

# Route 66

## *2 Chronicles: Construction to Destruction*

Part 14 – August 2, 2009

Well, we *are* covering familiar ground, but with a twist. The writer is *chronicling* the spiritual condition of the nation of Judah, that led to its exile in Babylon, in order to inform, inspire, and forewarn the remnant that is about to return home!



Re-creation of Solomon's Temple

Do you know who the star of Chronicles is? The temple. It takes center stage throughout. Second Chronicles begins with its construction and ends with destruction. The temple is where they encounter God and receive forgiveness. So, how they treat it accurately reflects their heart for God.

Same goes for us; only our “temple” is Jesus (where we encounter God and receive forgiveness), and the degree to which we give *Him* center stage in our lives reveals *our* spiritual condition.

1st Chronicles *ends* with King David amassing the materials, and 2nd Chronicles *begins* with Solomon humbly carrying out the task.



Re-creation of Solomon's Temple

But who is able to build a temple for him, since the heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain him? Who then am I to build a temple for him, except as a place to burn sacrifices before him? - *2 Chronicles 2:6 NIV*

Ah, what wisdom: The sanctuary is *not* where God lives

This sanctuary was specifically designed without many religious icons in order to combat the false notion that we come to church to “visit” the Lord. This room is *not* holy. Only God is holy. However, it *is* temporarily *made* holy by His presence, which is ushered in by His children who are filled with His Holy Spirit. When we enter, He enters; and when we leave, He leaves.

The foundation Solomon laid for building the temple of God was sixty cubits long and twenty cubits wide ... - *2 Chronicles 3:3a NIV*

That might be smaller than you think. It's about 90' by 30'.

Ever wonder why God instructed the Jews to build themselves a temple when He knew it would be neglected and destroyed? It wasn't just built for the Jews. In Solomon's dedication, he prays for the foreigners who'll come and pray *toward* the temple, that God will hear their prayers and they'll come to know Him.

Only the Jews believed in *one* God, a God of grace, personal forgiveness, and *righteous* judgment. And His temple was situated on the crossroads of the world's ancient trade routes. In God's response to Solomon's prayer He gave a warning:

[If you] go off to serve other gods ... I will uproot Israel from my land, which I have given them, and will reject this temple ... all who pass by will be appalled and say, "Why has the Lord done such a thing to this land and to this temple?" People will answer, "Because they have forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers, who brought them out of Egypt ..." - 2 Chronicles 7:19-22a NIV

You see, everyone knew their story. And God was communicating with the *entire* world through His people *and* His temple. It's construction served as a witness of His glory; it's destruction served as a warning of His wrath.

We've talked about Solomon's wisdom as well as his gold, silver, and ivory - but there's also a little known *fourth* commodity:



The king had a fleet of trading ships manned by Hiram's men. Once every three years it returned, carrying gold, silver and ivory, and apes and baboons. King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. - 2 Chronicles 9:21-22 NIV

Port of Aqaba (Solomon's Port)

I'm sure when the Queen of Sheba visited she said: "That's a lot of gold ... that's a lot of silver ... that's a *lot* of monkeys!"

Just after the death of Solomon, under the mismanagement of his son, Rehoboam, the nation splits into two kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The king of Israel, in the north, Jeroboam, rejects the priests and builds two new temples with golden calves to worship.

The priests and Levites ... throughout Israel sided with [Rehoboam] ... and came to Judah ... Those from every tribe of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the Lord, the God of Israel, followed the Levites ... - 2 Chronicles 11:13-16 NIV



So, the only ones left in the north are the unfaithful; and that's the last the chronicler says about that. His attention is on Judah, the kingdom of David, in the south. Remember how we went through the 19 hot and cold kings of the south noting the *good* from the *bad*? Well, you can sum up all the bad ones with this one verse about Rehoboam:

He did evil because he had not set his heart on seeking the Lord. - 2 Chronicles 12:14 NIV

That's cause and effect right there. If you don't set your heart on *seeking* the Lord, you will seek evil ... eventually. Out of those 19 kings of Judah, only four really *stand out* for serving God whole-heartedly: Asa [A-suh], Jehoshaphat [jih-HAHS-u-fat], Hezekiah [HEZ-ih-kigh-uh], and Josiah [joh-SIGH-uh].

Through each of these whole-hearted kings, God continued to reach out to His hard-hearted people. First up is Asa ...

King Asa [even] deposed his [own] grandmother ... from her position as queen mother, because she had made a repulsive Asherah [uh-SHEE-ruh] pole. - 2 *Chronicles 15:16a NIV*

“Asherah” was a fertility goddess, and the “pole” designated worship sites where sexual activity was conducted to stimulate the fertility gods into producing crops and births.



It was a type of pornography for the gods, to get ‘em going! Thousands of little Asherah goddesses have been excavated in Jewish homes from this period. And a Jewish tomb inscription was found that blesses the deceased in the name of “Yahweh *and His Asherah!*”

There’s an interesting archaeological phenomenon: as you progress through the strata toward the exile of Judah, the percentage of household cultic material increases rapidly. Remember: An idol is anything or anyone you give priority over God.

The word of God came to Asa at the height of a military success, and gives us a great Asa scripture:

The Lord is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you. - 2 *Chronicles 15:2b NIV*

It’s that cause and effect again: Don’t expect to find Him if you’re forsaking Him.

Our second whole-hearted king is Jehoshaphat ... funny story: He was in the northern kingdom (Israel), allied with King Ahab in battle. Jehoshaphat asks for God’s counsel, and Ahab brings out 400 false prophets who all agree they’ll have victory.

Jehoshaphat asked, “Is there not a prophet of the Lord here whom we can inquire of?” The king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, “There is still one man through whom we can inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me ... - 2 *Chronicles 18:6-7a NIV*

So, they bring in the prophet Micaiah [migh-KAY-yuh] who warns them that this battle is *not* of God and they’ll be defeated.

The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “Didn’t I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad?” - 2 *Chronicles 18:17 NIV*

One humorous side note: Ahab ignored Micaiah, went into battle, and was immediately killed! In a later military battle, a terrified Jehoshaphat prayed: “We have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.”



God's responds with a great Jehoshaphat scripture:

You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you. - 2 Chronicles 20:17 NIV

So they took their positions, stood firmly on God's promise, began to sing and praise, and then watched as the enemy utterly destroy itself. Again with the cause and effect! God will fight the battle, but I must stand firm.

Eight kings later comes whole-hearted Hezekiah. He inherits a nation once again running rampant in idolatry, and immediately begins an aggressive campaign to undo the spiritual damage. And it's *just* in the nick of time. Who is slowly marching their way toward Judah? The Assyrians, having conquered Israel in the north.



Sennacherib's Palace wall relief

Remember Sennacherib [suh-NAK-uh-rib]? He's the one who decorated his palace with wall reliefs depicting Jews having their skin flayed. He has conquered all the cities of the north and several in the south, but when he lays siege to Jerusalem, whole-hearted Hezekiah prays.

And the Lord sent an angel, who annihilated all the fighting men and the leaders and officers in the camp of the Assyrian king. - 2 Chronicles 32:21a NIV



2nd Kings says that they counted 185,000 dead the next morning! This 2,700 year-old clay prism is Sennacherib's boast of his many conquests. But in describing Jerusalem it says: "I then besieged Hezekiah of Judah ... I made him like a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage." Interestingly Jerusalem is the only city he doesn't claim to have overthrown. And the Bible tells us why! God always honors whole-hearted obedience.

Later in life, Hezekiah became deathly ill and was miraculously healed. His new allies, the Babylonians, sent an envoy of well-wishers and he proudly showed them the riches of Jerusalem.

His son, Manasseh [muh-NASS-uh], considered Judah's most vile. His son, AMON [AM-uhn], every bit as bad. But his son, Josiah [joh-SIGH-uh], Judah's last whole-hearted king.

How can there be such a swing between good and evil so quickly? As king, they're granted complete and absolute power to do whatever they desire and however they desire it. What would your life look like if *you* had absolute power?

It would simply be an exaggeration or extrapolation to the nth degree of your current disposition and the bent of your heart.

Josiah went to incredible lengths to stamp out idolatry and reinstate the covenant, but he couldn't stem the momentum of evil that was surging under the surface obedience of the people.

You can legislate surface level morality (e.g. actions and behavior), but you can't legislate a heart change in the people.

So, after four more evil kings, it's off to Babylon they go. But the book jumps ahead fifty years and ends on a hopeful note when Persia conquers Babylon and releases them, and gives them permission to return home.

800 years earlier, just before they entered the Promised Land, Moses had warned his people that they would be scattered among the nations if they refused to serve God with their whole heart. But, he had also given them this promise:

Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers ... - *Deuteronomy 30:4-5 NIV*

And the Lord is about to deliver on that promise.