



Volume IV

By

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Chapter Thirty-One

The Promised Land

The time had come for Joshua to lead Israel into the ‘promised land’ to ‘subdue and have dominion.’ The children (armies) of Israel were trained to reign, but how well would they do under the intense pressures that awaited them?

And the Lord said: ‘I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come now, therefore, and I will send you to

Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt. Exodus 3:7-10

It's important for us to keep sight of God's eternal plan for His people. He told Moses from the 'burning bush' that He had 'seen the oppression' of His people in Egypt. He had 'heard their cry' because of their taskmasters. He 'knew' their sorrows. God's Plan? To 'deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey.'

God was ready to 'lead' Israel into the 'promised land' about a year after He led them out of Egypt. They had completed enough training by that time, including receiving God's Law, building the Tabernacle, etc. However, the people believed the fears of ten spies over God's promise so they had to wander in the desert for 40 years. That was one year for each day that the men 'spied out the land.' God called them an 'evil congregation who are gathered together against Me' (Numbers 14:35).

Once the 40 years were up and almost all of the people who had left Egypt had died in the wilderness, God was ready once again to lead Israel into the ‘promised land.’

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, it came to pass that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, saying: ‘Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded

you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:1-9

With that ‘Divine Mandate,’ Joshua commanded the officers of the people to prepare provisions for the journey to cross over the River Jordan, ‘to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess’ (Joshua 1:11). The response of the people was different this time –

So they answered Joshua, saying, 'All that you command us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we heeded Moses in all things, so we will heed you. Only the Lord your God be with you, as He was with Moses. Whoever rebels against your command and does not heed your words, in all that you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and of good courage. Joshua 1:16-18

Israel Takes the Promised Land

The Book of Joshua is a detailed account of how Joshua led the Israelites across the River Jordan to take the land God had promised to give them. Some of the accounts are miraculous – the work of the Almighty God. Some of the accounts are demonstrations of Israel’s training to reign with God. I invite you to read the Book of Joshua and see for yourself the power of God and how He gave victory after victory to Israel.

One of my favorite parts is when Joshua met the ‘Commander of the Lord’s army’ –

And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, ‘Are You for us or for our adversaries?’ So He said, ‘No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.’ And Joshua fell on his face to the earth

and worshiped, and said to Him, 'What does my Lord say to His servant?' Then the Commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, 'Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.' And Joshua did so.
Joshua 5:13-15

In some ways this reminds me of when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, except that God appeared to Joshua as 'a Man.' The fact that the 'Man' accepted Joshua's worship and told Joshua to take off his sandals because he was standing on 'holy' ground, demonstrates what is called a 'Theophany' – sometimes also called a 'Christophany.' Abraham experienced the same thing in Genesis 18 when, 'the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground.' Joshua had a similar sighting of the Lord, but this time He appeared as a 'Warrior,' holding His sword drawn in His hand. When the sword is out of the sheath, it's time for 'war.'

The Lord On Our Side

One of the ‘train-to-reign’ lessons we can take away from our study of Israel’s battle for the ‘promised land’ is that the Lord is on our side. He trains us to fight, leads the fight, and wins the fight. Just as Israel did not fight and win on its own, so we don’t fight and win on our own. I often think of the Lord Jesus as the ‘Commander of the Lord’s army’ with sword drawn for battle. He fought for us when He died on the Cross, and won for us when He walked out of the grave alive. The Crucifixion and Resurrection are our strength for battle. Trying to fight life’s battles in our own strength is a futile attempt. Christ is our strength!

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:37-39

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled. 2 Corinthians 10:3-6

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Ephesians 6:10-13

Chapter Thirty-Two

Joshua (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ – Yehoshua – ‘the LORD is salvation’) followed the ‘Commander of the Lord’s armies’ (Joshua 5) into battle as Israel entered the ‘promised land.’ What Israel accomplished militarily in a short period of time is an amazing feat, but knowing that the Lord went before them to win the battles against many cities and nations helps us understand how an army of the children of slaves could do it.

Joshua's Victory

I recommend you read the entire Book of Joshua to see for yourself how the children of Israel defeated the pagan nations that had caused their parents great fear only 40 years earlier (Numbers 13). They trusted God, followed Joshua, and were victorious. Joshua chapter 12 lists all of the kings that Israel conquered under Moses and Joshua.

Joshua grew up in Egypt and had seen the power of God in liberating Israel from slavery. Joshua served Moses and God during 40 years in the wilderness. He led Israel into the promised land after the death of Moses. Joshua won many battles, but finally came to the end of his time on earth.

And the Lord said to him: 'You are old, advanced in years, and there remains very much land yet to be possessed.' Joshua 13:1

Joshua divided up the conquered land among the tribes according to God's direction (Joshua chapters 13 – 21) and also set up special 'cities of refuge' (Joshua chapter 20).

So the Lord gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. The Lord gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass. Joshua 21:43-45

Joshua's Summary and Warning

Joshua chapters 23 and 24 are what I call 'summary/warning' chapters. Joshua addressed the tribes of Israel prior to his death. He reminded them of how God called a pagan family that included Abraham and his father Terah from 'the other side of the River.' God called Abraham to Canaan and multiplied his descendants, including Isaac and Jacob.

Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. Also I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt, according to what I did among them. Afterward I brought you out. Joshua 24:4-5

Joshua summarized the great things God had done for Israel and warned them against turning to 'other gods.'

Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, and lest you go among these nations, these who remain among you. You shall not make mention of the name of their

gods, nor cause anyone to swear by them; you shall not serve them nor bow down to them, but you shall hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day. Joshua 23:6-8

Joshua also spoke these words, which are familiar to many Christians:

Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.' Joshua 24:14-15

Joshua died at the age of 110. The children of Israel buried him 'within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Serah, which is in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash' (Joshua 24:30). The children of Israel buried the bones of Joseph which they had brought from Egypt. They buried him at Schechem in the plot of ground that Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor many centuries earlier (Joshua 24:32). Israel also buried Eleazar the son of Aaron.

Judges' – Summary and Warning

As we saw earlier, God told Joshua 'there remains very much land yet to be possessed.' We learn about what Israel did about that after Joshua died in the Book of Judges. Judges begins with both a summary and a warning. The children of Israel asked God who would be first to fight the Canaanites. God answered – 'Judah shall go up. Indeed I have delivered the land into his hand' (Judges 1:2). Remember that the Seed of the woman that God promised Eve in the Garden of Eden would come through the Tribe of Judah, so it's important to see that God chose Judah to be first to fight the Canaanites and promised them victory.

The leaders of the Tribe of Judah approached the leaders of the Tribe of Simeon and asked for their help in fighting the Canaanites. Judah promised Simeon that they would 'likewise go with you to your allotted territory' (Judges 1:3). Simeon agreed and both tribes were successful in their battles.

Then Judah went up, and the Lord delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand; and they killed ten thousand men at Bezek ... And Judah went with his brother Simeon, and they attacked the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. So the name of the city was called Hormah. Also Judah took Gaza with its territory, Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory.'

Judges 1:4, 17-18

Unfortunately, those are the highlights. Other tribes of Israel failed to complete the conquest of the land as God had told them. They included Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan. The tribes did place some of the Canaanite people 'under tribute to them,' but they did not finish the work God had sent them to do. How did the Lord respond to their disobedience?

Then the Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: 'I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you. And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.' So it was, when the Angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept. Judges 2:1-4

Israel's Thorns and Snares

The story of Israel's life in the 'promised land' is not a happy one. The children of Israel 'did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger' (Judges 2:11-12). The anger of God was 'hot against Israel, so He delivered them into the hands of plunderers 'who despoiled them.' God 'sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for calamity, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed' (Judges 2:14-15).

God raised up ‘judges’ who would deliver Israel out of the hands of the pagans who plundered them. However, Israel ‘played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them.’ When the people groaned and cried out to God, the Lord would raise up a judge who would deliver them. However, when the judge died the children of Israel ‘behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.’

Chapter Thirty-Three

The Book of Judges tells a sad story about Israel in the ‘promised land.’ Because the children of Israel did evil in God’s sight by following and worshipping ‘other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them,’ God delivered the Israelites into the hands of ‘plunders who despoiled them.’ The people were greatly distressed and cried out to the Lord. God raised up ‘judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them.’ However, when a judge would die, the people reverted to their sin of following after other gods.

Though God’s anger ‘was hot against Israel,’ He continued to love and test them –

Then the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel; and He said, ‘Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he

died, so that through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the Lord, to walk in them as their fathers kept them, or not.’ Therefore the Lord left those nations, without driving them out immediately; nor did He deliver them into the hand of Joshua. Judges

2:20-23

Ruth and Hannah

Most of the judges came from tribes other than Judah, but the Seed of the woman (Jesus Christ) who would destroy the seed of the serpent (Genesis 3:15) would come through Judah (Matthew 1 & Luke 3). Two women who played an important role in God's plan to bring our Savior into the world were Ruth and Hannah.

Both women lived during the time of the Judges. I'll explain Ruth first (from the Book of Ruth). It started when a family of the tribe of Judah living in Bethlehem moved to the country of Moab because of a famine. The husband's name was Elimelech. His wife was Naomi. Unfortunately, Naomi's husband died. Her sons married two Moabite women, Oprah and Ruth, but they also died. Naomi heard that God had visited His people by giving them bread, so she decided to return to the land of Judah. Naomi told her daughters-in-law to stay in Moab and remarry. However, Ruth would not leave Naomi and made the journey back to Bethlehem.

Ruth went to work in the fields to find food. That's where she met Boaz, who was a relative of Elimelech. Boaz was 'a man of great wealth' and treated Ruth kindly because of her kindness to Naomi. A relationship developed between them and Boaz 'redeemed' her and they became husband and wife. Ruth gave birth to Obed. Obed became the father of Jesse, who was the father of David – who became King of Israel. God's eternal plan for Israel to 'reign' was working even during the sad times of the Judges. A famine sent Naomi and her family to Moab, where Ruth became a daughter-in-law. When they returned to Judah, they became ancestors of Israel's greatest king.

The second woman was named Hannah. She also lived during the time of the Judges, but we find her story in 1 Samuel. She was married to a man from the tribe of Ephraim named Elkanah. He had two wives – Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah did not. The family would go up to Shiloh every year to worship and sacrifice to the Lord. One year Eli the priest saw Hannah crying and praying, though he thought she was drunk at first because he saw her lips move but heard no sound. Hannah made a vow to God

that if He would give her a son, she would give him back to the Lord. When Eli talked with Hannah and realized she was praying, he said – ‘Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him’ (1 Samuel 1:17).

God blessed Hannah and Elkanah with a son. She named the boy Samuel, saying ‘Because I have asked for him from the Lord.’ After Hannah weaned Samuel, she took the boy to Shiloh and presented him to Eli the priest. 1 Samuel 2 contains the wonderful prophetic prayer of Hannah about a king who God would use to ‘reign’ over Israel. Samuel remained with Eli in Shiloh, but Hannah visited her son once year when she came up to Shiloh with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. The Lord blessed Hannah with three more sons and two daughters. ‘Meanwhile the child Samuel grew before the Lord.’

Samuel – Prophet, Judge, Kingmaker

1 Samuel 3 tells us that the Word of the Lord was ‘rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation.’ However, that was about to change. God began speaking to Samuel when he was a boy. The first prophecy that God gave Samuel concerned the upcoming punishment upon the house of Eli. That prophecy was fulfilled to the letter.

So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord. Then the Lord appeared again in Shiloh. For the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord. 1 Samuel 3:19-21

In addition to being God's prophet, Samuel became Israel's judge. He told the children of Israel to return to the Lord with all their hearts, and put away the foreign gods and Ashtoreths from among them. Samuel said that if they did and served God only, the Lord would deliver Israel 'from the hand of the Philistines.' The Israelites did as Samuel told them and God confused the Philistines so that the Israelites were able to drive them away.

So the Philistines were subdued, and they did not come anymore into the territory of Israel. And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. Then the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath; and Israel recovered its territory from the hands of the Philistines. Also there was peace between Israel and the Amorites. 1 Samuel 7:13-14

Samuel became old and the people of Israel did not want his sons judging them. They demanded a king like the other nations had. Samuel warned them how life would be for them under the control of a king, but the people continued to demand a king.

Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, 'No, but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.' And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he repeated them in the hearing of the Lord. So the Lord said to Samuel, 'Heed their voice, and make them a king.' 1 Samuel 8:19-22

We read in 1 Samuel 9 that God told Samuel to anoint Saul from the tribe of Benjamin as king. This was part of training Israel to reign in the promised land. Their desire to have a king rule over them came from their 'flesh,' so God gave them a king who would rule from his 'flesh. 1 Samuel 12 contains the details of Samuel's warning to Israel about obeying the Word of the Lord. Samuel told them that 'if you

still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.’ 1 Samuel 13 contains the details of King Saul’s disobedience and what would happen to the king and his family –

And Samuel said to Saul, ‘You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you. For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.’ 1 Samuel 13:13-14

God sent Samuel to the home of Jesse, a member of the tribe of Judah, to choose another king for Israel.

Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. 1 Samuel 16:13

David became King of Israel many years later following the death of Saul and his son Jonathan (1 Samuel 31). Samuel truly was Israel's great prophet, judge, and kingmaker.

Chapter Thirty-Four

Now the Lord said to Samuel, ‘How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons.’ 1 Samuel 16:1

God sent Samuel to the home of Jesse, a member of the tribe of Judah living in Bethlehem. Samuel learned an important lesson that day. He expected God to choose one of Jesse’s older sons based on their appearance, but that was not God’s plan.

But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’ 1 Samuel 16:7

After Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, the prophet said – ‘The Lord has not chosen these.’ Did Jesse have any more sons. Yes, his youngest who was ‘keeping the sheep.’ Samuel asked Jesse to bring the youngest son to him. When David arrived the Lord told Samuel – ‘Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!’ Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed David, ‘and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward’ (1 Samuel 16:13).

Lesson for training to reign? The Lord does not see as man does. Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

Training David to Reign

David did not immediately begin to reign over Israel, even though God chose him and Samuel anointed him. David had much to learn about being the kind of king God wanted to reign over His people.

How did God train David to reign? He began by removing His Spirit from King Saul and sending a 'distressing spirit' to trouble him. That led Saul's servants to find someone who was a 'skillful player on the harp' to help the king feel better. Guess who they chose? That's right – David. David began his training by serving the man he would one day replace as king. Humbling, yes, but humility is an important lesson in training to reign. Compassion is another. David played his harp, God's Spirit would rest on Saul, Saul would be refreshed, and the distressing spirit would depart from him.

The next step in David's training was in trusting God when others have doubts. 1 Samuel 17 is the wonderful story so many know about David – David the giant killer – David and Goliath.

Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.' Moreover David said, 'The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.' 1 Samuel 17:36-37

David believed in God's power and trusted Him to defeat the giant without the use of 'sword and shield.' All David needed was a sling shot, a stone, and faith in God. Goliath dropped dead at his feet and the armies of Israel routed the Philistines. David went on to become one of Israel's greatest warriors and generals. While that might make many kings pleased to have such a great general working for him, Saul became jealous of David's popularity with the people because of his prowess on the battlefield –

So the women sang as they danced, and said: 'Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands.' Then Saul was very angry, and the saying displeased him; and he said, 'They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed only thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?' So Saul eyed David from that day forward. 1 Samuel 18:7-9

The next lesson in David's training was how to deal with hatred, jealousy, and persecution from someone you serve, while continuing to be faithful to God's will. King Saul often attempted to kill David because of his jealousy. David had the opportunity to kill Saul, but would not do it. Why?

And he said to his men, 'The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.' 1 Samuel 24:6

King Saul was eventually killed in a battle, which opened the way for David to become the king God intended for him to be when He told Samuel to anoint him. However, there were still more lessons to learn – many lessons.

David's Reign

We see something of David's character in 2 Samuel 1. Even though Saul tried to kill him multiple times, David did not gloat about Saul's death. Instead, David called on the daughters of Israel to 'weep over Saul.' David also did not rush in to take over Saul's place as king. He first inquired of the Lord –

'Shall I go up to any of the cities of Judah?' And the Lord said to him, 'Go up.' David said, 'Where shall I go up?' And He said, 'To Hebron.' 2 Samuel 2:1

David went up to Hebron with his family and 'the men who were with him' and their families. That's where the men of Judah anointed David 'king over the house of Judah.' The commander of Saul's army took Saul's son Ishbosheth and made him king over Israel. This meant that the 'tribes of Israel' became divided after Saul's death. 'Only the house of Judah followed David.' David had more training before he would become king over a unified nation of tribes.

What followed next was war between Judah and Israel. The battles and ensuing intrigue are strong examples of the character God was building into David (2 Samuel chapter 2 – 4). After ruling over Judah for seven years and six months, the tribes of Israel made David their king as well.

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and spoke, saying, “Indeed we are your bone and your flesh. Also, in time past, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and brought them in; and the Lord said to you, ‘You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over Israel.’ ‘Therefore all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord. And they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years over all Israel and Judah. 2 Samuel 5:1-5

The City of David

King David chose Jerusalem to be the capital of his kingdom. It was located near Bethlehem within the area God had promised to the tribe of Judah. Saul had ruled from Gibeah which was within the area God had given to the tribe of Benjamin. David, a member of the tribe of Judah, wanted his new capital to be located in Judah.

Jerusalem was a stronghold of the Jebusites, so David directed his army to take the city.

Then David dwelt in the stronghold, and called it the City of David. And David built all around from the Millo and inward. So David went on and became great, and the Lord God of hosts was with him. 2 Samuel 5:9-10

King David unified the twelve tribes of Israel and became a conquering king. He defeated the Philistines by first enquiring of the Lord as to whether he should go up against them. David asked, 'Will You deliver them into my hand?' God's answer was clear and direct – 'Go up, for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into your hand' (2 Samuel 5:19).

In addition to winning wars against Israel's enemies, David brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6). David wanted to build a Temple to house the Ark, but God would not allow him to do it. Nathan the prophet brought God's message to David along with a special covenant concerning David and his descendants – including the Seed who would come from David and establish an 'everlasting' Kingdom.

When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.’ 2 Samuel 7:12-15

David continued to win wars and rule his kingdom well. However, life did not end well for David because of his sinful actions involving Bathsheba and her husband Uriah. David committed adultery and murder. God allowed David to live after his confession, but the king’s actions caused great trouble within his family his reign as king. 2 Samuel chapters 11 – 24 detail what happened.

Chapter Thirty-Five

When the prophet Samuel told King Saul that he had ‘done foolishly’ by not keeping God’s command, he said – “The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you” (1 Samuel 13:14). That man after God’s own heart was David.

Yes, David made mistakes – some very serious – during his time of training to reign over God’s people. However, David remained a man ‘after God’s own heart.’ David loved God deeply. He believed that He was the Only True God. He trusted God. He obeyed God – most of the time. David was not a perfect man, but he was faithful to God in many ways.

We can all learn from David’s life. None of us are perfect, but God uses imperfect people who have a ‘broken and contrite heart’ (Psalm 51:17).

The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the Lord delivers him out of them all. Psalm

34:17-19

Lessons from David

King David left a wonderful legacy of lessons he learned during his lifetime. 2 Samuel includes many of those lessons, but do do the Psalms that David wrote. 19th century pastor Charles Spurgeon wrote a wonderful commentary on the Psalms titled The Treasury of David. Here are a few words from the Preface –

The delightful study of the Psalms has yielded me boundless profit and ever-growing pleasure; common gratitude constrains me to communicate to others a portion of the benefit, with the prayer that it may induce them to search further for themselves.

I agree with Spurgeon and invite you to search the Psalms deeply for the great insight King David and other writers of the ‘songs’ of Israel. I also recommend Spurgeon’s three-volume commentary to you as well. You can purchase the books [individually](#) or [as a set](#). You can also [read them online](#).

David's writings are an open and honest view into his thinking before and after he became Israel's king. David had great skill as a warrior, musician, poet, and song writer. It's important to remember that the Spirit of God came upon David when Samuel anointed him king, 'from that day forward' (1 Samuel 16:13). David's writings carry a deep insight into the character of God because the Spirit of God was upon David as he wrote. God also spoke directly to David, as well as through visions and prophets. David was in a unique position to know God intimately and accurately. We benefit from being able to read what he wrote.

There are many areas of 'Basic Training' that God has for His people, but I've chosen five as examples for this series. This spiritual training, just like military training, is not a 'cafeteria' where you can pick-and-choose what you want to learn. They are all necessary for the spiritual warfare that awaits everyone who follows God seriously. King David understood that and exemplified it in his life and in his writings:

1. Believe in the Only True God (Monotheism)
2. Fear God and Obey Him
3. Worship God and Serve Him
4. Listen to God and Trust Him
5. Love God and Devote Your Life to Him

You will find 150 Psalms in the Book of Psalms; half of them are attributed to King David. Many Bible translations include a note about the Psalms David wrote. One of my personal favorites is Psalm 1 because it establishes David's deep understanding about God and differences between the godly and ungodly:

Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper. The

ungodly are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish. Psalm 1

Other Psalms of David that have helped me during my growth as a Christian include –

- Psalm 2
- Psalm 5
- Psalm 8
- Psalm 11
- Psalm 14
- Psalm 15
- Psalm 16
- Psalm 18
- Psalm 19
- Psalm 22

- Psalm 23
- Psalm 24
- Psalm 25
- Psalm 27
- Psalm 29
- Psalm 30
- Psalm 31
- Psalm 32
- Psalm 34
- Psalm 36
- Psalm 37
- Psalm 40
- Psalm 41
- Psalm 51
- Psalm 53
- Psalm 59
- Psalm 61

- Psalm 62
- Psalm 63
- Psalm 68
- Psalm 69
- Psalm 86
- Psalm 95
- Psalm 101
- Psalm 103
- Psalm 110
- Psalm 122
- Psalm 133
- Psalm 138
- Psalm 139
- Psalm 141
- Psalm 143
- Psalm 144
- Psalm 145

May we learn the great lessons that David learned and be able to say with him:

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer. Psalm 19:14

Chapter Thirty-Six

Now the days of David drew near that he should die, and he charged Solomon his son, saying: 'I go the way of all the earth; be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man. And keep the charge of the Lord your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn; that the Lord may fulfill His word which He spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul,' He said, 'you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.' 1 Kings 2:1-4

King Solomon

King David chose one of his younger sons to follow him as King of Israel. Solomon's mother was Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:24). You can read about Solomon's 40-year reign in 1 Kings chapters 2 – 11. Two of the most important are chapters 3 and 11. Chapter 3 tells us that God appeared to Solomon in a dream and asked the young king – “Ask! What shall I give you?” Solomon responded – “Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” Here's how God responded to Solomon –

The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. Then God said to him: 'Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, 'behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days. So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days. 1 Kings 3:10-14

Solomon was a wise king, but he had a weakness that led him away from God in his later years –

But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites— from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, ‘You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.’ Solomon clung to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David. 1 Kings 11:1-4

Solomon lacked wisdom toward the end of his life, even though God had given him wisdom beyond all other people (1 Kings 4:29-34).

So the Lord became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the Lord had commanded. Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, 'Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen. 1 Kings 11:9-13

The one 'tribe' that God gave to Solomon's descendants was Judah. The reason for that was the covenant God had made with King David many years earlier (2 Samuel 7). The lineage of King David would lead to an everlasting Kingdom. Even though God's promise spoke about the 'seed' that would come from David to follow him as king (Solomon), the covenant about the 'everlasting kingdom' pointed to the eternal reign of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Lessons from Solomon

Even though Solomon turned away from the Lord in his later years, we can learn many things about how to reign with Christ. Solomon, like his father, was a prolific writer. Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs and wrote one thousand and five songs (1 Kings 4:32). I highly recommend reading Solomon's proverbs in the Book of Proverbs and some of his songs in the Book of Psalms. Solomon's wisdom and love for God as a younger man come through these writings in a powerful way. They are a great training tool for Christians.

One of my favorite writings of Solomon is Proverbs 3:5-6 – “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.” The fact that Solomon did not heed his own wise advice as an older man is important to note. ‘Training to reign’ with Christ means obeying God now and forever. We must endure. As the Apostle Paul wrote at the end of his life – “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up

for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

Solomon also wrote The Song of Solomon, which is about his love for his wife as a young man. It is an excellent book for newly married couples about the special gift God has given them. Solomon wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes toward the end of his life. It is about Solomon’s journey through life as a king and the futility he experienced during that journey. The way Solomon ends Ecclesiastes is important for every Christian to read –

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: ‘Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Christians have God's promise of forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. However, that does not mean we can follow Solomon's example and turn away from God to follow after 'other gods.' We cannot and should not abuse God's grace. As Paul wrote in Romans 6 – "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" We should heed the words of Solomon and Paul. We should fear God. We should not continue in sin.

Solomon's Legacy

Solomon was the last king over a unified Israel (all 12 tribes). His legacy ended in a major split that led to two kingdoms – Northern and Southern. The Southern Kingdom included the tribe of Judah and a small portion of Benjamin. Jerusalem was its capital and continued the Davidic Dynasty. The Northern Kingdom included the other ten tribes, along with a portion of Benjamin. Samaria eventually became the capital.

All of the kings of the Southern Kingdom were blood relatives of David and Solomon. None of the kings of the Northern Kingdom were blood relatives of David and Solomon. That will be important to watch as we see how God moves to reveal the 'Seed of the woman' that will destroy the 'seed of the serpent.'

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Rehoboam, King Solomon's son, was unwise from the beginning of his reign over Israel. He listened to his 'young' advisors rather than the 'elders' who had advised his father.

Then the young men who had grown up with him spoke to him, saying, 'Thus you should speak to this people who have spoken to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you make it lighter on us'—thus you shall say to them: 'My little finger shall be thicker than my father's waist! And now, whereas my father put a heavy yoke on you, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!' 1 Kings 12:10-11

Rehoboam's lack of wisdom led to a major revolt within the kingdom that divided the nation of Israel –

Now when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, saying: 'What share have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Now, see to your own house, O David!' So Israel departed to their tents. But Rehoboam reigned over the children of Israel who dwelt in the cities of Judah. 1 Kings 12:16-17

The Training of Kings

Rehoboam became King of Judah (Southern Kingdom) and Jeroboam became King of Israel (Northern Kingdom). Both of them set bad precedents within their separate kingdoms. Jeroboam, who was not a descendant of David, was afraid that his kingdom would 'return to the house of David' when his people went to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to God. So, Jeroboam made two calves of gold and told his people to worship them in Bethel or Dan. Jeroboam made 'shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not the sons of Levi.'

Jeroboam also 'ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that was in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar.' He made offerings and sacrifices to the golden calves he had made. Jeroboam led the Israelites back into pagan worship of 'other gods.' That led the One True God to send 'a man of God' from Judah to Bethel with a message concerning a future king of Judah named Josiah who would 'sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn

incense on you, and men's bones shall be burned on you' (1 Kings 13:2). Jeroboam stretched out his hand commanding that the prophet be arrested. However, his hand withered and the altar was split apart with the ashes pouring out from the altar. Jeroboam asked the prophet to ask God to restore the use of his hand. The prophet asked and God restored Jeroboam's hand. However, that did not keep Jeroboam from continuing his worship of idols and leading Israel away from God. Jeroboam's life ended badly, as you can read in 1 Kings 14.

Rehoboam was also a bad king for Judah. Though he was King David's grandson, he followed in the ways of his father Solomon who worshipped idols in his later years because of his many foreign wives. Rehoboam led Judah into apostasy –

Now Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord, and they provoked Him to jealousy with their sins which they committed, more than all that their fathers had done. For they also built for themselves high places, sacred pillars, and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree. And there were also perverted persons in the

land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. 1 Kings 14:22-24

A majority of the kings of Judah followed in Rehoboam's evil ways. All of the kings of Israel followed in Jeroboam's evil footsteps. God sent prophets to Judah and Israel for centuries to train the kings how to reign for Him, but most wanted nothing to do with the One True God. They preferred the sinful pleasures of worshipping false gods and doing what pleased them.

Some of the 'training' God did through His prophets included severe punishments, but also a demonstration of His grace and mercy. God wanted His people to love only Him, obey only Him, and worship only Him. Because Israel and Judah were His people, God was long-suffering with them. He gave the kings of both 'kingdoms' ample opportunity to know right from wrong, good from evil. However, most did not heed God's Word through His prophets.

God's Wrath Revealed

God is long-suffering, but He will do what He says He will do. God told many of His prophets to let the kings of both kingdoms know that He would use the kings of pagan nations to destroy Israel and Judah. The prophets were often very specific in how the destruction would occur. That way, when it happened, everyone would know that God in the Only True God. God will do what He will do. No one on earth or in the heavens can stop God from being God. No one can deter God from accomplishing His will for His people or for the other nations of the world.

God began warning the children of Israel through His prophet Moses –

Gather to me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their hearing and call heaven and earth to witness against them. For I know that after my death you will become utterly corrupt, and turn aside from the way which I have

commanded you. And evil will befall you in the latter days, because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands.

Deuteronomy 31:28-29

After centuries of warnings, the Northern Kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrian army of King Shalmaneser in 722 BC. The king carried all of the Israelites into captivity in Assyria and brought non-Israelites from Babylon, Cathay, Ava, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, 'and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; 'and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities' (2 Kings 17:24). That was the end of the Northern Kingdom started by Jeroboam.

Judah fell to the Babylonians a little more than a century later when God used King Nebuchadnezzar to take the king and people of Judah captive. Nebuchadnezzar's final move militarily was to destroy Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple. However, Nebuchadnezzar did not move any foreigners into Judah. The land had 70 years of 'Sabbath rest' (2 Chronicles 36:21). That period of time became known as the time of 'exile' for Jews living in Babylon. God used prophets like

Daniel and Ezekiel who had also been taken captive to encourage His people that they would one day return to Judah. God led a different nation (Persia) and king (Cyrus) to conquer Babylon and give the Jews the freedom to return to Judah and rebuild Jerusalem and its Temple.

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, 'Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up! 2 Chronicles 36:22-23

That command from Cyrus opened the door for several groups of Jews to return to Judah over a period of many years. They were led by people like Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods; and Cyrus king of Persia brought them out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. This is the number of them: thirty gold platters, one thousand silver platters, twenty-nine knives, thirty gold basins, four hundred and ten silver basins of a similar kind, and one thousand other articles. All the articles of gold and silver were five thousand four hundred. All these Sheshbazzar took with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem. Ezra 1:7-11

Our 'Training' Lesson

God is the Only True God. Israel's and Judah's attempts to worship 'other gods' ended in defeat and destruction. God is long-suffering, but He will not 'suffer' His wrath to fall on the ungodly forever. God will be obeyed by all flesh one day. If we understand that now, we are well ahead of most people living on this planet. Even people who call themselves 'Christians' can be fooled into worshiping the 'false gods' of this world through the deception of false preachers and teachers, and through the delusion of pleasing themselves through sin.

Israel and Judah stand as powerful lessons for all people who will read, consider, and learn. There is no way to be successful in this life, or the one that follows, unless we worship and obey the One True God. I highly recommend that all Christians spend time reading 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles, to learn these lessons through the lives of real people. Some of them learned; most did not. May we follow the ways of learning and obeying.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

King Zedekiah was the last king of Judah – the last king from the lineage of David and Solomon. Zedekiah’s reign ended in 586 BC. God had promised David that He would establish his and Solomon’s kingdom ‘forever,’ so what did that mean for the future of Judah and Israel?

The Messiah King

God knew from ‘before time began’ that Israel and Judah would fail to reign – even with all the training they had received from the Lord for hundreds of years. That’s why God promised the ‘Seed’ of the woman who would destroy the ‘seed’ of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). That Seed is also known in the Old Testament as the ‘Messiah’ (מָשִׁיחַ – mashiach). The word means ‘anointed.’ Even as David was anointed to be Israel’s king, so the Messiah will rule Israel and the world forever – just as God promised David (2 Samuel 7).

Many of the prophets spoke and wrote about the coming of the Messiah, the Anointed One. Isaiah addressed the specifics of the coming of Messiah more than the other prophets, so I recommend every Christian read Isaiah carefully to see what God said would happen with His Anointed One. Other prophets to read include Micah, Zechariah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Malachi, and Jeremiah.

Behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord, 'That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. Jeremiah 23:5

'Behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord, 'that I will perform that good thing which I have promised to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah: 'In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David A Branch of righteousness; He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In those days Judah will be saved, And Jerusalem will dwell safely. And this is the name by which she will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.' Jeremiah 33:14-16

Many other prophets referred to the Messiah as 'a Branch,' but Jeremiah's statement is particularly important because he prophesied during the reign of the last king in the Davidic lineage, King Zedekiah (Mattaniah). Jeremiah's prophecy was about something God was going to do in the 'future,' but Judah and Israel have not had a king from Davidic lineage since Zedekiah (597-586 BC). Even though Rome appointed

Herod to rule Judea from 37-4 BC, Herod was not from the Davidic lineage. His father (Antipater) was an Edomite who converted to Judaism. That means Jeremiah's prophecy that God would 'raise to David a Branch of righteousness' is still future.

Christians know from both the Old and New Testaments that Jesus Christ that 'Branch of Righteousness' and that He will one day sit on the throne of David. The Old Testament has hundreds of prophecies concerning the Messiah that Jesus fulfilled with His First Coming (1st century AD). He will fulfill the remaining prophecies with His Second Coming (in the near future).

Post-Exile Prophets and Leaders

Judah's exile in Babylon lasted for 70 years ('Sabbath rest' (2 Chronicles 36:21). God delivered Babylon into the hands of the Persians at the end of that time and put it on heart of the king (Cyrus) to allow Jews to return to Judah to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and its Temple (Ezra 1:1-11).

Sheshbazzar was the first 'prince of Judah' to return with thousands of Jews to Judah (Ezra chapter 1). Ezra also mentioned Zerubbabel as another Jewish leader to return with a large group of Jews from Babylon to Judah (Ezra chapter 2). They may have traveled together or Zerubbabel may have followed Sheshbazzar months later. They restored the worship of the Only True God in Judah and began rebuilding the foundation for the Temple (Ezra chapter 3). They faced opposition from non-Jews living in the area which eventually stopped the building process (Ezra chapter 4).

Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them. Ezra 5:1-2

With the help of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, Zerubbabel and Jeshua continued building the 'house of God' in Jerusalem years later. Those people who opposed the building sent a letter to King Darius asking him to search the king's treasure house in Babylon to see if King Cyrus actually gave his permission to the Jews for rebuilding the Temple. King Darius issued a decree that a search be made of the royal archives. The search led to the discovery of King Cyrus' original decree. King Darius wrote a decree commanding the opponents of the Jews to stay away and allow the Jews to build the 'house of God.' Darius also supported the effort with the cost being paid at the king's expense, and commanded that whatever the Jews needed

for the Temple to 'be given them day by day without fail' (Ezra 6:6-12). The building of the Temple was finished and dedicated. The people offered sacrifices to God and celebrated Passover together.

Many years later King Artaxerxes of Persia approved of Ezra returning to Judah from Babylon.

And I, even I, Artaxerxes the king, issue a decree to all the treasurers who are in the region beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, may require of you, let it be done diligently. Ezra 7:21

However, what Ezra found in Judah upon his arrival was a great disappointment –

When these things were done, the leaders came to me, saying, 'The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the

Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass.’ So when I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished. Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. Ezra 9:1-4

It did not take long for the Jews to return to their sinful ways of mixing with pagans. The people, including some of the priests and Levites, had actually intermarried with pagan women – which was forbidden by God. Ezra rebuked them for their sin and they responded correctly –

And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, 'We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this. Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also are with you. Be of good courage, and do it. Ezra 10:2-4

Nehemiah followed Ezra years later from Babylon. He was the 'cupbearer' for King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah expressed his strong desire to return to Judah to help rebuild the city of Jerusalem. Nehemiah faced much opposition as he guided the rebuilding of the wall around the city, but he was able to accomplish it with God's help. Nehemiah joined Ezra and other Jewish leaders in calling God's people to obey the Mosaic Law. The people confessed their sins and made a covenant with God. Nehemiah the governor joined other

leaders in placing ‘their seal on the document’ (Nehemiah chapters 9 and 10). They all made many promises to God, including to ‘not neglect the house of our God.’ I recommend you read the rest of Nehemiah to learn about the many promises Judah made to God. I also recommend you read the writings of the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, to learn more about the return of the exiles to Judah as well as the promise of the Messiah who would rule and reign as King.

The Future King

As you read these passages of Scripture from the last prophets, remember that they prophesied after the last king from David's lineage sat on the throne in Jerusalem. Since no other Davidic king has been on Israel's throne since Zedekiah in the early part of the 6th century BC, these prophecies about God coming to His people to rule over them is 'future.'

Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,' says the Lord. 'Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you. And the Lord will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the Holy Land, and will again choose Jerusalem. Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord, for He is aroused from His holy habitation! Zechariah 2:10-13

‘Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, You and your companions who sit before you, For they are a wondrous sign; For behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH. For behold, the stone That I have laid before Joshua: Upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription,’ Says the Lord of hosts, ‘And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. In that day,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘Everyone will invite his neighbor Under his vine and under his fig tree.’

Zechariah 3:8-10

‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, saying: ‘Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, And He shall build the temple of the Lord; Yes, He shall build the temple of the Lord. He shall bear the glory, And shall sit and rule on His throne; So He shall be a priest on His throne, And the counsel of peace shall be between them both. ’

Zechariah 6:12-13

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim And the horse from Jerusalem; The battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be 'from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth.' Zechariah 9:9-10

And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, on them there will be no rain. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the Lord strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do

not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. In that day 'HOLINESS TO THE LORD' shall be engraved on the bells of the horses. The pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yes, every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holiness to the Lord of hosts. Everyone who sacrifices shall come and take them and cook in them. In that day there shall no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts. Zechariah 14:16-21

Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,' Says the Lord of hosts. Malachi 3:1

In Summary

Humans are haunted by a deception and a decision made thousands of years ago in a beautiful garden location somewhere in the ancient world. The God who created the heavens and the earth and all living things, is a perfect God. As we've seen throughout this series, God has revealed Himself to be Self-Existent, Almighty, All-Knowing, Everywhere Present at the same time, Unchangeable, Loving, Kind, Compassionate, Caring, Honest, Truthful, Righteous, and Just. However, there is a being who has opposed God throughout the ages.

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. Genesis 3:1a

This 'cunning' serpent approached the woman God had created and questioned her about what God had said.

And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'? ' Genesis 3:1b

When the woman responded that God had said that, the serpent contradicted God and deceived the woman into believing him rather than God.

Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' Genesis 3:4-5

The woman disobeyed God and led her husband into disobedience as well. Nothing has been the same since. People believe lies and are easily deceived. We've seen that throughout this series. Remember that God's purpose in creating humans, male and female, was to 'reign' with Him over the world. That reign would include being fruitful and multiplying, filling the earth and subduing it, and having dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth (Genesis 1).

However, the disobedience of the first humans led to a severe curse that every human would endure from that day until now and into the future. God cursed the serpent, the man, and the woman, but He did not give up on humanity. We find God continually guiding and training humans, even as He judged them with righteousness. What we see in the Old Testament is that humans preferred worshipping false gods rather than the Only True God.

God knew that humans could not do anything to ‘save’ themselves, so He promised them a Savior, the Messiah, the Branch of Righteousness who would come from the lineage of King David. However, as the Old Testament drew to a close with its final prophet (spokesman for God), the Messiah had not yet appeared. Israel, the chosen people of God, were still waiting.

Next eBook

God did not speak to Israel for 400 years between the time of the prophet Malachi and the prophet John the Baptist. What happened to Judah and the promised Seed during that time? Did the Seed ever appear? If so, when and how? What happened when the Seed appeared? We'll step into the next phase of God's eternal plan in the next part of our special series – Train to Reign.

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