

2 CHRONICLES: GOD'S KING IN GOD'S HOUSE

by Ray C. Stedman

Tremendous riches are hidden away in the neglected book of 2 Chronicles. As I Chronicles was all about King David, 2 Chronicles is all about the house of David. The nation of Israel -- the ten tribes in the north -- is viewed only as it relates to the kingdom of Judah in the south. This book follows only the course of the kings of Judah, the descendants of David. Both I and 2 Chronicles center on the temple, distinguishing these two books from the parallel historical passages recorded in Kings and Samuel. This book gives us a picture of God's king walking in the light of God's house. That is the secret of blessing in the kingdom.

David and Solomon were both types of the Lord Jesus, and together these two men, father and son, picture Christ as king over his people. But these books are also a picture of us as individuals. As we find in Hebrews, Jesus is the pioneer of our salvation. (Heb. 12:2) He is the one who has gone the whole course ahead of us. The principles by which he walked are therefore the principles by which we are to walk. He lived his life as an example. Of course, it isn't his example that saves us; it is his death that saves us. But it is the example of his life that teaches us the principles by which God expects us to walk after we are redeemed. These books picture for us our own will as king of our kingdom. The secret of blessing and victory in the Christian life is to subject the will to the temple of God, which is the human spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit. These Old Testament books, in exquisitely accurate pictures, show us truths in the spiritual kingdom of our own lives. This is one of the great proofs, if not the greatest proof, of the divine inspiration of the Bible. How could men write books that are as wonderfully accurate as these in portraying the issues in the spiritual life? It is simply impossible in the flesh. It is the mark of divine activity.

The first nine chapters of 2 Chronicles all center on the temple. The book opens with a visit of Solomon to the tabernacle in the city of Gibeon. The tabernacle, which had been the center of God's guidance to the people all through the wilderness journey, the days of the judges, the reigns of King Saul and King David, was located in the city of Gibeon. Solomon goes there to make an offering. But the account is immediately transferred from the tabernacle to the temple site which David had bought in Jerusalem. This symbolizes the fact that when the Lord Jesus reigns as king in our life and we yield to his lordship, then we no longer have a relationship with the tabernacle which followed us in our up-and-down experience. We are now walking in a more permanent relationship in which God's king is ruling and walking in the light of God's house. It was in Jerusalem that God had placed his name.

The account goes on in the second chapter to show how the temple was built by Solomon, though planned and supplied for by David. It was Solomon, as a type of Christ as the Prince of Peace, who was given the honor of actually building the temple. He thus represents the picture completed in the New Testament where the Lord Jesus himself is the builder of the temple of the human spirit. Remember in Hebrews we are told that Moses had honor in God's house as a servant but Christ had more honor -- just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. (Heb. 3:3-6) Christ is the builder. He is the one who made the temple of our body which contains the sanctuary of the spirit.

This is pictured for us in the physical temple described here. What a beautiful place it must have been. It was small as temples go, but incomparably beautiful. The whole interior was completely lined with gold. Everything was made of gold. In one place in 2 Chronicles it says that silver was counted as nothing in the days of Solomon. The furniture, except for the ark of the covenant, was rebuilt completely. In other words, this temple is a new beginning. Many of us have experienced this when we intelligently, conscientiously, and with permanent intention, yielded ourselves to the lordship of Jesus Christ. It was as though we had been born again. It was a new beginning, wasn't it? This is why certain groups feel there is a second work of grace. It is such a glorious experience of release, of relief, and of victory that they say it is really something new and different. It actually isn't. Rather, it is the fulfillment of all that was already there in potential. When I received the Lord Jesus, the Spirit of God came to dwell in my life. But he may be there for many months, or even years, before I enter into the fullness of what that means by a willing submission in obedience to the lordship of Christ. This is what is depicted here in the new beginning in the temple. All is remade except the ark of the

covenant -- the guarantee of God needs no renewing.

The prayer of Solomon in chapter 6 shows that the temple was also made for the restoration of sin. Whether the people were under circumstances of spiritual failure or the punishment of captivity, they were to remember that if they would pray in earnestness -- genuinely confessing their sin -- God would hear them, heal their hearts, and restore them to their rightful place. When Solomon had finished his prayer, while all the people waited outside in the temple courts, fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice on the altar. Immediately the temple was filled with a cloud of glory so that the priest could not enter. This was the sign that God had accepted the offering and of the presence of God in this house.

It is immediately followed by an account of the tremendous conquests and glory of the kingdom. We have the account in chapter 9 of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon. Hollywood notwithstanding, the account of the Queen of Sheba is a wonderfully illustrative picture of how God intended the whole of the earth to know the story of his grace. Jews, in the days of Israel, weren't sent out into the whole world as we are commanded to do now in the Great Commission. (Matt. 28:19,20) God's grace was displayed by the building of a land and a people and a place that was so wondrously blessed of God, so obviously different from everyone around, that word of it spread to the uttermost parts of the earth. People came to Jerusalem from all over the earth to hear and to learn the secret of God's activity.

This is a picture for us of God's own supreme method of evangelism. Every believer, wherever he is in the world, is to be living this kind of life with the Spirit of God inhabiting the temple and in control of the will. When believers are walking in obedience to the indwelling Spirit, their lives will so manifest the victory, the rejoicing, the blessing, the prosperity and the joy of the Lord that people round about will ask, "What is there about these people? I want to know what this is all about." When the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon, she saw (9:3b-4):

... the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, and their clothing, his cupbearers, and their clothing, and his burnt offerings which he offered at the house of the Lord, {2 Chr 9:3b-4a RSV}

When she saw all of this, "...there was no more spirit in her." She said, "The half was never told me. I never dreamed it could be like this." (9:5-6) Have you ever had Solomon's experience? Have you ever had somebody say to you after coming to know you intimately, "You know, there is something about your life that drew me when I first saw you. Now I have learned the secret of it. In the inner place of your heart you are resting on the great sacrifice of the Lord Jesus." This is what Peter says:

but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence; {1 Pet 3:15 RSV}

This is God's method of evangelism.

Chapters 10 through 36 go on to give us the record of the kings of Judah up to the time of the captivity of this kingdom. Nine of them were good kings and eleven were bad. Manasseh, who reigned for fifty-five years on the throne of Judah, started out as the worst king in Judah's history and ended up as one of the best, as God reached him, redeemed him, and restored him. As you read through these accounts, the bad kings reveal the pattern of temptation and evil in a disobedient heart. There is a declining standard here. It begins with the infiltration of evil into the kingdom on a rather trivial level. Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, in chapter 10 was unwilling to follow the good counsel of the wise men of his kingdom. He asked the older men, "What shall I do? How shall I treat the people?" They said, "Your father was rather severe with them. If you are more gentle and more lenient, they will love you and serve you." But the young men advised him, "No, don't do that. If your father was strict, you be stricter." Rehoboam refused to follow the old men's good counsel. That is all he did. Yet that was the beginning of the evil that was in its final stages to destroy this kingdom.

A little later, in chapter 12, verse 1, you will find a further lowering of the standards:

When the rule of Rehoboam was established and was strong, he forsook the law of the Lord, {2 Chron 12:1 RSV}

He turned a deaf ear to what God said. As a result, the kingdom was invaded by the Egyptians. The moment there is a turning away from obedience to the rule of God in the temple of God, there is an immediate weakening of the defenses of life, and the enemies come. It was only by God's grace that the Egyptians were turned back. When Rehoboam humbled himself and returned to God, the Egyptians were repelled.

The next bad king, Jehoram, appears in chapter 21, verse 4:

When Jehoram had ascended the throne of his father and was established, he slew all his brothers with the sword, and also some of the princes of Judah. {2 Chr 21:4 RSV}

Jealousy was next. First, there was the refusal to give heed to good advice. Then a deaf ear was turned to the law. Now, the spirit of jealousy begins to assault the kingdom. This is immediately followed, as we read in verse 11, by another downward step:

Moreover he made high places in the hill country of Judah, and led the inhabitants of Jerusalem into unfaithfulness, and made Judah go astray. {2 Chr 12:11 RSV}

In one sense, the high places did not yet represent idolatry. They were high hills where the people of Israel worshipped Jehovah. The problem was that that was not the place where God had told them to worship Jehovah. He had put his name in the temple and it was there that they were to worship and offer sacrifice. They were worshipping out on the hills because that was where their neighbors and friends were worshipping. They were simply down-grading and reducing the true worship of Jehovah to a lower level. This, too, was quickly followed by invasion and by disease. As you read, you find that King Jehoram was immediately afflicted by an invasion from the Philistines -- representing the desires of the flesh.

The next bad king is King Ahaz. In chapter 28, verses 1-2, we read:

Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord, like his father David, but walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. He even made molten images for the Baals; {2 Chr 28:1-2 RSV}

Here is the actual introduction of vile, despicable practices of idolatry which were primarily sexual in nature. Israel was increasingly afflicted by these practices. The kings were responsible for introducing them, as we read of King Ahaz (verses 3-4):

And he burned incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burned his sons as an offering, according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree. {2 Chr 28:3-4 rsv}

The pattern is the same. Again, this is followed by invasion verse 5):

Therefore the Lord his God gave him into the hand of the king of Syria, who defeated him and took captive a great number of his people... {2 Chr 28:5a RSV}

We sometimes wonder why we fall prey to so many of the afflictions and oppressions -- neuroses and psychoses -- of our day. It is because the defenses of the temple are destroyed. Some inner idolatry is weakening us and we find ourselves defenseless against these invaders of the spirit that bring us into depression, frustration, defeat, and darkness. All the way through this book there is a constant battle against the flood of wicked practices during the reign of these kings.

By contrast, the good kings reflect the grace of God in cleansing and restoring and they also reveal the instruments that he uses. There are five great reformations recorded in Israel as God seeks to arrest this

deteriorating process in the nation and bring it back to the place of glory and blessing as in the days of David and Solomon. The first of these periods of reformation was under King Asa found in chapters 14 through 16. In chapter 14, verses 2-3, we read:

And Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God. He took away the foreign altars and the high places, and broke down the pillars and hewed down the Asherim, {2 Chr 14:2-3 RSV}

The sign of Asherim, a symbol of sex, actually signified the worship of the male sex organ. (verse 4)

and commanded Judah to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, and to keep the law and the commandment. {2 Chr 14:4 RSV}

This seeking is followed by deliverance, (verse 9)

Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men [What an attack!] and three hundred chariots, and came as far as Mareshah. {2 Chr 14:9 RSV}

We may be put under pressure at times, but if the heart is obedient to the revelation of the Holy Spirit within the human spirit, the defenses are secure against whatever may come. As Isaiah says, "Thou dost keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusts in thee." (Isaiah 26:3) The principle of power is clearly declared when Asa, returning from the battle with the Ethiopians, meets the prophet Oded (15:2):

And he [Oded] went out to meet Asa, and said to him, "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: The Lord is with you, while you are with him..." {2 Chr 15:2a RSV}

Did you hear that?

"The Lord is with you, while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you." {2 Chr 15:2b RSV}

The forsaking is never that he gives you over completely to be lost. He forsakes in the sense of not providing any power, or victory, or ability to walk. This is the same as the New Testament teaches, isn't it? It declares that God is fully available to you if you are prepared to be fully available to him. Paul says in Philippians, "I press on to make it [the power of his resurrection] my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own." (Phil. 3:12) Or, "I long to be as fully available to him as he is prepared to be available to me." That is always the secret of real power. This was declared to King Asa for his benefit and for ours.

Each of these kings who leads a restoration shows us a different principle of restoration. In Asa we find the determination to obey the law. In chapter 15, verses 12-15:

And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul; and that whoever would not seek the Lord, the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether young or old, man or woman. They took oath to the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with horns. And all Judah rejoiced over the oath; for they had sworn with all their heart, and had sought him with their whole desire, and he was found by them, and the Lord gave them rest round about. {2 Chr 15:12-15 RSV}

Here is a heart that has awakened at last to the fact that it had been drifting off into weakness, into failure, into assault by the enemies, into bondage and slavery again. The way of return is a renewal of the vow, a renewal of the determination, a hunger and thirst for the Lord, to walk in his sight. And immediately there is a return to rest.

Then in the reign of King Jehoshaphat, the next king on the throne of Judah, there is another time of restoration after a time of failure. Jehoshaphat cleans out the idols of the land. In chapter 17, verse 7-9, the second principle of restoration, the ministry of teaching, is set forth:

In the third year of his reign he sent his princes, ... {2 Chr 17:7a RSV}

And they taught in Judah, having the book of the law of the Lord with them; they went about through all the cities of Judah and taught among the people. {2 Chr 17:9 RSV}

That was the principle of this return -- the ministry of teaching, followed immediately by deliverance. Look at verse 10:

And the fear of the Lord fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, and they made no war against Jehoshaphat. {2 Chr 17:10 RSV}

Later, however, Jehoshaphat in weakness makes an alliance with Israel and there is an invasion from Ammon, Moab, and Edom -- all types of the flesh. But God delivers him in a wonderful way. It would be well worth your time to read this carefully. God says you don't have to fight these enemies of the flesh. Don't try to subdue with your will power all these evil desire -- of bitterness, jealousy, revenge, and lust -- all the feelings within yourself. Don't try to fight them. God says, "Believe. That is the way of victory. You are not capable, in yourself, of defeating these things." Instead, "Stand still and you will see the deliverance of God." So God fought for them and these enemies were defeated. In chapter 20, verse 24:

When Judah came to the watchtower of the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude; and behold, they were dead bodies lying on the ground; none had escaped. {2 Chr 20:24 RSV}

Believe what God has done to the flesh in the cross of Christ. We do not have to fight the flesh. Nail it to his cross, rendering it absolutely worthless. When we believe and act on that principle, these things disappear. Even if they come back again five minutes later, they can always be overcome by this principle.

In King Joash, chapters 23 and 24, you have the third principle of restoration. The third restoration of Israel was by the collection of taxes on all things. Chapter 24, 4-5, tell us:

After this Joash decided to restore the house of the Lord. And he gathered the priests and the Levites, and said to them, "Go out to the cities of Judah, and gather from all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year; and see that you hasten the matter." {2 Chr 24:4-5a RSV}

Here is something that had been neglected. No one had been paying the costs for repairing the temple, so it had fallen into such disrepair that the doors were actually shut. No sacrifice was being offered in the temple at all. Joash, realizing this, gathered in money to restore the temple. Now if the temple is the spirit, the restoring and repairing of it is a picture of the strengthening of the spirit. How? By what we call restitution -- the paying of that which is owed. It may be an apology to someone, or the restoring of something wrongfully taken, or the putting back of something that has been wrongfully used. No matter what it may be, this is the principle of return and restitution.

Then in Hezekiah's reign is the fourth principle of restoration, in chapters 29 through 32 -- the cleansing of the temple. When Hezekiah came to the throne, the nation had fallen on such terribly evil days that the temple had actually been filled with rubbish and filth. There was garbage throughout all the courts. Hezekiah set the people to cleaning the temple. They started carrying out the rubbish and it took them sixteen days, so much had accumulated. At last, when the temple was clean, they restored the worship and celebrated the Passover for the first time since the days of Solomon. What does this picture? It is the cleansing of the temple of our spirit, the putting away of the filth that has accumulated, the turning away from ideas and concepts to which we have given ourselves. and the turning back to the worship and the cleansing of the Lord.

Then in Josiah, the last good king of Judah, you find the last principle of restoration. When Josiah came to the throne, the temple had fallen into complete disuse again. He set the people to cleaning it up and in chapter 34, verse 14, we read:

While they were bringing out the money that had been brought into the house of the

**Lord, Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law of the Lord given through Moses.
{2 Chr 34:14 RSV}**

This sounds incredible, but the people had actually forgotten that there was a copy of the law of Moses in the temple. It had been so neglected in the land that it had been totally forgotten. When the priests went through the temple to clean it, they accidentally found the law of the Lord, brought it to the king, and read it to him (34:19):

When the king heard the words of the law he rent his clothes. {2 Chr 34:19 RSV}

He commanded the men around him to inquire of the Lord what he should do. In verses 29-31a, we are told:

The king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up to the house of the Lord, with all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the Levites, all the people both great and small; and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which had been found in the house of the Lord. And the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord and to keep his commandments ... {2 Chr 34:29-31a RSV}

So the last principle of restoration is that of a return to the hearing of the word.

But the people had gone a long way down. The patience of God was ended. The last chapter gives us the account of the terrible, dark days when Nebuchadnezzar took the city captive and set a puppet king upon the throne, who rebelled against him. Then Nebuchadnezzar set his brother on the throne, until at last he came to destroy both the rebellious city and the temple with fire.

Now go back for a moment to the early chapters and look again at that wonderful scene when Solomon, in all his royal robes of glory, is kneeling before the people and praying to the God of heaven. The whole kingdom is at peace. Solomon is reigning over the uttermost limits of the kingdom promised to Abraham, from the River Euphrates clear down to the River Egypt. All the peoples around him are at peace and the fame of this kingdom has gone out to the ends of the earth.

People were actually making pilgrimages to the city of Jerusalem to see the glory of God. The fire of God comes down from heaven and the glory of God fills the whole of the temple like a cloud -- what a marvelous sight. Then think of this final scene, with the temple lying in ruins, the city destroyed, the people slaves and bondservants in a foreign country, and the whole of the land given over to its enemies. This is the picture that God draws for us of what can happen when the heart walks in disobedience. Yet God's patience is visible in the whole story of this book -- how he intervenes, again and again, to call his people back.

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