably at *greater* risk of attack from the enemy. (Just ask Job.)

That was certainly Zechariah’s experience. God told him to go on a mission, and it got him killed. *God doesn’t always protect us*. So, how should we respond to that reality? Should Zechariah’s death be labeled a tragedy—even though he was doing what the Spirit led him to do? Should we expect God to always grant us *temporary* protection when we are doing His will? Or can we trust His promise to provide for our *ultimate* protection—regardless of what happens to us in the here and now?

God is most concerned about and working to ensure our *ultimate* protection. And sometimes He

may be best able to accomplish *that* goal by forgoing our *temporary* protection in this life. Given the choice, which kind of protection would you rather have? Are you willing to trust God to do what's *ultimately* best for you?

Chapter 25

GOD CAN GIVE US MORE.

Amaziah—like his father—started out well as king. Later, he too strayed from the ways of the Lord, but as kings of Judah went, he was a pretty good one. (Which is, I think, a sad commentary on the kings of Judah!) Before he went astray, however, he had a habit of listening whenever the Lord talked to him. One such occasion was recorded in this chapter:

“[Amaziah] hired a hundred thousand fighting men from Israel for a hundred talents of silver. But a man of God came to him and said, ‘Your Majesty, these troops from Israel must not march with you, for the Lord is not with Israel—not with any of the people of Ephraim. Even if you go and fight courageously in battle, God will overthrow you before the enemy, for God has the power to help or to overthrow.’ Amaziah asked the man of God, ‘But what about the hundred talents I paid for these Israelite troops?’ The man of God replied, ‘The Lord can give you much more than that.’ So Amaziah dismissed the troops who had come to him from Ephraim and sent them home.” (vs 6-10)

Often, I find myself in Amaziah’s shoes. I have set out to do something that I thought was a great idea, only to become convinced that *God* didn’t think it was such a great idea. And then, I ask the same question Amaziah did: *But what about the investment I’ve already made in this?* Those investments can be financial or emotional or relational, and when an investment has already been made, it is that much harder to turn back.

That’s why God reminds us that He can always give us *more*. No investment we have made on our own terms is ever going to bring blessing to us like God can. But often, our vision is *so* narrow, so limited. We can’t see like *God* sees, so we don’t think like *He* thinks. Amaziah mistakenly thought there was strength in numbers. But God knew that the strength was found in a reliance on Him. And as much as parts of that were missing in Judah, it must have been non-existent in Israel.

So, the next time you reflexively want to “close your hand” around something for fear that you’re going to lose it, let’s remember that God can always give us more. When we relax, when we trust Him, and when we *let go*, He is able to do things in our lives that we never would have thought possible. Instead of asking Him to fulfill *your* plan, ask Him to *enlarge your vision*. He wants you to see things as He does!

Chapter 26

GOD BELIEVES IN THE SEPARATION OF POWERS.

If you were educated as a child in America, one of the first things you learned about our form of government is that it is based on a separation of powers. Divided into three branches—executive, legislative, and judicial—each one has independent powers and areas of responsibility so that (in theory) no one branch has more power than the others. Although many have attempted throughout history to use one branch to usurp the authority of the others, the founders of our country envisioned a system where no person or group of people would hold absolute power.

Did you know that God’s government works the same way? Let’s begin by looking at the government He established on this Earth with the Israelites, the principles of which King Uzziah began to violate: “After Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. Azariah the priest with eighty other courageous priests of the Lord followed him in. They confronted King Uzziah and said, ‘It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord. *That is for the priests*, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense.’” (vs 16-18)

The general principle in Israel—according to the way the Lord had set up their government—was that no king should *also* be a priest. The king might have been the *civil* authority in Israel, but that was *not* the only authority in the land. There was also a *spiritual* authority, and the king could not be both.

In the people’s eyes, the king was to be in charge of “the state,” and the priests were to be in charge of “the church.” There was a separation of powers.

Uzziah’s problem was that he had become so powerful, he wanted to also add priestly functions to his royal power. But absolute power has no place in God’s government. *He* doesn’t even exercise absolute power. Just think about that for a moment.

God’s government on this sinful planet is one thing, but He *also* maintains a separation of powers in His heavenly government. Consider this: A dictator who holds absolute power always gets his way, but that doesn’t describe God. God created beings with freedom—power to think and to do. That means that, even in heaven, there is a separation of powers. *We* have just as much power to decide about our eternal destiny as God does. In fact, even though He wants everyone to be saved, we have the power to usurp His wishes in that regard and place ourselves beyond His reach.

Absolute power has no place in God’s government—even for Him. He believes in the separation of powers, and He has hardwired that principle into the very fabric of His creation.

Chapter 28

GOD GOD'S TIMING IS DIFFERENT THAN OURS.

One of the few accomplishments of King Jotham that is recorded in the Bible is this: "Jotham rebuilt the Upper Gate of the temple of the Lord and did extensive work on the wall at the hill of Ophel." (vs 3) Of course, any time anyone in Judah had regard for God's temple, that was a good sign, but Bible scholars suggest that working on the "Upper Gate" of the temple means that Jotham rebuilt and restored the link between the temple and the palace in order to have free access from his house to God's house.

If you'll remember from yesterday's chapter, Jotham's father Uzziah had seriously misunderstood the link between the temple and the palace. At one point in his life, he entered the palace in order to bolster his royal authority. From the very beginning of this chapter, however, the author makes it clear that Jotham didn't want to follow in *those* particular footsteps of his father. Still, he wanted there to be a strong bond between his palace and the Lord's temple.

And the reason I believe this event got recorded in the Bible is because a strong bond between *our* house and *God's* house *is also important to God*. He wants us to be drawn into a deeper relationship with Him, to benefit from keeping the lines of communication between us open and strong. That is the easiest channel through which His blessings may flow to us.

Chapter 28

GOD'S LOVE IS NOT PASSIVE.

In this chapter, there is a wonderful example of God's principle of returning good for evil, inspired by leaders of Ephraim who urged the people of Israel to release the captives from Judah they had defeated in battle: "You must not bring those prisoners here,' they said, 'or we will be guilty before the Lord. Do you intend to add to our sin and guilt? For our guilt is already great, and his fierce anger rests on Israel.' So the soldiers gave up the prisoners and plunder in the presence of the officials and all the assembly. The men designated by name took the prisoners, and from the plunder they clothed all who were naked. They provided them with clothes and sandals, food and drink, and healing balm. All those who were weak they put on donkeys. So they took them back to their fellow Israelites at Jericho, the City of Palms, and returned to Samaria." (vs 13-15)

This immediately reminded me of one of Solomon's famous proverbs: "If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." (Prov 25:21-22)

Jesus also encouraged us in this direction with His admonition to "love your enemies, *do good* to those who hate you, *bless* those who curse you, *pray* for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, *turn* to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, *do not withhold* your shirt from them. *Give* to everyone who asks you, and if any-

one takes what belongs to you, *do not demand* it back. *Do* to others as you would have them do to you." (Luke 6:27-31)

Look at all the *verbs* in that passage! These are active words, not passive words. And that's exactly what God's love is like—it is *active*, not passive. It does not simply stop at *not getting revenge* for evil; it *actively* repays *good* for evil. God doesn't tell us to simply refrain from doing to other people what we wouldn't like to have done to us. On the contrary, He says that we should figure out what we would like someone to do for us . . . *then grab the initiative and do it for them instead.*

This is just like God. His love is *active*, not passive. He doesn't simply "not destroy us" because He loves us. His love is full of verbs. He gives, He blesses, He protects, He helps, He saves, He nurtures . . . really, the list could go on and on!

Chapter 29

GOD IS A SONG.

As I read this chapter, I couldn't help but notice the emphasis on music. Particularly this verse: "Hezekiah gave the order to sacrifice the burnt offering on the altar. As the offering began, singing to the Lord began also, accompanied by trumpets and the instruments of David king of Israel." (vs 27)

Among other things, I believe this chapter acts as a metaphor for the cleansing of our hearts—our inner lives that are to be the temple of the Holy Spirit, dwelling place of the Lord. And often, because of this crisis or that sorrow, the song of our hearts is silenced. Somehow, we drift away from the important task of attending to the presence of God and eventually find that, within us, there is no offering, no sacrifice, no song.

But I like the hope this chapter gives—that even if the temple of our hearts has been abandoned for a long time, it doesn't have to remain barren. When we turn back to God and seek Him, there is cleansing and restoration. The things that have been neglected or destroyed can be brought back and rededicated. God is not too proud to return to a house that has been long-abandoned. He will gladly meet us in any temple we open to Him.

I also love that the idea of sacrifice is linked with music. It is offering ourselves to God and engaging in self-sacrifice that causes the music to begin again. This must mean that sacrifice and offering are the sweet things in life. We usually think of them as the *hard* things, but here, they are the very

things that give rise to beauty, joy, and praise. They are the things that make our heart sing.

And so I wonder once again if it isn't self-sacrifice that is the music of God's kingdom. For if God is a song, it is certainly a love song about humility and servanthood. And when we also humble ourselves to take part in that kind of self-sacrifice, we begin to hear the music.

How long has it been since the song played in your heart? Has it been barren for some time? Are there weeds growing in the courtyard? Stagnant water in the basins? It is never too late to have a fresh start. As it says in Malachi 3, "the Lord, whom you seek, *will suddenly come to His temple.*" When we fling open the doors to Him, He will appear. And as we offer ourselves to Him once more, we will hear the beautiful, familiar melody of His song in the temple.

Chapter 30

GOD CARES MORE ABOUT ATTITUDES THAN RULES.

After Hezekiah repaired the temple, he called the Israelites together to celebrate the Passover—something that hadn't been done for a long, *long* time. It was a grand celebration—with music and feasting and thousands of sacrifices. The people were having such a great time that, at the end of the prescribed seven days, they decided to extend the celebration for *another* seven days. There was one slight problem, however: “Although most of the many people who came from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun had not purified themselves, yet they ate the Passover, *contrary to what was written*. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, ‘May the Lord, who is good, pardon everyone who sets their heart on seeking God—the Lord, the God of their ancestors—even if they are not clean according to the rules of the sanctuary.’ And the Lord heard Hezekiah and healed the people.” (vs 18-20)

God had set forth very strict rules regarding the temple and the sanctuary services—*especially* the feasts. But even though this was the first time the Passover was being celebrated in a long time, all the rules weren't being followed. The people who participated in the feast were supposed to be ceremonially clean. They were supposed to have gone through certain rituals of purification, even before entering the temple. But they hadn't. They ate the Passover feast while they were unclean, which was in direct contradiction to what God had commanded.

Yet, when Hezekiah prayed to the Lord about the situation, he discovered that God cares more about

attitudes than He does about rules. What mattered most to God was that the people were willing to come to the temple and participate in worship. The fact that they missed a purification ritual didn't matter to God any more than the father in the story of the Prodigal Son cared that his son came home smelling like pigs.

Our hearts have *always* been more important to God than “the rules.” If you have trouble believing that, take God's own word for it. At the beginning of the book of Isaiah, He basically told the Israelites that following all the rules meant *nothing* if their hearts were absent: “The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?’ says the Lord. ‘I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; *I have no pleasure in the blood* of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! *Your incense is detestable to me*. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your worthless assemblies. Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals *I hate* with all my being. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.’” (Isa 1:11-14)

All of those things—the sacrifices, the offerings, the incense, and the festivals—were things *God* had asked for. In fact, He had set down very strict rules about how they were to be carried out and conducted. Yet, when it was clear that the Israelites cared more about checking off a list of rules than they did about having a relationship with God,

God needed to make it clear *to them* that He cares more about attitudes than rules.

That was true of Him then, and it's still true of Him today. Set your heart on seeking the Lord and trust Him to guide you into an understanding of what He requires. What matters most to Him is your attitude.

Chapter 31

GOD PUTS HIS HEART INTO HIS WORK.

Today's blog will center around the last verse of this chapter: "In everything that [Hezekiah] undertook in the service of God's temple and in obedience to the law and the commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so he prospered." (vs 21) This is the key to prosperity and success in God's universe—working for God with your whole heart, no matter what you do. This is what God does.

Think about it. How a person does a job—any job—depends on how the person views what they're doing. For instance, a new mother does some of the most burdensome tasks on the face of the planet: round-the-clock feedings, changing endless diapers, and enduring weeks of interrupted sleep. Could you *pay* someone to perform all those tasks with the same love and care as a mother? I don't think so!

Or consider someone who cares for a terminally ill person. I watched my mother care for my father in a remarkable way for months on end while he slowly died from ALS. Without the use of his arms or legs, she did *everything* for him. Could any *hired* caretaker have tended to his needs in the same way as my mother did? I don't think so!

In both scenarios, those doing the work were totally motivated by love—not money. In such a case, the burden of the work disappears. It ceases to be work and—although sometimes exhaust-

ing—becomes a joy to the one who loves. Such work is blessed and becomes a blessing, both to the one who does the work and the one(s) who benefits from it.

God puts His heart into His work. His dealings with us are not drudgery for Him. And His work flourishes and prospers *because* of His immense love. Just like Mother Teresa, who worked every day in the gutters of Calcutta, God continuously touches lives—healing, saving, and restoring. He puts His heart and soul into His work, and no matter what our life's work is, we can choose to be like God. We can put our whole heart into everything we do, choosing to work as God does—for the love, not the money.

Chapter 32

GOD IS OUR STRENGTH.

I must say, Hezekiah was an awesome king. He didn't do what so many of the other kings of Judah did—which was start out well, but end miserably. With the exception of one minor hiccup recorded in this chapter, it seems he was steadily faithful to God his whole life.

I was particularly impressed with his firm faith during the time the Assyrians attacked Jerusalem. When they were under siege, this is what he said to the people: “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, *for there is a greater power with us* than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles.” (vs 7-8) And it goes on to say that the people were very encouraged by his message.

Wow! Imagine seeing this huge army coming for you and having enough faith in God to not even bat an eye. Hezekiah was rock solid in his belief that God—and *only* God—was his strength. And he knew that if that was the case, it really didn't matter if the Assyrians showed up with five soldiers or five *billion* soldiers. He knew they could not prevail against God.

Does it feel like you've got an army coming against you? Are you anxious about the state of the world? Problems in your family? Looking for a job? Trying to finish a degree? Anything? Remember today that *there is a greater power with you* than with any problem you can face. God is your strength, and it doesn't

matter what the enemy tries to throw your way. *Nothing* is more powerful than God.

Turn your problems over to the Lord. He wants to fight your battles for you. And while you watch Him work, He wants to give you rest. Isaiah 54:17 says that no weapon formed against you will prosper. God is your strength. He is a strong and mighty tower. Find your refuge in Him!

Chapter 33

GOD HUMBLER US.

It's kind of hard to believe that—after seeing such a wonderful example of a king in his father, Hezekiah—Manasseh could be so wicked. He virtually reversed *every* good thing his father had done during his reign. However, maybe that's what happens when a *twelve-year-old* becomes a king! Can you imagine putting a teenager in charge of a country? Mercy!

The first part of 2 Chronicles 33 describes a young king who is out of control. He rebuilt all the places where Israel worshiped false gods. He built altars to Baal and bowed down to the stars. He practiced witchcraft and consulted mediums. He even burned his own children alive in the fire—sacrificing them in the Valley of Ben Hinnom. How sad.

God was neither ignorant of the situation nor passive. Verse 10 says, “The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention.” Doesn't this remind you of those parents and out-of-control children you see in the stores? The kids are running around causing havoc, and every once in a while, Mom will reprimand one or all of the kids. But it never does any good. They ignore her and keep on doing what they're doing. (You see, they have learned well that Mom is all talk and no walk, so they know that Mom's warning will go by the wayside without anything to back it up.)

I'm so pleased to say that God is not that kind of parent.

When the speaking didn't work, God moved on to Plan B: “So the Lord brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon.” (vs 11) Aha! If Manasseh didn't want to listen, that was just fine. God had some other ways of getting his attention.

And it certainly got his attention: “*In his distress* he sought the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. And when he prayed to him, the Lord was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. *Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God.*” (vs 12-13)

So God put Manasseh in a world of hurt, and it greatly distressed him. So much so that he woke up to the foolishness of his ways and begged God for help. And, of course, God immediately responded. You see, God has a purpose in humbling us. It's not to get revenge because we haven't obeyed. And it's not to force us into submission. It's to *train* us.

After Manasseh's attention-getting episode, the Bible says that *then* he knew that the *Lord* is God. No longer did he burn his children in the fire to other gods. No longer did he visit the witches and the mediums. God's plan worked; it turned Manasseh around and set him back on the road toward home.

God humbles us—sometimes He humbles us *hard*. But He does it because (1) He loves us and (2) it is best for us. You see, whenever I encounter an out-of-control child, I don't get angry at the child. I get angry at the parent. The child *needs* discipline, but especially when he is immature, he can't discipline himself. That is the job of the parent.

So, the next time you feel like God is humbling you—rejoice! God only disciplines the ones He *really* loves, and if you're experiencing His correcting hand in your life, it means *He really cares about you!*

Chapter 34

GOD IS SPEAKING .

Once again, a king in Judah (Josiah, this time) was trying to reform the spiritual state of the nation. After years of idol worship and evil-doing kings (with little respite in between), here was a king who was determined to seek God and do things His way. And in the process of restoring the temple, the chief priest found the Book of the Law. Apparently, it had been lost—either accidentally or intentionally. Either way, when Josiah heard what was in the Book of the Law, he was quite distraught. He tore his robes and wept.

Following that, he sent a delegation to Huldah, a female prophet who lived in Jerusalem, to ask her what the Lord was planning to do since the people had been so wicked. Her response was just what Josiah had feared: the people were headed for doom because of their insistence upon idol worship. However, God continued: “Tell the king of Judah . . . ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: Because *your heart was responsive* and *you humbled yourself* before God when *you heard* what he spoke against this place and its people, and because you humbled yourself before me and tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the Lord. Now I will gather you to your ancestors, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place and on those who live here.’” (vs 26-28)

Josiah was a good and righteous king. But before the Book of the Law was found, it’s possible that Josiah was even “breaking” some of the rules him-

self out of ignorance. But the problem God mentions in His answer to Josiah is not breaking the rules, but *willful defiance*, an unwillingness to listen. This is the problem God is trying to overcome in us. He doesn’t need perfect people. He needs people who will *listen*.

If we are willing to listen to God, there is *nothing* He can’t accomplish in us. In fact, if we are willing to listen to God, He *already* sees us as perfect, because even if we still struggle in the behavior department, our willingness to listen to God will *ensure* that His good work will be completed in us. For nothing is impossible with God.

Since the beginning of time, God has been speaking. And He’s still speaking today. Do you have your listening ears on?

Chapter 35

GOD IS ORDERLY.

As a church musician, I have always been intrigued with the somewhat-common idea (amongst musicians especially) that letting the Holy Spirit work means preparing very little (or not at all) ahead of time. Have you ever encountered that attitude? I actually worked with a group of musicians once who steadfastly refused to rehearse in the belief that leaving themselves totally open “in the moment” would allow the Holy Spirit to control and direct all their music.

I’ve always had a hard time buying that. And as I read this chapter of 2 Chronicles, I was really struck by the theme running through it:

“*Prepare yourselves* by families in your divisions, according to the instructions written by David king of Israel and by his son Solomon.” (vs 4)

“Slaughter the Passover lambs, *consecrate yourselves* and *prepare the lambs* for your fellow Israelites, doing what the Lord commanded through Moses.” (vs 6)

“The service *was arranged* and the priests stood in their places with the Levites in their divisions as the king had ordered.” (vs 10)

“After this, they *made preparations* for themselves and for the priests, because the priests, the descendants of Aaron, were sacrificing the burnt offerings and the fat portions until nightfall. So the Levites *made preparations* for themselves and for the Aaronic priests.” (vs 14)

“The musicians, the descendants of Asaph, were in the places prescribed by David, Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun the king’s seer. The gatekeepers at each gate did not need to leave their posts, because their fellow Levites *made the preparations* for them.” (vs 15)

These verses were describing the build-up to the greatest Passover celebration the Israelites had seen in a long, long time. And there was *nothing* left to chance. Everything was planned, down to the very last detail—including the preparations that had been made for the gatekeepers, so they didn’t have to leave their posts. I don’t think King Josiah would have dreamed of leaving anything to chance. He trusted God to guide him *in all the preparations*. And God did.

We serve a very orderly God. Even if you look at the Creation story, you’ll see a pattern of order running through it. On days 1-3, God spent time structuring a framework of environments—light, water, and land. And then, on days 4-6, God spent time filling that empty framework with His creative objects—the sun and moon and stars, sea creatures, and plants and animals and people. When God opened His mouth to say, “Let there be light,” He could just as easily have said, “Let there be everything.” But He didn’t do that. He prepared. He took His time.

I think we honor God when we use our time to make careful preparations in our service to Him and others. Actually, I think that having taken time

and effort to prepare makes us more free to be open to any “last-minute changes” the Spirit might have in mind. But I believe those kinds of moments are rare. God is an orderly God, and as we take the time to prepare in an orderly way, He is more than able to communicate with us ahead of time about His wishes and desires.

Chapter 36

GOD REASONS WITH US.

I probably should have titled this blog *God reasons with us (or at least He tries to)*. That was the story with this last chapter of 2 Chronicles. We finally got to the end of the history of Israelite kings, and it reminded me of a tailspin . . . right down into Babylonian captivity.

Tucked in there, however, were these verses: “The Lord, the God of their ancestors, *sent word to them* through his messengers *again and again*, because he had *pity* on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God’s messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and *there was no remedy.*” (vs 15-16)

God did everything He could until there was no remedy for the problem. And why was there no remedy? Because God *reasons* with us. That’s how He deals with us—through a relationship. He doesn’t force us to do things. He appeals to our reason and intelligence.

And I think it’s also interesting to note here that the “wrath of the Lord” is linked with the fact that there was no remedy. What does God do when we can’t be persuaded to come over to His way of thinking? What does He do when He cannot reason with us any longer? *He gives up*. That is His wrath. It’s not some angry, vengeful show of force. It’s *giving up*.

That’s precisely how Paul describes it in Romans, chapter 1: “The *wrath of God is being revealed* from

heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, *because God has made it plain to them*. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened . . . Therefore *God gave them over* in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised.” (vs 18-21, 24-25)

Paul goes on to say two more times that God “gave up” those who were hell-bent on leaving Him. This is the definition of God’s wrath. And it’s what God does when there is no remedy for us any longer, because the only way He chooses to appeal to us is through our reason. He won’t force us. He won’t coerce us. He won’t enslave us. We are free to agree with His reasoning . . . and we are free to disagree.

When we are on the wrong track, God sends words to us through His various messengers again and again, because He has *pity* on us. Are you willing to “come and reason” with Him today?