



SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY

Discipleship Plan

Year Six
The Divided Kingdom
(Part 1)

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The Divided Kingdom

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Lesson 1: Asa's Reign--Those Who Begin Well Must Press to Finish Well

Primary Verse: "At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him: "Because you relied on the king of Aram and not on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand. Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and horsemen? Yet when you relied on the Lord, he delivered them into your hand. For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war." 2 Chronicles 16:7-9 ESV

Teaching Text: 2 Chronicles 16

Supporting Text: 2 Chronicles 13-15

Like Father Like Son? Just two verses into the account of this fifth king of Judah, the Chronicler offers this description of Asa, "[He] did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God" (2 Chronicles 14:2). In 2 Chronicles 14:9-15, Asa is at war, and like his distant father David (2 Samuel 7:18-29), we see him at prayer. But while Asa may have remembered the faithfulness of David, he also saw his own father, Abijah, praying in a time of distress. In 2 Chronicles 13:4-12, King Abijah is being attacked by Jeroboam of Israel. He proclaimed God's power to save and he was indeed rescued from his enemies. Sadly, this moment in Abijah's life was short lived for 1 Kings 15:3 speaks of his wickedness. Asa saw his father praying in time of crisis, but like stubborn Israel returning to her sin, his father's devotion didn't extend to times of peace.

Faithfulness is More Than Just Words: Asa's father said what was right, but he did what was evil. On the contrary, Asa's words generally matched his walk; 2 Chronicles 15 details Asa's religious reforms. After hearing God's word from the prophet Azariah, Asa, with all Judah with him, enters in to covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and soul (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Asa's dealings with his mother (2 Chronicles 15:16) reminds us of an instance documents in Deuteronomy 14:6-10, when Israel is commanded to love God and hate idolatry so fiercely that no relationship should compromise it. His devotion to God embodies Jesus' words, found in Luke 14:26, that call for supreme loyalty to God above all others.

Asa's Shaky End: If Asa impresses us with his faithfulness, then he surprises us with his growing indifference documented in 2 Chronicles 16. The king who prays for God's help in war (2 Chronicles 14), seeks support from foreign powers (chapter 16). The king who zealously responds to the Word of God (2 Chronicles 15) imprisons God's prophet (chapter 16). It is said, "even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but sought help from physicians" (2 Chronicles 16:12). Like his forefather Solomon, Asa begins well but concludes with a shaky end. Paul charges us thusly, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it" 1 Corinthians 9:24.

Questions to Consider: How may we grow indifferent to God and His commandments? How may church members encourage each other to finish the race of faith well? Within the context of the story, what is the writer saying in pointing out Asa's reliance on doctors, rather than on prayer? Does this mean Christians should trust God and shun medicine when sick? Is faith compatible with modern medicine?

Challenging the Class: Is your devotion to God in times of affliction the same as in times of comfort?

Lesson 2: Jehoshaphat Reigns and God's Word Proves True

Primary Verse: "Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, returned in safety to his house in Jerusalem. But 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? Because of this, wrath has gone out against you from the Lord. Nevertheless, some good is found in you, for you destroyed the Asheroth out of the land, and have set your heart to seek God." 2 Chronicles 19:1-3 ESV

Teaching Text: 2 Chronicles 19-20

Supporting Text: 2 Chronicles 17-18

God's Word Proves True: When Asa dies, he is succeeded by his son, Jehoshaphat, who also "walked in the earlier days of his father David" (2 Chronicles 17:3). He didn't serve the Baals "but sought the God of his father and walked in his commandments, and not according to the practices of Israel" (2 Chronicles 17:3-4). It's interesting to note the adverb "therefore" in verse 5 of Chronicles 17. Jehoshaphat obeyed God. *Therefore*, God established his kingship. The LORD was with Jehoshaphat *because* he walked with Him. But this shouldn't surprise us. A young King Solomon was told God would establish the thrones of his sons *if* they walked before God in faithfulness (1 Kings 9:1-9). Conversely, if those sons turned aside to other gods, God would afflict them. Consistent messages are found in 2 Samuel 7:12-14 and Deuteronomy 28. God was with Jehoshaphat because *His Word* proves true!

Curses for Disobedience: As if wanting to demonstrate the certainty of God's promise to Israel and her Davidic kings, the writer of 2 Chronicles 17 highlights two divergent events in Jehoshaphat's life (disobedience and obedience) and God's Word remains consistent in both accounts. Second Chronicles 18:1 is a perplexing verse. Jehoshaphat, wealthy and honored because of God's Word, goes off and makes a marriage alliance with Ahab - the evil king of the northern kingdom (Israel). While demonstrating the wisdom to seek God, he doesn't follow through and is shown following Ahab (the entire chapter), even going to battle together. Ultimately, Jehoshaphat is rebuked (2 Chronicles 19:2) and there would be wrath for his disobedience mixed with mercy for his disobedience. Even in our punishment, God's word proves true!

Blessings for Obedience: After forfeiting his God-given peace through a faulty alliance with Ahab, Jehoshaphat wakes up to news of a multitude advancing toward him from Edom. Like his father, Asa, and grandfather, Abijah, Jehoshaphat--along with all Judah--turns to the LORD in prayer. Jehoshaphat's prayer (20:6-12) rests on God's Word to his forefathers--he pleads for God to remember His promise to Abraham and brings to bear Solomon's temple dedicatory prayers (20:7-9). The covenant-keeping God of Israel hears and saves His own--He fights on behalf of a helpless people, and their salvation comes by His hand and trusting in Him alone (20:12-17 and Ephesians 2:8). Yet again, God's Word proves true!

Questions to Consider: How should believers today understand the idea of God giving blessings for obedience and "curses" for disobedience (Galatians 3:10-14)? How should we understand God's question to Jehoshaphat in 19:2 within the context of the narrative? Does this mean Christians never assist unbelievers? What does the New Testament passage, Romans 12:20, relate?

Challenging the Class: What do you base your prayers to God on? Do they rest primarily on His Word, which never changes or on something else?

Lesson 3: Uzziah's Reign and the Holiness of God

Primary Verse: "But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the Lord his God and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. But Azariah, the priest, went in after him, with eighty priests of the Lord who were men of valor, 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. Go out of the sanctuary, for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the Lord God." Then Uzziah was angry. Now he had a censer in his hand to burn incense, and when he became angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead in the presence of the priests in the house of the Lord, by the altar of incense." 2 Chronicles 26:16-19 ESV

Teaching Text: 2 Chronicles 26

Supporting Text: 2 Chronicles 22-23

The Grace of Godly Counsel: Throughout the Chronicles, we find kings who make either godly or ungodly decisions, based on the counsel of advisors. Rehoboam follows the words of his young and unwise friends and consequently loses part of his kingdom (2 Chronicles 10:6-19). We are told young King Joash "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest" (2 Chronicles 24:2). But at the death of Jehoiada, we find an idolatrous and murderous Joash, led by wicked officials (24:17-22). In our passage, King Uzziah (called Azariah in 2 Kings 15) does right so long as Zechariah teaches him. A godly counselor who instructs from God's Word is God's grace to His people.

Uzziah's Pride and Leprosy: As Uzziah sought the LORD, God gave him success (26:5). Like Solomon, he became a great builder and constructed towers and cisterns. Like David, he was surrounded by fighting men and a valiant army. The King's "fame spread far and wide, for he was greatly helped until he became powerful" (26:15). Puffed up by his success, Uzziah presumed himself to be as great as God; he boldly entered the temple of God to burn incense, an honor given solely to the sons of Aaron (Exodus 30:7). As a prideful Miriam was struck with leprosy, so was Uzziah (Numbers 12:10). The king lived the rest of his life in isolation, humbled by the God who makes great and brings low.

The Eternal King is Holy: Many of us will remember King Uzziah from the account of Isaiah's commission (Isaiah 6:1). The contrast of a prideful king--made low by his sacrilege--and an enthroned King, *seated* in the temple, is striking! The prophet Isaiah is named as a recorder of other events in Uzziah's life (2 Chronicles 26:22). Familiar with Uzziah's situation, we cannot wonder at Isaiah's fear of the holy God of the temple (Isaiah 6:5). Let the reader in Christ praise God for the King who atones for sin and, through Jesus Christ, makes us priests who with confidence can draw near to the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16).

Questions to Consider: How would you compare/contrast Miriam's leprosy with King Uzziah's? Why does David eat consecrated bread (for priests only) without penalty, but Uzziah is severely reprimanded for performing acts only priests can do (Leviticus 24:9, 1 Samuel 21:1-6, Matthew 12:1-8)? Can you think of reasons why Isaiah's vision of God enthroned in the temple is in jarring contrast with Uzziah's sin? How can we avoid the apparent pattern of sliding away from faithfulness to God in our latter years?

Challenging the Class: Do you consistently seek teachers and friends who counsel you with biblical truth? Are you someone who can be counted on to give biblical answers, in a gracious manner, to life's questions?

Lesson 4: Hezekiah's Reign and the Sovereignty of God

Primary Verse: “And so in the matter of the envoys of the princes of Babylon, who had been sent to him to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land, God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart. 2 Chronicles 32:31 ESV

Teaching Text: 2 Chronicles 29-32

Supporting Text: 2 Kings 18-20

Obedience from the Heart: King Hezekiah's early commitment to God and proper worship in His temple is admirable. Hezekiah was the son of Ahaz, the first of king of Judah to sacrifice his children to Baal (2 Chronicles 28:3). But Hezekiah made the reinstated worship of God his priority. He reopened the temple doors and assembled the priests and Levites; he admonished them to consecrate themselves for the service of the Lord. King Hezekiah led the re-establishment of the Passover--an event described as being unmatched since the days of Solomon (2 Chronicles 30:26). Hezekiah obeyed the spirit of God's Law, not just the “letter.” We do well to examine if our obedience of God is from the heart or merely on the surface.

God is Sovereign Over All: Hezekiah's story gives a vivid picture of God's sovereignty. Sennacherib sent messengers to intimidate Judah with a letter full of blasphemous insults against the Living God of Israel (2 Chronicles 32:10-15). While he sat boasting of his victories, God, through the prophet Isaiah, sent him this message: “Have you not heard that I determined it long ago? I planned from days of old what now I bring to pass, that you should turn fortified cities into heaps of ruins” (2 Kings 19:25). What is outside of God's control? If no sparrow falls to the ground apart from His knowledge, rest assured that He sees those of us in Christ, and our times are in His hands (Mathew 10:31; Psalm 31:15).

God's Enabling Grace: God's sovereignty is further displayed in the account of Hezekiah. After rescuing him from Sennacherib and healing his disease, God “left” Hezekiah in order “to test him and to know everything that was in his heart” (2 Chronicles 32:31). 1 Corinthians 15:10 tells us God's grace grants, not only forgiveness, but also, enabling power for work that pleases God. Without the help of the Spirit, Christians cannot please God (Romans 8:8). Hezekiah was a great king, one who did right in the eyes of the LORD. But without the enabling grace of God, he could do nothing (John 15:5). On his own, he was tested and found wanting--because of Hezekiah's pride, Babylon would one day invade Judah (2 Kings 20:5-19). Let us remain in the Vine, that you and I may bear good fruit!

Questions to Consider: How does the story of Hezekiah challenge us to better appreciate time as referenced in 2 Chronicles 29:3, 15-17, and 35-36? Would our understanding of Hezekiah's heart to worship be different or perhaps diminished if we didn't know the time references? Consider the interaction between Sennacherib's messengers and King Hezekiah. Discuss the value of staying still/silent amid insults until we have consulted God for His spoken word?

Challenging the Class: Despite his failings, King Hezekiah did understand the immediacy of proper worship for whoever would lead God's people. How does his example motivate you to pray for your pastors, ministers, and other leaders in your church? How highly do you esteem the worship of God over your own traditions, conveniences, and preferences?

Judah's Scepter

“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples” (Gen. 49:10).

- Genesis 49:8–12

Reuben lost the privileges of the firstborn because he slept with his father’s concubine (Gen. 35:22; 49:3–4). Wanton violence and anarchy cost Simeon and Levi the same right (chap. 34; 49:5–7). Jacob’s next son in the birth order is Judah (29:31–35), and so we ask: Will he share the fate of his three older brothers?

An overview of Judah’s life is necessary to understand today’s passage. Recall that Judah sinned grievously when he led the sale of Joseph into Egyptian slavery (37:12–28). Later on, he wickedly failed to provide a husband and thus an heir and provider to his daughter-in-law, Tamar (38:1–23; Deuteronomy). Were this the end of his story, Judah would have lost the greatest portion of Jacob’s favor as well. However, Judah showed himself sensitive to the Spirit when he confessed his evil deeds concerning Tamar (Gen. 38:24–26). Judah’s repentance bore its fullest fruit later on when he offered to sacrifice himself and take Benjamin’s place as Joseph’s slave (chap. 44).

Judah inherits the firstborn’s rights because of his selflessness. Jacob declares in today’s passage that Judah’s brothers will praise Him and that he will have his hand “on the neck” of his enemies (49:8). In other words, Judah will triumph over his foes. Jacob’s other sons will also bow to Judah, according to the same verse. This predicts future events, for Joseph received this homage during Judah’s lifetime (44:14). Of course, Judah later becomes Israel’s chief tribe, the initial head of the nation after Joshua’s death (Judg. 1:1–2) and the clan that produces David and his descendants (1 Samuel 17:12a; 2 Samuel 2:4a).

John Calvin comments: “The kingdom which he [Jacob] transfers to the tribe of Judah, he declares shall be no common kingdom, because from it, at length, shall proceed the fullness of the promised benediction.” The abundance depicted in Genesis 49:11 proves Calvin’s point. One of Judah’s sons will rule over a kingdom so blessed that costly vines, the source of wine and income, will be hitches for donkeys. These animals would surely chew through such vines, but this is not a problem since the number of vines they own in the kingdom is so vast that losing them will not cause financial ruin.

Coram Deo

The King and His kingdom will be the subject of tomorrow’s study. For now, consider that Judah’s repentance and exaltation illustrates the biblical principal that “whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matt. 23:12). Judah’s greatest son, Jesus of Nazareth, is the final object of this prophecy, but

we too will be lifted up if we humble ourselves in service to the Father as He did. Humility and self-sacrifice is the only path to exaltation.

Passages for Further Study

Deuteronomy 33:7

Joel 3:17–21

Zeph. 2:1–7

Luke 3:23–38

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