

Adonijah Put Himself Forward

Now Adonijah ...put himself forward and said, "I will be king" ...Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the sacred tent and anointed Solomon ...So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established. -1 Kings 1:5,39;2:12

This is a story of two men—one who wanted to be king and one who was destined to be king. The one put himself forward, the other waited for the appointment. The one said, "I will be king," the other said nothing. The one's rule crumbled in a day, the other's rule was firmly established for a generation.

As a son of David, Adonijah could argue that he had the legitimate right of succession to his father's throne. His strategy to gain power was politically astute. His first move was to stage a political rally with fifty men running ahead of his chariots—parade ala king.

Adonijah then garnered the support of two very influential persons, the commander of the army and one of the two acting high priests. Excellent chess move. He then invited all of his brothers (with the exception of Solomon) and some key officials from Judah to a great sacrifice and feast. (That his brothers came and showed their support for Adonijah could have been an indication that each had his own design on the throne. Throwing their support away from Solomon to their poser brother would destabilize kingly succession, possibly giving them a shot at the palace.) The idea was that this great feast would turn into Adonijah's coronation.

And it might have worked if not for some quick action by Nathan, the prophet, and Solomon's mother, Bathsheba. They went to the aged King David to inform him of Adonijah's gambit so that the king could make some maneuvers of his own. So Solomon was set on David's mule, sent to a strategic place, and was anointed by Zadok, the other high priest, with oil from the Lord's tabernacle. When they blew the trumpet announcing Solomon as king, that was it, the party was over for Adonijah.

There is a difference between taking your rightful place and putting yourself forward to the place you desire. One is about receiving warranted authority and the other is about acquiring misbegotten power. Even though it happens every day, the power grab has no legitimacy in any healthy society, and there is no stronger bane within the church. Selfish ambition will always eclipse potential greatness, and godly rule will never be established by self-promotion.

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He Had Wisdom from God to Administer Justice

When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice. -1 Kings 3:28

It takes wisdom to administer justice. Ask any parent. And like a young parent, Solomon was put in a situation where he was going to have to administer justice without the benefit of much experience. The Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." Instead of asking for riches or long life, he asked for, "A discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong" (3:9). What he was asking for was wisdom, and God gave it to him.

One thing that we learn from Solomon's early reign is that wisdom is not necessarily connected with experience or knowledge. God gave Solomon much knowledge in addition to his wisdom, but wisdom is not knowledge—nor is it "knowledge correctly applied," as some have defined it. Wisdom is discerning the right thing to do or to say. This discernment may be helped by experience and knowledge—or it could even be hindered by them.

Wisdom is discerning the right thing to do or to say

The kind of wisdom you want is the kind that comes from God. It's the kind that Joshua received when Moses laid hands on him (Dt 34:9). It's the kind that Solomon received because of his humble request. It's the kind Jesus promised his followers when he said, "I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict" (Lk 21:15).

This kind of wisdom does not come by erudition. It comes by revelation. In one day, Solomon received wisdom that he did not previously possess. Proverbs 2:6 says, *The Lord gives wisdom*. Paul said to the Colossians that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found in Christ (2:3) and that he was always praying for them and asking God to fill them *with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding*. (1:9). The biblical gift of the "word of wisdom" is simply a revelation of wisdom given by the Spirit to discern the right thing to do or to say.

How do you get wisdom? Do what Solomon did. Because he knew the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom, he humbly asked for it. You know the promise: *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him* (Ja 1:5). If you do, you will have wisdom from God to administer justice.

As Numerous as the Sand on the Seashore

The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy.... During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, each man under his own vine and fig tree. -1 Kings 4:20,25

Somewhere near the year 1900 B.C., the Lord appeared to our father Abraham and said, *"I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the sand on the seashore"* (Ge 22:17). Nine hundred years later, during the reign of Solomon, the Lord's covenant with Abraham came to full fruition in the natural. If Abraham had been able to gaze down the annals of time to see the unfolding of God's promise to him, he would have looked in on 970 B.C. and witnessed the zenith of his ancestral promise.

This pinnacle was achieved not just because Abraham's descendants had become *as numerous as the sand on the seashore*. Israel's numbers were substantial at the time they came out from Egypt some four-hundred plus years earlier. Under Solomon however, the quantity of the populace was matched by the quality of living. All of Judah and Israel, from the farthest points north and south, dwelt in safety. Each person rested securely with their own place to live and prosper. *They ate, they drank, and they were happy*. This is the kind of thing that all parents want for their children. Abraham would have been gratified with such a picture.

As good as this picture is, Abraham would have looked further down these chronicles of time and seen something exponentially more pleasing to his soul. He would have seen the multitudes of his spiritual descendants dwelling securely in the kingdom of *one greater than Solomon* (Lk 11:31). Each one would be partaking of the bread of life, drinking living water and experiencing *joy unspeakable and full of glory* (1 Pet 1:8 KJV). And in this land of the messianic kingdom, where sin was removed in a single day, Abraham would have seen each one enjoying life under his own vine and fig tree (see Mic 4:4 & Zec 3:10).

The glory and security of Solomon's kingdom, of course, did not last. But still, it was a great thing to behold. And as much as Abraham would have rejoiced at seeing the day of Solomon, he rejoiced even more at the thought of seeing the day of Jesus. He did see it, and was glad (Jn 8:56).

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The Pillars at the Portico of the Temple

He erected the pillars at the portico of the temple. The pillar to the south he named Jakin and the one to the north Boaz. -1 Kings 7:21

There were two bronze pillars at the entrance of the temple. Everyone coming to the temple would pass between these two pillars as they entered. All who came—from priest to peasant—would be greeted by these two imposing pillars, each being three stories tall and eighteen feet in circumference. And each pillar had a name that would be a constant reminder of what it would take for the house of the Lord to stand. The pillar on the left, as you entered, was called Jakin, which means "he establishes." The one on the right was called Boaz, which means "in him is strength."

When you think of "pillars," what do you think of? What do pillars symbolize? Proverbs 9:1 says, *Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars*. Galatians talks

about Peter, James and John being "pillars" in the church (2:9). Pillars obviously function as supports. They are what hold up structures. There is some conjecture that the pillars in Solomon's portico were purely ornamental, but even if so, there was a significant symbolic reason why they were there.

The temple was the "house of God"—the place where the nation gathered to worship. The pillars which support the house of God are Jakin and Boaz. The Lord must "establish" it and "give it strength" in order for it to stand. And this held true not only for the worship life of the people of Israel, but for everything else that comprised who they were and what they did. If the Lord establishes and gives strength, no power on earth or in the heavenly realms can bring it down. More than gold or silver, bronze symbolizes strength. Pillars of bronze are strong pillars and not easily toppled.

Now listen, don't you know that you yourself are the temple of the Living God? Don't you know that the pillars that support your life are meant to be Jakin and Boaz? These are pillars of bronze that signify the fact that he has established you and continually gives you strength? In him, you are made mighty and your house is established and strengthened.

Pillars of bronze. One named Jakin and the other named Boaz. May these support your life both now and always.

The pillars that support your life are meant to be Jakin and Boaz

And the Priests Could Not Perform Their Service

When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple. -1 Kings 8:10-11

Have you ever experienced a manifestation of the glory of the Lord in a physiological way? When the glory of the Lord is made manifest, it will, by nature, affect the physical realm. The Hebrew word for glory, “kabod,” in essence, means “weight,” and the New Testament Greek word for glory, “doxa,” in essence, means “light.” Weight and light are fundamental to physical science. When the glory of God is manifest on the earth, it will be observed and measured in the physical realm.

Such was the case at the dedication of the temple of the Lord. This permanent tabernacle, which had taken Solomon seven years to build, was now ready for the Ark of the Covenant to be brought into the Holy of Holies. As the ark of the presence of the Lord was put in place, the Lord began to manifest his glory. Just as a great cloud was made manifest when the Lord descended on Moses’ tabernacle (Ex 40:34-35), so the glory of the Lord filled Solomon’s temple and produced a response of similar substance. The manifestation of his glory, which at Mt. Sinai had produced lighting and thunder and caused the mountain to quake (Ex 19:16-18), affected the temple and the ability of the priests to serve there: *And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple.*

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The New Testament also testifies to how the physical elements can be affected by the glory of God. We see the manifestation of light (Lk 2:9; Ac 22:11; Rv 21:23), sound (like a violent wind) and fire (Ac 2:1-4), the shaking of a building (Ac 4:31), and smoke (Rv 15:8), to name a few.

It should not surprise us that the glory of the Lord should produce physical manifestations. Physical matter and mortal flesh must of necessity respond to his presence in some way: Blood and fire and billows of smoke; healing and deliverance; laughing, crying, dancing, and conviction of sin; shaking, quaking, stillness and trances; dreams and visions.

Should you seek these experiences? Certainly not for the sake of the experience, but if you seek to know the God of Sinai, Solomon’s Temple and the upper room, there is always the chance you’ll feel the weight and see the light of his glory and be changed by it.

And He Called Them the Land of Cabul

King Solomon gave twenty towns in Galilee to Hiram king of Tyre... But when Hiram went from Tyre to see the towns that Solomon had given him, he was not pleased with them. "What kind of towns are these you have given me, my brother?" he asked. And he called them the Land of Cabul, a name they have to this day. -1 Kings 9:11-13

It’s funny how a reputation can stick. . . for a long time.

King Solomon of Israel had a very good relationship with King Hiram of Tyre. For twenty years Hiram supplied Solomon with building materials from the famed hills of Lebanon. Cedar and granite were supplied for the temple of the Lord and the royal palace. As part of the unique arrangement between the two kings, Solomon gave Hiram twenty towns in western Galilee, close to the Phoenician border where Hiram ruled. But when Hiram went down to see these towns, he didn’t think much of them at all. He voiced his displeasure to Solomon and said, *“What kind of towns are these that you have given me, my brother?”* Then Hiram gave the district where these towns were located a name and a reputation that would stick for the next thousand years. He called the land “Cabul”– which sounds like the Hebrew word for “good-for-nothing.” Eventually, Solomon would redeem these towns and resettle them with Israelites (see 2 Chronicles 8:2), but by then the die had been cast. This section of Galilee would be hung with the tag, “good-for-nothing” for longer than any chamber of commerce could bear.

Nathanael’s reply reflects ten centuries of prejudice: “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?”

Move ahead some nine-hundred years when a man named Philip finds his friend Nathanael (Jn 1:44-46) and reports that he has found the one foretold by Moses and the prophets: *“Jesus of Nazareth.”* Guess what parcel of land Nazareth was a part? That’s right, Cabul. Nathanael’s reply reflects nearly ten centuries of prejudice: *“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?”* Never mind that Nathanael is a fellow Galilean (from a prosperous coastal town in eastern Galilee), everyone has known for a long time that those western Galilean towns have always been “good-for-nothing.”

But Jesus changed all that, didn’t he? Isn’t it just like our God to have the Messiah come from a “good-for-nothing” place? Don’t you love the poetic irony of the concept? The name “Cabul,” though once long remembered—is now long forgotten. And the chamber of commerce is finding their job a whole lot easier these days.

I Will Take You, and You Will Rule

I will take the kingdom from his [Solomon's] son's hands and give you [Jeroboam] ten tribes...I will take you, and you will rule over all that your heart desires; you will be king over Israel. -1 Kings 11:35,37

Solomon blew it. He had a really, really good thing going for his people. Because of the Lord's blessing during his reign, Israel reached the apex of its glory as a nation. Unity, peace and prosperity were the national bywords. And there was no reason for the blessings to come to an end. But Solomon's desire for pagan women and his declension into worshipping their gods opened the door to division, war and hardship.

The one lesson that permeates the Hebrew Scriptures is the consequences of obedience and disobedience. But there is a related lesson in this story of Solomon's disobedience worth

It is the disposition of the Lord to find a different person for the job if need be

noting. It is the disposition of the Lord to find a different person for the job if need be. The Lord can put you in, but he can just as easily take you out. The promise to David and his descendants was conditional: *If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel* (1 Ki 2:4). Just as the Lord was willing to remove the throne from the house of Saul and give it to the house of David, he was not obliged to keep it there.

Enter Jeroboam, a public works supervisor under the administration of Solomon. He was on his way to Jerusalem one day and is met by the prophet Ahijah who tells him that because of Solomon's idolatrous worship, God is going to divide the kingdom, take the largest share away from Solomon's heir, and give it to Jeroboam. The Lord says to Jeroboam, *"I will take you, and you will rule over all that your heart desires; you will be king over Israel."* Wow. Just like that.

The fact is, the Lord can and will take anyone he chooses and put him or her in the place of leadership. No leader in the kingdom is indispensable and, if not vigilant to walk in the ways of the Lord, the careless ruler may soon see another appointed in their place. The chief priests and the elders of Israel found that out when Jesus told them, *"The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit"* (Mt 21:43). It is not unlike the Lord to do that because of the glory of his name and the value of his sheep.

I Too Am a Prophet, as You Are

The old prophet answered, "I too am a prophet, as you are. And an angel said to me by the word of the Lord: 'Bring him back with you to your house so that he may eat bread and drink water.'" (But he was lying to him.) So the man of God returned with him and ate and drank in his house. -1 Kings 13:18-19

I have to admit that there are a few biblical passages that trouble my sensibilities—and this is one of them. As the story goes, an unnamed “man of God” from Judah comes to Bethel to confront King Jeroboam with the word of the Lord. The Lord powerfully confirms the word. Jeroboam then requests that the man of God come with him to eat and to receive a gift. The offer is refused because the man of God has explicit instructions from the Lord to not eat or drink anything until returning home.

You must not deviate from the word the Lord has given you

Now a certain old prophet living in Bethel, hearing about what happened, tracks down the man of God and invites him to come eat and drink with him. The man of God again declines, but the old prophet contends that he too is a prophet (true) and that a new word has come to him through an angel that supercedes that which the man of God had known (untrue). The man of God relents and while they are eating together the word of the Lord genuinely comes to the old guy that the younger prophet has disobeyed and now will die. Why the old man would lie, why the man of God would be punished so severely, why the deception was seemingly left unpunished, and why the Lord would bring his word through a liar are the sensible, and mostly unanswered, questions.

There are some things that we can learn however, including: 1) Callings and giftings can still be in operation despite flaws in character. 2) If someone has a reputation or even a track record in ministry, it doesn't necessarily mean that they are on track now. And, 3) You can't compromise what you have heard from the Lord based on a) what someone else has said (despite whom you think them to be in the Lord), b) a desire to be polite or c) what your flesh might justify. You must stay true to the direction that you have received. You have to be humble enough to admit you've heard wrong if need be, but until the word of the Lord has been fulfilled, or until you hear for yourself that things have changed, you must not deviate from the word the Lord has given you.

The Boy Will Die

When you set foot in your city, the boy will die. All Israel will mourn for him and bury him. He is the only one belonging to Jeroboam who will be buried, because he is the only one in the house of Jeroboam in whom the Lord, the God of Israel, has found anything good. -1 Kings 14:12-13

Here we have a case where the Lord rewarded a person by causing him to become ill and die. That scenario doesn't fit with our normal paradigm—nor with the Lord's for that matter—but it is true nonetheless.

When Jeroboam's son becomes ill, Jeroboam decides to send his wife, incognito, to the prophet, Ahijah, to try to ascertain what the Lord has in store for his son. The reason he doesn't go himself is because he has been a veritable train wreck as a godly king. He is not up to another confrontation with a prophet of God (see 1 Kings 13), especially when it was Ahijah who first told him he would be king and that the Lord would build him a dynasty that would rival David's if he would walk in the ways of God (1 Ki 11:38). At this point, he has gone about three million miles the other way. But still, he is concerned about his son. His wife's guise is no match for the word of revelation to Ahijah and the word comes that the boy will die.

Interestingly, the explanation for his impending death is that he is the only one in the house of Jeroboam in whom the Lord has found anything good. We don't know how old the prince is, but there is no reason to assume that he is an infant, and there is some indication that he is old enough to have developed some character. The Lord's reward for the boy's goodness is that he will die, be mourned by the entire kingdom and then be buried. This will be how the Lord will honor him in the house of Jeroboam where no one else is to receive a respectable burial. All others' corpses will be eaten by dogs and vultures. The boy's destiny is according to Isaiah 57:1 which says, in part, *"Devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil."*

I get bothered by sappy funeral rhetoric attempting to explain the reason for a person's death, i.e., "God needed a flower for his garden." I'm also bothered by simplistic theologies that either refuse to account for God's purpose when someone dies or chalk up every death as inevitably pre-determined in an unalterable divine economy. There are those who die in the will of God and those who die outside the will of God. We need discernment, maybe even a prophetic word of revelation, to know the difference.

There are people who die in the will of God and who die outside the will of God

But First Make a Small Cake of Bread for Me

"I don't have any bread--only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it--and die." Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me..." -1 Kings 17:12-13

You probably would not have done what Elijah did. Here is a poor widow coping with a famine in the land who has just enough food for one last meager meal for her and her son. A little flour and a little oil—that's it. After it's gone there is no hope for survival. You are the man of God and you say to her, "Listen, before you make that last meal, do me a favor and bake up a little something for me first. Thanks." Probably not.

Yet that, in essence, is what Elijah does. The brook where he has been living has dried up. God tells him to leave Israel and go to Zarephath in Sidon where *"I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food"* (v9). If I'm Elijah, I'm thinking this is going to be a well-stocked home. He shows up and finds nothing of the sort—just the pitiful scene of this poor widow gathering sticks to cook her last meal.

Elijah was not afraid to test this woman because he knew that her obedience would be her provision, and that by blessing him, she would become blessed. And yet, most of us would be offended at the thought of dealing with such a woman in such a way. When Elijah gave her the word of the Lord that the flour and oil would be supernaturally perpetual if she would first make a small cake of bread for him, she believed. In the least, she figured that she had nothing to lose. She *went away and did as Elijah told her* and her obedience saved both her life and the life of her son.

The widow was required to provide for the man of God first. If you give the first and best of what you have, your gift is worthy of a return blessing. You don't give the Lord's servants the leftovers. The Levites were to receive the firstfruits of the land. If you take care of the "man of God" first, then the Lord will be faithful to take care of you.

All this sounds self-serving coming from one who depends on the people of God for his supper. But Elijah would have done the widow no favor by withholding the opportunity for her to provide for his needs. Her provision for him was the Lord's provision for her. That's the way it works in the kingdom.

Elijah would have done the widow no favor by withholding the opportunity to provide for his needs

The God Who Answers by Fire—He Is God

"How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing... [Elijah said] "you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire--he is God." -1Kings 18:21,24

The Israelites were wavering between two opinions. Pagan Baal worship had infiltrated Israel, big time, but their heritage was in Yahweh. At the Lord's leading (v36), Elijah called Israel to assemble on Mt. Carmel to witness a showdown with the prophets of Baal. Elijah begins by addressing the people's double-mindedness. They have nothing to say. He then proposes a sensational challenge that not even the WWF could equal. A sacrifice is set up, both the name of Baal and the name of the Lord will be called upon, and the one who answers by fire from heaven will be proven to be the real God. The people are no longer mum. Elijah has their attention.

In one feat, the nation is won back to the Lord and four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal meet their final destiny

Elijah's attitude with the prophets of Baal is caustic. This is a no-holds-barred event. His sarcastic taunting of Baal's representatives is meant to impassion the on-looking multitude of jurors. The goal is to turn the hearts of the people back to the Lord. So, Elijah mocks Baal and his prophets to expose their impotence. When Elijah steps forward at the "time of sacrifice" to call on the name of the Lord, fire comes from heaven and the people fall on their faces and cry, *"The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!"* (V39). Their original silence has now turned into a passionate confession of the preeminence of the Lord. In one feat, the nation is won back to the Lord and four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal meet their final destiny.

What more effective way can there be to demonstrate the supremacy of the God of Israel than a miraculous sign? There is none. But you say, *"A wicked generation asks for a miraculous sign"* (Mt 12:39) and, *"Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed"* (Jn 20:29). You forget that *Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs* (Ac 2:22), and that the Gentiles were led to obey the gospel *by the power of signs and miracles* (Ro 15:19).

Our culture is inundated with various opinions. People are legitimately asking, "Where is the God who will answer by fire that we may believe in him?" There are numerous prophets of Baal who are drawing their hearts away. Where are the Elijahs who will challenge them in the name of the Lord?

Is this How You Act as King over Israel?

Jezebel said, "Is this how you act as king over Israel?" -1 Kings 21:7

Ahab wants the vineyard of Naboth. He makes him an offer but Naboth says, *"The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers"* (v3). So what does Ahab do? He goes home, crawls into bed, becomes sullen and refuses to eat. Any wife finds it difficult to respect and submit to a man in this mode, how much more a Jezebel? She finds Ahab sulking and says, *"Is this how you act as king over Israel?"* He is not acting like a man, much less a king, which prompts Jezebel to do what?—to take matters into her own hands. With no resistance from him she tells him "I'll handle it" and she arranges for Naboth, an innocent and righteous man, to be murdered. When word reaches Jezebel that Naboth is dead, guess where we find Ahab. Still in bed. Now she starts telling him what to do: *"Get up and take possession of the vineyard"* (v15). And so he follows her orders. This is the spirit of Ahab and Jezebel. He abdicates. She takes over.

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In another story (1 Kings 20), the King of Aram, Ben-Hadad was besieging Samaria with a vast army. He sends a message to Ahab saying *"Your silver and gold are mine, and the best of your wives and children are mine."* So how does the mighty man of valor, Ahab, reply? He says, *"Just as you say, my lord the king. I and all I have are yours."* He capitulates, abdicating his responsibility to protect the people under his charge. But Ben-Hadad sees the abdication of Ahab and says, *"Tomorrow I'm coming to pillage the palace and all the homes of your government officials."* Even Ahab can capitulate only so much, so he goes to the elders and people. They say, in essence, "Lead us. Protect us. Fight for us." So he tells Ben-Hadad, "Not this time." Ben-Hadad sends an angry message that he is going to come and wipe them out. Ahab sends an excellent and bold reply: *"One who puts on his armor should not boast like one who takes it off,"* meaning, "Don't boast too soon, the battle hasn't been fought yet." At that point the Lord actually honors Ahab, and gives him victory in the ensuing battle.

Ahab was as contemptible as they come, but the Lord actually honored him when he finally put on the mantle of authority which was inherent with his position. It has been said that there can be no "Jezebel" without an "Ahab." True. Too bad Ahab knew little of that kingly mantle.

Zedekiah Went up and Slapped Micaiah in the Face

“The Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours...” Then Zedekiah went up and slapped Micaiah in the face. “Which way did the spirit from the Lord go when he went from me to speak to you?” he asked. Micaiah replied, “You will find out on the day you go to hide in an inner room.” -1 Kings 22:23-25

What an interesting interplay between two different men who claimed to be speaking for the Lord. One of them, representing a group of four hundred prophets, was deceived, and the other, who stood all alone in his conviction, had the true word of God.

Jehoshaphat, the righteous king of Judah, was asked by Ahab, the wicked king of Israel, to help him fight the Arameans. He is willing, but he tells Ahab to “*first seek the counsel of the Lord.*” Ahab has improved the caliber of his prophets—but not by much. At least now, his prophets are prophesying in the name of Yahweh (the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal are no longer available since their timely demise at Mt Carmel). Ahab has retained the services of a group of four hundred prophets who claim to know the will of the Lord (he evidently has a penchant for a bevy of spiritual advisors). So he calls in the wannabe seers and asks if he should go to war. “You betcha,” they reply. Jehoshaphat, for some good reason, is not satisfied with this company, and asks for a second opinion. “There is another guy who is a prophet of Yahweh,” Ahab says, “*But I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me.*” I wonder why?

Enter Zedekiah, a leader of the group of four hundred and Micaiah, Ahab’s thorn. Zedekiah has gone to dramatic lengths to confirm what Ahab wants to hear but Micaiah spoils the party and says, “Not.” Micaiah reveals that Zedekiah and his buddies have gotten their info from a *lying spirit* from the Lord. Greatly insulted, Zedekiah slaps Micaiah in the face and says, “Ok Jack, which way did this lying spirit go when it left me to be your inspiration?” Not to be outdone, Micaiah retorts, “Ask me again when you are hiding out from the Aramean army.”

It’s not easy being the Lord’s lone prophet with an unpopular message when there are plenty of others who are telling people what they want to hear. You can expect a few insults and maybe even a slap in the face. But hold your ground. If your message is from the Lord, he’ll defend you. And remember, it’s usually the false prophets who get personally insulted when opposed.

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While the Harpist Was Playing

“Now bring me a harpist.” While the harpist was playing, the hand of the Lord came upon Elisha and he said, “This is what the Lord says... -2 Kings 3:15-16

Of all the gifts God has given to us, music is in a class by itself. The potent effect of music is deep and wide. It soothes the savage beast. It rallies nations. It creates massive industries. It causes church splits. Most of the world’s six billion people rarely live a day without it. Ultimately, this gift is to be used to glorify the God of Heaven—as the angels do. But how is that best done and how can we be sure that we are in touch with the power of God and not just the power of music as we worship and serve the Lord?

Kings Jehoshaphat and Joram have gone to Elisha to hear from the Lord. After a short interview, the prophet is ready to inquire of the Lord and says, “*Now bring me a harpist.*” Is he providing entertainment for the visiting dignitaries? Obviously not. The music is to aid him in hearing the word of the Lord. But how? Is it merely to create an appropriate mood or is the music itself going to foster the anointing of the Lord?

The scripture says, “*While the harpist was playing, the hand of the Lord came upon Elisha.*” Now, I don’t want to make too much of this, but *the hand of the Lord* is no small thing. And, the fact that it came upon Elisha while the harpist was playing is not just a coincidence. Here we have scriptural evidence that music not only has the power to soothe the savage beast, but it can be used as a tool to bring about the supernatural in our lives.

There is no doubt that music creates a disposition. Try taking the musical sound track away from a motion picture and see how that decreases the impact of the story. Try taking music away from our corporate worship gatherings and see how that decreases the impact of our experience. Creating the right disposition for worship is important. But a big problem in our corporate gatherings is that the natural potency in music to stir our souls is so often mistaken for the supernatural anointing of God. The difference is sometimes difficult to discern because, as in the case with Elisha and the harpist, the anointing of God will often accompany the ministry of the music.

Beautiful music does not the anointing make, but if employed correctly, the playing of the harpist can help in experiencing the coming of the hand of the Lord upon our lives.

How can we be sure that we are in touch with the power of God and not just the power of music as we worship

Didn't I Tell You, 'Don't Raise My Hopes'?

When she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet . . . "Did I ask you for a son, my lord?" she said. "Didn't I tell you, 'Don't raise my hopes'?" - 2 Kings 4:27-28

Earlier in Kings (1 Kings 14) there was an account of a boy who died and, clearly, it was the will of God. Here we have a story of another boy who dies. This time it is outside the will of God and he is raised back to life.

A wealthy, but childless, woman at Shunem has been kind to Elisha, providing him his own room and meals whenever he was traveling through. He wants to repay her kindness, but she assures him that she has need of nothing. When Elisha asks his servant about what might be done for her, he mentions that she has no son. Elisha calls her and tells her, "*About this time next year you will hold a son in your arms*" (v16). Her reply is "*No my lord, don't mislead your servant,*" but sure enough, the word comes to pass.

Does it seem fitting that the Lord should give her a son in this way, only to take him from her? I am cognizant of those who

We must account for forces that have come to steal, kill and destroy

have had to come to terms with such a loss, but in this case, it is not acceptable. When the boy dies, the Shunamite puts his lifeless form in Elisha's room and travels twenty-five miles to Mt. Carmel to find the prophet of Yahweh. "*Did I ask for a son my lord?*" she said. "*Didn't I tell you, 'Don't raise my hopes'?*"

How Elisha raises the boy from the dead is an uncanny precursor to how Peter raises Tabitha in Acts 9, but the question here is, "How do you account for the boy's death in the light of his glorious birth? A random happenstance of life? Maybe. Ordained by the Lord to reveal his glory? Not likely. The most apt explanation is that we must account for forces that have come to steal, kill and destroy—and that they are all the more intent on destroying lives that are a testament to the glory of God. I don't think this a "test" of the woman's faith. It was an out-and-out attack from the enemy—an attack she was able to overcome with the help of the prophet.

2 Kings 3 tells us that when the king of Moab couldn't defeat the Israelite army he offered his son as a human sacrifice to his gods (vs. 26-27). When he did, "*The fury against Israel was great,*" and they had to withdraw from Moab. Incredible. What does that say? It says that the battles we fight are serious and are against enemies who operate out of, and are fueled by, wickedness. Not everything can be blamed on the devil but be sure that many things patently are.

About this Time Tomorrow

There was a great famine in the city; the siege lasted so long that a donkey's head sold for eighty shekels of silver, and a quarter of a cab of seed pods for five shekels. Elisha said ... "*About this time tomorrow, a seah of flour will sell for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria.*" -2Kings 6:25, 7:1

Rome wasn't built in a day, but some very dramatic things can happen in 24 hours. If someone were to have said to the one hundred and twenty disciples gathered in the upper room on day nine, "By this time tomorrow, things will be different," would that have been true? If someone were to have said to Bartimaeus on the day before Jesus passed by, "By this time tomorrow, things will be different, would that have been true? If someone were to have said to Joseph on the day before Pharaoh had his dreams, "By this time tomorrow things will be different," would that have been true?

Elisha's word was hard to believe. For a long, long time, the city of Samaria was under siege. There was nothing left to eat. Food was at such a premium that a donkey's head sold for two pounds of silver and a half of a pint of seed pods (some translations say "doves' dung") for two ounces of silver. But that's not the worst of it. Some had started to eat their children. In that desperate situation who could have predicted that things would change so that the very next day a seven-quart bag of flour and twice as much barley would sell for two-fifths of an ounce of silver each? Who except for the prophet of God.

The particulars regarding the deliverance of the city and the abundance of provision that came next day delivery, doesn't really matter. What matters is that God made it happen. He specializes in miraculous deliverance and provision. Your circumstance will differ from Samaria's. The siege you are under is a different kind. But all the same, your deliverance and abundant provision can come in a day. About this time tomorrow, it is possible for things to be drastically different.

Some may say I am encouraging the pipe dream—the easy fix. "Why not just tell the people to go out and buy a lottery ticket to solve their problems?" It is not about the easy fix. It is about what the Lord can and will do for those desperate for him. Often, the day of dramatic change comes after many weeks, months and even years of earnest seeking. But the day comes nonetheless, and when it does, nothing is the same as it was the day before.

It is not about the easy fix. It is about what the Lord can and will do for those desperate for him.

So That No One Will Be Able to Say, "This Is Jezebel"

On the plot of ground at Jezreel dogs will devour Jezebel's flesh. Jezebel's body will be like refuse on the ground in the plot at Jezreel, so that no one will be able to say, 'This is Jezebel.'" -2 Kings 9:36-37

Gutzon Borglum was the genius behind the colossal Mt. Rushmore National Memorial in the United States. He wanted to create this presidential monument because he believed that in order to continue to inspire future generations with ideals worth pursuing, the national shrines depicting those who best exemplified those ideals should be as large and as lasting as possible. If that viewpoint is valid, what then should be done in memory of those who worst exemplified the ideals to which we all should aspire?

Some persons are memorable and some are worthy of remembering. Jezebel was a memorable character, to be sure, but the Lord made sure that there would never be any tangible memorial to her life. Jehu had been anointed with an unprecedented zeal to "clean house" in Israel. He had already meted out the Lord's justice on Ahaziah, king of Judah and Joram, king of Israel. When Joram asked Jehu if he was coming in peace. Jehu said, "*How can there be peace as long as all the idolatry and witchcraft of your mother Jezebel abound?*" (2 Ki 9:22). So he came to Jezreel to deal with Joram's mother and Ahaziah's mother-in-law, Jezebel. And deal with her he did. After she was thrown down from a window, Jehu unmercifully trampled her with his horses and left her body lying in the street. When he finally gave the order for her to be buried, it was too late. All that was left was a skull, feet and hands. Dogs had already devoured the body and taken away her bones.

The fact that there was nothing left of Jezebel to identify or remember is no coincidence. It was the Lord's judgment, and rightly so. It is best that there was no grave for Jezebel just as it is best that there is no grave for Adolf Hitler. Like Hitler, Jezebel was a pox who needed to be eradicated from the face of the earth. The less to remind us of their evil existence, the better.

In a spiritual sense, Jezebel represents the influences of evil in our lives. Whatever it is that entices us in any way toward control, manipulation, rebellion, witchcraft, sexual immorality or false worship of any kind (see Revelation 2:20) needs to be dealt with the way Jehu, dealt with Jezebel. Those enticements need to be obliterated so that no trace of their existence remains or can ever be identified again. The Lord would have it so.

***Some persons are memorable
and some are worthy of
remembering***

Come with Me and See My Zeal for the Lord

Jehu said, "Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord." -2 Kings 10:16

For every person in the church today who is overzealous, I can find you a hundred—probably a thousand—who are under-zealous. How many of us can say, as Jehu said, "*Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord?*"

If there was ever a time that the Lord needed someone to be consumed with zeal for him, it was at the time of Jehu. The moral skies of Israel and Judah were polluted with the Baal worship that belched from the spiritual mills of Jezebel, Queen Mother of both kingdoms. Most anyone who was anyone, was loyal to the Queen and the administrations run by her son in Israel and her son-in-law in Judah. Idolatry and witchcraft pervaded the land (see 9:22). The Lord looked for a man who would not shrink back from the job at hand and found one in Jehu, a commander in the army of Israel.

Jehu's accomplishment in ridding the land from the influence of Jezebel was absolute and conspicuous. Jehu started with kings Joram and Ahaziah who happened to be together when they met Jehu. Then it was the wicked Queen Mother who was in an upstairs window when Jehu came riding into town. Jehu's zeal was recognized by the guardians of the princes of Ahab who realized that they had no other choice but to ally themselves with Jehu after he challenged them to make one of Ahab's son king in Samaria and get ready to "*fight for your master's house*" (10:3). They wisely refused to take the challenge and acceded to the will of the Lord and of Jehu by executing all the sons of Ahab. No one at all from Ahab's family was able to escape the Lord's justice through Jehu. And finally, Jehu tricked every last minister of Baal to come to the temple of Baal so he could wipe them out, make the temple into a latrine and virtually eradicate Baal worship from the land.

To be a people zealous for the Lord, we need not be violent, but we do need to be aggressive. A "jealousy" for the house of the Lord should consume us like it did Jesus (Jn 2:17) who did become violent when he cleared the temple. Paul tells us, "*Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual 'zestos'*" (Ro 12:11). And the Lord says, "*My righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him*" (He 10:38). Who can say with Jehu, "*Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord?*"

***For every person in the church
today who is overzealous, I can
find you a hundred— probably a
thousand— who are under-
zealous***

The Priests Still Had Not Repaired the Temple

But by the twenty-third year of King Joash the priests still had not repaired the temple. Therefore King Joash summoned Jehoiada the priest and the other priests and asked them, "Why aren't you repairing the damage done to the temple?" -2 Kings 12:6-7

The temple was in disrepair. King Joash had instructed the priests to start collecting money to pay for the needed renovations and had given them the responsibility of doing the work. Sometime later, *the priests still had not repaired the temple*. Joash couldn't understand it. He summoned Jehoiada, and the rest of the priests to ask them what the problem was. Joash then told them to hand over any funds that had come in for the repairs and not to collect any more money. The priests readily agree to this and to the idea that they are to be divested of the responsibility to do the repairs. Other men were then appointed to supervise the work. They hired the tradesmen who did a great job in completing the construction project. Question: Why had the priests neglected the responsibility that they had been given and why were they so agreeable to Joash's new arrangement?

The repairs got left on the back burner because the project didn't fit their calling

A gas station attendant once asked Eugene Peterson what he did for a living. Peterson's response was, "I run a church." As he later reflected on his answer, he bemoaned the idea that his ministry had degenerated to "running a church" when his true calling as a pastor was "caring for souls." Consider also that in Acts 6, the apostles found themselves neglecting prayer and preaching the gospel because they had to *wait on tables*.

It is not that the repairs to the temple were unimportant nor that the priests should have neglected the responsibility they had been given, but the repairs were obviously not at the top of the list of the priest's priorities. I suspect that the repairs got left on the back burner, not because the priests were necessarily slothful nor because they didn't care that the place where they served was in disrepair but because the project really didn't fit their calling. Were they purposeful in their neglect? Probably not. But if you want something done, you have to give the job to the right people who are motivated to do the work. The work that was needed was the work of carpenters, builders, masons and stonecutters—not priests.

In the church, some are more capable, called and motivated to handle the practical ministries that need to be done. And the shepherds are, by nature, usually and by calling, certainly, not among them.

They Followed Worthless Idols and Became Worthless

They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their fathers and the warnings he had given them. They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless. -2 Kings 17:15

2 Kings 17 is an index of the charges against Israel at the time of their last king, Hoshea. They: 1) Worshiped other Gods, 2) Followed the practices of the pagan nations, 3) "Secretly" did unrighteous things against the Lord, 4) Built numerous "high places" where they burned incense in false worship, 6) Set up "sacred stones" and Asherah poles (part of Baal worship), 7) Did wicked things that provoked the Lord, 8) Worshiped idols, 9) Ignored both the commandments of the Law and the warnings of the Lord's prophets, 10) Built golden calves at Dan and Bethel, 11) Bowed down to the "starry hosts," 12) Worshiped Baal, 13) Sacrificed their sons and daughters by fire, 14) Practiced divination and sorcery, and 15) Sold themselves to do evil. Their sentence? Removal from the Lord's presence through captivity and exile at the hands of the Assyrians.

You become worthy of what you worship

The word says, *They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their fathers and the warnings he had given them. They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless*. The road to spiritual insolvency begins with the rejection of God's decrees and covenant. If the way of righteousness is rejected, the soul can find nothing of value in which to invest. Apart from the One True God, there is nothing that can make us spiritually affluent. We were made to worship and worship we will. If not the Lord, then something else will surely command our ultimate affection. The reality is that any and everything apart from the Lord that gains our worship is worthless. And if what we give ourselves to is worthless, then we become worthless. The people of the northern kingdom of Israel *followed* worthless idols and became worthless themselves. And that explains how they became bereft of any moral and spiritual value.

You become worthy of what you worship. In the end, your fortune is measured solely by the value of whom or what you give yourself to. In the end, unless your highest affection is set upon the Eternal God, your life is worthless.

There Was No One like Him among All the Kings of Judah

Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the Lord and did not cease to follow him. -2 Kings 18:5-6

The book of Kings is in essence a series of epitaphs of the kings of Israel and Judah— with some intriguing stories regarding the kings and some prophets inserted to fill the gaps. Those who ruled subsequent to Solomon are eulogized as good or bad, often with some other commentary on their lives that sheds light on why they were so. The kings are classified as either doing *evil in the eyes of the Lord*, or doing *what was right in the eyes of the Lord*. Of the forty rulers in the divided kingdom (thirty-nine men and one woman), only eight were commended as righteous and they were all kings of Judah (Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Amaziah, Azariah, Jotham, Hezekiah, and Josiah). None of the rulers of Israel, with the exception of Jehu whose early zeal was overshadowed by later disobedience, was worthy of any praise of note.

You probably won't be naming your next child Hezekiah because it's too unconventional. Too bad—it would have been a good choice.

So, in three hundred and forty-five years, Judah had twenty kings, eight of whom were considered righteous. But none was more righteous than Hezekiah. He *trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel*. He *held fast to the Lord and did not cease to follow him*. He *kept the commandments that the Lord had given Moses*. Hezekiah was holding fast to Yahweh, being careful to follow his commands despite the fact (or maybe because of it) that the Northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen and had been taken into exile by the Assyrians.

Hezekiah literally brought revival to the land. 2 Chronicles 29-31 tells us that he was responsible for the spiritual cleansing, reconstruction and rededication of the temple. He reinstated sacrificial worship as well as the Passover festival. And he inspired the people to take the initiative to destroy the vestiges of idol worship in the land. *The Lord was with him and he was successful in whatever he undertook* (2 Ki 18:7).

You probably won't be naming your next child Hezekiah because it's too unconventional. Too bad—it would have been a good choice.

He Spread it out Before the Lord

Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord. -2 Kings 19:14

The northern kingdom of Israel had already fallen under the strong hand of the Assyrians. Sennacherib, King of Assyria, was now setting his sights on Judah. He captured many of its cities and his army was about to lay siege to Jerusalem. After a shrewd and unnerving psychological barrage from the Assyrian field commander (18:19-37) the siege was put on hold as the commander left to help Sennacherib on another front. But the threat continued as the commander, with the swagger of an undefeated heavyweight champion, sent an intimidating letter to King Hezekiah, assuring him of an imminent and irresistible defeat at the hands of his lingering army.

When Hezekiah read it, his immediate response was to go up to the temple of the Lord and spread out the letter before God—a trenchant portrayal of what we should do when in crisis. See Hezekiah as he enters the temple of his God and unrolls the scroll of this letter and literally spreads it out before the Lord. “Take a look at this,” Hezekiah says to the Lord. Not that the Lord needs to be informed about the content of the letter, but in Hezekiah’s mind, he needs to lay it out before him. “Look at this, Lord. See what they are doing and saying against you.” “*You alone are God. You made heaven and earth. Give ear, O Lord, and hear; open Your eyes, O Lord, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the Living God*” (v 16). Hezekiah spreads it out before the Lord so that the Lord will deal with it. And deal with it he does. Isaiah is sent to prophesy (19:21-34) and that very night, the angel of the Lord went out and put to death one-hundred-and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp (19:35) forcing them to withdraw and to acknowledge the God of Israel.

There have probably been times of great need when you have “spread it out before the Lord.” It might have been at an altar of prayer, in a hospital chapel or underneath a starry sky. What better thing can you do when you have received news that is cause for concern than to follow Hezekiah’s example? When the crisis comes, go to your special place of prayer and spread it out before the Lord. Ask him to take a look at it and see if he will not make your concern his concern.

What better thing can you do when you have received news that is cause for concern than to follow Hezekiah's example?

I Have Found the Book of the Law

Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the Lord." He gave it to Shaphan, who read it. Then Shaphan the secretary went to the king... When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes. -2 Kings 22:8-9,11

One of the basic observations that you will have to make as you progress through a study of the Old Testament is that Israel's awareness and adherence to the Law of God tended to diminish over time. Not only did the people normally devolve in their observance of the requirements of God, the Lord himself, in his mercy, became less exacting in applying the immediate consequences of sin called for in the Law of Moses. Whereas people were stoned for breaking the Sabbath under Moses, by the time of the kings, most people were doing what was right in their own eyes, and, temporarily, getting away with it. There were certain times of revived adherence to the Law and resulting blessings, but just as the church atrophied through time from its glorious beginning, the spiritual vitality of Israel waned more than gained as the seasons progressed.

Our lives, our churches and our denominations need to be in constant revival to stave off this tendency toward spiritual malaise

Given that there was probably no greater event in the history of Israel than the giving of the Law to Moses at Mt. Sinai, it is difficult to imagine that there was virtually no dissemination of the written Law of the Lord by the end of the reign of the kings. This fact goes a long way to explain why their reign ended. No doubt, particular teachings and traditions were being propagated orally, but it got to the place where they were living without the benefit of the written witness of the word of God. Consider the scene where the Book of the Law is found during the temple renovations. Can you imagine? The High Priest, who you think would know about this book, comes across it unintentionally, and says, "Well, what do you know? The Book of the Law. Haven't seen this around here before. Wonder what it says." Do I exaggerate? He turns it over to the King Josiah's secretary who brings it to the king and reads it in his hearing. Josiah's reaction indicates that he has never, ever heard these details before. His attention to the word brings a season of renewal.

Our lives, our churches and our denominations need to be in constant revival to stave off this tendency toward spiritual malaise. Not only is this possible, it is imperative. Otherwise, the drift toward apostasy is inevitable and the Word of God will be forgotten.

The Shedding of Innocent Blood

Surely These things happened to Judah according to the Lord's command, in order to remove them from his presence because of the sins of Manasseh and all he had done, including the shedding of innocent blood. For he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the Lord was not willing to forgive. -2 Kings 24:3-4

Just this week in the city where I live a school bus driver was killed when someone dropped a large rock from a freeway overpass as the unsuspecting man was driving by. Innocent blood was shed. Also just this week, more than twenty thousand unborn children were killed in North American abortuaries. More innocent blood. According to Proverbs 6:16-19, there are seven things which the Lord hates. One of them is, *hands that shed innocent blood*. There is much provision in the Law of Moses for both the prevention of the shedding of innocent blood (i.e., cities of refuge) and the retribution for those who are guilty of it.

There are few things that rankle the ire of a just God like the shedding of innocent blood

There was one person supremely responsible for the exile and captivity of the nation of Judah into Babylon. His name was Manasseh. He was, by far, the most corrupt monarch in the history of the southern kingdom. His transgressions provoked the Lord to great anger. He erected altars to Baal. He worshiped the "starry hosts," building altars to them in the very temple of Yahweh. He practiced sorcery and divination. He consulted with mediums and spiritists. (See 2 Kings 21). But the thing that the writer of Kings specifically cites as justification for the Lord removing Judah from his presence was *the shedding of innocent blood* (v3).

There is not a lot of detail as to how Manasseh shed this innocent blood. We do know that, *he sacrificed his own son in the fire* (2 Ki 21:6, see also 2 Chronicles 33:6). According to the NIV Bible Commentary, Jewish tradition has it that Manasseh murdered the prophet Isaiah, sawing him in two. Whatever the particulars, we are told that he *filled Jerusalem with innocent blood*.

There are few things that rankle the ire of a just God like the shedding of innocent blood. The death of the bus driver has been at the top of the news for days now. Why? Because we, like the Lord, cannot stand for the shedding of innocent blood. For that, the Lord was not willing to forgive. What then of the blood of the unborn children?

These Were the Sons of David

These were the sons of David...: The firstborn was Amnon the son of Ahinoam of Jezreel; the second, Daniel the son of Abigail of Carmel; the third, Absalom the son of Maacah daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; and the sixth, Ithream, by his wife Eglah. -1 Chronicles 3:1-3

We all know the most serious breach of the legacy of David was his adultery with Bathsheba and the sins that flowed through that break in the dam. Second to that is probably David's less than stellar record as a father. His sons didn't turn out all that well. We have knowledge concerning three of David's first six sons listed here in 1 Chronicles 3. These were all disappointments and died before their prime. David's first born, Amnon, raped his half-sister and subsequently was murdered as a result (2 Sa 13). David's third born, Absalom, was the one who plotted that assassination and later conspired against David's kingship before he met his bizarre end (2 Sa 13,15, 18). The fourth born, Adonijah was the one who put himself forward to hijack the throne from Solomon and was later put to death by Solomon for lusting after Abishag the Shunammite (1 Ki 1, 2).

It is no wonder that the New Testament shores up this polygamy thing

Solomon turned out pretty good, at least for the first part of his life, but he is the only virtuous one we know of from the array of nineteen sons born to David's seven wives. And herein, in all probability, lies the basis for the problem. When you have nineteen sons, plus their sisters, by seven different wives (not to mention the unnumbered children that he had by his concubines (v9)), it makes it a little tough to be "Dad" to your kids.

Concerning his relationship to Adonijah, we are told that David *never interfered with him by asking, 'Why do you behave as you do?'* (1 Ki 1:6). And when Amnon raped his sister, Tamar, although David was furious (2 Sa 13:21), he didn't do anything about it. The likely scenario is that with that many children and with all the responsibilities that befell him as king, David left the raising of his children to his wives and others.

It is no wonder that the New Testament shores up this polygamy thing. It never did work because being one flesh with more than one person is more than God intended (see Genesis 2:24). Children need fathers who are able to "be there," and they certainly don't need their mothers competing with six other women for the attention of their dad. I'm not saying that a man shouldn't have a lot of kids. It's just better if he has them with one wife.

Brave Warriors, Famous Men, and Heads of Their Families

These were the heads of their families: Ephraim, Ishi, Eliel, Azriel, Jeremiah, Hodaviah and Jahdiel. They were brave warriors, famous men, and heads of their families. -1 Chronicles 5:24

At the core of a red-blooded man is the desire to be a brave warrior, a famous man and the head of his family. John Eldredge, in his life changing book "Wild at Heart," hits the nail on the head when he says, *What really is in the heart of a man has been badly missed. When it is all said and done, most men believe God put them on the earth to be a good boy. If they will try really hard, they can reach the lofty summit-- a nice guy. That's what we hold up as models of Christian maturity: Really nice guys. Now in all your boyhood dreams growing up, did you ever dream of becoming a nice guy? We've taken away the dreams of a man's heart and told him to play the man. C.S. Lewis said, "We castrate the gelding and bid him be fruitful."*

What man wouldn't want to be a brave warrior, a famous man and head of his family?

What man wouldn't want to be a brave warrior, a famous man and head of his family? These men from the tribe of Manasseh knew the fulfillment of some of the basic longings within the breast of a man. As John Eldredge puts it, "A battle to fight, an adventure to live and a beauty to rescue."

What does it mean to be a brave warrior in today's context? There are a number of battles and devils that we must fight. Life is full of struggles and tests. The Braveheart faces them straight on. The worst thing that we can do as men is to shrink back from those battles. Neither we, those around us nor the Lord will be pleased if we do.

Does a man have to find fame in order to be fulfilled? Worldly fame is so transient. But a man does need to leave his mark in whatever sphere God has given him. He needs to have an impact on others, leaving a legacy that will be honored after he is gone.

And what about being "head of his family?" This too is at the core of what naturally makes up the psyche of a man. For men who have families, they must take that privilege seriously and assume their place as the servant-leader for their household.

Now these particular men of Manasseh ultimately forfeited the things that their expression of manhood had gained by not sealing them up with fidelity to the Lord. No amount of masculinity could countervail the displeasure of the Lord as he sent the Assyrians to take them captive. Nonetheless, their epitaph remains. And it remains worth contending for.

The Gatekeepers Had Been Assigned to Their Positions of Trust

Altogether, those chosen to be gatekeepers at the thresholds numbered 212.... The gatekeepers had been assigned to their positions of trust by David and Samuel the seer. -1 Chronicles 9:22

There were two kinds of “gatekeepers” in Old Testament times. The most frequently mentioned were the Levites who were assigned to guard the entrances to the temple twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Also known as doorkeepers, they were stationed *at the gates of the Lord’s temple so that no one who was in any way unclean might enter* (2 Ch 23:19). It is of this post that David said in Psalm 84, *“I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked”* because, *“better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere.”*

The other kind of gatekeepers were the ones who kept watch at the city gates. Their job, like those of the Levites at the temple, was to keep anyone or anything undesirable or harmful from entering. They worked in conjunction with the “watchmen” on the city walls who would inform the city gatekeeper of who was coming, being especially aware if the approaching party might be packing trouble. It should go without saying that those given charge of protecting the entrance to either the temple or the city were given positions of trust. A corrupt or negligent gatekeeper could easily mean the defilement of the temple or the destruction of a city.

Modern day gatekeepers would include security personnel in office buildings, business and apartment complexes, border crossings, airline terminals and even nightclubs. “Ushers” in many of our churches, though finding themselves ushering people “in” a lot more than “out,” still have the responsibility of keeping an eye out for ones who may pose a threat to the peace and well being of the corporate gathering of the people of God.

Since 9-11, there has been an increased effort to secure our gates from those who would harm us. But spiritually speaking, how aware are we of the dangers seeking to invade our confines? Who are the gatekeepers at the doors of your “temple”—your household, your church, your city? How trustworthy are they to protect you from those things which would defile or destroy? It is the Lord who *strengthens the bars of your gates* (Ps 147:13). If those given authority as gatekeepers (ourselves, parents, pastors, etc...), along with the watchmen (intercessors) prove discerning and faithful, we will be kept safe.

Spiritually speaking, how aware are we of the dangers seeking to invade our confines?

Joab Son of Zeruiah Went up First

David had said, “Whoever leads the attack on the Jebusites will become commander-in-chief.” Joab son of Zeruiah went up first, and so he received the command. -1 Chronicles 11:6

Proverbs, even non-biblical ones, can give wisdom and aid in discerning the right course of action. But proverbial sayings can seem contradictory because they describe different facets of truth to be applied in different situations. Compare, for instance, “Discretion is the better part of valor,” and, “Only fools rush in,” with “He who hesitates is lost” and “Opportunity knocks but once.” Which is true? It depends on what is called for in a particular circumstance. In Joab’s case, because he didn’t hesitate, he received the command of Israel’s army.

Joab, who was a cousin to David, had a long and varied existence. His name is mentioned 132 times in the Bible. As far as I can tell, this ranks only behind Jesus, David, Moses, Aaron, Jacob, Saul, Abraham, Solomon, Paul, Joshua, Joseph, Peter, Jeremiah and John (in that order). Joab had many divergent experiences as the commander of David’s army. He was often wise, sometimes villainous, and never timid, apprehensive, or faltering.

Joab had already led some raiding parties under David’s command. But now that David was king, he was looking to turn his command over to another. As David and his men marched to Jerusalem to attack the fortress of the Jebusites, David said, *“Whoever leads the attack will become commander-in-chief.”* Try to picture yourself part of that company. What are you thinking? How do you respond? Do you have what it takes to be the one?

The genius of David’s challenge is that he gets to see first-hand who really has the stuff. In addition, the one who shows the stuff will have gained the confidence of the rest of the men by doing so. David is not interested in perusing resumes. He wants to find out who can lead his army.

I don’t know how much time the prospective leaders had to mull it over, but it was Joab who *went up first*. Whether that meant that he was the first to the battle line or the first to break through, there can be little doubt that Joab was short on hesitation and long on fortitude. And that is what made him a leader. Yes, sometimes fools rush in, but if you want to be a leader you have to go up first.

David is not interested in perusing resumes. He wants to find out who can lead his army.

Because He Had Put His Hand on the Ark

When they came to the threshing floor of Kidon, Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the ark, because the oxen stumbled. The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah, and he struck him down because he had put his hand on the ark. So he died there before God. - 1 Chronicles 13:9-10

In the Scriptures, there are some things from the hand of God that seem unfair, and the death of Uzzah is one of them. Was the Lord justified in striking down Uzzah for putting his hand on the ark? Despite his good motive, and despite the probability that he had no idea that he was doing anything wrong, the answer to the question is, “Yes.”

David had invited all of Israel to join in the procession to bring the ark of God into its new home, Jerusalem. They were having quite a celebration. With many different kinds of musical instruments and with dancing, they were praising the Lord with all their might.

We can't claim ignorance because ignorance is often the very problem

Little did they know that the party was about to come to an abrupt end. The oxen that were pulling the ark on a new cart stumbled, and because it was his responsibility to guide the cart, Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the ark to keep it from falling. Zap! The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah and he struck Uzzah down for his irreverent act (see 2 Samuel 6:7). So, David gets angry with the Lord and basically says, “What's up with that?”

What was up with that, as David learned, was that they had given no thought or inquiry as to how the ark of God's Presence should be transported (see 15:13-15). The Lord had clearly prescribed that the ark be handled and carried by Levites only. The Lord was justified in striking down Uzzah.

Was Uzzah's death his own fault? No. David and/or the Levites were responsible for what happened. Their ignorance and lack of diligence resulted in the demise of an otherwise innocent man. A little homework would have saved his life, not to mention the great celebration.

What do we learn from Uzzah's misfortune? We should make sure that, by our actions, we are free from violating any instruction the Lord has given us—especially from the Scriptures which “cannot be broken.” We need to keep in mind that ignorance is no excuse and that pure motive will not redeem us. We can't claim ignorance because ignorance, as in Uzzah's case, is often the very problem. Though ignorance is sometimes bliss, it is most often dangerous, no matter how good our motives might be.

Those Chosen and Designated to Give Thanks to the Lord

With them were Heman and Jeduthun and the rest of those chosen and designated by name to give thanks to the Lord, “for His love endures forever.” - 1 Chronicles 16:41

Much has been said about the concept that love is a choice. Feelings are important, but they can go as quickly as they come, so true love is more a decision of the will than an emotion. The same can be said of worship. We worship, not because we feel like it, but because we have a God who is worthy. We can, by a decision of our will, put our heart and soul into worshiping our God. Worship will never become part of our lifestyle if we are not intentional about making it a spiritual discipline. You don't pray only when you feel like it. You don't read the word only when you feel like it. Why then would you worship only when you felt like it?

David had brought the ark of the Lord to Jerusalem. This meant that regular worship was to be scheduled in the tabernacle which had been set up at Gibeon.

We worship, not because we feel like it, but because we have a God who is worthy

Asaph the musician and his associates were there to minister according to the daily requirements. Zadok and his fellow priests were responsible for presenting the burnt offerings to the Lord, as prescribed by the law of Moses. With them were Heman and Jeduthun and the rest of those *chosen and designated by name to give thanks to the Lord*.

I don't know who Heman and Jeduthun were but I doubt that they were chosen because, “Well...they are really thankful people.” No—just as the priests had received their assignment for tabernacle worship, these men were receiving their own assignment. It was their job to give thanks. Now if it is someone's job to give thanks, I suppose they do it whether they feel like it or not.

And so it should be with us. Yes, the Lord is looking for the heart in worship, but choosing to worship in spite of negative circumstances does not make one a hypocrite. Quite the opposite, really. Were Paul and Silas hypocrites for worshiping the Lord in the middle of the night in a Philippian jail? There is something to be said for offering up a “sacrifice of praise.” It's when we don't feel like worshiping that perhaps honors the Lord the most. It's probably when we need to worship the most, as well.

Worship is something that you enter into by choice. It literally means to prostrate yourself before the One greater than you. To do that, all you need is a will for it. So, when it comes time to worship, remember, you have been *chosen and designated by name to give thanks to the Lord*.

Satan Incited David to Take a Census of Israel

Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel. - 1 Chronicles 21:1

There are two major questions that arise from 1 Chronicles 21:1. The first is, “How come it says here that Satan incited David when the parallel passage in 2 Samuel (24:1) tells us that the Lord incited David?” The second question is, “What was wrong with taking a census?”

Concerning the first question, Gleason Archer in his helpful book, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, gives an able defense of the veracity of both narratives. He basically says that it is possible that both are true, citing scriptural examples where Satan’s malevolent intentions figured into the will of God, including Job’s test and Judas’s betrayal of Jesus. Satan works to cultivate a desire in the heart of a

person and there will be times when the Lord will hand a person over to that desire in order to deliver him or her from it. This concept may be unsettling, but there is ample biblical precedent to support it.

His motive was pride. It’s the numbers game. Isn’t that how so many of us measure success?

Now, why was it wrong for David to take this census? The book of Chronicles, from which this story is taken, is certainly not opposed to census taking. It contains census data ad infinitum. Moses took a census and I can see no specific injunction given to David to prohibit him from doing so. But Joab obviously discerned it was wrong, for when David told him to go and count the Israelites he tried to dissuade the king from this course of action that he said would “*bring guilt on Israel*” (v3). And obviously it was wrong because it brought the Lord’s punishment upon Israel.

So it must come down to a matter of the motive of David’s heart for doing so. And what other conclusion can you come to, since the census was *evil in the sight of God* (v7), than his motive was pride. It’s the numbers game. Isn’t that how so many of us measure success? We as leaders are inflated or deflated depending on our church attendance records (which are often inflated). Keeping track of which sheep are missing from our gatherings is one thing, but we should ask ourselves what is the real purpose of taking a head count.

There is also a trust issue here. Would David begin to trust in “horses and chariots” rather than the name of the Lord (Ps 20:7)? Would he take pride and find his security in his vast army? Pride moves us away from dependance on the Almighty. This is evil in his sight—which makes it clear why Satan would want to incite David to take the census.