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A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: 2 Chronicles 7:12-22

15. THE BOOK OF 2 CHRONICLES

Around the year 1952 General Dwight D. Eisenhower was thinking about running for the presidency of the United States. An oil baron in Fort Worth, Texas named Sid Richardson wanted him to run, and Sid talked to Billy Graham about it. Billy was a young man who had just become a popular national figure in America. So Billy Graham wrote a letter to Dwight Eisenhower. *In his letter, Billy Graham quoted a politician who had said to him that if Washington is not cleaned out in the next two or three years, we are going to enter a period of chaos that could bring about our downfall.* Billy quoted that statement to Eisenhower and then added, “ *Sometimes I wonder who is going to win the battle first, the barbarians beating at our gates from without, or the termites of immorality from within.*” Well, when Eisenhower read the letter he was taken back and said, “ *Who is this young man ?*” But Eisenhower *did* run for the White House, and when he won the election he called Billy Graham and asked to meet him at the Commodore Hotel in New York City.

It was five days before the inauguration, and Eisenhower told Billy that he was concerned about the spiritual condition of America and he asked Billy to give him a Scripture verse he could claim as his own as he prepared

to take the oath of office. Billy Graham suggested this verse, 2 Chronicles 7:14 and when Eisenhower took the oath of office, his hand rested on a Bible that was opened to this passage. My if the president of the United States and if the United States of America needed that verse when I was a baby in my mother’s arms, we need it a hundred times more today. When I think of growing up in the 1950s, I think of it as a time of relative innocence. Ulster was by and large a church attending country. In primary school we opened each day with devotions. There was an atmosphere where God was feared. And yet, Dwight Eisenhower was worried about the spiritual condition of the U.S.A. and as he took the oath of office his hand rested on a Bible that was opened to 2 Chronicles 7:14. My the 1950s are long gone and things have never been as bad as they are today. And yet, the formula for revival is still the same, “ *If my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*”

Bible scholars tell us there are sixteen different revivals described for us in the Bible, and the greatest book in the Bible on the subject of revival is 2 Chronicles. This Old Testament record gives us the biblical formula for revival, and then describes for us five different revivals under five different Old Testament kings. Now before we get there let’s back up a moment and refresh our minds with the background to these books.

(a) There are Similarities:

With other books. 1 Chronicles contains material found in 2 Samuel and 2 Chronicles contains material found in 1 and 2 Kings. There are similarities. Of course the books of Chronicles and Kings are not the only parts of the Bible where the same period is covered twice. There are four accounts of the life of Christ in the New Testament. Even though the books seem the same, they each come from a different angle, because each gospel was written for a different kind of person.

(b) There are Omissions:

1. Saul barely gets a mention.
2. David is mentioned at some length, but even then it is interesting to notice what is omitted. His struggles with Saul are ignored, Absalom's rebellion is missed out, and the whole episode with Bathsheba the turning point in David's reign does not receive a single line. (a) (b)

(c) There are Additions:

For example 1 Chronicles starts with genealogies or "*family trees*," but the author is only concerned with the royal line of David. None of the kings in the north were in the royal line so they don't receive a mention. Chronicles is specifically a history of the royal house of David and nothing more.

(d) There are Differences:

Samuel and Kings are written from a prophetic viewpoint, Chronicles from a priestly. Samuel and Kings are more negative, Chronicles is more positive. Samuel and Kings are a record of both Israel and Judah, Chronicles is a

record primarily of Judah, Samuel and Kings is all about Man's failings, Chronicles is all about God's faithfulness. Samuel and Kings emphasizes kings and prophets, Chronicles emphasizes the temple and priests. Samuel and Kings were written shortly after the beginning of captivity in Babylon, Chronicles was written shortly after the return from the captivity. *Now when you bring together the similarities, the omissions, the additions and the differences you can see the purpose of the book.* The books of Chronicles are given from a different viewpoint. The books of Kings give us history from the viewpoint of the prophets, Chronicles from the viewpoint of the priests. The books of Kings give us history from the human viewpoint, Chronicles from the divine standpoint. The former show us man ruling, the latter show us God overruling. Chronicles therefore provides us with a more heavenly perspective.

And it's because of this, many believe the books were written by Ezra. They were written after the Babylonian captivity to demonstrate the significance of their history. You see, in Kings the people needed an explanation for why they had been sent into exile, but in Chronicles they knew why, they just needed to be encouraged and sent back to the land to re-establish the walls of the city and rebuild the temple. *So Chronicles was a sermon for a returning remnant to encourage them to persevere amidst the difficult times.* Now when they got back to Jerusalem it wasn't very exciting. They had to struggle to make a living. They were very poor, building the temple was slow work. It needed two prophets Haggai and Zechariah to urge them to keep going. And the author of this book had

to get the truth instilled in them that God must come first in their life as a people. **Is this not why the emphasis is on the temple ?** You see, even before Nehemiah is sent to rebuild the city, Ezra and Zerubbabel are sent to rebuild the temple. For as Dr. S. Baxter says, “ *In any national reconstruction we must begin there with the temple that is with God. Our politicians will not learn. They persist in the worldly wise idea that the city must be built before the temple. Well, they are wrong,* ” So these books of Chronicles were written to explain to the people the meaning of their history and to encourage them to rebuild the temple for God had not forgotten His promises to His people. Now as I have said Chronicles contains material found in other books. 2 Chronicles contains material found in 1 and 2 Kings so this book opens where 1 Chronicles left off. 1 Chronicles closes with the death of David, 2 Chronicles opens with,

(1) THE REIGN OF SOLOMON Ch's 1-9

Solomon's reign is Israel's “ *golden age,* ” of peace and prosperity. The glory and grandeur of Solomon's kingdom span from the border of Egypt to the east and south, to the River Euphrates to the east and north. (1 Kings 4:21) Solomon's reign began in a blaze of glory. Some of the greatest years of Israel's existence were during the reign of Solomon. I mean think of,

(a) SOLOMON'S WISDOM:

When the Lord gave to Solomon a blank cheque and said to him, “ *Ask what I shall give thee,* ” (1:7) Solomon

reminded the Lord of the circumstances and responsibilities of his life and prayed “ *give me now wisdom and knowledge,* ” (1:10) And God answered his prayer. Like Solomon are you involved in the work of God ? Maybe like him you are in a position of leadership, and you feel your need to wisdom ? Perhaps its soul winning, its outreach, its evangelism among the children, its working with the youth with all of their problems, do you not need this wisdom ? John Blanchard defined wisdom “ *as the ability to discern God's hand in human circumstances and apply heavenly judgments to earthly situations.* ” And how we stand in need of this heavenly wisdom for human reasoning is deficient. (a)

(b) SOLOMON'S WEALTH:

Look if you will at (1:15-17) Solomon was the Bill Gates of his day. If ever there was a subject Solomon knew, it was money. He secured it, saved it, spent it, studied it and shared it. Has God endowed you with wealth ? Well, do you realise that you are only a steward of God's money ? There is an interesting verse in the book of Deuteronomy that says, “ *But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth.* ” (8:18) Who gives you the power to get wealth ? Who give you the mental capacity to make money ? Where does it all come from ? The Lord. (1 Chron 29:14) Do you realise that you are only a steward of God's money ?

(c) SOLOMON'S WORK:

For this book gives the history of what is known as Solomon's Temple, the temple being a place of worship. In the opening chapters it is **built** by the final chapters it is **burnt**. The concluding verses, however hold out hope, that a further temple would replace it this was later built by Zerubbabel. *You see, if David gave Judah a scepter, Solomon gave Judah a sanctuary.* Tenderly the writer of Chronicles keeps in mind the fortunes of the temple. *Conceived* in the mind of David, *constructed* under the guidance of Solomon, *contaminated* by some of the kings, *cleansed* by others, and at last *consumed* in the fires that demolished Jerusalem, the temple is never far from the centre of the story. Commenced in the fourth year of Solomon's reign it was completed seven years later. (1 Kings 6:38 3:2) You see, God originally dwelt in the tabernacle (Ex 40:34) then in Solomon's temple (6:18 7:1) Then the glory of God came to earth in the person of the Lord Jesus. (Jn 1:12-14) Today, the church corporately (Eph 2:21) and the Christian individually (1 Cor 6:19-29) is the temple of God.

Do you recall Paul's words ? “ *What ? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own.* ” (1 Cor 6:19) My do you realise that what you do to your body you are doing to the temple of God ? When you overeat, smoke, and engage in sexual sin do you know what you are doing ? You are defiling the temple of God. Someone says, “ *smoking won't take you to hell.* ” No, it only makes you smell as if you've already been there. Now can you see something of the greatness of Solomon ?

(d) SOLOMON'S WORSHIP:

For at the dedication of the temple King Solomon led the congregation in prayer and worship. Its interesting that Solomon makes it clear in his prayer that the condition of Israel's heart is more important than the presence of the temple. He knew that sin would bring chastening but that repentance would bring blessing. It was far more important to dedicate the people than the building. I wonder, if we would assemble to worship correctly, reverently, and submissively, if the “ *glory of the Lord would fill the house, ?* ” (7:1) Now the remaining chapters in this opening section are taken up with,

(e) SOLOMON'S WAYS:

As in 1 Chronicles, David's sins in relation to Bathsheba and Uriah are omitted, so in 2 Chronicles the sins of Solomon are not recorded which in (1 Kings Ch 11) are presented as the reason for the division of the kingdom. Do you see the focus again ? You see, a prophet would concentrate on the bad things the kings did which brought judgment on the land. But the priest is pleased to record the building of the temple, the arrangement of the choirs and the establishment of worship. David and Solomon are therefore seen in a different light from Kings. (1)

(2) THE REVIVAL IN JUDAH Ch's 10-36

Now let's not forget where we exactly are in this book. The first nine chapters are given over to the reign of Solomon. Then in (Ch 10) we have the division of the

kingdom but after that only the account of the southern kingdom of Judah is given. The spotlight is on the kings who followed in the line of David. Now remember the times of the Kings generally were some of the darkest days of Israel's illustrious history. Idolatry, immorality, apostasy, and apathy filled the land. *The worship of the preeminent God had been replaced with the worship of many pagan gods.* The Northern Kingdom of Israel had 19 kings and they were all bad. Of the 19 Kings and 1 Queen of the Southern Kingdom most were bad but some were good. But it's interesting to note that although there were more bad kings ruling Judah the sum total of their years on the throne amounts to considerably less than that of the combined reigns of the good kings. Given special prominence are 5 of these kings in whose reigns were periods of revival, renewal, and reformation. These kings were,

1. Asa (Ch's 14 - 16)
2. Jehoshaphat (Ch's 17 - 20)
3. Joash (Ch's 23 – 24)
4. Hezekiah (Ch's 29 – 32)
5. Josiah (Ch's 34 – 35)

James MacDonald said, “ *Revival is renewed interest after a period of indifference or decline.* ” Martin Lloyd Jones said “ *a revival means days of heaven on earth.* ” Stephen Olford said “ *revival is an invasion from heaven that brings a conscious awareness of God.* ” Vance Havner said, “ *revival is the church falling in love with Jesus all over again.* ” Perhaps the best definition is found in (Acts 3:19) “ *times of refreshing from the presence of*

the Lord. ” So during this time of degradation, God sent 5 periods of revival. Now I want you to notice that with each of these five kings a different aspect of revival is emphasized. For example in,

(a) King Asa: We have the Social Aspect of Revival:

That is, revival impacts society. You see, the first revival was during the reign of Asa. Of him we read “ *For he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves. And commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment. Also he took away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the images: and the kingdom was quiet before him.* ” (14:3-5) You see, Asa, tore down idolatry, he took up idolatry, he threw away idolatry. Asa even took away the throne from his own mother, Maachah, because she “ *had made an idol in a grove.* ” (15:16) When the Ethiopians attack with an army twice the size of Judah's King Asa turns in total reliance upon the Lord and experiences a great and overwhelming victory. The Lord gives him a promise with a condition.

“ *The Lord is with you while ye be with him and if ye seek him he will be found of you but if ye forsake him he will forsake you.* ” (15:2) Asa responded whole heartedly to that prophecy and dealt ruthlessly with idolatry in the land. Do you remember the words of the psalmist after he had prayed for revival ? He says “ *truth shall spring out of the earth and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yea the Lord shall give that which is good and*

our land shall yield her increase.” (85:11-12) Did you know that every major social and political reform that ever came about came as a result of revival. The abolition of slavery was a result of revival. The end of the 90 hour week came because of revival, The removal of child labour resulted from revival in the days of John Wesley. The Y.M.C.A. the Salvation Army and the Sunday School movement all of those movements came as a result of revival. (a)

(b) King Jehoshaphat: We have the Supernatural Aspect of Revival:

Jehoshaphat was Asa’s son who sent the Levites to teach the Law of God in every city. This strategy had such an effect that the nations around Judah are gripped by the fear of the Lord. (17:10) So much so that none of them attempts to make war with Judah. However some years later the Ammonites, with the Moabites and the inhabitants of Mount Seir come up against Judah. When news of this mighty invasion reaches the King of Judah he reacts as the only the godly can do. Can you see here,

1. The Prayer to the Lord:

Look at (20:6-12) Incidentally, prayer is the key to revival. George Müller, was born in 1805, and he lived until 1898. He was born in Germany, and as a young man he got himself into a lot of trouble. In fact, he was just wild, doing whatever he felt like doing. By the age of 16, he was in prison. When he got out of prison, he started where he had left off, and he lived a thoroughly immoral

life. But in his early 20s, he begun getting tired of it. One day a friend invited him to go with him to a Bible study group, and instantly Müller knew that he wanted to go, too. He did go that evening, and it was the turning point in his life. To make a long story short, Müller went on to become a man of incredible faith and prayer who started evangelistic works and missionary enterprises and orphanages, and ran them all by faith and prayer. He would pray and specific, virtually miraculous answers would come down from heaven. He published an account of this in a book called “*Answers to Prayer.*” Copies of this book made it to this country and in January, 1857, a young man named James McQuilkin read that book. McQuilkin was deeply moved by Müller’s record and he went out and found a prayer partner, and, in time they recruited a handful of prayer partners, four of them as far as we know. Every Friday night, these four men gathered in the old schoolhouse in Kells and prayed revival.

McQuilkin and his very small group prayed for about a year, and on 1st January 1858, the Lord gave them their first remarkable answer to prayer, *the conversion of a farm worker*. Encouraged by this, the group continued meeting in earnest prayer as more people came to faith in Christ. Another year passed, and in February of 1859, a spirit of revival broke out in a nearby church as McQuilkin preached. So many people came and crammed themselves into the church that fears arose that the balconies and galleries would collapse. The revival overflowed into the streets. It spread to other churches and towns. The new believers carried the spiritual fire to other places and a revival spread throughout this country.

It's estimated that as many as a thousand people a day gave themselves to Christ. Business came to a complete standstill for a brief period of time as people couldn't do anything else until they got themselves right with God. People were unable to sleep at night, for they were under such conviction that they wept and prayed through the night in their homes. And it all began with prayer. 1.

2. The Praise of the Lord:

Look at (20:22) Can you imagine putting singers into the battle at the head of the army ? 1. 2.

3. The Power from the Lord:

For “ *the Lord sent ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir which were come against Judah and they were smitten.* ” (20:22) Do you see the supernatural aspect here ? The Lord had to do it. God was the source of this blessing. Do you recall the prayer of the psalmist ? (85:6) “ *Wilt thou not revive us again ?* ” The book of Habakkuk has a prayer like this, “ *O Lord revive Thy work in the midst of the years.* ” (Hab 3:2) Isaiah prayed, “ *O that Thou wouldst rend the heavens, that Thou wouldst come down, that the mountains might flow down at Thy presence.* ” (Is 64:1) My when revival comes, it is something which God has to do. We are not able to bring revival. Sure, we can do the human thing that God expects of us, but we must recognise that we cannot work up revival. David Matthew's stated the truth well, “ *Divine movements have their birthplace in the heart of Deity.* ” (a) (b)

(c) King Joash: We have the Sacrificial Aspect of Revival:

For it was Joash, who set about repairing the house of the Lord after the reign of wicked Queen Athaliah. Joash devised a rather unique way to get the offerings of the people to repair the house of the Lord. He had a chest built. (24:8 -14) I want you to notice how these Israelites gave ?

1. They gave Obediently:

It says that they were “ *to bring in to the Lord the collection that Moses the servant of God laid upon Israel in the wilderness.* ” (24:9) In other words, they gave because the Bible says to give. Have you started to give to the work of the Lord ? My the question that we need to answer this is this, “ *how much owest thou unto my Lord.* ” (Lk 16:5) Yes, unto the Lord who has given you life, breath, and all things. To the Lord who has loved you eternally, redeemed you sacrificially and indwells you permanently. “ *How much owest thou unto my Lord ?* ”

2. They gave Joyfully:

Did you notice (24:10) ? “ *And all the people rejoiced.* ” Paul says, “ *For God loveth a cheerful giver.* ” Did you know that the word “ *cheerful,* ” literally means “ *hilarious,* ” the Lord loves a hilarious giver. Is that how you give ?

3. They gave Abundantly:

It says they gave “ *much money*, ” (24:11) In the last part of (24:11) it says they “ *gathered money in abundance*. ” What did they do with all that money ? Well, look at (24:12) In other words, they took the money and put it in the hands of those who would do the work of the Lord. Now there are a lot of believers who talk about revival but they are robbing God. Do you recall how God charged the people of Malachi’s day ? “ *Will a man rob God ? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee ? In tithes and offerings. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse and prove me now herewith saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it.* ” (3:8-10) Do you long to see revival ? Well, what about your giving ?

(d) King Hezekiah: We have the Spiritual Aspect of Revival:

You see, no king of Judah is more unreservedly commended than good king Hezekiah. He was marked by holiness: He said to the Levites, “ *Hear me, ye Levites, sanctify now yourselves, and sanctify the house of the Lord God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place.* ” (29:5) By the time Hezekiah came to power, the Temple had become filled with filth, rubbish and garbage all throughout the courts. It took the workers 16 days to remove all of the refuse. He was marked by thankfulness: for he celebrated the first Passover feast that had been kept in the kingdom for many a year. (30:26) He was marked by boldness: for it was Hezekiah who defied the Assyrians (32:8) He was marked by

prayerfulness: for each crisis in his life drove him to the place of prayer. (32:24 Is 37:16-20) It was a time of revival but sadly the changes were only on the surface. It never touched the rank and file of the common people and once their sponsors were dead, the people went back to their old evil ways. Finally in,

(e) King Josiah: We have the Scriptural Aspect of Revival:

You see, Josiah was the boy King (34:1) who during a spring cleaning of the temple found the book of the Law. And what an effect the Word of God had on him. Look at (34:23-28) Josiah responded with a sincere commitment to follow the Lord and he called the people to join him. (34:29) You see, the rediscovery of the book of the law sparked an awakening that changed the course of a nation. My is this not what happened in the 16th century Protestant Reformation ? The Bible was rediscovered. It had been hid under the cloak of Romanism for many a year. *But now its great truths were unveiled to the millions in Europe and the fires of revival began to spread.* You see, central to any real movement of the Spirit of God will be the Word of God. People often speak about witnessing revival, but so often they are content with the emotional, the exotic, the exciting and the charismatic. The question is, where does the Word of God feature ? Is it central ? Is it fundamental ? Is it predominant ?

Sadly after five revivals Ezra underscored the increasing rebellion of Judah. The people refused to repent went into

Babylonian captivity (36:14-21) But the book ends on a bright note with,

(3) THE RETURN FROM CAPTIVITY

For notice (36:22-23) Do you know what the Lord was doing here ?

(a) ***GOD WAS FULFILLING HIS WORD:***

Do you see that phrase ? “ *that the Word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished.* ” (36:22) You see, Jeremiah had prophesied not only the fact of the Babylonian captivity but the duration of it. He said, “ *For thus saith the Lord, that after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you and perform my good word toward you in causing you to return to this place.* ” (Jer 29:10-11 25:11-12) The seventy year captivity began in 606 BC and in 536 BC Cyrus issues this amazing proclamation, allowing the Jews to go back to their homeland to rebuild the temple. *The decree of Cyrus was the fulfillment of prophecy.* No doubt during the long night of the exile God’s people must have wondered at times if they would ever see Jerusalem again. But God was faithful to His Word and did not forget His people.

Isn’t it an amazing book we hold in our hands ? In spite of their sins, these exiles were God’s chosen people and children of the covenant He had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Gen 12:1-3) God was faithful to His promises and He did not forget His people. ***But then He***

never does. Are you finding that difficult to believe ? Are you going through some kind of personal exile ? Is your situation dark and gloomy ? Is Satan whispering in your ear that God has forgotten you ? Is he tempting you to look at your circumstances rather than God ? My the truth is, that at such a time, when everything else has failed, the only thing left we have left to rely on is the faithfulness of God and His Word. (a)

(b) ***GOD WAS ORDERING HIS WORLD:***

God is in control of the nations. God is governing global affairs in accordance with his blueprint for mankind. God is still on the throne. My it was the Lord who raised up Nebuchadnezzar “ *My servant,* ” (Jer 25:9 27:6 43:10) to chasten the people of Judah, and then He raised up Cyrus to defeat the Babylonians and establish the Persian Empire. The Lord called Cyrus “ *My shepherd,* ” (Is 44:28) and “ *My anointed,* ” (45:1) The Lord said, “ *He shall build my city and he shall let go my captives.* ” (Is 45:13) This is all the more remarkable when we realise that Cyrus did not know God. (Is 45:5) But God knew Cyrus. Matthew Henry reminds us “ ***that the hearts of kings are in the hands of the Lord.*** ” Whatever political motives lay behind Cyrus’ decree, God was working out His own plans. My what a Bible we have, but what a God we have.

For “ *the kings heart is in the hand of the Lord as the rivers of water He turneth it whithersoever He will.* ” (Prov 21:1) People don’t have to be Christian believers for God to use them. It does not matter whether it’s a

president, or a prime minister, or a mayor, or a governor, God can exercise His sovereign power to accomplish His purposes for His people. Puritan John Watson said, “ ***God can make a straight stroke with a crooked stick,***” and that’s what He did with Cyrus. My as we watch the news program’s on television, and see the world scene with its rebelliousness, perverseness, political unrest, shaky foundations we might become fearful for the future. But then “ *the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever He will.* ” (Dan 4:17)

My its not such a dry book after all sure its not ? It’s **the book** on revival and do we not desperately need it ? David Dodge was in conversation with a devout Quaker who like Dodge was eager to see a fresh movement of the Spirit of God. The Quaker agreed with Dodge concerning the need of more zeal, more prayer and more consecration. Finally, the Quaker broke in with these words, “ *Friend Dodge, suppose thee and I make a beginning.* ” That’s it. Suppose this “ *thee and I,* ” make a beginning remembering that “ **I,** ” is central to the word revival.

**Lord do it again
Lord do it again
Send us a great revival
Lord do it again**