

BIB104 OT2 Life & Literature of Israel

Unit 4b 2 Chronicles: Hope Through Obedience (Part 2)

Presented by the



LANCASTER BIBLE COLLEGE
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When we last left our heroes, King Solomon had just taken the reins after the death of his father, King David. Can you imagine being Solomon? His dad was a magnificent leader. His dad was a man who loved God, and God loved him. He had some big shoes to fill. It had to have been overwhelming in many aspects. But now he's put in that position not by man but by God. Will he turn out to be a good king? It might have bounced through his head. "Will I be a bad king? What should I do? Will I remember what my dad told me? Will I make application to it? Will I be able to build this temple that my dad told me I need to do? And if I do, how long will it take? Do I have the resources? Do I have the ability? Will the people follow me?" All questions that you and I still face today as we oftentimes are insecure about the roles we have in life.

I remember distinctly the day that my first child was born. I remember holding him in my hands, in my arms. His name was Christopher. And I remember two thoughts hit me. One was "Oh my goodness. I have to take care of him forever." But I also remember thinking, "Lord, I feel so ill-equipped." I love that our God is a God that not only gives us the equipping beforehand that sometimes we don't even acknowledge or realize, but he ongoing equips us through our failures and our successes as we take his word and use that as our guide. And that's what Solomon needed to do. Would he or wouldn't he? We'll find out a little bit more as we dig into 2 Chronicles here.

Really, Solomon didn't have any worries that he had to really be concerned about in his initial stages of getting started. He was actually a pretty amazing king overall. What he would humbly ask God at the beginning: for wisdom to rule. Wow. I mean, if God gave you any option of anything you could choose and you're going to be the king, I know what my thinking would be. Well, man, I want to knock out the other kings that are my adversaries. Perhaps there is internal strife you wanted to take down. Maybe he just wanted that everybody would think he was the greatest or the best-looking. Or perhaps he wanted them to just think that he was as good as his dad. But instead, we see the true heart of Solomon that we don't want to lose sight of as we see some of his flaws and the sins that he commits. He had an option to ask for anything. In the pureness of his heart, he asked for wisdom.

Now, God is so impressed with his request, and knowing where it comes from, he doesn't just give him wisdom. He gives him lots of money. He gives him prestige. He gives him peace in the land. He gives him clout in the international community. Solomon oversees the major project that may have concerned him: the building of the greatest feat of architectural magnificence at least that Israel had ever seen, in the building of the temple in Jerusalem. It was lavish, with gold and bronze and angels everywhere. God's house was totally magnificent and detailed to the finest quality in every way possible. And the best resources were available for the best quality materials to be used in the building of it. Because of this, just about everyone over the whole world thinks that Solomon is the smartest, the richest, the best king alive. But then Solomon dies and things go downhill pretty fast.

Now, again, it's so easy for us, as we look at this kind of roller coaster of kings that we notice here, that we could say, "Wow. What was wrong with these dads?" We don't have the whole picture. It certainly seems like many of them really dropped the ball in passing on their mantle. But ultimately, each of our children will decide if they accept God or they reject God. And we need to be aware of that. So be careful of the harsh judgments you give when that could easily fall on ourselves as well.

Rehoboam takes over, Solomon's son. And under his rule, the nation of Israel fractures into two different countries. Rehoboam and the rest of David's ancestors rule in what is the southern kingdom of Judah, while Jeroboam takes charge in the northern kingdom of Israel. Because the Chronicler loves David so much, he naturally thinks that the folks on the south are way superior. After all, they have the temple in their territory, which means God is their neighbor down the street, so to speak. So the folks in the north and south are almost always at war constantly. And again, I don't say that in a minimal way because, especially for us that are watching this that live in America, we really live in a state of peace that really is kind of mind-blowing. For those of you that might live in other parts of the world, you understand what it's like to have that constant stress of having war right around the corner, of factions battling against each other, of individuals vying for power and political clout. These individuals now were entering that state. There was no more peace.

Meanwhile, as they're fighting each other, each country also goes through a string of not so great kings. Eventually, things go badly for both kingdoms when King Jehoshaphat of Judah attempts to call a truce by letting his son marry King Ahab of Israel's daughter. It turns out that the lady in question is an idol worshiper and she uses her influence to turn the people of Judah away from God. Wow. One person's influence for good or bad is magnificent. Now, you might think, "I'm not a king. I'm not a political ruler." But you are a person of influence. Your life is influencing another's life. Your life is making an impact on another person's life. So keep that in mind as you make the decisions you make, and don't minimize the life that you live and the family that you live in and the community you live in and the church that you remember of. Don't minimize that aspect of things because we know that God loves those who love him and God punishes the idol worshiper.

But it's really not all bad in everything that happens here. In between these incompetent, murderous, idolatrous monarchs, there are a few good apples in the bunch. There's Hezekiah. There's Josiah. And they're two examples of a few kings who turn things around. In fact, they spend their entire reigns trying to make amends for the previous generations' idolatry and general corruption. How? By trusting God and following his laws. You may have grown up where your legacy handed down to you was one of rejection of God, but you don't have to reject God. As King Hezekiah and Josiah show to us, a person who steps in and says, "I will stop the flow of this." How? By trusting God and following his laws. It's amazing the difference you can make by simply being obedient to what God calls you to do.

Now, God is totally willing to help a country out as long as their people are willing to swear their unwavering loyalty and devotion to him, Yahweh, God alone. That's all it takes. God is waiting for those opportunities to be able to come along and to be a part of that. In the end, though, as we read about both the northern and southern kingdoms, we find that they just can't seem to get this whole thing together. Northern Israel seems to be a lost cause, so God is forced to allow the Assyrian Empire to destroy that kingdom. What a tragedy. Ten lost tribes of Israel to the north, and Judah doesn't fare much better. After several kings there stray from God's commandments, God has had enough. He let the Babylonian Empire invade Jerusalem, kill most of the important people, and leave the rest to starve and die, exile the royal family and their officials, and burn the temple to the ground. The wrath of God came down in a harsh way. But remember, it's easy sometimes to go, "God, why would you do that?" instead of failing to recognize the Israelites were asked to do something simple. "Obey me. Follow me. I want to bless you." They reject. Be careful, my friend, that you don't reject God and then judgment comes and you wave your fist to God, thinking God somehow messed up.

After 70 years of exile and despair for the Judeans, the spirit of God moves King Cyrus, an unsaved king of Persia who managed to defeat the Babylonians, to allow the exiles from Judah to head home and rebuild the temple. Have you ever had that experience of going home again? When I grew up in the home that I lived in, in the Midwest, I remember going off to college. And it wasn't like it was thousands of miles away, but it was enough away where there was nothing quite as sweet as when Thanksgiving break came and I get to go back home. The smells of home, the sights of home, the people of home, there's a comfort there. And it's kind of odd sometimes when you go home and you find a new building built, a house torn down that had been there for years, a field you played in is now a development. And the Israelites had to go back to the beautiful temple they were told about, completely destroyed, the walls knocked down, the city completely and totally devastated. But it was still home. And they were given a task: rebuild the temple. Rebuild this nation. But in all of it, stay faithful to God. And they started over again in doing that. But that's for another book and another story.

Now, a post-exilic or an after-the-exile Jewish scholar compiled material from many historical resources to chronicle the history of his people. This person isn't named, and he remains unknown or anonymous. Now, Ezra has been cited as a possible candidate, but whoever the chronicler was, he utilized official and unofficial documents to write this historical account. As noted earlier, 2 Chronicles originally was joined as one book. So was Kings. So was Samuel. Not first and second, but Chronicles, Kings, Samuel. The late Israeli scholars chose to separate those two books since about 200 B.C. And that's when the Septuagint or the Greek version of the Old Testament was translated.

Now, 2 Chronicles covers the time from Solomon's ascension to the throne in 971 B.C. until the southern king of Judah was finally carried away into exile in Babylon at 586 B.C. The focus of this book is on Judah. The author was more concerned with telling the story of David's descendants who reigned over Judah than with the history of the northern kingdom of Israel. The centrality of Jerusalem where the temple was located falls in line with the book's overarching focus on the priesthood as well.

The Book of 2 Chronicles is a narrative history. The author appears, as I mentioned, to be the prophet Ezra possibly. Again, we're not sure. And like I said, he wrote it right around 430 B.C. It covers those events that we laid out there, but interesting to note there were some key personalities outside of King Solomon. There was the Queen of Sheba. There was Rehoboam, Solomon's son. There was Asa. There was Jehoshaphat. There was Jehoram, Joash, Uzziah, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah. Quite a few key characters, and they did all play a significant part, as we see in 2 Chronicles.

Now, remember, again, 2 Chronicles was written probably around 5th century B.C. That was following the return of a small group. Remember, it was a small group to begin with of Jews to Judah following the fall of the battle on the empire. Their goal again was to rebuild the temple and resettle the Holy Land. And this little community soon found itself in a struggle simply to survive. Now, the Jews did eventually rebuild the temple, but languished for years in their fight to reclaim the land. Against this backdrop, the Chronicler portrays Jewish history, focusing on the blessings God bestowed when leaders were faithful to the law. Remember, this book opens with Solomon establishing his throne over a unified nation, solidifying his authority and squashing early rebellion. We even see that in 1 Kings 2. He then builds this magnificent temple to God using the plans that God had given to his father, King David. Six of the nine chapters devoted to King Solomon focus on the temple construction, a task reserved for him since his birth. We see 2 Chronicles 2-7 there.

Now, when the kingdom split under the rule of Rehoboam, Solomon's son and the Levites from all over Israel sided with Rehoboam and flocked to Jerusalem to continue their priestly duties [2Ch 11:13-14]. But a cycle of righteousness and corruption characterized the thrones. And it's interesting to note right from the beginning how that happened. Solomon dies. Rehoboam takes over. And Rehoboam immediately makes a choice. Now, remember, we talked about Solomon making a choice and saying, "God, give me wisdom." Rehoboam has an opportunity. The tax burden was heavy at this time on the Israelites. The wise counselors, counselors to the wisest king, Solomon, at that time, were still around, and Rehoboam could have tapped in to their wisdom. He also had his buddies, the guys his age, the guys he had grown up with, the guys he hung out with. The wise counselors said, "The nation needs a break. Lift part of that tax burden. Let them breathe. That will help our economy. That will help the spirits of our people. You're going to find that's a great way to start things." His friends, his cohorts, the people he grew up with, "Absolutely not, Rehoboam. You need to go in there and tax them in ways where they think your dad's taxes were nothing compared to you. You show them who's boss." Well, we know what happens from that. Things don't start off well for Rehoboam. The people are in arms against him, and it just goes from bad to worse for Rehoboam, and that cycle of righteousness and corruption that characterized not only his throne but so many of the other kings.

Now, some kings were completely evil. They disregarded God's law and they led their people into sinful behaviors with what seems to be reckless abandonment. Now, a few kings, like Solomon, started off as righteous but they fall away. Others, they strayed but they repented. That was Manasseh's story in 2Ch 33:1-25. Now, a few kings (we mentioned this a little earlier), like Hezekiah and Josiah, they were honored with the epitaph...now, listen to this...what a great epitaph...“He did right in the sight of the Lord.” (2Ch 29:2 and then also 2Ch 34:2) Throughout 2 Chronicles, faithfulness, just like 1 Chronicles, just like the Kings, just like Samuel, faithfulness is rewarded. Betrayal was judged towards God.

Now, a history lover will enjoy the numerous mentions of secular historical figures that are stated during this time period. We hear from the beginning, Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria to Sennacherib of Assyria to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the non-Jewish foreign leaders that played prominent roles in the political fortunes of the nation of Judah. Now, the Book of 1 and 2 Chronicles cover mostly the same information as I stated that 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings do. Now, the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles, though, focus more on that priestly aspect of the time period. The Book of 2 Chronicles is essentially an evaluation of the nation's religious history. We find, in fact, the big outline that chapters 1 through 9, Solomon rebuilds the temple. Chapters 10 through 35, we see that David's line rules in Jerusalem. And then chapter 36, as a standalone, is when that persecution comes and exile takes place as Babylon comes in and conquers the nation of Israel and removes them from their homeland.

Now, to break that down a little bit more, chapters 1 through 9, they teach the details of the reign of King Solomon. Now, the main part of it, as I mentioned, is the building of the temple. But it also covers the wisdom of Solomon. Also, like we said, the building and construction of the temple, and that was dedicated to the Lord, by the way, in 2Ch 7:14. And I want to read this one to you because it's a great verse. “If My people, who are called by My name, they humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and they turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and I will heal their land.” What a promise to give to the Israelites, that if they could cling on to that and understand what God wanted, a life of peace and goodness follows. And rejecting that meant that God would be forced to judge them. That's all in chapters 1 through chapter 9.

Then we see in chapters 10 through chapter 36 that this really describes the split of the nation of Israel. The nation splits into two kingdoms, as we stated earlier, north and south. The northern kingdom, they revolt against King Rehoboam and they take a new king and his name was Jeroboam. 2 Chronicles focuses mainly from here on to the events of the southern kingdom, as we said. These include 20 kings and a dynasty that's all from the line of King David. And these chapters describe the events all the way up through the northern kingdom and its captivity to Babylon. Nevertheless, the mercy of the Lord is seen in the last two verses of this book. Cyrus, king of Persia, a nonbeliever, declares that the remnant of Israel may return to Jerusalem. And I love this, 2Ch 36:22. “In order to fulfill the word of the Lord.” God is faithful.

Now, these post-exilic Jews or after-the-exile Jews need a reminder of who their God was and how he worked. History provided the best lesson for them of all. The author uses the history of Judah to demonstrate that God blesses his people when they remain faithful and joyfully worship the Lord. In fact, one writer stated it this way. “History itself is a call to worship and an invitation to hope. If the struggling community of Jews in Judah will put God first, as did godly generations of the past, and show their commitment by a similar zeal for worship, the Lord will surely show his faithfulness to them. The line of David will yet again take the Zion’s throne and the kingdom of God will be established over all the earth.” He states that very well.

As it did for the Israelites, history can jog our memories. Can you remember times when God blessed you? Remember, not purely financially. In fact, sometimes not financially at all. Such memories are blessings in themselves. We don’t take enough time to stop, take a deep breath, and to remember back to the blessings of God. Falls in driving through this scenery and seeing the blessing of nature, the blessing of a good meal with good friends, the blessing of uncovering, and for you at least, for the first time, a promise in the Scriptures as you read them. The blessing of a friend that loves me enough to confront me in my sin. If they would simply do that. Such memories are blessings in themselves, as well as encouragements for you and I to press on in holiness, with hope and with confidence. If you’re hard-pressed to recall specific times when God worked in your life, consider your devotional habits. A prayer journal maybe that recalls prayers you asked and those that were answered on can kind of be a history manual of your life on how God works. God wants us to remember. He established wells and he put up altars for the Israelites to go. “Go to this well and remember. Tell the story of. Go to this altar and remember. Tell the story of.” He knows we forget. I believe communion is one of those for us. But press on. God wants us to remember his works, so that we too can praise him for his goodness and have hope for our future and pass it down to the next generation.

This book was written to emphasize the blessings of the righteous kings and expose the sins of the wicked kings. That was at least one purpose. It parallels, as we mentioned, parts of the 1 and 2 Kings. And like 1 Chronicles, it was written from the viewpoint of a priest who spoke from a spiritual perspective, including revivals. It too is written after the exile and focuses on the proper and correct worship of Yahweh.

There’s a couple of key verses that I wanted to point out to you. In 2 Chronicles 2:1, we see this: “Solomon gave orders to build a temple.” Listen. “For the Name of the Lord... a royal palace for himself.” 2 Chronicles 29:1-3, “Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years. His mother’s name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as (I love this) his father David had done. In the first month of the first year of his reign, he opened the doors of the temple of the Lord and he repaired them.” “Furthermore,” 2 Chronicles 36:14 says this, “all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the Lord, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem.”

And last, 2Ch 36:23 says this. “This is what Cyrus king of Persia says.” Cyrus king of Persia says this. Listen. “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you, may the Lord his God be with him and let him go up.” Wow. Can you imagine some of our non-Christian rulers today saying a phrase—There’s this opening phrase again. “The Lord, the God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth.”? We see the way that God works, even from places we would never imagine. Great key verses there.

Now, as we mentioned, the Book of 2 Chronicles being the history of the southern kingdom and where the reign was, the decline of Judah, but again, I think that we want to make sure that we point out that one aspect of what it focused on was there was an emphasis on the spiritual reformers who zealously sought to turn the people back to God. Little is said about the bad kings, in fact, or the failures of the good kings. Only the goodness is stressed in these passages in this book. Since 2 Chronicles takes a priestly perspective, the northern kingdom of Israel is rarely mentioned because most of the time, her false worship and she refused to acknowledge the temple of Jerusalem. 2 Chronicles concludes with the final destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. But we see that the heart of it was the lessons that were learned from those that chose to follow God in Judah.

Now, as with all the references of kings and temples in the Old Testament, we see them as a reflection of the true king of kings, Jesus Christ, and of the temple of the Holy Spirit, his people. Even the best of the kings of Israel had their faults that all sinful men have, and they led people imperfectly. But when the King of kings comes to live and reign on the earth in the millennium, he will establish himself on the throne of all the earth as the rightful king and the heir of David. Only then will we have a perfect king who will reign in righteousness and holiness, something the best of Israel’s kings could only dream about. Similarly, the great temple built by Solomon was not designed to last forever. Just 150 years later, it was in need of repair from decay and was defaced by future generations who turned back to idolatry (2 Kings 12). But the temple of the Holy Spirit, those who belong to Christ, will live forever. We who belong to Jesus are the temple, made not by human hands but by the will of God, as John 1:12-13 says. The spirit who lives within us will never depart from us and will deliver us safely into the hands of God one day (Ephesians 1:13 and Ephesians 4:30). No earthly vessel or temple contains that promise.

The reader of the Chronicles is invited to evaluate each generation from the past and discern why each was blessed for their obedience or punished for their wickedness. But we’re also able to compare the plight of these generations to even our own, both corporately and individually. If we or our nation or our church is experiencing hardships, it’s to our benefit to compare our beliefs and how we act with those beliefs and experiences of the Israelites under those various kings. God hates sin. He doesn’t tolerate it. But if the Chronicles teach us anything, it’s that God desires to forgive and to heal. Who? Those who humbly pray and repent (1 John 1:9).

If you could have anything that you wish for from God, what would you ask from him? Wealth? Health? Health for your loved ones? Power over life and death maybe? It's amazing to think about what that one wish from God could be. But more amazing is that God made such an offer to Solomon and he chose none of these things. What he asked for was wisdom and knowledge to complete the task that God had assigned to him and to do it well. The lesson for us is that God has given each of us a commission to fulfill, and the greatest blessing that we can ask from God is the ability to carry out his will for our lives. For that, we need wisdom from above, as James 3:17 says. Why? So we can discern his will, as well as have an understanding and an intimate knowledge of him so that we can be motivated to live in a Christ-like way both in our deed and in our attitude. Again, we find that in James 3:13. 2 Chronicles. What will we learn from it? What will we take away from it? How will it impact the way that I live my life today?