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THE LOOKOUT

JULY 2021

UNIT: History of Israel (1–2 Kings & 2 Chronicles)

THEME: A Troubled Kingdom

OVERVIEW:

Sometimes common sense is not so common. The kings of Israel and Judah often jettisoned God’s common sense. A few good kings and godly prophets called for reforms in God’s troubled kingdom. Students will learn to embrace God’s wisdom, pray earnestly for revival, witness God’s miracles, and avoid the heartache of disobedience.

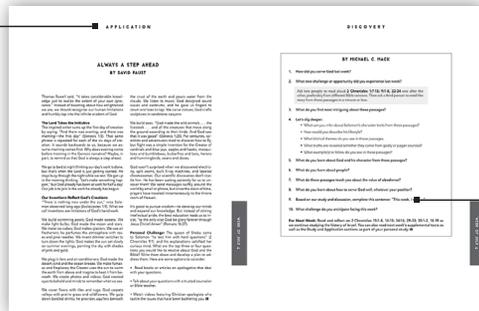
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF JULY 11, 2021

LESSON AIM: **Return to the Lord,
for he hears the
prayers of his people.**

UNIT: History of Israel (1-2 Kings; 2 Chronicles)

THEME: A Troubled Kingdom

LESSON TEXT: 2 Chronicles 15:1-8, 14-15; 34:14, 29-33;
35:1-2, 18-19

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 2 Chronicles 34; Jeremiah 7:2-7

THE CALL FOR REFORM

BY MARK SCOTT

It did not take many years for the wisdom of Solomon to unravel and the kingdom to be divided. The narrator of Chronicles is kind to Solomon, but the narrator of Kings told how Solomon's wives turned his heart away from God (1 Kings 11:1-4). Solomon's successor, Rehoboam, abandoned the Lord (2 Chronicles 12:1) and the kingdom split—ten tribes against two.

The ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom (and their wicked kings) continued in a downward spiral until their Assyrian captivity in 722 BC. The two tribes of the Southern Kingdom followed suit, but from time to time they had moments of reform and spiritual health. Second Chronicles primarily traces the history of the Southern Kingdom. Two good kings, Asa and Josiah, led the call for godly reforms in Judah. The selected passages from 2 Chronicles give us three ingredients for reform.

Seeking the Lord

2 Chronicles 15:1-8, 14-15

The Spirit of God came on a prophet named Azariah, and he gave a strong exhortation to the third king of Judah (Asa) as well as the Southern Kingdom (designated as *Judah and Benjamin*). The God of the Bible is the "withness" God—he is "with us" (Matthew 1:23), but our lesson text points out we are called to also be *with* (beside) *him*. The prophet promised the king that if he would *seek* God, then God would allow himself to be found. If Asa forsook (left off) God, however, then God would forsake him.

The prophet also acknowledged that God's people had been wayward. They had turned to other gods and had not listened to the priests sent to teach the law. But dissatisfaction can be a great impetus to revival. In Israel's *distress* (sorrow) *they turned to the Lord*. A great truth of Scripture is that God is not good at hide-and-seek. He desires that people find him (cf. Acts 17:27). In his permissive will, God allowed *turmoil* in the land and strife between kingdoms and cities. But the prophet called the king to *be strong* and *not give up* his efforts at reform.

Asa removed the *detestable* (abominable or filthy) *idols* in his area and *repaired* (renewed) *the altar* of burnt offering in the temple. Great numbers of people followed their godly king in this reform. They sacrificed 700 oxen and 7,000 sheep as part of renewing the covenant of the Lord. Alongside of their sacrifices they brought their praise.

This included loud shouting and blasts from trumpets and horns. They sought God, and *he was found by them*.

Reading the Word

2 Chronicles 34:14, 29-33

We move forward almost 300 years from one of the earlier kings to the last good king of the Southern Kingdom. Josiah became king when he was 8 years old (2 Chronicles 34:1). He reigned for 31 years and did what King David had done. When he was older, Josiah initiated a reform to repair the temple, which had fallen into disarray. During those repairs, Hilkiah the priest *found the Book of the Law of the Lord*. Some scholars suggest this was just a portion of Deuteronomy, but there is no good reason to suggest the whole Pentateuch is not being considered. The section that perhaps was especially convicting was Deuteronomy 17:18-20, which speaks of the king rewriting the Law when he comes to power.

When Josiah heard the reading of the *Book of the Covenant* (The Ten Commandments?), he had himself a good Bible cry. He quickly gathered his spiritual directors and inquired what he and the people could do. A prophetess and her husband (Huldah and Shallum) ultimately were enjoined to give their counsel. The prophetess said God's judgment would come, but that Josiah's days would end in peace since he humbled himself before the Lord. There is no substitute for the public reading of Scripture (1 Timothy 4:13) in bringing about reform. Josiah *renewed the covenant* and pledged his obedience to God.

The people followed the examples of these two kings. The people were at rest in Asa's reforms, and they were at peace in Josiah's reforms.

Remembering Our Roots

2 Chronicles 35:1-2, 18-19

Seeking the Lord and reading the Word produced celebration. The nation of Israel was birthed in the Passover in Egypt. Successful revivals occur when people remember their roots. So Josiah's people returned to their roots by observing the Passover.

This chapter describes the extent to which Israel celebrated this Passover. The celebration was extensive and complete. In fact, it reminded the people of how Passover was celebrated during the days of Samuel. Once again, the path forward was accomplished by going backward. ■

APPLICATION

THE MISSING BOOK

BY DAVID FAUST

On a January night in 2017, thieves nearly pulled off a daring heist in a crime one reporter likened to the plot of a *Mission: Impossible* movie. Two men cut holes in the roof of a warehouse in London, rappelled down through the ceiling to avoid security sensors, and hauled away 16 bags in a car driven by a third accomplice. Their target was not cash or jewels, but rare books valued at over \$3 million that were being shipped to an auction in Las Vegas. In 2020, authorities found the stash buried under the floor of a house in Romania, and members of an organized crime group have been charged with the theft. The recovered books include first-edition volumes written by Galileo, Copernicus, and Sir Isaac Newton, and an edition of Aesop's *Fables* published in 1505.

The Old Testament tells an interesting story about a missing book. The temple had fallen into disrepair, and young King Josiah decided to restore it. During the construction project, workers discovered "the Book of the Law of the Lord that had been given through Moses" (2 Chronicles 34:14). It was remarkable that they found the Book, but why did they lose it in the first place? God's Law was priceless, handed down from the days of Moses. How could anyone misplace it?

Hidden in Plain Sight

The Book wasn't lost as much as it was neglected and taken for granted—hidden in plain sight. It had been there in the temple all along, but no one was paying attention to it.

Are we losing sight of God's Book? In America today, the Bible is readily available but frequently ignored. We have more tools for biblical study than at any previous time in history. Yet, according to a 2020 survey conducted by Barna Research, only half of American adults believe the Bible is the Word of God, down from three-quarters just 20 years ago. And there is

considerable inconsistency between the plain teachings of the Bible and the behaviors of those who say we believe it.

Is the Book missing from our preaching, our student ministries, and small groups? In my son Matt's jail ministry, he often talks with inmates about three worldview questions (adapted from Charles Colson): *Where did we come from? Why are we here? What happens when we die?* These universal questions about origin, purpose, and destiny are relevant to people of all cultures and educational levels, and they are best answered by a biblical worldview.

Sadly, God's Book is missing in many families. According to Barna, a person's worldview starts developing at 15 to 18 months of age, and it's almost completely developed by age 13. Friends, media, teachers, coaches, church leaders, and public figures exert influence as well, but parents are the most important factor in shaping what children believe and do. Without the Book, confusion reigns.

When King Josiah rediscovered the Scriptures and heard what they said, he was deeply moved. He realized the nation had departed from God's will. He called the people together, read God's Word aloud, "and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord—to follow the Lord and keep his commands, statutes and decrees with all his heart and all his soul" (2 Chronicles 34:31). The missing Book addressed what they and their nation had been missing.

Personal Challenge: Think about the three worldview questions mentioned above: *Where did we come from? Why are we here? What happens when we die?* How does the Bible shape your answers? Discuss these questions this week with at least one other person, and/or talk about them with your small group. ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. In what specific way did you serve God last week?
2. What was the biggest challenge you faced last week?

Ask two people to read aloud **2 Chronicles 15:1-8, 14-15** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then repeat the process with **2 Chronicles 34:14, 29-33; 35:1-2, 18-19**.

Ask a third person to summarize the stories from these passages. Remind them to keep it simple, as if sharing it with a group of middle schoolers.

3. What similarities do you see between Asa's reforms (in 2 Chronicles 15) and Josiah's reforms (in chapters 34 and 35)?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - What spurred on the reforms of Asa?
 - What spurred on the reforms of Josiah?
 - What conditions and circumstances were King Asa and the people facing before the reforms?
 - How did both Asa and Josiah respond *personally* to the circumstances and to God's leading?
 - Note that in both accounts, the king went first in repentance and renewal of heart, and *then* the people joined in social reforms. What do you learn about leadership and cultural change by their examples?
 - What do you learn from these passages about the vitality of God's Word?
 - What do you learn about the place of corporate celebrations and worship?
 - How might commemorating events from the past be valuable for our faith today?
5. What do you learn about God from these passages?
6. What do you learn about God's people?
7. What does it look like in your own life to keep (obey) God's commands, statutes, and decrees with all your heart and with all your soul?
8. What opportunities do you have this week to serve the Lord your God? How will you follow through?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What challenge are you facing this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **1 Kings 18:31-39; 2 Kings 2:11-14; 5:9-15** as we continue studying the history of Israel. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■