THE BOOK OF 2 CHRONICLES

# The King Who Hears from Heaven

*2 Chronicles, Unfiltered*

*For teens who think they've heard it all*

**BILL McLEOD**

*Papa Bill Books*

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Hears from Heaven: The Book of 2 Chronicles, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

**AI Disclosure.** This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

# Before You Start

You know the saying by now: “If you want to get something done, hire a teenager while they still know it all.” You may know one verse from 2 Chronicles without knowing it’s from 2 Chronicles. It shows up on church signs, coffee mugs, and posters: “if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven.” But most people have never read the rest of the book.

2 Chronicles tells the story of the kings of Judah, from Solomon to the exile in Babylon. If you’ve read 1 and 2 Kings, many of the names will be familiar. But just like 1 Chronicles, this book tells the story from a different angle and for a different audience: God’s people who had come home from exile and were trying to rebuild their lives around a humble new temple.

Over and over, 2 Chronicles asks one question about every king: did he seek the LORD? The kings who seek God find help. The kings who abandon Him find trouble. And again and again, when people humble themselves and pray, even the worst of them, God hears. That’s the message of the whole book. It’s a message for anyone who has ever wondered whether it’s too late to turn back.

Let’s go.

## How This Book Works

This book walks through 2 Chronicles in eight chapters: Solomon’s temple and its dedication (2 Chronicles 1–7), the kingdom splits (8–

12), Asa (13–16), Jehoshaphat (17–20), from Joash to Uzziah (21–28), Hezekiah's great Passover (29–32), Manasseh and Josiah (33–35), and the fall of Jerusalem and Cyrus's decree (36).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains what kind of book 2 Chronicles is, when it was written, and how it's different from 1 and 2 Kings. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or argue about with friends; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as how 2 Chronicles 7:14 applies today, I'll lay out the main views fairly and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes 2 Chronicles in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

# A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the fourteenth book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some humor, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Rather than retelling 1 and 2 Kings, this book focuses on what makes 2 Chronicles distinct: its focus on Judah, the temple, worship, and the call to seek God, along with stories found only in Chronicles, such as Hezekiah's invitation to the northern tribes and Manasseh's repentance in exile. A balanced box on 2 Chronicles 7:14 explains the verse's original setting, God's answer to Solomon's temple prayer for Israel, and how Christians have applied its call to humility and prayer today, while cautioning against turning it into a political slogan for any nation or party.

Real Talk boxes address pride, fear, anxiety, peer pressure, finishing well, and the hope that no one is too far gone for God. Where relevant, readers are pointed to trusted adults, and the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is listed for anyone in crisis.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows how the New Testament sees the temple, repentance, and the book's open-ended final words fulfilled in Jesus, while acknowledging that Jewish

readers treasure Chronicles as the final book of the Hebrew Bible. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, in the chapters and in the Key Verses, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. They work well for a youth group, a small group, a family dinner table, or a car ride. Don't rush to the right answer. Let them wrestle. Faith that has been thought through tends to last.

My prayer is that every reader will finish 2 Chronicles convinced that God hears humble prayer, and that it is never too late to seek Him.

*Grace and peace,*

**Bill McLeod**

*Papa Bill Books*

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

# Setting the Scene

## What Kind of Book Is This?

2 Chronicles is the second half of one long book, Chronicles, which was split in two because it was too long for one scroll. 1 Chronicles covered the family tree of Israel and the reign of David. 2 Chronicles covers Solomon and the kings of Judah who came after him, ending with the destruction of Jerusalem and the decree of Cyrus king of Persia, about 970 to 538 BC.

## Who Was It For?

Chronicles was written after the exile, probably in the 400s or 300s BC, for Jews who had returned from Babylon to a rebuilt but humble temple in Jerusalem. They had no king and lived under Persian rule. The Chronicler wanted them to learn from their history: when their ancestors sought God, He helped them; when they abandoned Him, disaster followed; and when they humbled themselves and returned, He forgave. That pattern gave the returning exiles hope that God would hear them too.

## How Is It Different from Kings?

1 and 2 Kings tell the story of both kingdoms, north and south, and explain why both fell. 2 Chronicles focuses almost entirely on Judah, the southern kingdom, where David's family ruled and the temple stood. It says very little about the northern kings, except when they interact with Judah. It includes many stories that Kings doesn't, especially about worship, prayer, and repentance. And it

adds a lot of detail about the temple, the priests, the Levites, and the singers.

## The Big Idea: Seek the LORD

If you read 2 Chronicles carefully, you'll notice certain words coming up again and again: seek, humble, pray, turn, heart, forsake. These words are the key to the book. The Chronicler judges every king by one question: did he seek the LORD with all his heart? The answer explains almost everything that happens to him. And in 2 Chronicles, God is quick to respond when people humble themselves, even the worst of them.

## The Last Book of the Hebrew Bible

In Christian Bibles, 2 Chronicles comes in the middle of the Old Testament, after Kings and before Ezra. But in the Hebrew Bible, called the Tanakh, the books are arranged differently, and Chronicles comes last. That means the Hebrew Scriptures end not with a neat conclusion, but with an invitation from Cyrus king of Persia to God's people: let him go up. The story ends in the middle of a journey.

## The Map

Chapter 1 (2 Chronicles 1–7): The house of God.

Chapter 2 (2 Chronicles 8–12): The kingdom splits.

Chapter 3 (2 Chronicles 13–16): Asa.

Chapter 4 (2 Chronicles 17–20): Jehoshaphat.

Chapter 5 (2 Chronicles 21–28): From Joash to Uzziah.

Chapter 6 (2 Chronicles 29–32): Hezekiah's great Passover.

Chapter 7 (2 Chronicles 33–35): Manasseh and Josiah.

Chapter 8 (2 Chronicles 36): Let him go up.

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CHAPTER 1

# The House of God

*2 Chronicles 1–7*

2 Chronicles opens with Solomon firmly on the throne and God with him. Solomon goes to Gibeon, where the old tabernacle from Moses' time still stands, and offers a thousand sacrifices. That night, God appears to him with an astonishing offer. "Ask for what you want me to give you."

Solomon asks for wisdom. "Now give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this great people of yours?" God is pleased. Because Solomon didn't ask for riches, honor, revenge on his enemies, or a long life, God gives him wisdom and all the rest too.

If you've read 1 Kings, you know that story. What's different here is what comes next. 1 Kings spends time on Solomon's wise rulings and his palace. 2 Chronicles goes almost straight to the temple. Of the first nine chapters, six are about building and dedicating it. For the Chronicler's readers, who were worshiping in a rebuilt temple, this was the story of where their worship came from.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Mount Moriah**
>
> 2 Chronicles 3 says Solomon built the temple "on Mount Moriah," on the threshing floor of Ornan, where God had stopped the plague in David's day. Moriah is also where Abraham went to offer Isaac in Genesis 22, and where God provided a ram instead. The Chronicler is connecting three moments:

> Abraham's near-sacrifice, David's sacrifice that stopped the plague, and the temple where sacrifices would be offered for centuries. Many Christians see a fourth connection. Jesus was crucified just outside Jerusalem, close to this same area, as the sacrifice God Himself provided.

Solomon understands that no building can hold God. He writes to King Huram of Tyre, asking for cedar and skilled workers, and says, "But who is able to build him a house, since heaven and the heaven of heavens can't contain him?" The temple isn't a box for God. It's a place where God chooses to meet His people.

The temple takes seven years to build. It's covered in gold, decorated with carved cherubim, palm trees, and flowers, and furnished with a huge bronze basin, lampstands, tables, and altars. When it's finished, Solomon gathers all Israel, and the priests carry the ark of the covenant into the Most Holy Place.

Then comes the moment the whole project was for. The Levite singers and musicians, dressed in fine linen, stand with cymbals, harps, and lyres, along with 120 priests blowing trumpets. And "the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD." They sing, "For he is good, for his loving kindness endures forever." And at that moment, a cloud fills the temple, "so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; for the LORD's glory filled God's house."

That detail is unique to Chronicles. In 1 Kings, the cloud comes after the ark is put in place. In 2 Chronicles, it comes when the people worship with one voice. God's presence shows up in the middle of praise.

> **REAL TALK** **When Worship Is One Sound**
>
> The singers and trumpeters were "as one." Hundreds of people, different instruments, different voices, all focused on praising God together. It's a

> beautiful picture of what worship can be. Worship isn't a performance, and it isn't just about the music you like. It's a whole community turning its attention to God at the same time. Next time you're at church or youth group, try to stop worrying about how you sound or what people think, and focus on the words. You're part of something much bigger than one song.

Then Solomon kneels on a bronze platform in front of everyone, raises his hands toward heaven, and prays. He praises God for keeping His promises to David. Then he asks the big question: "But will God indeed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens can't contain you; how much less this house which I have built!"

He asks God to keep His eyes open toward the temple day and night and to listen when people pray toward it. And over and over, he asks one thing: "hear from your dwelling place, even from heaven; and when you hear, forgive." He lists situations where people will need God's help: when someone wrongs a neighbor, when Israel loses a battle because of sin, when there's no rain, when there's famine or plague, when foreigners come to pray, when the army goes to war.

The last situation is the one that mattered most to the Chronicler's readers. "If they sin against you (for there is no man who doesn't sin)," and You let them be carried away into exile, and then they come to their senses there, and turn back to You, and pray toward this land and this house, "then hear from heaven, even from your dwelling place, their prayer and their petitions, and maintain their cause, and forgive your people who have sinned against you." Solomon was praying, centuries ahead of time, for the exiles. And the people reading Chronicles were those exiles' children.

Solomon's prayer is worth reading in full, because it's so honest about human nature. He doesn't pray as if Israel will always be

faithful. He assumes they will fail. Notice his little aside in the middle: there is no one who doesn't sin. Solomon knows that the temple won't make people perfect. What it will do is give them a place to come back to when they fail. That's a helpful way to think about church, prayer, and faith. They aren't only for people who have it all together. They're for people who have messed up and need somewhere to turn. The most important prayer in Solomon's list isn't for a perfect people. It's for forgiven ones.

When Solomon finishes praying, "fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the LORD's glory filled the house." The people fall on their faces on the pavement and worship, singing again, "For he is good, for his loving kindness endures forever!"

Later, the LORD appears to Solomon at night and answers his prayer. "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for myself for a house of sacrifice." If I shut up the sky so there's no rain, or send locusts or plague, "if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

But God also gives a warning. If you turn away and serve other gods, I will uproot you from the land, and this temple will become a joke among the nations. The Chronicler's readers knew that this warning had come true. But they also knew the promise was still there.

**BACKGROUND CHECK** **What Does 7:14 Mean Today?**

2 Chronicles 7:14 is one of the most quoted verses in the Bible, and it's worth reading carefully. In its original setting, God was speaking to Solomon about Israel, the people "called by my name," in the land He had given them, connected to the temple Solomon had just built. The healing of the land

refers first to things like rain, crops, and an end to plagues, the disasters listed in verse 13. Christians apply the verse today in different ways. Many believe its pattern still holds for God's people anywhere: when believers humble themselves, pray, seek God, and turn from sin, God hears and forgives, and renewal often follows. The New Testament echoes this, as James says, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he will exalt you." Others emphasize that no modern nation is in Israel's position, so the promise to heal the land shouldn't be read as a guarantee for any country. Most agree on a couple of cautions. The verse is addressed to God's people, not to a nation's government or to people who disagree with us. It calls us to humble ourselves and turn from our own wicked ways, not to point fingers at others. And it isn't a political slogan for any party or country. Read in context, it's an invitation to humble, honest prayer, starting with me.

**KEY VERSE**

*if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*

**2 Chronicles 7:14 (WEB)**

## REAL TALK

1. Solomon said that heaven itself can't contain God. Why build a temple at all?
2. Why do you think God's glory filled the temple at the moment the people worshiped together?
3. Solomon prayed ahead of time for people who would fail. What does that tell you about God's mercy?
4. What do you think it looks like to humble yourself, pray, seek God's face, and turn from your wicked ways today?

**TRY THIS** *Take ten minutes this week to pray through 2 Chronicles 7:14 for yourself, one phrase at a time. Ask God to show you one way you need to humble yourself or turn.*

CHAPTER 2

# The Kingdom Splits

*2 Chronicles 8–12*

Solomon's reign is the high point of Israel's history. He builds cities, trades across the world, and becomes wealthier than any king on earth. The Queen of Sheba hears about his fame and comes all the way to Jerusalem "with a very great caravan, including camels that bore spices, gold in abundance, and precious stones." She tests him with hard questions, and he answers every one. She is so overwhelmed that she says the reports didn't tell half of it. And she praises Solomon's God, who made him king "to do justice and righteousness."

**BACKGROUND CHECK** **What Chronicles Leaves Out**

In 1 Kings 11, we learn that Solomon married hundreds of foreign wives, that they turned his heart toward other gods, and that God told him the kingdom would be torn from his son. 2 Chronicles leaves that out completely, just as 1 Chronicles left out David's sin with Bathsheba. The Chronicler isn't hiding the facts; his readers had Kings, and Chronicles itself mentions elsewhere that Solomon's foreign wives led him into sin. He's focusing on Solomon as the builder of the temple. But the consequences of Solomon's choices show up anyway in what happens next.

After Solomon dies, his son Rehoboam goes to Shechem to be crowned. The northern tribes, led by Jeroboam, come to him with a request. "Your father made our yoke grievous. Now therefore make

the grievous service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put on us, lighter, and we will serve you." Solomon's building projects had required heavy taxes and forced labor, and the people were exhausted.

Rehoboam asks for three days to think. First, he asks the older advisers who served his father. They tell him: be kind to them and speak good words, and they'll serve you forever. Then he asks the young men he grew up with. They tell him to be tough. Tell them, my little finger is thicker than my father's waist.

Rehoboam goes with his friends. "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to it. My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions."

The response is immediate. "What portion do we have in David?" the northern tribes shout. "Every man to your tents, Israel!" Ten tribes break away and make Jeroboam their king. Rehoboam is left with just Judah and Benjamin. The kingdom David built is split in two, and it will never be united again.

> **REAL TALK** **Whose Advice Do You Take?**
>
> Rehoboam had two sets of advisers. The older ones had experience and wisdom. The younger ones were his friends, and they told him what he wanted to hear. He chose his friends, and it cost him most of his kingdom. That doesn't mean young people never give good advice or that old people are always right. But it's worth asking: when you have a big decision, who are you listening to? Are they wise? Do they have experience? Do they care about what's right, or only about making you feel strong? It's also worth noticing that the wise advice was about kindness. Being a leader isn't about being tough. It's about serving people.

It's worth pausing on how quickly a kingdom can fall apart. Solomon had spent forty years building the richest, most powerful

kingdom Israel would ever have. His son lost most of it in a single conversation. One harsh answer, given to impress his friends, undid generations of work. Words carry more weight than we think. A harsh answer in an argument, a cruel post online, or a dismissive comment to a parent can break trust in seconds that takes years to rebuild. Proverbs puts it this way: a gentle answer turns away wrath. Rehoboam learned that lesson the hard way.

From here on, 2 Chronicles follows only Judah, the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom of Israel almost disappears from the story. Why? Because for the Chronicler, Judah was where David's family ruled and where the temple stood.

But the Chronicler never forgets that the northern tribes are part of God's people. And he records something interesting. When Jeroboam set up golden calves and appointed his own priests, the priests and Levites in the north left their land and moved to Judah. "After them, out of all the tribes of Israel, those who set their hearts to seek the LORD, the God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the LORD, the God of their fathers." Faithful people from every tribe were drawn to the place where God was worshiped. The kingdom was divided, but God's people weren't defined by political borders. They were defined by whether they sought Him.

For three years, Rehoboam's kingdom does well. But then "when the kingdom of Rehoboam was established and he was strong, he abandoned the LORD's law, and all Israel with him." Notice the pattern. When things were hard, Rehoboam followed God. When he got comfortable and strong, he drifted away. This pattern will come up again and again in 2 Chronicles.

So King Shishak of Egypt invades with a huge army, captures Judah's fortified cities, and marches on Jerusalem. The prophet

Shemaiah brings Rehoboam a blunt message: "The LORD says, 'You have forsaken me, therefore I have also left you in the hand of Shishak.'"

Rehoboam and the leaders respond the right way. They "humbled themselves; and they said, 'The LORD is righteous.'" And God responds immediately. "They have humbled themselves. I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance." Shishak still takes the treasures from the temple and the palace, including the gold shields Solomon had made. Rehoboam replaces them with bronze ones. It's a sad picture of a kingdom that has lost its shine. But Jerusalem isn't destroyed.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Shishak in History**
>
> Shishak is known from Egyptian records as Pharaoh Sheshonq I, who ruled around 945 to 924 BC. On a wall of the great temple of Karnak in Egypt, he recorded a list of more than 150 towns he conquered in a military campaign into Canaan. Many of the names are places in Israel and Judah. It's one of the earliest outside records that matches events in the Bible.

This is the first clear example of the book's big theme in action. Humility brings mercy. "When he humbled himself, the LORD's wrath turned from him." But the Chronicler's final verdict on Rehoboam is sobering: "He did that which was evil, because he didn't set his heart to seek the LORD." He humbled himself once, in a crisis. But he never set his heart to seek God as a way of life.

> **REAL TALK** **Comfortable and Strong**
>
> It's often easier to pray when you're struggling than when life is good. When you're stressed, sick, scared, or sad, you reach for God. When everything is going well, it's easy to forget Him. Rehoboam drifted away when he felt secure. If life is good for you right now, that's a gift. Thank God for it. But don't

let comfort pull you away from Him. Seeking God isn't just for emergencies. It's for every day.

**KEY VERSE**

*After them, out of all the tribes of Israel, those who set their hearts to seek the LORD, the God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the LORD, the God of their fathers.*

**2 Chronicles 11:16 (WEB)**

## REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Rehoboam listened to his friends instead of the older advisers?
2. What made the faithful people from the northern tribes move to Jerusalem? What did it cost them?
3. Why is it so easy to drift away from God when life is comfortable?
4. What's the difference between humbling yourself once in a crisis and setting your heart to seek God?

**TRY THIS** *Think of a decision you're facing. Ask one wise, older person for their advice this week, and really listen.*

CHAPTER 3

# Asa

*2 Chronicles 13–16*

Rehoboam's son Abijah reigns only three years, but the Chronicler tells one story about him that Kings doesn't. Jeroboam's army, twice the size of Judah's, surrounds Abijah's troops. Before the battle, Abijah stands on a mountain and shouts to the northern army. You've abandoned the LORD, made golden calves, and driven out His priests. "Behold, God is with us at our head, and his priests with the trumpets of alarm." Don't fight against the LORD. You won't win.

Jeroboam ambushes them anyway, and Judah finds itself attacked from front and back. They cry out to the LORD, the priests blow the trumpets, and the men of Judah shout. God gives them a stunning victory.

Then Abijah's son Asa becomes king, and his story is one of the most interesting in the book, because it starts so well and ends so sadly.

"Asa did that which was good and right in the LORD his God's eyes." He tears down the altars to foreign gods, smashes their sacred stones, and cuts down the Asherah poles. And he "commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, and to obey his law and command." For ten years, the land has peace.

Then an enormous army from Cush, the region south of Egypt, invades Judah. The Bible describes it as a vast army with three hundred chariots. Asa's army is much smaller. So Asa prays one of the great prayers of the Bible. "LORD, there is no one besides you to help, between the mighty and him who has no strength. Help us, LORD our God; for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this multitude. LORD, you are our God. Don't let man prevail against you."

God answers, and Judah wins.

On the way home, a prophet named Azariah meets Asa with a message that sums up the whole book of Chronicles. "The LORD is with you while you are with him; and if you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will forsake you." And then he adds an encouragement: "But you be strong! Don't let your hands be slack, for your work will be rewarded."

Asa takes it to heart. He removes even more idols, repairs the altar of the LORD, and gathers the people of Judah, along with many from the northern tribes who had come over to him when they saw that the LORD was with him. They make a covenant together "to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul." "All Judah rejoiced at the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found by them." Asa even removes his own grandmother from her position as queen mother because she had made an idol for Asherah. Faithfulness cost him something at home.

> **REAL TALK** **Seeking with Your Whole Heart**
>
> Notice the phrases: with all their heart, with all their soul, with their whole desire. Seeking God isn't something you do halfway. It's not just showing up to church or praying when you need something. It's wanting God more than

> anything else. Jeremiah later wrote, "You shall seek me and find me, when you search for me with all your heart." That doesn't mean you have to be perfect. It means you keep turning your heart toward Him, again and again. And His promise is that when you seek Him like that, He will be found.

Notice what Azariah's message does. It doesn't just warn Asa about what could go wrong. It encourages him to keep going: be strong, don't let your hands go slack, your work will be rewarded. Sometimes the hardest part of following God isn't starting. It's continuing after the first big victory, when the excitement wears off and faithfulness turns into daily, ordinary work. Asa listened, and for twenty-five years Judah had peace. Encouragement like that is something you can give to others too. A short message to a friend who is trying to do the right thing, telling them you see it and it matters, can be exactly what keeps them going.

But Asa's story doesn't end there. In the thirty-sixth year of his reign, King Baasha of Israel builds a fortress just north of Jerusalem to cut off travel into Judah. This time, Asa doesn't pray. He takes silver and gold from the temple treasury and sends it to the king of Syria, asking him to break his treaty with Israel and attack them instead. The plan works. Baasha pulls back.

But a prophet named Hanani comes to Asa. "Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and have not relied on the LORD your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped out of your hand." Remember the huge army from Cush? Because you relied on the LORD, He gave you victory. "For the LORD's eyes run back and forth throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. You have done foolishly in this; for from now on you will have wars."

**REAL TALK** **God Is Looking for You**

Hanani's words to Asa contain one of the most encouraging pictures in the Bible. God's eyes are moving across the whole earth, searching. Not searching for people to catch doing something wrong, but searching for people whose hearts are fully His, so He can show Himself strong for them. The word perfect here means whole or completely devoted, not flawless. God isn't looking for perfect people. He's looking for people who are all in. That could be you.

Asa doesn't take the rebuke well. He's furious. He throws Hanani in prison and starts oppressing some of the people. Then, near the end of his life, he develops a severe disease in his feet. "His disease was exceedingly great; yet in his disease he didn't seek the LORD, but just the physicians."

**BACKGROUND CHECK** **Is It Wrong to See a Doctor?**

Some people have read this verse as meaning that going to a doctor is a lack of faith. That's not what it says. The problem wasn't that Asa saw physicians. It was that he saw only physicians and didn't seek the LORD at all. The Bible elsewhere treats medicine as a good gift; Paul told Timothy to take some wine for his stomach, and Luke, who wrote two books of the New Testament, was a doctor. The lesson is to seek God and also use the help He provides. If you're sick, or struggling with your mental health, go to a doctor or counselor and pray. Those two things belong together.

Asa started so well. He prayed one of the great prayers of faith. He led a national revival. But in the last years of his life, he relied on his own schemes, refused correction, and stopped seeking God. His story is a warning for every believer: it's not just how you start. It's how you finish.

**KEY VERSE**

*For the LORD's eyes run back and forth throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. You have done foolishly in this; for from now on you will have wars.*

**2 Chronicles 16:9 (WEB)**

## REAL TALK

1. Asa trusted God against the huge army from Cush, but not against Baasha. Why do you think he changed?
2. Azariah said, "if you seek him, he will be found by you." What does it look like to seek God with your whole heart?
3. Why do you think Asa got so angry when Hanani corrected him? How do you respond to correction?
4. What helps someone finish well in their faith, not just start well?

**TRY THIS** *Write a short prayer like Asa's first one, telling God about something too big for you, and telling Him you're relying on Him. Then pray it each day this week.*

CHAPTER 4

# Jehoshaphat

*2 Chronicles 17–20*

Asa's son Jehoshaphat is one of the best kings in the book. "The LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and didn't seek the Baals, but sought the God of his father." His heart, the Chronicler says, "was lifted up in the ways of the LORD." That's a great phrase. Pride lifts a heart up in a bad way. Jehoshaphat's heart was lifted up with courage and enthusiasm for God.

In his third year, Jehoshaphat does something no king before him had done. He sends officials, Levites, and priests throughout Judah. "They taught in Judah, having the book of the LORD's law with them. They went about throughout all the cities of Judah and taught among the people." It was a traveling Bible school. Jehoshaphat understood that a nation can't seek God if it doesn't know what God has said.

But even good kings make bad choices. Jehoshaphat makes an alliance with Ahab, the wicked king of Israel, and arranges a marriage between his son and Ahab's daughter. That decision will cause disaster for Judah for years to come.

Then Ahab invites Jehoshaphat to go to war with him. Ahab's four hundred prophets all promise victory. Jehoshaphat isn't convinced.

"Isn't there here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we may inquire of him?" Ahab admits there's one, Micaiah, "but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me." Micaiah is summoned and pressured to agree with everyone else. But he says, "As the LORD lives, I will say what my God says." He predicts Ahab's death. Ahab goes into battle anyway, disguised, and dies from a random arrow. Jehoshaphat, wearing his royal robes, is nearly killed. He cries out, and God helps him.

When he gets home, the prophet Jehu son of Hanani confronts him. "Should you help the wicked, and love those who hate the LORD?" But then he adds, "Nevertheless there are good things found in you." God sees both the failures and the faithfulness.

> **REAL TALK** **The Company You Keep**
>
> Jehoshaphat was a good man, but his alliance with Ahab almost got him killed and later brought Ahab's family into Judah's royal house, with terrible results. The people closest to you shape your choices more than you realize. That doesn't mean you should only hang out with Christians or avoid people who are different from you. Jesus was a friend of sinners. But it does mean being careful about whose influence you let into the steering wheel of your life. Ask yourself whether your closest friends help you follow God or pull you away from Him.

Jehoshaphat takes the correction well. He goes out among the people himself, bringing them back to the LORD, and he appoints judges in every city. He gives them a charge that still applies to anyone with power: "Consider what you do, for you don't judge for man, but for the LORD." No bribes. No favoritism. God is watching.

Then comes the most famous story of Jehoshaphat's reign, found only in Chronicles. A huge army of Moabites, Ammonites, and

others is marching toward Judah. They're already at En Gedi, near the Dead Sea, less than a day away.

"Jehoshaphat was alarmed, and set himself to seek the LORD." He calls a fast throughout Judah, and people come from every town to seek help from the LORD. They stand together in front of the temple, men, women, and children, and Jehoshaphat prays.

He reminds God who He is. "LORD, the God of our fathers, aren't you God in heaven? Aren't you ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations?" He reminds God of His promises, and of Solomon's prayer that God would hear when His people cried out to Him from this temple. And then he ends with one of the most honest prayers in the Bible: "For we have no might against this great company that comes against us. We don't know what to do, but our eyes are on you."

> **REAL TALK** **When You Don't Know What to Do**
>
> Jehoshaphat was the king. He was supposed to have the answers. And he stood in front of his entire nation and admitted, we don't know what to do. That takes humility. Sometimes life throws things at you that you can't fix: a family crisis, a diagnosis, a friendship falling apart, anxiety that won't go away, a decision with no good options. It's okay not to know what to do. What matters is where you look. Paul wrote, "In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." Keep your eyes on Him. And don't carry it alone; talk to a trusted adult, a pastor, or a counselor. If you're feeling overwhelmed to the point of not wanting to live, please call or text 988.

While the whole crowd stands there waiting, the Spirit of the LORD comes on a Levite named Jahaziel. "Don't be afraid, and don't be dismayed because of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's." Go down tomorrow. "You will not need to fight this

battle. Set yourselves, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you."

Jehoshaphat bows to the ground, and all the people fall down and worship. Then the Levites stand up and praise God "with an exceedingly loud voice."

The next morning, Jehoshaphat does something that makes no military sense. He tells the people, "Believe in the LORD your God, so you will be established!" Then he appoints singers to march out in front of the army, dressed in holy clothes, singing, "Give thanks to the LORD, for his loving kindness endures forever."

Imagine being in that choir. You're walking toward an enemy army, in front of the soldiers, armed with nothing but a song.

"When they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushers against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were struck." The enemy armies turn on each other. By the time Judah reaches the lookout point in the wilderness, all they see is the aftermath. The battle is over. It takes them three days to collect all the plunder.

On the fourth day, they gather in a valley and name it the Valley of Beracah, which means blessing, because they spent the day praising God. Then they march back to Jerusalem "with joy; for the LORD had made them to rejoice over their enemies," with harps, lyres, and trumpets, straight to the temple.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Praise as a Weapon?**
>
> Some Christians have taken this story as a pattern: praise God first, and He'll fight your battles. There's truth in that. Praising God in a hard situation reminds us who's really in charge and moves our focus from the problem to Him. But it's important not to turn the story into a technique, as if singing the

right songs guarantees the outcome you want. Judah sang because God had already promised victory through His prophet. Their praise was an act of trust in what God had said. Paul wrote that "the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh." Worship, prayer, and trust are real spiritual weapons, but they work because of who God is, not because of the words we use.

**KEY VERSE**

*Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no might against this great company that comes against us. We don't know what to do, but our eyes are on you.*

**2 Chronicles 20:12 (WEB)**

## REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Jehoshaphat sent teachers around the country with God's law?
2. What's a situation in your life where you honestly don't know what to do?
3. What would it look like to say, "our eyes are on you," in that situation?
4. Why do you think God had the choir go in front of the army?

**TRY THIS** *The next time you feel anxious this week, stop and pray your own version of Jehoshaphat's prayer out loud: God, I don't know what to do, but my eyes are on You. Then put on a worship song and listen to the words.*

CHAPTER 5

# From Joash to Uzziah

*2 Chronicles 21–28*

After Jehoshaphat, Judah goes through a dark stretch. His son Jehoram marries Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, and that alliance Jehoshaphat made with Ahab bears bitter fruit. Jehoram murders all six of his brothers as soon as he takes the throne. He leads Judah into idolatry. And yet the Chronicler pauses to say that God would not destroy David's house, "because of the covenant that he had made with David, and as he promised to give a lamp to him and to his children always."

Jehoram dies of a painful disease, and the Chronicler adds a sad note: no one was sorry to see him go. After his son Ahaziah is killed, Athaliah seizes power and tries to wipe out the royal family. One baby, Joash, is rescued by his aunt and hidden in the temple for six years, until the priest Jehoiada leads a revolt and crowns him king at seven years old. If you've read 2 Kings, you know this story. It's one of the closest calls in the history of David's family.

Joash does well while Jehoiada is alive. He repairs the temple, which had been looted and neglected under Athaliah. He sets up a chest at the temple gate, and the people joyfully bring their offerings until it's full, again and again. The work is finished, and the temple is restored.

But then Jehoiada dies at 130 years old, and he's buried among the kings, an unusual honor for a priest. And everything changes. The leaders of Judah come to Joash, bow down, and flatter him, "Then the king listened to them." They abandon the temple and go back to idols.

God sends prophets to call them back, but they won't listen. Then the Spirit of God comes on Zechariah, Jehoiada's own son, and he stands up in front of the people. Why are you disobeying the LORD's commands? You can't prosper this way. You've abandoned Him, and so He has abandoned you.

The people conspire against him, and at the king's command, they stone him to death in the courtyard of the temple. Joash, the boy whose life had been saved by Zechariah's father, has the son of his rescuer murdered.

**BACKGROUND CHECK** **From A to Z**

Hundreds of years later, Jesus mentioned Zechariah when He warned the religious leaders of His day about the long history of God's people rejecting His messengers. He spoke of the blood of the righteous from Abel to Zechariah, who was killed between the sanctuary and the altar. Since Chronicles was the last book in the Hebrew Bible, many scholars think Jesus meant something like from the first book to the last, or from A to Z: from the first murder in Genesis to the last murder of a prophet in Chronicles. Jesus was saying that the rejection of God's messengers ran through the whole story, and it was about to reach its climax.

**REAL TALK** **When the Mentor Is Gone**

Joash's faith seems to have depended on Jehoiada. When Jehoiada was gone, Joash listened to flatterers instead. It's a pattern worth watching for in your own life. Maybe your faith has been strong because of a parent, a youth leader, a camp, or a friend. What happens when you go to college, move away, or those people aren't around? The best time to build a faith that's your

> own is now. Read the Bible for yourself. Pray on your own. Ask your own questions. And be careful about people who tell you what you want to hear. Flattery feels good, but it's rarely wise.

Joash's last words show how far he had fallen. As he died, Zechariah said, "May the LORD look at it, and repay it." And within a year, a small Syrian army defeated Judah's much larger army, and Joash was badly wounded. His own servants then killed him in his bed, to avenge the blood of Zechariah. The king who started life hidden and protected in God's house ended it by shedding innocent blood in that same house. It's one of the saddest reversals in the Bible, and it shows how dangerous it is to let other people's voices replace God's voice in your life.

The next king, Amaziah, is described in one telling line. "He did that which was right in the LORD's eyes, but not with a perfect heart." He obeys God in some things, but halfway. After defeating the Edomites, he brings their idols home and worships them. It makes no sense: why worship the gods of a nation you just beat? But pride and halfway faith rarely make sense. He ends up defeated, and later assassinated.

Then comes his son Uzziah, who becomes king at sixteen. His story is one of the clearest pictures in the Bible of how success can lead to pride.

At first, Uzziah does everything right. "He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the vision of God; and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper." (This is a different Zechariah, a wise adviser.) Uzziah wins wars against the Philistines and Arabs. The Ammonites pay him tribute. He builds towers in Jerusalem and in the wilderness, digs wells, and has huge herds and farms, "for he loved farming," the Chronicler adds. He

organizes a well-trained army. And he becomes famous for his inventions: devices on the towers of Jerusalem that could shoot arrows and hurl large stones, possibly an early kind of catapult. "His name spread far abroad, because he was marvelously helped until he was strong."

That last phrase is the turning point. Marvelously helped, until he was strong.

"But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up, so that he did corruptly." Uzziah walks into the temple to burn incense on the altar, something only the priests were allowed to do. He seems to think that because he's the king, and so successful, he can do whatever he wants, even in God's house.

Eighty brave priests follow him in, led by the high priest Azariah. They confront him directly. This isn't your job. It belongs to the priests. Leave the sanctuary, for you have sinned.

Uzziah, holding the incense burner, becomes furious. And while he's raging at the priests, right there by the altar, a skin disease breaks out on his forehead. The priests rush him out, and he hurries out himself. For the rest of his life, he lives in a separate house, cut off from the temple, while his son Jotham runs the kingdom. When he dies, he's buried in a field near the royal tombs, not in them, because of his disease.

> **REAL TALK** **Success and Pride**
>
> Uzziah's problem wasn't failure. It was success. He was talented, hardworking, and blessed by God. And somewhere along the way, he started to believe it was all him. Proverbs says, "Pride goes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall." Success can be one of the most dangerous tests a person faces, whether it's being the best on your team, getting the top grades, becoming popular, or going viral. None of those things are bad. But

> they can quietly convince you that you don't need God, that rules don't apply to you, or that you're better than others. The antidote is gratitude and humility: remembering that every gift you have came from God, and that the higher you rise, the more you need Him.

The prophet Isaiah, whose book is in your Bible, began his ministry "in the year that King Uzziah died." That year, Isaiah saw a vision of the true King, the LORD, high and lifted up in the temple, the place Uzziah had tried to take for himself. Earthly kings come and go. The real King is always on His throne.

The section ends with Ahaz, one of the worst kings of Judah. He sacrifices his children, worships the gods of Syria, and finally shuts the doors of the temple. "In the time of his distress, he trespassed yet more against the LORD, this same King Ahaz." Some people turn to God in hard times. Ahaz turned further away.

**KEY VERSE**

*He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the vision of God; and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper.*

**2 Chronicles 26:5 (WEB)**

## REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Joash turned away after Jehoiada died?
2. What does it mean to do what is right "but not with a perfect heart"?
3. Uzziah was "marvelously helped until he was strong." Why is success sometimes more dangerous than failure?
4. Ahaz turned further from God in his distress. What helps a person turn toward God in hard times instead?

**TRY THIS** *Make a list of three things you're good at or have succeeded in. Next to each one, write a short thank-you to God for it.*

CHAPTER 6

# Hezekiah's Great Passover

*2 Chronicles 29–32*

After Ahaz shut the temple, his son Hezekiah opens it. Literally. "In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the LORD's house and repaired them." He doesn't wait. On day one, he goes to work.

He gathers the priests and Levites and tells them what has happened. Our fathers were unfaithful. They shut the doors, put out the lamps, and stopped worship. That's why disaster has come on us. "Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD, the God of Israel, that his fierce anger may turn away from us." He tells them not to be negligent, because God has chosen them to serve Him.

For sixteen days, the priests and Levites clean out the temple, carrying all the filth and idol junk out to the Kidron Valley. Then Hezekiah offers sacrifices for the sins of the nation, and as the offerings begin, the Levites start singing with the instruments David had made. The whole assembly worships until the offerings are finished. Hezekiah and the people rejoice "because of that which God had prepared for the people; for the thing was done suddenly." Sometimes revival happens faster than anyone expects.

Then Hezekiah does something no king had done since the kingdom split two hundred years earlier. He sends letters not only throughout Judah, but to the northern tribes, inviting everyone to come to Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover.

This is a big deal. By this time, the northern kingdom of Israel had been conquered by Assyria, and many of its people had been deported. Those who remained were scattered, leaderless, and spiritually lost. Hezekiah's message to them is full of grace. Return to the LORD, so He can return to you. Don't be stubborn like your ancestors were. Come to His sanctuary. "For if you turn again to the LORD, your brothers and your children will find compassion with those who led them captive, and will come again into this land, because the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you if you return to him."

The messengers go from town to town through the north. Most people laugh at them and mock them. "Nevertheless some men of Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem."

> **REAL TALK** **When People Laugh at the Invitation**
>
> Hezekiah's messengers carried an invitation to come home to God, and most people laughed in their faces. That must have been discouraging. But some came. If you've ever invited a friend to church or youth group, or tried to talk about your faith, and been mocked or brushed off, you're in good company. You're not responsible for how people respond. You're only responsible for delivering the invitation with kindness. And you never know who will say yes. Sometimes the people you least expect are the ones who come.

A huge crowd gathers in Jerusalem. They tear down the pagan altars in the city and throw them into the Kidron Valley. Then they celebrate the Passover. But there's a problem. Many of the people

from the north haven't gone through the required purification rituals. According to the law, they weren't supposed to eat the Passover meal. They didn't know the rules. They'd been away from God's house for generations.

So Hezekiah prays for them. "May the good LORD pardon everyone who sets his heart to seek God, the LORD, the God of his fathers, even if they aren't clean according to the purification of the sanctuary." And "The LORD listened to Hezekiah, and healed the people."

That might be the most beautiful moment in the book. God cared more about hearts that were seeking Him than about getting every ritual right. The rules mattered. But the heart mattered more.

> **REAL TALK** **Coming Back Messy**
>
> Some people stay away from God or church because they think they need to get their lives cleaned up first. They don't know the songs. They don't know where to find books in the Bible. They've done things they're ashamed of. Hezekiah's Passover says: come anyway. The northern Israelites showed up messy, and God welcomed them because they were seeking Him. Jesus told a story about a son who wasted everything and came home dirty and broke, and "while he was still far off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and ran." You don't have to clean yourself up to come to God. He's the one who makes you clean.

The celebration is so joyful that the people decide to keep going for another seven days. "So there was great joy in Jerusalem; for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was nothing like this in Jerusalem." For a moment, all Israel worshiped together again, north and south, as one family. The priests bless the people, "and their prayer came up to his holy habitation, even to heaven." That's the answer to Solomon's prayer and to 7:14. People

humbled themselves, prayed, and sought God, and He heard from heaven and healed them.

Think about what this Passover meant for the people who came from the north. For two centuries, their kingdom had been separated from Jerusalem. Their kings had built rival altars and told them the temple wasn't for them. Many had probably never seen it. Now a king of Judah, a son of David, was writing to them personally, calling them brothers and inviting them home. It took courage for them to make the journey, past neighbors who were laughing at them, to a city where they didn't know the customs. But when they arrived, they weren't treated as outsiders. They were welcomed as family. That's a picture of what God's people should always be: a family that keeps the door open and runs to welcome people who come home.

The Chronicler tells the story of Sennacherib's invasion more briefly than Kings does. When the Assyrian army comes, Hezekiah prepares the city's defenses, including stopping the spring of Gihon and channeling its water into the city, the famous tunnel you can still walk through today. Then he gathers the people and encourages them. Be strong and courageous. Don't be afraid of the king of Assyria, "for there is a greater one with us than with him. An arm of flesh is with him, but the LORD our God is with us to help us and to fight our battles." And God delivers Jerusalem.

But Hezekiah isn't perfect. After God heals him of a serious illness, his heart becomes proud. Then he humbles himself, and the disaster is delayed. When envoys come from Babylon, the Chronicler says that "God left him to test him, that he might know all that was in his heart." Even the best kings have hearts that need testing.

**KEY VERSE**

*For if you turn again to the LORD, your brothers and your children will find compassion with those who led them captive, and will come again into this land, because the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you if you return to him.*

**2 Chronicles 30:9 (WEB)**

## REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Hezekiah started repairing the temple in the very first month of his reign?
2. What do you think it took for the northern Israelites to accept Hezekiah's invitation when others were laughing?
3. Hezekiah prayed for people who weren't ritually clean, and God healed them. What does that say about what God values most?
4. Is there anything that makes you feel like you need to clean yourself up before coming to God?

**TRY THIS** *Invite one person this week to something where they could hear about God: church, youth group, or just a conversation. Whatever they say, thank God for the chance.*

CHAPTER 7

# Manasseh and Josiah

*2 Chronicles 33–35*

Hezekiah's son Manasseh is twelve years old when he becomes king, and he reigns for fifty-five years. He is the worst king in Judah's history. He rebuilds the pagan altars his father destroyed. He worships the stars. He puts an idol in the temple itself. He sacrifices his own sons in the fire in the Valley of Hinnom. He practices sorcery and consults mediums. 2 Kings adds that he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood from one end to the other.

"The LORD spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they didn't listen."

If you've read 2 Kings, you might think that's the end of Manasseh's story. In Kings, he's simply the king whose sins were so great that they sealed Jerusalem's fate. But 2 Chronicles tells us something Kings doesn't.

The army of Assyria captures Manasseh. They put a hook in him, bind him with bronze chains, and drag him off to Babylon. The most powerful man in Judah is now a prisoner far from home, in chains, with nothing left.

And there, at the bottom, something happens. "When he was in distress, he begged the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. He prayed to him; and he was

entreated by him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God."

**REAL TALK** **Nobody Is Too Far Gone**

Manasseh sacrificed his own children. He led an entire nation into evil. He killed innocent people. If anyone was beyond forgiveness, it was him. And when he humbled himself and prayed, God heard him. That doesn't mean what he did didn't matter; the damage he caused lasted for generations, and Kings is honest that his sins helped bring about the exile. But it means that God's mercy is bigger than any sin. Paul wrote, "where sin abounded, grace abounded more exceedingly." Maybe you think you've gone too far, that you've done something God could never forgive, or that someone you know is beyond hope. Manasseh's story says otherwise. If you're carrying guilt that's crushing you, please talk to a trusted adult or a pastor. And if you're ever thinking about harming yourself, call or text 988. God's not done with you.

**BACKGROUND CHECK** **Why Only in Chronicles?**

Some scholars have wondered why Kings doesn't mention Manasseh's repentance. One likely answer is that the two books have different purposes. Kings explains why the exile happened, so it focuses on the lasting damage of Manasseh's long reign. Chronicles was written for people who had just come back from exile in Babylon, and Manasseh's story was their story: taken to Babylon in chains because of sin, humbled there, praying, and brought back home by God. For them, Manasseh was proof that 7:14 was true. Assyrian records confirm that Manasseh was a vassal of the Assyrian kings, and many scholars find a summons to Babylon historically plausible. Later Jewish writers even composed a prayer in his name, the Prayer of Manasseh, imagining what he might have said in his chains.

Back in Jerusalem, Manasseh tries to undo the damage. He throws out the foreign gods and the idol from the temple. He tears down the altars he built and throws them out of the city. He repairs the altar of the LORD and offers thank offerings. He tells Judah to serve

the LORD. But the people keep worshiping at the old shrines, and his son Amon follows Manasseh's earlier example, not his later one. Repentance changed Manasseh's heart. It couldn't erase all the consequences of fifty years of evil.

There's something quietly powerful about the fact that Manasseh's repentance didn't fix everything. We sometimes want forgiveness to be like a reset button that erases every consequence. Usually it isn't. If you break someone's trust, God can forgive you completely, but rebuilding that trust may still take time. If a habit has damaged your health or your relationships, forgiveness doesn't always undo the damage overnight. That's not because God's forgiveness is weak. It's because sin really does hurt people, and healing takes time. What forgiveness does is give you a new relationship with God and a new direction. Manasseh spent his last years trying to repair what he had broken. That's what real repentance looks like: not just saying sorry, but turning around and working to make things right where you can.

After Amon is assassinated, his eight-year-old son Josiah becomes king. Chronicles gives us a detail that Kings doesn't: "For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father." Josiah was sixteen. At twenty, he began cleaning the idols out of Judah and Jerusalem, and he went even further north, into the territory of the old northern kingdom, tearing down altars there too.

At twenty-six, while the temple is being repaired, the high priest Hilkiah finds "the book of the LORD's law given by Moses." When it's read to Josiah, he tears his clothes. The prophetess Huldah tells him that judgment is still coming, but not in his lifetime, "because your

heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before God." There's that word again: humbled.

Josiah gathers the people, reads the whole book to them, and makes a covenant to follow the LORD with all his heart and soul. Imagine hearing God's word for the first time as an adult, after growing up in a culture that had forgotten it. That's what happened to Josiah and to the whole nation. The words had been there all along, gathering dust in the temple. When they were finally read aloud, they were like a mirror, showing the people how far they had drifted. That's one of the reasons to read the Bible: not just to learn facts, but to let it show you yourself. It's uncomfortable sometimes. But Josiah's tender heart turned that discomfort into change.

Then he celebrates a Passover so great that the Chronicler says nothing like it had been seen since the days of the prophet Samuel. Josiah personally gives thousands of animals from his own flocks so the people can celebrate. The singers are in their places, the gatekeepers at every gate. Everything is done the way David and Solomon had arranged it.

> **REAL TALK** **Sixteen and Seeking**
>
> Josiah was sixteen when he began to seek God for himself. He didn't wait until he was an adult. His father and grandfather had both been evil for most of their lives, and he could have used that as an excuse. Instead, he started a new pattern. If you're a teenager, you're at exactly the age Josiah was when he made his choice. Your faith doesn't have to wait until you're older. You can seek God now, with all your heart, and it could change not just your life but the lives of people around you.

Josiah's story ends tragically. Pharaoh Neco of Egypt marches north to fight at Carchemish, on the Euphrates. Josiah goes out to stop him. Neco sends messengers saying, I'm not here to fight you. God

has told me to hurry. Don't oppose God, or He will destroy you. Josiah doesn't listen. He disguises himself and goes into battle at Megiddo. Archers shoot him, and he says to his servants, "Take me away, because I am seriously wounded!" He dies in Jerusalem, and all Judah mourns. Jeremiah writes laments for him, and singers remember him for generations.

**BACKGROUND CHECK** **Why Did Josiah Die?**

The Chronicler says Josiah didn't listen to God's words through Neco. That's surprising. Why would God speak through a pharaoh? And why would such a good king make such a mistake? Christians have understood it in different ways. Some think Josiah simply made a bad decision by not seeking God before going to war, the way good kings in Chronicles usually did. Others see it as a reminder that even the most faithful people can misjudge situations. The Chronicler doesn't diminish Josiah's goodness; he honors him. But he shows that even the best king couldn't save Judah. The people needed something more than a good king.

**KEY VERSE**

*When he was in distress, he begged the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. He prayed to him; and he was entreated by him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.*

**2 Chronicles 33:12–13 (WEB)**

## REAL TALK

1. Why do you think it took being in chains for Manasseh to humble himself?
2. Does Manasseh's story make you feel hopeful, uncomfortable, or both? Why?
3. Manasseh's repentance was real, but it couldn't erase all the damage he'd done. What does that teach about sin and forgiveness?
4. Josiah began to seek God at sixteen. What would it look like for you to seek God for yourself right now?

**TRY THIS** *Think of someone you've written off as too far gone. Pray for them by name every day this week.*

CHAPTER 8

# Let Him Go Up

*2 Chronicles 36*

The last chapter of 2 Chronicles moves fast. After Josiah, four kings reign in twenty-two years, and every one of them does evil. Egypt removes one. Babylon carries off two. Each time, more treasures from the temple are taken to Babylon, and more people go with them.

The last king is Zedekiah, Josiah's son. The Chronicler sums him up with the book's key words, used in reverse. He didn't humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet. He rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, breaking an oath he had sworn in God's name. "He stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD." Everything 7:14 called for, he refused to do.

And it wasn't just the king. The leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following the practices of the nations and defiling the temple.

Then comes one of the most heartbreaking sentences in the Bible. "The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent to them by his messengers, rising up early and sending, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place." God was like a parent who gets up early every morning to try again, sending messenger after messenger, because He loved them. "But they mocked the

messengers of God, despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets, until the LORD's wrath arose against his people, until there was no remedy."

> **REAL TALK** **Rising Up Early**
>
> That phrase, rising up early and sending, shows God's heart. He didn't want to judge His people. He kept giving them chances, day after day, year after year, through prophet after prophet. Judgment came only after they had rejected every warning. If you've ever felt like God is eager to punish you, look at this verse. He's the God who rises early to call you back. But it's also a warning. It's possible to ignore God's voice for so long that you stop hearing it. If you sense Him calling you to turn around about something, don't wait. Today is a good day.

So the Babylonians come. The Chronicler describes the destruction briefly and soberly. The army kills many, with no mercy for young or old. They carry off everything from the temple, every vessel large and small, and all the treasures of the king and his officials. Then "they burned God's house, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all of its valuable vessels." The survivors are taken to Babylon as servants, until the kingdom of Persia rises.

The temple whose dedication filled the first chapters of the book, where the glory cloud filled the house and fire fell from heaven, is gone.

Then the Chronicler adds an explanation found nowhere else. The exile happened "to fulfill the LORD's word by Jeremiah's mouth, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. As long as it lay desolate, it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years."

**BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Seventy-Year Sabbath**

God's law commanded Israel to let the land rest every seventh year, a Sabbath year with no planting or harvesting, trusting God to provide. Leviticus 26 warned that if the people disobeyed, they would be scattered, and "the land will enjoy its Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate." Many think Israel had ignored the Sabbath years for centuries, so the land finally got the rest it was owed. Jeremiah had prophesied that the exile would last seventy years. Scholars count the seventy years in different ways: some from the first deportation in 605 BC to the first return in about 538 BC, others from the temple's destruction in 586 BC to its rebuilding in 516 BC. Others see seventy as a round number for a full lifetime. Either way, the point is that the exile had a limit. God set an end date. And Leviticus also promised that if the people humbled themselves in exile, God would remember His covenant.

And then, in the last two verses, everything turns.

The Chronicler jumps ahead to the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, who conquered Babylon in 539 BC. To fulfill what He had said through Jeremiah, "the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia," and Cyrus issued a decree throughout his kingdom. The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem. Then Cyrus speaks to the scattered people of God: whoever among you belongs to His people, may the LORD his God be with him, "and let him go up."

**BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Cyrus Cylinder**

In 1879, archaeologists found a clay cylinder in the ruins of Babylon. It's now in the British Museum. On it, Cyrus describes his conquest of Babylon and says that he returned conquered peoples to their homelands and restored their temples. It doesn't mention the Jews by name, but it matches the policy the Bible describes. A pagan king, without knowing it, was carrying out the

> plan of the God of Israel. The prophet Isaiah had even named Cyrus as God's chosen instrument, long before he was born.

And that's where the book ends. Not with the exiles arriving home. Not with the temple rebuilt. Not with a king on David's throne. It ends with an invitation, in the middle of a sentence of hope: let him go up.

Think about how unlikely this was. The Babylonians had destroyed Judah, and now Persia had destroyed Babylon. To the empires of the world, the Jews were one small, defeated people among dozens. No one expected them to survive as a nation, let alone rebuild their temple. But the God who had sent them into exile had also promised to bring them back, and He kept His word through the most unexpected person imaginable, a foreign emperor who didn't worship Him. The Chronicler wants his readers to see that God is in control of history, even when it looks like empires are running everything. Kings rise and fall, but the King of heaven keeps His promises.

The book of Ezra repeats this decree at its beginning and finishes the sentence, telling the exiles to go up to Jerusalem and rebuild the house of the LORD. But in 2 Chronicles, the words just hang there.

Remember, in the Hebrew Bible, Chronicles is the very last book. The Hebrew Scriptures, which begin in Genesis with "In the beginning," end here, with God's people standing at the start of a journey home, waiting for the rest of the story. It's as if the whole Old Testament ends with a door swinging open and a voice saying, go.

**REAL TALK** **The Story Isn't Over**

2 Chronicles could have ended with the ashes of Jerusalem. That would have been an honest ending. Instead, the Chronicler ends with hope. God's people had sinned, been warned, been judged, and lost everything. But God hadn't given up on them. He had set a limit on the exile and stirred up a king to send them home. If you're in a season that feels like exile, where things are broken and you've lost something important, maybe even because of your own choices, this ending is for you. God's last word isn't judgment. It's an invitation. Go up. Come home. The story isn't over.

**KEY VERSE**

*Cyrus king of Persia says, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given all the kingdoms of the earth to me; and he has commanded me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all his people, the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up.'*

**2 Chronicles 36:23 (WEB)**

## REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God kept sending prophets, "rising up early," even when the people mocked them?
2. What do you think the land enjoying its Sabbaths says about God's commands?
3. Why do you think the Hebrew Bible ends with "let him go up" instead of a neat conclusion?
4. Is there an area of your life where you sense God inviting you to go up, to start over, or to come home?

**TRY THIS** *Write a short letter to God about one area of your life that feels like exile. End it by telling God you're going up, and name one step you'll take this week.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

# Where This Points

2 Chronicles begins with a magnificent temple filled with God's glory and ends with that temple in ashes and an invitation to go up and rebuild. The Hebrew Bible ends there, mid-journey. The exiles did go up and rebuild, but the new temple was smaller, the glory cloud never returned in the same way, and no son of David sat on the throne. God's people kept waiting.

Jewish readers treasure Chronicles as the final word of the Tanakh, a call to seek God, to worship Him, and to keep hoping. The New Testament writers, who were Jewish themselves, believed the waiting ended with Jesus. John wrote, "The Word became flesh and lived among us. We saw his glory." Jesus spoke of His own body as the true temple: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." When He died, "the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom," opening the way to God for anyone. And the message of 7:14 came to its fullest meaning when Jesus said that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem." The book that ends with go up is answered by a risen King who says, go and make disciples of all nations, "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Here's what the Bible says about where that story leads, as plainly as I can put it.

### 1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. He hears from heaven when you pray.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

### 2 We've all sinned.

Even the best kings of Judah failed. The Bible says all of us have sinned and gone our own way.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

### 3 Sin has a real cost.

God is good, so He doesn't shrug off evil. 2 Chronicles shows sin ending in exile. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

### 4 Jesus is the true temple.

Jesus, the Son of David, died on the cross for our sins and rose again. In Him, God's presence comes to us, and the way to God is open.

> *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.* **1 John 4:10 (WEB)**

### 5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Manasseh couldn't undo what he had done. He could only humble himself and pray. Salvation is a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

### 6 Humble yourself and turn.

Admit your sin, turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God honestly, right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

*God, I humble myself before You. I've sinned against You, and I can't fix that myself. Thank You that You hear from heaven and that no one is too far gone for You. Thank You that Jesus gave His life for me, and that You raised Him from the dead. Forgive me, and make me new. I don't always know what to do, but my eyes are on You. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## If You Just Said Yes

**Tell someone.** A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

**Read the real thing.** Read 2 Chronicles 7, 20, and 33, then read John 2 and Hebrews 10, where Jesus opens the way into God's presence.

**Find your people.** Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

**Seek Him daily.** The best kings of Judah sought God every day, not just in emergencies. Set aside a few minutes each day to pray and read.

## Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Keep asking. Keep reading. Manasseh took decades to turn, and God still heard him. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if 2 Chronicles is right, the God who heard a king in chains is still listening, and the invitation is still open: go up.

*For the LORD's eyes run back and forth throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.*

**2 Chronicles 16:9 (WEB)**