

Even more Lessons from History - 2 Chronicles to Esther:

Tonight's question: *If you were to summarise 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles in one sentence, what would that be?*

These two books also link together chronologically just like *2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles*.

Here we have the rapid-fire story, over and over again, of the downfall of one king after another, usually murdered by someone who has a hunger for the throne, in other words - government by assassination. The story of the nation of Israel, the ten tribes which constituted the northern kingdom, is that of moral abandonment, the danger of a nation which gives itself up to what it supposes is liberty.

Remembering that although these problems occurred historically to the nation of Israel, they have been recorded for us as examples of what dangers and stumbling blocks the Church will encounter. Although these historical accounts are inspired by God the Holy Spirit, there is one common factor between the nation of Israel and today's Church - they are all human beings with flesh-led carnal nature.

Have you ever said to yourself, "Oh, I am tired of these problems and restrictions of the Christian life! If I could just do what I want and I go where I please and say what I like and abandon myself to the pursuit of pleasure, then I would be happy." **[Read 2 Kings 17:16-17]**

Where in the New Testament is this condition described exactly?

Notice how the words "gave them up" (*oorgegee*) is repeated three times.

This is the story of **moral abandonment** - when a nation flings aside all the bonds and restrictions and they live life as they please. And the result is the removal of every restraint of godliness and goodness in the life. It is moral disaster.

This happened here in Israel, and the rest of **2 Kings** is the story of Israel, followed by the captivity of Judah, the southern kingdom, the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

The downfall of Judah is the story of the danger of the **hardened heart** - of a nation which was warned by the downfall of the northern kingdom, but refused to take notice of that warning and became indifferent to the warnings of God - so they failed. **[Read 2 Kings 21:10-14]**

Why did Judea fail? They succumbed to the terrible pressure of a **hardened heart**, of indifference to the warnings of God. (Perhaps we should look at our own lives. Do we heed the warnings of our loving Heavenly Father, as they are played out and shown to us in the lives of others?)

But in the midst of these 2 books is the beautiful story of *Hezekiah* and *Josiah*, kings of Judah - one who *cleansed the Temple* and one who *found again the book of the Law*.

This brings us to the last 3 historical books: **Ezra**, **Nehemiah**, and **Esther** - which we will deal with as a unit.

They are the story of the nation in captivity, carried away at last into bondage after having morally deteriorated so far that they are no longer "God's people" to give glory to God by their presence amongst the heathen nations but have become the laughing stock of the world - having lost their integrity and witness! (*Have we still got our integrity and witness?*)

While they are in bondage, God begins to work. At last, after the seventy years' captivity, Ezra is raised up to lead a group back into the desolate land of Palestine to begin rebuilding the Temple.

The book of **Ezra** is the story of a *discouraged people*, along with a reluctance to leave captivity of Babylon. Only a handful could be persuaded to go. The rest were so blinded that they decided to stay in captivity, and they drifted off and lost themselves among the nations of the world. We call them "*the ten lost tribes of Israel.*" No one knows where they are, or who they are. They are completely lost because they have lost their identity and no longer know who they are! But those who were willing to go back found all the promises of God waiting for them when they returned to the land.

The danger and stumbling block of these three books together is that of a ***discouraged heart***.

Sometimes we all get into this frame of mind. We say, "*What's the use? I might just as well quit. I might as well throw it all in and just stay where I am. I know I am not victorious. I know I am not walking with God. I know I am getting nowhere. I might just as well quit and stay this way.*"

Well, this is the awful pressure which comes upon us in that state.

But the story of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther is the story of the triumph of faith in the midst of that negative circumstance. A remnant finally returned and began to build the second Temple.

The book of **Nehemiah** is the story of the determined opposition and harassment of everybody else trying to keep these people from coming back into the grace and glory of God. When we are in defeat, we discover that every obstacle will be put in our path to keep us from coming back to God.

The book of **Esther** is the story of the victory of God in the midst of seemingly impossible circumstances. God watches over his own and delivers them. The individuals who stand out by overcoming the danger and stumbling block of a ***discouraged heart*** on these 3 books are **Ezra**, **Nehemiah**, and **Esther** themselves. All three showed the triumph of faith in the midst of defeated circumstances.

It is important to look at your own life and try to recognize any of the perils narrated in these twelve historical books?

- **Joshua** - premature contentment
- **Judges & Ruth** - dedicated ignorance
- **1 Samuel** - legalistic conformity & divided allegiance
- **2 Samuel & 1 Chronicles** - forgotten calling
- **1 Kings & 2 Chronicles (1st half)** - glorification of material possessions & a substitute faith
- **2 Kings & 2 Chronicles (2nd half)** - moral abandonment & hardened heart
- **Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther** - discouraged heart

Are you struggling against any of these forces? The best way that you can overcome this is identify the peril you are particularly up against, take the appropriate book and read it prayerfully, asking God to speak to you and show you the way of deliverance in the midst of that kind of defeat.

That is the purpose of all these historical books - that we might know the pressures that we face as "*Israelites in the Promised Land*" and the way by which God can take us through. I am sure these twelve books be a blessing to you.

Next week we will start to look at the Poetic Books of the Old Testament - Your homework is to review the 5 steps to maturity as depicted in the Pentateuch, and to understand the 10 dangers to faith as depicted in the Historical Books. It is important to grasp these before we look at the Poetic books.