

WHY DID MANY OF THE GOOD KINGS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH STUMBLE LATE IN LIFE?

Based on original outline from a sermonette entitled
“Lessons of Asa” by Mark Robertson

When we read the history of ancient Israel, beginning with the United Kingdom of Israel in the days of Saul, David and Solomon and continuing with the history of the southern kingdom of Judah (the Jews) after ten of the tribes split off and formed the northern kingdom of Israel, we notice an unfortunate trend that happened to many of their kings.

Most of the kings who started off good and “did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord” stumbled late in their life. In the case of some of them, those great spiritual falls were permanent and they never recovered from them spiritually. In one sense, they died in their sins.

In **1 Corinthians 10:11** we read: “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”

Since these things were written as examples for us today we should learn what we can about this problem that surprisingly happened quite often. Most of them to one degree or the other **lost perspective** in their latter years and their heart was lifted up above their brethren. How did this become a frequent problem? What can we learn from their mistakes so that it doesn’t happen in our own lives.

After the period of the Judges the people of ancient Israel wanted a human king like the other nations. Even though it meant a rejection of Him as king, God gave the people what they wanted. The kings would be anointed by God through the prophets and, unlike the kings of other nations around them, they were under the authority of God and the laws God gave to Israel. Many of the kings of Israel and Judah at times, though, acted like other kings and as if they weren’t accountable to anyone.

Saul

The first king that God anointed over Israel was Saul. Saul started off on a good foot and God gave Him every chance to succeed as a king over Israel.

We pick up the story of Saul at the beginning of **1 Samuel 9** where we read: “There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bechorath, the son of Aphiah, a Benjamite, a mighty man of power. And he had a choice and handsome son whose name was Saul. *There was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people*” (**verses 1-3**).

Saul was a giant of a man. He was physically impressive to look at and strong – just the type of man that the Israelites would want as their king. In rejecting God as their king the people of Israel were more inclined to trust in strong men who could fight their enemies around who God allowed to oppress Israel when they lapsed morally.

As the story of Saul unfolds we see a personality fault that surely played a part in why God decided to choose Saul. He was a very insecure man, even to the point of

having an inferiority complex at times. [This character trait, where one doesn't place their trust and security in God to guide events for good, causes many leaders to become control freaks.] Saul feared the people more than he feared God. God gave him every opportunity to rise above this character flaw but if he failed God would use this as a lesson to the people of Israel to trust in Him and not in men, even men who were physically very impressive.

Saul's father had lost some donkeys and he humbly decides to go to see Samuel and ask if God can help him find the donkeys. Notice how little he was in his own eyes to begin with when Samuel begins to tell him of what God's plans are for him:

"And Saul answered and said, 'Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then do you speak like this to me?'" (**1 Samuel 9:21**).

God gave Samuel every advantage to succeed including the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (**1 Samuel 10:9-10**). When the Ammonites threatened those at Jabesh Gilead God moved and helped Saul win a great battle against them (**1 Samuel 11**). With the help of his son Jonathan, Saul and his army defeated the Philistines and all the enemies around Israel (**1 Samuel 14:46-48**).

"Saul's first sin was his failure to wait for Samuel at Gilgal (**1 Samuel 13:8-9**). There he assumed the role of a priest by making a sacrifice to ask for God's blessing. His second sin followed soon afterward. After defeating Moab, Ammon, and Edom, Saul was told by Samuel to go to war against the Amalekites and to 'kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey' (**1 Samuel 15:3**). Saul carried out his instructions well except that he spared the life of Agag, the king, and saved the best of the animals. When he returned, he lied and told Samuel that he had followed instructions exactly.

"Saul's disobedience in this case showed that he could not be trusted as an instrument of God's will. He desired to assert his own will instead. Although he was allowed to remain king for the rest of his life, the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul. He was troubled by an evil spirit that brought bouts of madness. Meanwhile, Samuel went to Bethlehem to anoint David as the new king.

"Saul's last years were tragic, clouded by periods of depression and gloom. David was brought into Saul's court to play soothing music to restore him to sanity. Saul was friendly toward David at first, but this changed as David's leadership abilities emerged. Enraged by jealousy, Saul tried to kill David several times. But David succeeded in eluding these attempts on his life for many years, often with the aid of Saul's son Jonathan and his daughter Michal.

"The closing years of Saul's life brought a decline in his service to his people and in his personal fortunes. Rather than consolidating his gains after his early victories, Saul wasted his time trying to kill David. Meanwhile, the Philistines sensed Israel's plight and came with a large army to attack the Hebrew nation. Saul's army was crushed, and three of his sons, including Jonathan, were killed. Wounded in the battle, Saul committed suicide by falling on his own sword" (Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary, article - Saul).

Twice David spared Saul's life when he had the opportunity to kill his harasser to prove to him that he had no ill will towards his father-in-law, Saul. David used the power of kindness and won back Saul's favour and friendship. Sadly, it was only temporary and ultimately Saul's insecurity got the better of him and he again went

after David. His jealousy got so great that he ordered the cold-blooded killing of all the priests of Nob and their families and livestock suspecting they were helping David.

What a tragic moral slide for someone who was so humble in his own eyes to begin with! Rather than acknowledging and taking responsibility for his sins by turning to God he turned away from seeking God's will for His life and the nation of Israel. God could have still used him had he humbled himself, taken full responsibility for his failures and fully committed himself to obeying God. Instead, his rebellious spirit led him to depression, acts of violence and murder and mad fits of rage against the one who God chose to succeed him.

The Life Application Bible makes these comments about Saul's life: "During his reign, Saul had his greatest successes when he obeyed God. His greatest failures resulted from acting on his own. Saul had the raw materials to be a good leader -- appearance, courage, and action. Even his weaknesses could have been used by God if Saul had recognized them and left them in God's hands. His own choices cut him off from God and eventually alienated him from his own people...Our skills and talents make us tools, but our failures and shortcomings remind us that we need a Craftsman in control of our lives. Whatever we accomplish on our own is only a hint of what God could do through our lives."

David

The next king of Israel was David. He was the shepherd boy who later became king and has been hailed as the greatest king that Israel had. David was called by God "a man after My *own* heart" (**1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22**) at the time he was a mere shepherd boy. Despite some big sins in His life He did remain faithful to the end and will be the one that God appoints to rule over the twelve tribes of Israel in the millennium (**Jeremiah 30:9**).

Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary makes these comments about David:

"Although David committed deep sin, he still was known as a man who sought God's will. Certainly he was not perfect, but he was willing to repent of his wrongdoing and to follow God's leadership. His influence for good in the life of his nation was great, since every king of Judah after David was compared to the standard he established. A capable musician, David unquestionably gave great encouragement to this fine art in the life of his people. As a warrior and military man, he was resourceful and courageous. As a king, he was without equal in the life of his nation. As a religious leader, he was exceptional. Many of his writings will continue to be the favorite devotional literature for honest souls who seek a closer walk with God...

"Although David was a righteous king, he was subject to sin, just like other human beings. On one occasion when his army went to battle, David stayed home. This led to his great sin with Bathsheba. While Uriah, the Hittite, Bathsheba's husband, was away in battle, David committed adultery with her. Then in an effort to cover his sin, he finally had Uriah killed in battle [**2 Samuel 11**]. David was confronted by the prophet Nathan, who courageously exposed his wrongdoing. Faced with his sin, David repented and asked for God's forgiveness [**2 Samuel 12**]. His prayer for forgiveness is recorded in **Psalms 51**.

"Although God forgave David of this act of adultery, the consequences of the sin continued to plague him. The child born to David and Bathsheba died. The example he set as a father was a bad influence on his sons. One son, Amnon, raped and

humiliated his half-sister [**2 Samuel 13**]. Another son, Absalom, rebelled against David and tried to take away his kingdom by force.”

David could have easily went the same way as Solomon and lost the Holy Spirit and his sanity if he had not responded in humility and repented when Nathan confronted him about his adultery and murder. Everything was on the line at that moment. For close to a year he had turned his back on God. Had he not responded to the prophet when his sins were so craftily pointed out to him he would have lost the Holy Spirit and gone down the same path as Saul becoming a bitter, self-willed old man.

David strayed from the commandment not to have multiple wives (**Deuteronomy 17:15-17**). Though God forgave David and spared him from the death penalty that was due for a murderer and adulterer (**2 Samuel 12:13**), one of the punishments that God decreed would happen to David was allowing his wives to be taken from him and defiled by someone near to him (**2 Samuel 13:11**). David repented of his polygamy with the concubines (**2 Samuel 20:3**).

The guilt he felt over the depths of his own sins probably played a part in his weakness to firmly punish his son, Absalom, who rose up in rebellion against him. We also find this same lack of firmness near the end of his life that he had in dealing with another rebellious son, Adonijah (**1 Kings 1:5-6**).

The matter of Uriah the Hittite occurred midway through his life. He was more humbler and firmly committed to God’s way from this time forward. However, there was one more great sin where he temporarily allowed his heart to be lifted up in pride.

“**1 Chronicles 21:1** says that...Satan...moved David to take [a] census...**2 Samuel 24:1** attributes this to God, as a result of His anger toward Israel for some unstated reason. No doubt God *allowed* Satan to act, as He did with Job, for His own purposes. But why would God be upset at anyone taking a census, when He ordered them several times Himself in the past (e.g., in **Numbers 1 and 26**)?”

“Apparently there was an attitude problem here that even Joab was able to see. Perhaps David and the rest of the people were glorying unduly in their own physical might and power, as seems to be implied by **2 Samuel 24:3**...”

“As we’ve seen, by the time of the census, God was clearly already angry with the Israelites for some reason—and the possibility that they had become swollen with pride and were beginning to put their trust in their own greatness (rather than giving glory to and trusting in God) seems to fit. Or maybe David was considering some unauthorized military expansion campaign, since all of those counted by David’s chief general were ‘valiant men who drew the sword’ (**2 Samuel 24:9**)...”

“Following the census, David finally realizes his error, but as is usually the case with our own sins, the consequences were still something he would have to face. In this case, through the prophet Gad, God offers him a choice of consequences, all of which would affect the entire nation. This may seem unfair, but remember the whole incident was prompted because ‘the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.’ Israel as a nation was already guilty of something, and God is dealing here with David and the nation simultaneously according to His own divine purposes in a manner that seems to have been designed to humble all concerned” (Good News Bible Reading Program).

“Gad came to David and said to him, ‘Thus says the LORD: ‘Choose for yourself, either three years of famine, or three months to be defeated by your foes with the sword of your enemies overtaking *you*, or else for three days the sword of the LORD—the plague in the land, with the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the territory of Israel.’ Now consider what answer I should take back to Him who sent me. And David said to Gad, ‘I am in great distress. Please let me fall into the hand of the LORD, for His mercies *are* very great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man.’

“So the LORD sent a plague upon Israel, and seventy thousand men of Israel fell. And God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it. As he was destroying, the LORD looked and relented of the disaster, and said to the angel who was destroying, ‘It is enough; now restrain your hand.’ And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. Then David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the LORD standing between earth and heaven, having in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem. So David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell on their faces. And David said to God, ‘Was it not I who commanded the people to be numbered? I am the one who has sinned and done evil indeed; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, O LORD my God, be against me and my father’s house, but not against Your people that they should be plagued” (1 **Chronicles 21:11-17**).

When David had his sin in numbering the military strength of Israel pointed out to him by Joab, David still stubbornly persisted with this decision. It appears on first reading of verses 15-16 that God stepped in and said enough before David made intercession and said let it fall on me who sinned, not the people. David seems to appear rather slow to intercede for his people when actually it was quite the opposite. Matthew Henry’s Commentary helps clear up the confusion with these comments:

“The brazen altar which Moses made was at Gibeon (1 **Chronicles 21:29**), and there all the sacrifices of Israel were offered; but David was so terrified at the sight of the sword of the angel that he *could not go thither*, v. 30. The business required haste, when the plague was begun. Aaron must go quickly, nay, he must *run*, to make atonement, **Numbers 16:46-47**. And the case here was no less urgent; so that David had not time to go to Gibeon: nor durst he leave the angel with his sword drawn over Jerusalem, lest the fatal stroke should be given before he came back. And therefore God, in tenderness to him, bade him build an altar in that place, dispensing with his own law concerning one altar because of the present distress, and accepting the sacrifices offered on this new altar, which was not set up in opposition to that, but in concurrence with it. The symbols of unity were not so much insisted on as unity itself.”

“And David built there an altar to the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called on the LORD; and He answered him from heaven by fire on the altar of burnt offering. So the LORD commanded the angel, and he returned his sword to its sheath” (1 **Chronicles 21:26-27**).

Shortly prior to this event David burned to do something special for God and house the Ark in something beautiful and more permanent – a Temple. Though God had no initial desire for a Temple he let David’s son, Solomon, build the Temple (1 **Chronicles 17**). After the census sin he made good on preparing lavish materials for the Temple which Solomon would soon build. Near the end he confirmed Solomon as his heir and charged him to obey God faithfully. Though he made his share of big sins he also had a big love for God and he endured in the faith to the end.

Solomon

The reign of David's son, Solomon started off very well. In **1 Kings 3** we read of an event that happened early in his reign:

"And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David...Now the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place: Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask! What shall I give you?' And Solomon said: 'You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as *it is* this day. Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I *am* a little child; I do not know *how* to go out or come in. And Your servant *is* in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?'

"The speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing. Then God said to him: 'Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days'" (**verses 3-13**).

When he unselfishly asked for wisdom to properly rule God's people God went over and above by not only giving him great wisdom (such that many foreign rulers like the Queen of Sheba travelled to meet and learn from him) but God also gave him great wealth and honour. This was one of two occasions where God appeared to him in vision, the other being after the great dedication ceremony of the Temple.

"Wisdom is only effective when it is put into action. Early in his life, Solomon had the sense to recognize his need for wisdom. But by the time Solomon asked for wisdom to rule his kingdom, he had already started a habit that would make his wisdom ineffective for his own life -- he sealed a pact with Egypt by marrying Pharaoh's daughter. She was the first of hundreds of wives married for political reasons. In doing this, Solomon went against not only his father's last words, but also God's direct commands. His action reminds us how easy it is to know what is right and yet not do it" (Life Application Bible, Personality Profile on Solomon).

This habit of taking foreign wives led to a downward moral slide in Solomon's life. Probably slowly at first and then rapidly gaining pace towards the end when he was old, his foreign wives turned his heart away from God.

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

went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as *did* his father David. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that *is* east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.

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

“In many ways, Solomon’s 40-year reign as king of the Hebrew people is a puzzle. In his early years he was both noble and humble—undoubtedly one of the best rulers of his day. Although he was surrounded by wealth and luxury as a young man, he seemed to be a person of honor and integrity. He was the first king in Israel who was the son of a king [In some respects his depth of conversion was shallow like many who grow up in the church as children of church members i.e. second generation christians]. The glory of his empire was a reflection of his own royal tastes, which he satisfied through a shrewd and successful foreign policy. Unfortunately, Solomon was not strong enough to withstand the temptations that go along with a long life of luxury. His contribution to the nation of Israel is figured largely in material terms. He made Jerusalem one of the most beautiful cities of the ancient world, and he will always be remembered as a great builder...

“The large number of foreign women in Solomon’s court made many demands upon the king. He allowed these ‘outsiders’ to practice their pagan religions. The result was that Jerusalem, and even its holy Temple, was the scene of pagan practices and idol worship (1 Kings 11:1–13). Solomon’s own faith was weakened. Eventually he approved of, and even participated in, these idolatrous acts. The example he set for the rest of the nation must have been demoralizing. This unfortunate error was a severe blow to the security of Solomon’s throne and to the nation he had built...

“Years before Solomon’s death, his heavy taxation of the people brought unrest and rebellion. Surrounding nations began to marshal their forces to free themselves of Israel’s tyranny, but the most serious uprising came from within the nation itself. When Solomon’s son Rehoboam ascended the throne after his father, Jeroboam, a young leader who had been exiled to Egypt, returned to lead a successful civil war against him. The result was a division of Solomon’s United Kingdom into two separate nations—the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel” (Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary, article – Solomon).

Was Solomon’s moral slide a permanent one? Did he repent before he died? There is no mention of any repentance in the historical books of the Kings and Chronicles. Also, there is no mention of Solomon as one who would be present at the first resurrection in the gospels or in the faith chapter of **Hebrews 11** where other Old Testament men and women are mentioned as having endured to the end. While he was given great wisdom from God there is no mention of the Spirit of the Lord coming upon him as occurred when both Saul (who later lost it) and David were anointed king.

The only indication we possibly have of a happy ending to Solomon's story is from the Book of Ecclesiastes which is almost universally believed to have been authored by Solomon towards the end of his life.

"Little is mentioned in the Bible about the last decade of Solomon's reign. Ecclesiastes probably records his last reflections on life. In that book we find a man proving through bitter experience that finding meaning in life apart from God is a vain pursuit. Security and contentment are found only in a personal relationship with God. The contentment we find in the opportunities and successes of this life is temporary" (Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary, article – Solomon).

Solomon tried to find fulfillment in every kind of physical pursuit (**Ecclesiastes 2**) but found it all so temporary. There is a cynicism in the lack of fulfillment from all the physical things and pursuits of life that runs through the whole book. It speaks of one who had to learn certain lessons very much the hard way.

He followed his father, David's, poor example of multiplying wives for himself. David eventually repented of this sin. Solomon took this sin to great excess far above the 8 wives and 10 concubines David had by having 300 wives and 700 concubines. He was the Hugh Hefner of the ancient world.

In the Book of Ecclesiastes we have an indication that Solomon confessed his sin and turned from it. He wrote: "And I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart *is* snares and nets, whose hands *are* fetters. He who pleases God shall escape from her, but the sinner shall be trapped by her" (**Ecclesiastes 7:26**).

In the end he does come to the right conclusion about where true lasting fulfillment comes from – a personal relationship with God and obeying His laws.

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (**Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**).

That said, there are some that count against Solomon repenting in any sort of wholehearted way. There is no record of him rending his heart and turning to God like his father David in Psalm 51 after God's pronouncement of his guilt in (**1 Kings 11:9-13**). He also tried to kill his political rival Jeroboam late in his life (**1 Kings 11:40**) and lastly he did nothing to lighten the taxation burden upon his people (**1 Kings 12:4**).

Israel split into two nations shortly after Solomon died during the beginning of the reign of Solomon's son, Rehoboam. Rehoboam reigned for nearly twenty years, briefly followed by his son, Abijah. Both these kings of Judah "did that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord".

Asa

The next king of Judah started off on a great foot. Early in his reign he didn't follow the example of his father and grandfather but sought to obey God in his life. His name was Asa. We have no clear indication for why Asa was convicted to seek God and not follow the example of his father and grandfather. We pick up Asa's story starting in **2 Chronicles 14 and 15**:

"So Abijah rested with his fathers, and they buried him in the City of David. Then Asa his son reigned in his place. In his days the land was quiet for ten years. Asa did

what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God, for he removed the altars of the foreign *gods* and the high places, and broke down the *sacred* pillars and cut down the wooden images. He commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to observe the law and the commandment. He also removed the high places and the incense altars from all the cities of Judah, and the kingdom was quiet under him.

“And he built fortified cities in Judah, for the land had rest; he had no war in those years, because the LORD had given him rest. Therefore he said to Judah, ‘Let us build these cities and make walls around *them*, and towers, gates, and bars, *while* the land *is* yet before us, because we have sought the LORD our God; we have sought *Him*, and He has given us rest on every side.’ So they built and prospered. And Asa had an army of three hundred thousand from Judah who carried shields and spears, and from Benjamin two hundred and eighty thousand men who carried shields and drew bows; all these *were* mighty men of valor.

“Then Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and three hundred chariots, and he came to Mareshah. So Asa went out against him, and they set the troops in battle array in the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. And Asa cried out to the LORD his God, and said, ‘LORD, *it is* nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power; help us, O LORD our God, for we rest on You, and in Your name we go against this multitude. O LORD, You *are* our God; do not let man prevail against You!’

“So the LORD struck the Ethiopians before Asa and Judah, and the Ethiopians fled. And Asa and the people who *were* with him pursued them to Gerar. So the Ethiopians were overthrown, and they could not recover, for they were broken before the LORD and His army. And they carried away very much spoil. Then they defeated all the cities around Gerar, for the fear of the LORD came upon them; and they plundered all the cities, for there was exceedingly much spoil in them. They also attacked the livestock enclosures, and carried off sheep and camels in abundance, and returned to Jerusalem.

“Now the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. And he went out to meet Asa, and said to him: ‘Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD *is* with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. For a long time Israel *has been* without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without law; but when in their trouble they turned to the LORD God of Israel, and sought Him, He was found by them. And in those times *there was* no peace to the one who went out, nor to the one who came in, but great turmoil *was* on all the inhabitants of the lands. So nation was destroyed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every adversity. But you, be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded!’

“And when Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities which he had taken in the mountains of Ephraim; and he restored the altar of the LORD that *was* before the vestibule of the LORD. Then he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those who dwelt with them from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon, for they came over to him in great numbers from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him.

“So they gathered together at Jerusalem in the third month, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa. And they offered to the LORD at that time seven hundred bulls and seven thousand sheep from the spoil they had brought. Then they entered into a

covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; and whoever would not seek the LORD God of Israel was to be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman. Then they took an oath before the LORD with a loud voice, with shouting and trumpets and rams' horns. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart and sought Him with all their soul; and He was found by them, and the LORD gave them rest all around.

“Also he removed Maachah, the [grandmother] of Asa the king, from *being* queen mother, because she had made an obscene image of Asherah; and Asa cut down her obscene image, then crushed and burned *it* by the Brook Kidron. But the high places were not removed from Israel. Nevertheless the heart of Asa was loyal all his days. He also brought into the house of God the things that his father had dedicated and that he himself had dedicated: silver and gold and utensils. And there was no war until the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa.”

Asa for most of his reign sets a tremendous example of passion for God and His ways. He went to great lengths to remove all forms of idolatry in Judah, even putting away his grandmother from being queen mother because she worshipped Asherah.

Zerah the Ethiopian came against Judah with a million man army that far outnumbered Judah's army. This was a combined Egyptian-Ethiopian-Libyan army. The term Ethiopian is translated from the Hebrew Cushite which may be a reference to southern Egypt. Zerah was either the Egyptian pharaoh based in Thebes in southern Egypt or the pharaoh's general.

When Zerah came against Judah Asa shows tremendous dependence on God by not engaging in battle at first but asking God to go before them and strike down the enemy.

Life was great for Asa and he stayed on the right path for the first thirty-five years of being king. Then began a terrible moral slide which he could have turned from at any point in time but which he stubbornly persisted in right through to his death.

“In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah and built Ramah, that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. Then Asa brought silver and gold from the treasuries of the house of the LORD and of the king's house, and sent to Ben-Hadad king of Syria, who dwelt in Damascus, saying, ‘*Let there be* a treaty between you and me, as there was between my father and your father. Here, I have sent you silver and gold; come, break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel, so that he will withdraw from me.’ So Ben-Hadad heeded King Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel. They attacked Ijon, Dan, Abel Maim, and all the storage cities of Naphtali. Now it happened, when Baasha heard *it*, that he stopped building Ramah and ceased his work. Then King Asa took all Judah, and they carried away the stones and timber of Ramah, which Baasha had used for building; and with them he built Geba and Mizpah.

“And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said to him: ‘Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and have not relied on the LORD your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped from your hand. Were the Ethiopians and the Lubim not a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied on the LORD, He delivered them into your hand. For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of *those* whose heart *is* loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars.’ Then Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in

prison, for *he* was enraged at him because of this. And Asa oppressed *some* of the people at that time. Note that the acts of Asa, first and last, are indeed written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel.

“And in the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa became diseased in his feet, and his malady was severe; yet in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but the physicians. So Asa rested with his fathers; he died in the forty-first year of his reign” (**2 Chronicles 16:1-13**).

This great king, so zealous for God earlier, but in his latter days he thinks he is better than other people imprisons the servant of God, oppresses his own people and is prepared to live out his time in horrible pain too stubborn to ask God for help.

Talk about a classic case of shooting the messenger. His story is truly amazing isn't it? **Talk about losing perspective!**

Asa is generally regarded as a good king but the way he was in his latter years certainly takes the gloss off his life. How is it that such a **passionate** man - so fired up for God for most of his life - could end up this way?

The Life Application Bible has these comments about Asa and the reasons for his moral slide:

“God has never accepted the idea that ‘the ends justify the means.’ He is just and perfect in all his ways. People, on the other hand, are far from perfect...As a king, Asa came very close to being good. He traveled a long way with God before getting off track. His sin was not so much deliberate disobedience as choosing the easy way rather than the right way.

“When the odds seemed impossible in the battle with the Cushites, Asa recognized his need to depend on God. Following that victory, God's promise of peace based on obedience spurred the king and people to many years of right living. But Asa was to face a tougher test.

“Years of animosity between Asa and Israel's king Baasha took an ugly turn. Baasha, king of the rival northern kingdom, was building a fort that threatened both the peace and the economy of Judah. Asa thought he saw a way out -- he bribed King Ben-Hadad of Aram to break his alliance with King Baasha. The plan worked brilliantly, but it wasn't God's way. When Asa was confronted by God's prophet Hanani, he flew into a rage, jailed Hanani, and took out his anger on his people. Asa rejected correction and refused to admit his error to God. His greatest failure was missing what God could have done with his life if he had been willing to be humble. His pride ruined the health of his reign. He stubbornly held on to his failure until his death.

“Does this attitude sound familiar? Can you identify failures in your life that you have continued to rationalize rather than admit them to God and accept his forgiveness? The ends do not justify the means. Such a belief leads to sin and failure. The stubborn refusal to admit a failure due to sin can become a big problem because it makes you spend time rationalizing rather than learning from your mistakes and moving on.”

What a sad story for someone who started off so well! His son Jehoshaphat would stay faithful to the end but, he too, would repeat similar mistakes of his father late in his life.

Jehoshaphat

“Then Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his place, and strengthened himself against Israel. And he placed troops in all the fortified cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah and in the cities of Ephraim which Asa his father had taken. Now the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the former ways of his father David; he did not seek the Baals, but sought the God of his father, and walked in His commandments and not according to the acts of Israel. Therefore the LORD established the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah gave presents to Jehoshaphat, and he had riches and honor in abundance. And his heart took delight in the ways of the LORD; moreover he removed the high places and wooden images from Judah” **(2 Chronicles 17:1-6)**.

After he made the mistake of making an alliance with wicked King Ahab of Israel we read: “And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to King Jehoshaphat, ‘Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Therefore the wrath of the LORD *is* upon you. Nevertheless good things are found in you, in that you have removed the wooden images from the land, and have prepared your heart to seek God” **(2 Chronicles 19:2-3)**.

Regarding Jehoshaphat and the lessons we should learn from his life the Life Application Bible has these comments:

“Are children more likely to learn from their parents' mistakes or to simply repeat them? In the lives of the people in the Bible, we find that the effects of parental examples are powerful and long-lasting. For much of his life, Jehoshaphat seems to have been a son who learned from his father Asa's mistakes and followed his positive actions. But on several occasions, his decisions reveal the negative aspects of his father's example.

“When the challenges were obvious, like the need for religious education of the people or the threat of war with a vast army, Jehoshaphat turned to God for guidance and made the right choices. His dependence on God was consistent when the odds were clearly against him. It was in depending on God for the day-to-day plans and actions that Jehoshaphat was weak. He allowed his son to marry Athaliah, the daughter of the wicked Ahab and Jezebel of Israel, who did her best to be as evil as her parents. Jehoshaphat was almost killed when, without asking God, he made an alliance with Ahab. Later, he got involved in an unwise shipbuilding venture with Ahab's son, Ahaziah -- a venture that was shipwrecked by God.

“God's faithfulness when the issues are clear and the enemy overwhelming is more than enough reason to seek his guidance when the issues are unclear and the enemy unseen. Jehoshaphat knew this, yet he made little use of that knowledge.

“We repeat Jehoshaphat's error when we relegate God to the background in the ‘easy’ decisions of life. Then, when things get out of hand, we want him to get us out of the mess we got ourselves into. God wants us to give him not only the major decisions, but also our daily lives -- the things we are most often fooled into believing we can control.”

For the 13 years after Jehoshaphat's death three kings reigned over Judah doing that which was “evil in the sight of the Lord”. The first was Jehoram, who married a daughter of wicked king Ahab. Then followed Ahaziah who was followed by Jehoram's wicked wife, Queen Athaliah, who killed all the other heirs to the throne except for Joash who would next reign over Judah. Joash would be another case of a

king who would started off doing that which was right but would go off track later in his life.

In the northern kingdom of Israel all the kings would follow after the idolatrous sins of its first king, Jeroboam. The only possible bright light was Jehu, son of Jehoshaphat, who was anointed king over Israel by Elisha and was to take God's vengeance out on Ahab and Jezebel.

Jehu

Jehu's story is told in **2 Kings 9 and 10**. In summarizing Jehu's life the Life Application Bible makes these comments:

"Jehu had the basic qualities that could have made him a great success. From a human perspective, in fact, he was a successful king. His family ruled the northern kingdom longer than any other. He was used by God as an instrument of punishment to Ahab's evil dynasty, and he fiercely attacked Baal worship. He came close to being God's kind of king, but he recklessly went beyond God's commands and failed to follow through on the obedient actions that began his reign. Within sight of victory, he settled for mediocrity.

"Jehu was a man of immediate action but without ultimate purpose. His kingdom moved, but its destination was unclear. He eliminated one form of idolatry, Baal worship, only to uphold another by continuing to worship the golden calves Jeroboam had set up. He could have accomplished much for God if he had been obedient to the One who made him king. Even when he was carrying out God's directions, Jehu's style showed he was not fully aware of who was directing him.

"As he did with Jehu, God gives each person strengths and abilities that will find their greatest usefulness only under his control. Outside that control, however, they don't accomplish what they could and often become tools for evil. One way to make sure this does not happen is to tell God of your willingness to be under his control. With his presence in your life, your natural strengths and abilities will be used to their greatest potential for the greatest good."

Joash

"Joash was seven years old when he became king, and he reigned 40 years in Jerusalem (**2 Chronicles 24:1**)...After Ahaziah died, Athaliah killed all the royal heirs to the throne. But God spared Joash through his aunt, Jehosheba, who hid him for six years in the house of the Lord (**2 Kings 11:2-3**). When Joash reached the age of seven, Jehoiada the priest arranged for his coronation as king (**2 Kings 11:4-16**).

"Early in his reign, Joash repaired the Temple and restored true religion to Judah, destroying Baal worship (**2 Kings 11:18-21**). But the king who began so well faltered upon the loss of his advisor, Jehoiada. After Jehoiada died, Joash allowed idolatry to grow (**2 Chronicles 24:18**). He even went so far as to have Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, stoned to death for rebuking him (**2 Chronicles 24:20-22**). God's judgment came quickly in the form of a Syrian invasion, which resulted in the wounding of Joash (**2 Chronicles 24:23-24**). He was then killed by his own servants" (Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary, article – Joash).

In summarizing Joash's life the Life Application Bible makes these comments:

“All parents want their children to make the right decisions. But to do this, children must first learn to make their own decisions. Making bad ones helps them learn to make good ones. If parents make all the decisions for their children, they leave their children without the skills for wise decision making when they are on their own. This problem seriously affected Joash. He had great advice, but he never grew up. He became so dependent on what he was told that his effectiveness was limited to the quality of his advisers.

“When Joash was one year old, his grandmother Athaliah decided to slaughter all her descendants in a desperate bid for power. Joash was the only survivor, rescued and hidden by his aunt and uncle, Jehosheba and Jehoiada. Jehoiada's work as a priest made it possible to keep Joash hidden in the temple for six years. At that point, Jehoiada arranged for the overthrow of Athaliah and the crowning of Joash. For many years following, Jehoiada made most of the kingdom's decisions for Joash. When the old priest died, he was buried in the royal cemetery as a tribute to his role.

“But after Jehoiada's death, Joash didn't know what to do. He listened to counsel that carried him into evil. Within a short time he even ordered the death of Jehoiada's son Zechariah. After a few months, Joash's army had been soundly defeated by the Arameans. Jerusalem was saved only because Joash stripped the temple of its treasures as a bribe. Finally, the king's own officials assassinated him. In contrast to Jehoiada, Joash was not buried among the kings; he is not even listed in Jesus' genealogy in the New Testament.

“As dependent as Joash was on Jehoiada, there is little evidence that he ever established a real dependence on the God Jehoiada obeyed. Like many children, Joash's knowledge of God was secondhand. It was a start, but the king needed his own relationship with God that would outlast and overrule the changes in the advice he received.

“It would be easy to criticize Joash's failure were it not for the fact that we often fall into the same traps. How often have we acted on poor advice without considering God's Word?”

Amaziah

Joash's son, Amaziah, followed a path similar to that of his father Joash. His story is told in **2 Chronicles 25**:

“Amaziah was twenty-five years old *when* he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. And he did *what was* right in the sight of the LORD, but not with a loyal heart.

“He also hired one hundred thousand mighty men of valor from Israel for one hundred talents of silver. But a man of God came to him, saying, ‘O king, do not let the army of Israel go with you, for the LORD *is* not with Israel—*not with* any of the children of Ephraim. But if you go, be gone! Be strong in battle! *Even so*, God shall make you fall before the enemy; for God has power to help and to overthrow.’ Then Amaziah said to the man of God, ‘But *what shall we* do about the hundred talents which I have given to the troops of Israel?’ And the man of God answered, ‘The LORD is able to give you much more than this.’ So Amaziah discharged the troops that had come to him from Ephraim, to go back home. Therefore their anger was greatly aroused against Judah, and they returned home in great anger.

“Now it was so, after Amaziah came from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the people of Seir, set them up *to be* his gods, and bowed down before them and burned incense to them. Therefore the anger of the LORD was aroused against Amaziah, and He sent him a prophet who said to him, ‘Why have you sought the gods of the people, which could not rescue their own people from your hand?’ So it was, as he talked with him, that *the king* said to him, ‘Have we made you the king’s counselor? Cease! Why should you be killed?’ Then the prophet ceased, and said, ‘I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this and have not heeded my advice.’

“Now Amaziah king of Judah asked advice and sent to Joash the son of Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, ‘Come, let us face one another *in battle*’...

“After the time that Amaziah turned away from following the LORD, they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish; but they sent after him to Lachish and killed him there” (**verses 1-10, 14-17, 27**).

He starts off right and does what is right in God’s eyes. When rebuked for foolishly hiring mercenaries from Israel to war with Edom he humbly accepts the prophet’s correction and discharges the mercenaries which would have been quite inconvenient given the reaction of the mercenaries after he followed through with it.

After this initial humility an amazing hardening of the heart occurs after the victory over the Edomites which inflates his pride and ego.

“Following a stunning victory over the Edomites, Amaziah embraced the gods of Edom (**2 Chronicles. 25:14**). The folly of his action was exposed by the ironic question of a godly priest, “Why have you sought the gods of the people, which could not rescue their own people from your hand?” (**2 Chronicles 25:15**)...

Apparently filled with pride over his victory, Amaziah challenged the king of Israel, Joash (or Jehoash), to war and suffered defeat at Beth Shemesh. The Bible notes that this was God’s punishment for Amaziah’s sin of idolatry (**2 Chronicles 25:20**). King Joash destroyed a large section of the wall of Jerusalem and claimed spoil from the Temple and the king’s treasury. He also took hostages back to Samaria, possibly even King Amaziah (**2 Chronicles 25:23–24**). Amaziah outlived Joash by 15 years. Learning of a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, he fled to Lachish. However, his enemies followed and assassinated him there, ending a reign of 29 years (**2 Chronicles 25:25–28**).

Uzziah

Amaziah’s son, Uzziah, was the next king of Judah. His story is eerily similar to that of King Asa and is told in **2 Chronicles 26** where we read:

“Now all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who *was* sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah. He built Elath and restored it to Judah, after the king rested with his fathers. Uzziah *was* sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Jecholiah of Jerusalem. And he did *what was* right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done. He sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God; and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper...

“But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to *his* destruction, for he transgressed against the LORD his God by entering the temple of the LORD to burn

incense on the altar of incense. So Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him were eighty priests of the LORD—valiant men. And they withstood King Uzziah, and said to him, ‘*It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed! You shall have no honor from the LORD God.*’ Then Uzziah became furious; and he *had* a censer in his hand to burn incense. And while he was angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead, before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the incense altar. And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and there, on his forehead, he was leprous; so they thrust him out of that place. Indeed he also hurried to get out, because the LORD had struck him. King Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house, because he was a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD” (verses 1-5, 16-21).

“Uzziah ascended the throne at age 16 and reigned longer than any previous king of Judah or Israel—52 years. He probably co-reigned with his father and had his son Jotham as his co-regent during his final years as a leper. A wise, pious, and powerful king, he extended Judah’s territory and brought the nation to a time of great prosperity. In the south he maintained control over Edom and rebuilt port facilities at Elath on the Gulf of Aqaba. To the west he warred against the Philistines, seizing several cities. He also apparently defeated and subdued the Ammonites...

“However, Uzziah’s heart was lifted up in pride. No longer satisfied to be a mortal king, he desired to be like some of his contemporaries—a divine king. He entered the Temple to burn incense. When Azariah the high priest and 80 associates confronted him, he responded in anger instead of repentance. God judged him by striking him with leprosy. Uzziah was forced to live the rest of his life in a separate place, with his son Jotham probably acting as king” (Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary, article – Uzziah).

During his reign a massive earthquake occurred (**Amos 1:1; Zechariah 14:5**). If this earthquake co-occurred with the event of his going into the Temple to burn incense perhaps fear might have been a factor for his presumptuousness but this appears unlikely given he only burned incense rather than burnt an animal sacrifice.

Like Asa he was faithful for most of his reign until he rejected correction after making a presumptuous sin. Like Asa he also stubbornly refused to confess his mistake and wouldn’t seek God’s intervention when he was struck with a physical ailment that claimed his life. Like Asa it appears that he, too, was a spiritual shipwreck after being faithful for so much of his life.

In summarizing Uzziah’s life the Life Application Bible makes these comments:

“We are never closer to failure than during our greatest successes. If we fail to recognize God’s part in our achievements, they are no better than failures. Uzziah (also called Azariah) was a remarkably successful king. His achievements brought him fame. He was successful in war and peace, in planning and execution, in building and planting.

“Uzziah overestimated his own importance in bringing about the great achievements he experienced. He did so many things well that a consuming pride gradually invaded his life like the leprous disease that finally destroyed his body. In trying to act like a priest, he took on a role that God did not mean for him to have. He had forgotten not only how much God had given him, but also that God had certain roles for others that he needed to respect.

“Uzziah's pride was rooted in his lack of thankfulness. We have no accounts of this king's ever showing appreciation to God for the marvelous gifts he received. Our accomplishments may not compare with Uzziah's, but we still owe a debt of thanksgiving to God for our very lives.”

Jotham

Judah's next king was Uzziah's son, Jotham. “Jotham the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, began to reign. He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jerusha the daughter of Zadok. And he did *what was* right in the sight of the LORD; he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done. However the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. He built the Upper Gate of the house of the LORD” (**2 Kings 15:32-35**).

“Jotham ruled as co-regent with his father when it was discovered that Uzziah had leprosy. His 18-year reign was a godly one, although the people persisted in idolatry. He was undoubtedly encouraged by the prophets Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah, who ministered during his reign (**Isaiah 1:1; Hosea 1:1; Micah 1:1**).

“Jotham built the Upper Gate of the Temple and strengthened the Jerusalem wall of Ophel. He also built cities and fortified buildings throughout the countryside to further strengthen Judah. He fought and defeated the Ammonites and exacted tribute from them for three years (**2 Chronicles 27:3–5**). Jotham's strength and prosperity were attributed to the fact that “he prepared his ways before the LORD his God” (**2 Chronicles 27:6**) (Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary, article – Jotham).

Jotham lived a godly life, apparently without seriously going off track at any particular time though he could have done more to remove the high places and deal with the idolatry that persisted amongst the people. His son, Ahaz, went fully into idolatry during his short reign even sacrificing by fire one of his sons (**2 Kings 16:3**).

Hezekiah

Ahaz's son, Hezekiah, did not follow the example of his father, Ahaz, but of his grandfather, Jotham, by doing “what was right in the sight of the Lord”. His mother was Abijah, daughter of Zechariah. If she was a good woman and this Zechariah, who was her father, was the same as the prophet Zechariah then this might explain why Hezekiah was a good king who followed God's ways given the corrupt example of his father.

“In the first month of his reign, Hezekiah reopened the Temple doors that his father had closed. He also assembled the priests and Levites and commissioned them to sanctify themselves for service and to cleanse the Temple. Appropriate sacrifices were then offered with much rejoicing (**2 Chronicles 29:3–36**).

“Hezekiah faced a golden opportunity to reunite the tribes spiritually. In the north Israel had fallen to Assyria in 722 B.C. Hezekiah invited the remnant of the people to come to Jerusalem to participate in the celebration of the PASSOVER. Although some northern tribes scorned the invitation, most responded favorably (**2 Chronicles 30:1–27**). Hezekiah's reformation reached beyond Jerusalem to include the cleansing of the land, extending even to the tribes of Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh. HIGH PLACES, images, and pagan altars were destroyed. The bronze serpent that Moses had made in the wilderness centuries earlier (**Numbers 21:5–9**) had been preserved,

and people were worshiping it. Hezekiah had it destroyed also (**2 Kings 18:4**; **2 Chronicles 31:1**). The land had never undergone such a thorough reform.

“When Hezekiah experienced a serious illness, the prophet Isaiah informed the king that he would die. In response to Hezekiah’s prayer for recovery, God promised him 15 additional years of life. God also provided a sign for Hezekiah as evidence that the promise would be fulfilled. The sign, one of the most remarkable miracles of the Old Testament, consisted of the sun’s shadow moving backward ten degrees on the SUNDIAL OF AHAZ (**Isaiah 38:1–8**).

“Shortly after he recovered from his illness (**Isaiah 39:1**), Hezekiah received visitors from the Babylonian king, Merodach–Baladan (**2 Kings 20:12**). They came with letters to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery and to inquire about the sign (**2 Chronicles 32:31**) in the land. But their real reason for visiting may have been to gain an ally in their revolt against Assyria. When they lavished gifts upon Hezekiah, he in turn showed them his wealth—an action that brought stiff rebuke from Isaiah (**2 Kings 20:13–18**).

“There is no evidence to indicate that Hezekiah formed an alliance with Babylon. Neither is there any indication that he joined the rebellion in 711 B.C. led by Ashdod, the leading Philistine city. However, Scripture does reveal that he finally did rebel. Sargon II had died in 705 B.C.; and his successor, Sennacherib, was preoccupied with trying to consolidate the kingdom when Hezekiah rebelled. With that accomplished, however, Sennacherib was ready to crush Hezekiah’s revolt.

“Anticipating the Assyrian aggression, Hezekiah made extensive military preparations. He strengthened the fortifications of Jerusalem, produced weapons and shields for his army, and organized his fighting forces under trained combat commanders. Realizing the importance of an adequate water supply, Hezekiah constructed a tunnel that channeled water from the Spring of Gihon outside the city walls to the Pool of Siloam inside the walls (**2 Kings 20:20**). This waterway (now known as Hezekiah’s Tunnel) was cut through solid rock, extending more than 520 meters (1,700 feet).

“As Sennacherib captured the fortified cities of Judah, Hezekiah realized that his revolt was a lost cause and he attempted to appease the Assyrian king. To send an apology and tribute, he emptied the palace treasuries and the Temple, even stripping the gold from the doors and pillars. But this failed to appease Sennacherib’s anger. At the height of the Assyrian siege, the Angel of the Lord struck the Assyrian camp, leaving 185,000 dead (**2 Kings 19:35**). In humiliation and defeat, Sennacherib withdrew to his capital city of Nineveh. Little more is said about Hezekiah’s remaining years as king, but his achievements are recorded in **2 Chronicles 32:27–30**” (Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary, article – Hezekiah).

Let’s look more closely at that event late in his life where he made a foolish mistake because of his pride:

“At that time Berodach-Baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick. And Hezekiah was attentive to them, and showed them all the house of his treasures—the silver and gold, the spices and precious ointment, and all his armory—all that was found among his treasures. There was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them.

"Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah, and said to him, 'What did these men say, and from where did they come to you?' So Hezekiah said, 'They came from a far country, from Babylon.' And he said, 'What have they seen in your house?' So Hezekiah answered, 'They have seen all that *is* in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them.' Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, 'Hear the word of the LORD: 'Behold, the days are coming when all that *is* in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the LORD. 'And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.' So Hezekiah said to Isaiah, 'The word of the LORD which you have spoken *is* good!' For he said, 'Will there not be peace and truth at least in my days?'" **(2 Kings 20:12-19).**

"Hezekiah did not repay according to the favor *shown* him, for his heart was lifted up; therefore wrath was looming over him and over Judah and Jerusalem. Then Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah...However, *regarding* the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, whom they sent to him to inquire about the wonder that was *done* in the land, God withdrew from him, in order to test him, that He might know all *that was* in his heart **(2 Chronicles 32:25-26, 31).**

Hezekiah's pride led him to show a lack of discretion when the ambassadors of Babylon came to visit with his unwise display of wealth to the Babylonian delegation that got Judah included on Babylon's "Nations to Conquer" list.

Hezekiah just simply accepted the verdict God handed down through the prophet. He humbled himself after his foolish pride which convinced God to hold off the punishment during his own lifetime. However Hezekiah didn't implore God to change his mind like Moses did on more than one occasion and humbly seek what he could do to get the nation back on track so the punishment could be avoided altogether. Despite this lack of intercession for his people Hezekiah did faithfully endure to the end and is regarded as one of the most godly kings.

Manasseh

Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, provides somewhat of a reverse example to what we've been seeing with many of these kings. Until he was dragged off to prison in Assyria Manasseh is described as THE worst king of Judah.

"He raised up altars for the Baals...He built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. Also he caused his sons to pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom; he practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists" **(2 Chronicles 33:2-6).**

"Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations (he has acted more wickedly than all the Amorites who *were* before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols)...Moreover Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides his sin by which he made Judah sin, in doing evil in the sight of the LORD" **(2 Kings 21:11, 16).**

"Therefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze *fettters*, and carried him off to Babylon. Now when he was in affliction, he implored the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed to Him; and He

received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God...He took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the LORD and in Jerusalem; and he cast *them* out of the city. He also repaired the altar of the LORD, sacrificed peace offerings and thank offerings on it, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel. Nevertheless the people still sacrificed on the high places, *but* only to the LORD their God. (**2 Chronicles 33:11-17**).

“Even a brief outline of King Manasseh's evil sickens us, and we wonder how God could ever forgive him. Not only did he intentionally offend God by desecrating Solomon's temple with idols, but he also worshiped pagan gods and even sacrificed his children to them! Child sacrifice is a vile act of pagan idolatry, an act against both God and people. Such blatant sins require severe correction.

“God showed justice to Manasseh in warning and punishing him. He showed mercy in responding to Manasseh's heartfelt repentance by forgiving and restoring him. Given the nature of Manasseh's rebellion, we are not surprised by God's punishment -- defeat and exile at the hands of the Assyrians. But Manasseh's repentance and God's forgiveness are unexpected. Manasseh's life was changed. He was given a new start” (Life Application Bible, Personality Profile on Manasseh).

It appears as if Manasseh's repentance was genuine because he followed through on his commitment to God by ridding the Temple of the idols he'd placed in there and the land of idols. Manasseh's life is a real life example of the prodigal son taken to a whole new level since he was guilty of killing very many innocent people. If God can forgive such a terrible sinner as Manasseh then He can surely forgive us of our worst sins as well upon genuine repentance.

Despite his turnaround the people of Judah were far less willing to turn of their sins which were stirred up by his own sinful example prior to his imprisonment. His son, Amon [named after the Egyptian god Amon-Ra] was next on the throne and reigned only two years. He was an idol worshipper and “did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord”. Amon's servants killed him, then those servants were killed by the people of the land who then proclaimed Amon's son, Josiah, king.

Josiah

Josiah was eight when he started to reign. Josiah would have been six when his grandfather, Manasseh, died. Manasseh, who had been humbled and served God in the end, may have been a good influence on him that countered the poor example of his father, Amon. His mother, Jedidah, may have also been a good influence on him.

“King Josiah devoted himself to pleasing God and reinstating Israel's observance of the Mosaic Law. That a wicked king like Amon could have such a godly son and successor is a tribute to the grace of God. The Bible focuses almost exclusively on Josiah's spiritual reform, which climaxed in the 18th year of his reign with the discovery of the Book of the Law.

“Josiah's reform actually occurred in three stages. Ascending to the throne at age eight, he apparently was blessed with God-fearing advisors who resisted the idolatrous influence of his father. More importantly, however, at the age of 16 (stage one), Josiah personally ‘began to seek the God of his father David’ (**2 Chronicles 34:3**).

“At the age of 20 (stage two), Josiah began to cleanse Jerusalem and the land of Judah of idolatrous objects (**2 Chronicles 34:3–7**). His reform was even more extensive than that of his predecessor, HEZEKIAH (**2 Kings 18:4; 2 Chronicles 29:3–36**). Josiah extended his cleansing of the land into the territory of fallen Israel; at the time Israel was nominally controlled by Assyria. Josiah personally supervised the destruction of the altars of the Baals, the incense altars, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images as far north as the cities of Naphtali. Josiah’s efforts were aided by the death of the great Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal, which brought about a serious decline in Assyria’s power and allowed Josiah freedom to pursue his reforms.

“At the age of 26 (stage three), Josiah ordered that the Temple be repaired under the supervision of Hilkiah, the high priest. In the process, a copy of the Book of the Law was discovered (**2 Chronicles 34:14–15**). When it was read to Josiah, he was horrified to learn how far Judah had departed from the law of God. This discovery provided a new momentum for the reformation that was already in progress.

“In 609 B.C. Josiah attempted to block Pharaoh Necho II of Egypt as he marched north to assist Assyria in her fight with Babylon for world supremacy. Despite the pharaoh’s assurance to the contrary, Josiah saw Necho’s northern campaign as a threat to Judah’s security. When he engaged Necho in battle at Megiddo, Josiah was seriously injured. He was returned to Jerusalem, where he died after reigning 31 years. His death was followed by widespread lamentation (**2 Chronicles 35:20–27**)” (Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary, article – Josiah).

“In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah this Passover was kept. After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by the Euphrates; and Josiah went out against him. But he sent messengers to him, saying, ‘What have I to do with you, king of Judah? *I have not come against you this day, but against the house with which I have war; for God commanded me to make haste. Refrain from meddling with God, who is with me, lest He destroy you.*’

“Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself so that he might fight with him, and did not heed the words of Necho from the mouth of God. So he came to fight in the Valley of Megiddo. And the archers shot King Josiah; and the king said to his servants, ‘Take me away, for I am severely wounded.’ His servants therefore took him out of that chariot and put him in the second chariot that he had, and they brought him to Jerusalem. So he died, and was buried in *one of* the tombs of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah” (**2 Chronicles 35:19–24**).

Josiah was faithful to the end though what cost him his life was something foolish that he did that was so easy to avoid. Josiah lacked faith that Necho [Ramses the Great] was simply passing through and had no quarrel with Judah. It came through an unlikely person but God, though Necho, was telling him to butt out and don’t meddle.

There was a simple way to confirm that this was so and that was consult one of God’s prophets or ask God through the Urim and Thummin that the high priest had in his breastplate (ephod). His premature death was so unnecessary but at least he did endure to the end, unlike other kings who started off on the right foot.

Sadly his successors Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jeconiah and Zedekiah were sinful kings who led the people further into sin until God's judgment of captivity in Babylon that He gave in Hezekiah's last days came to pass.

Summary Of The Kings That Started Off Good

The following chart shows the kings who started off good, what happened in their lives and whether they endured to the end. You'll notice that about half of them became spiritual shipwrecks and didn't repent of their sins before they died.

KING	SUMMARY OF SINS LATE IN THEIR LIFE	ENDURE TO THE END?
Saul	He wouldn't accept responsibility for his sins which included failing to wait for Samuel and doing that which only Samuel was allowed to do, taking spoil when instructed not to do so and trying over and over to kill David.	No
David	He committed adultery and then murder to cover up the sin. He repented of this and another major sin he stubbornly went through with – an unauthorized census to determine his military strength. He was faithful the rest of his life and described as "a man after [God's] own heart".	Yes
Solomon	He took hundreds of foreign wives who persuaded him to join them in their idol worship..	No
Asa	After 35 years of righteous ruling he made a forbidden alliance with Syria, imprisons the prophet who corrected him about it, oppressed many people and when struck with an ailment was too stubborn to confess his sins and ask God for help.	No
Jehoshaphat	He made an alliance with wicked king Ahab, allowed his son to marry Ahab's daughter and was involved with an unwise shipbuilding venture with Ahab's son, Ahaziah. He did repent of these when corrected.	Yes
Joash	After his wise counsellor Jehoiada died he listened to unwise counsel, brought in idolatry and had Jehoiada's son, Zechariah stoned for rebuking him of his sins.	No
Amaziah	Following his victory over Edom he embraced the gods of Edom and as a result of his pride wars with Israel only to lose.	No
Uzziah	He was a God fearing king for most of his life but in his latter years decided he was better than any priest, and unlawfully burned incense in the Temple and ended up with leprosy. Like Asa he was too stubborn to confess his sins and ask God for help.	No
Jotham	He was a God fearing king and no major sins are recorded other than a lack of action in removing the high places.	Yes
Hezekiah	Hezekiah's pride led him to show a lack of discretion when the ambassadors of Babylon came to visit with his unwise display of wealth to the Babylonian delegation that got Judah included on Babylon's "Nations to Conquer" list.	Yes
Josiah	Josiah was faithful to the end though what cost him his life was something foolish that he did that was so easy to avoid. Josiah lacked faith that Pharaoh Necho was simply passing through and had no quarrel with Judah. He went out to fight him and was shot by an arrow.	Yes

Most of them to one degree or the other **lost perspective** in their latter years and their heart was lifted up above their brethren. How does this happen?

God's Formula To Prevent Pride Getting the Better of Kings

Because God knew that kings would tend to regard themselves as pretty good and proud of their achievements and were susceptible to pride, God gave a specific formula way back in the time of Moses to help keep them from losing perspective and humbly serve God and His people. We read about it in **Deuteronomy 17**:

“When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations that *are* around me,’ you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; *one* from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who *is* not your brother. But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall not return that way again.’ **Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away**; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.

“Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from *the one* before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, **that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren**, that he may not turn aside from the commandment *to* the right hand or *to* the left, and that he may prolong *his* days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel” (**verses 14-20**).

Had Asa, for example, followed these words diligently, had he made a habit of regularly reading & meditating on God's law he would have better understood his place in the scheme of things.

I doubt he would have lost perspective because the words of God's law teach God's greatness and the smallness of man and they teach the importance of caring for the weak.

One king who did generally follow these words all his life was David. He did have lapses, but I'm sure that it was his life long habit of following of this command among other things which helped him stay small in his own eyes.

We should also take careful note of these words. This is really a formula for us as well. A formula for success which we also should consider very carefully

We are also called to be kings and priests in a future world and this instruction should be how we live our lives now.

We may not be kings now but we are also not immune from losing perspective and being puffed up in our own confidence, thinking that we, as God's people, are better than others. It's also easy for us to be too confident in our own righteousness.

In a prophecy directed to a great many of God's people in the end time Jesus Christ says:

“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich;

and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent” **(Revelation 3:15-19)**.

This is truly physically the richest time of God's church and because of it and all our soft living and creature comforts so many have become complacent and have drifted from God.

The 'me' generation of the United States, Canada, Australia and much of Europe wants to take it easy, have fun and do their own thing. Today's Western world reflects the Laodicean spirit spoken of by Christ. The church, as a whole, has been heavily influenced by the prevailing spirit of the times.

Given the wealth we have in this time it's easy for us to not feel the need for God and for our hearts to be lifted up against our brethren thinking we are better than others. We must repent of this, keep a proper perspective of our need for God and our own place and be zealous about supporting God's work and helping others who are in need.

Regularly reading God's word every day as the kings were instructed to do is vital to help us stay on track with God and His way of life.

So let us be diligent and read the Bible regularly all the days of our life and carefully follow these words so that we don't lose perspective.