

Two Year Bible Trek
Week 61
2 Kings 20-23; 2 Chronicles 32-35

Key Concepts: The key concept in these readings is that Judah's leadership can be as bad as Israel's and that evil leadership will ultimately doom Judah to defeat at the hands of the Babylonians.

Stories: 2 Chronicles begins a bit earlier than the 2 Kings passage with the defeat of the Assyrians at the hands of an angel of God, then the two books basically follow the same pattern: Hezekiah completes his reign by showing the Babylonians the riches and defenses of Jerusalem, the rise of Manasseh and his evil ways (with Chronicles telling a story of Manasseh being taken to Assyria), the rise of Amon, son of Manasseh, Amon's assassination and the execution of his killers, Amon's son Josiah becoming a good king, the repair of the Temple, the discovery of a copy of the Law, the restoration of appropriate worship, the keeping of the Passover and Josiah's death at Megiddo.

Brief Summary: With these stories we are bringing to a close the life and times of the nation of Judah. In these stories we cover a period of almost 90 years.

2 Chronicles begins with the destruction of the Assyrian army at the hands of an angel of the Lord. In actuality we are not sure why Assyria withdraws. History records two possibilities. First, a plague of mice infects the camp and perhaps even destroys the bow-strings of the Assyrian archers. Second, there was a rebellion at home, which ultimately led to the Assyrian king's assassination.

As mentioned above we then turn to the final days of Hezekiah during which he seeks and receives God's help with an illness but also shows the wealth and power of Jerusalem to the Babylonians (who at that moment were enemies of Assyria). While Chronicles barely mentions this event, 2 Kings makes clear, through the words of Isaiah that this action would lead to the downfall of Judah.

Following Hezekiah's death we meet his son Manasseh. Manasseh is described as the worst king to rule over Judah. His list of unfaithful deeds runs the gamut from setting up altars to foreign gods, to sacrificing his own sons, reestablishing the high places, worshipping the hosts of heaven, practicing soothsaying, sorcery and consorting with wizards. In other words, virtually every evil against which the people of God had been warned, Manasseh did. Here, however is where a bit of history helps us to understand these events in a slightly different light. Even though Assyria had withdrawn from Jerusalem they had not lost their place as a vicious world power. Chances are good that the only reason that Manasseh was able to maintain his grip on power was that he not only paid tribute to Assyria but worshipped their gods as well. We know that Manasseh was a vassal of Assyria from Assyrian records. In 2 Chronicles there is an interesting account of Manasseh being taken in chains to Assyria (probable) and then repenting to God for his evil deeds (not so probable).

Finally we have the rise of Josiah. Josiah is the last of the good kings. He comes to the throne at the age of twelve upon the assassination of his father Amoz (son of Manasseh). He is considered good because he repaired the Temple, destroyed all aspects of Assyrian worship, read and proclaimed the Law and held the Passover for the first time since Hezekiah. Many people believe that it was at this moment that the Book of Deuteronomy...or what would later become the basis for Deuteronomy...surfaced. He is able to carry out these reforms because Assyria was being destroyed by Babylon. Josiah dies trying to prevent the Egyptians from assisting in Assyrian survival.

1. Does knowing some of the history change your view of the kings? If so why, or why not?
2. Why do you think that Chronicles tries to make Manasseh out to be not quite as bad as he is portrayed in Kings?
3. How has our ability to worship freely been affected by our history?