

"WHEN IN ROME . . . !"

2 Chronicles 36

[Review of importance of worship and of the temple—for their walk with God, and for ours!]

Russian Parable:

A hunter raised his rifle and took careful aim at a large bear.

When he was about to pull the trigger, the bear spoke in a soft, soothing voice, "Isn't it better to talk than to shoot? What do you want? Let's negotiate the matter."

Lowering his rifle, the hunter replied, "I want a fur coat." "Good," said the bear, "that could be arranged. I only want a full stomach, so let's negotiate a compromise."

They sat down to negotiate. After a time the bear walked away alone. The negotiations had been successful. The bear had a full stomach, and the hunter had his fur coat.

The hunter just wanted to walk around in bear clothing, but he ends up devoured by the bear.

That's the way it works in daily living as well.

Those who want to look like the world, end up being consumed by the world.

Israel's problem: they want to belong to God and look like everyone else!

They want to act like their pagan neighbors.

In the end, their pagan neighbors destroy them.

It didn't work for them then. It won't work for us now.

After Josiah, no leader is interested in their spiritual condition nor in personal faithfulness to God.

Although Josiah dedicated himself to that struggle, it was all *his* struggle.

Everyone else wants to please him; not to do what's right because of their own conviction.

He never even convinces his children of the importance of his campaign.

The final chapter of Chronicles refers briefly to the last four kings of Judah.

Three of the four are Josiah's sons; the other his grandson.

None of them is interested in being faithful to Yahweh, nor in improving the spiritual condition of his people.

Things go from bad to worse.

Allen: "It's like a series of clips of automobile crashes issued in a public service announcement to warn drivers against alcohol and drugs."

The people degenerate more and more, while the captivity draws nearer. The process is already irreversible.

God sends the Babylonians to make them understand the importance of faithfulness to Him and of committing themselves to serve Him alone.

FINAL EVIL KINGS 36:1-14

Evil reign of Jehoahaz 36:1-4

Jehoahaz only reigns three months before he's removed by the king of Egypt.

Egypt is responsible for the death of Josiah when he tries to stop Neco, who's headed north to fight for Assyria in their battle against Babylonia.

His conflict with Josiah held him up enough so Neco arrives too late to help Assyria.

Three months later he returns home in 609 B.C.
To demonstrate his authority over Israel, and to assure their loyalty,
Neco removes Jehoahaz from the throne
and appoints his big brother, Jehoiakim, to be king.
Jehoiakim knows he owes his position to Neco.
Neco imposes a tribute and takes Jehoahaz captive to Egypt.
This serves as a reminder of importance of remaining faithful to him.

Evil reign of Jehoiakim 36:5-8

Except for charging tribute, Neco never interferes in Judah's internal affairs.
A few years later, Nebu. invades and adds the region to Babylonian empire.
In 605 B.C., his father dies back in Babylonia; he goes to secure his throne.
Because of that he's never very interested in the internal affairs of Judah either.
He pretty well let them govern themselves.
Nebu. comes back in 601 to try to control Egypt and the other nearby countries.
Although he never conquers Egypt, he does establish a covenant which leaves Judah a tributary of Babylonia and Jehoiakim as his servant.
Shortly thereafter the neighboring countries convince Jehoiakim to join them and rebel against Babylonia.

Because of this regional move for independence, Nebuchadnezzar returns in 598 to conquer Egypt and take full control of the area.

Thus after 11 years of disobedience to God and of rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar, Jehoiakim is taken captive.

Epitaph on his tomb: *"He did evil in the sight of the Lord his God."* **36:5**

They take the utensils from God's house and place them in the pagan temple in Babylonia—evidence of God's previous departure.

Evil reign of Jehoiachin 36:9-10

Jehoiachin reigns just three months before he's removed and taken captive to Babylonia because of the evil he does in God's sight.

What harm could an 8 year old do in 3 months?

Throughout the captivity, he's the surviving king that God could have brought to the throne whenever He was ready.

Evil reign of Zedekiah 36:11-14

Zedekiah is placed on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar.

Zedekiah is unfaithful, in his relationship with God and with Nebuchadnezzar. **12a, 13**

These last kings of Judah aren't worthy of anyone's trust, not even pagan kings around them.

No one can trust them!

They're never faithful, not in their relationship with Yahweh, nor in covenants they make with other nations. God sent Jeremiah to warn them, but they refuse to pay attention.

They harden their heart and won't turn back to Him.

The entire nation, following their leaders' example, imitate the pagan abominations of the other nations and contaminate God's temple.

God allows Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Jerusalem and take the people captive.

Summary of Zedekiah's reign describes attitude and conduct of last 4 kings:

They do evil in the sight of Yahweh.

They don't humble themselves before Him, nor his messengers.

They harden their hearts against turning to the Lord.

They're unfaithful, following the abominations of the pagan nations.

They defile the Lord's house.

They mock His messengers, despise His words and scoff at His prophets.

Therefore, God sends the Babylonians to teach them:

they can't play games with God and come out unhurt.

They spend 70 years in captivity to consider the consequences of rebellion.

REJECTION OF THE KINGS OF JUDAH 36:15-21

Story ends with commentaries concerning the final chapters of Israel's history. **15-16**

No one should think the Babylonians conquered the God of Israel, He gives them victory because of Israel's rebellion and idolatry.

In spite of God's repeated warnings, they refuse to listen.

When He has no other alternative, he sends the Babylonians to destroy them.

That doesn't mean He ends His covenant with Judah and they have no future.

He sends a remnant into exile in Babylonia. **20-21**

The land gets its 70 years rest to replace Sabbath years they never observed.

After they're over, God demonstrates His favor.

RESTORATION OF JUDAH DECREED 36:22-23

The author writes after many have returned from captivity; he wants them to get excited about what God is about to do for them.

Cyrus' decree is part of God's plan to reestablish His people.

So he brings that decree into the picture as he concludes his story. **22-23**

Important beginning: **God's intervention to return them to their land is evidence He will complete their restoration.**

Although they can't see their king on throne, they can be sure they will later.

They must prepare the land and their hearts for His kingdom to become a reality.

The restoration program has begun.

Therefore they must be ready.

God wants to do marvelous works for His people, if they're faithful to Him.

GOD ORDAINS THE CAPTIVITY

HE SENDS CYRUS' DECREE

NOW HE WILL RESTORE THEM, IF THEY SEEK HIM

Israel's problem: they want to belong to God and look like everyone else!

God wants them to get off the fence.

Now that they're starting again, Israel needs to learn this lesson.

God requires faithfulness.

If they trust Him and obey His Word, they can expect His blessing.

To ignore the importance of faithfulness

and to try to follow everyone else will result in their destruction, just like it did for the previous generation.

***GOD STILL REQUIRES FAITHFULNESS
IF WE TRUST HIM AND OBEY HIS WORD,
WE'LL ENJOY HIS BLESSING***

Illiterate couple had recently been saved; met with group of believers who dressed alike. While engaged in a project, men all wore red shirts, so the woman made one for her husband. He came home with a look of disappointment on his face, however because the others all had a message printed on their shirts, but he didn't. His wife, undaunted by her inability to read, sewed three words on his shirt which she copied off a sign in a store window. He wore it to next meeting and came home bubbling with joy. The men liked the inscription. It described change in his life. His wife had written, "UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT."

How about us?

Are we still trying to belong to God, but look like everyone else?

Or, are we wearing a sign that says:

"UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT?"

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

Israel is about to return from 70 years of captivity in a pagan nation that doesn't fear the Lord.

Persia has taken over and Cyrus has allowed them to go back home.

The new generation needs orientation; they don't know what's going on, nor what they ought to do about it.

They came back to the land under Zerubbabel, but it's desolate; not very encouraging.

They need a history lesson to remind them of their history and to encourage them.

ISRAEL'S PROBLEM: THEY WANT TO BELONG TO GOD AND LOOK LIKE EVERYONE ELSE!

GOD WANTS THEM TO GET OFF THE FENCE.

No one has been willing to stand up to the crowd!

This time it has to be different. They were to be God's people.

Two main lessons Chronicles has been teaching us:

1. The importance of deciding to follow Yahweh, and Him alone.

2. The importance of standing out as His people.

They were to be different!

In a word, the importance of FAITHFULNESS.

They're to be faithful to Him, even if no one else goes along with them.

More than a hundred years ago, Soren Kierkegaard warned that the age of the crowd was upon us. In such an age, he said,

people would not think of deciding for themselves. They would follow the advice given to children going to a party: "Watch what the others are doing and then behave like them."

Richard Armstrong and Edward Watkin tell the story of a biologist's experiment with "processional caterpillars." On the rim of a clay pot that held a plant, he lined them up so that the leader was head-to-back with the last caterpillar. The tiny creatures circled the rim of the pot for a week. Not once did any one of them break away to go over to the plant and eat. Eventually, all the caterpillars died from exhaustion and starvation.

Now that they are starting over again, Israel needs to learn this lesson.

God requires faithfulness.

**If they trust Him and obey His Word,
they can expect His blessing.**

To ignore the importance of faithfulness and to follow everyone else would result in their destruction, just like it had for the previous generation.

That was Elijah's warning too:

1KI 18:21 Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long {will} you hesitate between two opinions? If the \Lord\ is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people did not answer him a word.

WE TOO NEED TO LEARN THAT LESSON!

ROM 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.