

CHAPTER 5

GOD'S ASSESSMENT OF THE FAITHFULNESS OF THE KINGS OF JUDAH AND ISRAEL

because David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uri'ah the Hittite.

1 Kings 15:5 (RSV)

¹¹And Asa did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as David his father had done. ¹²He put away the male cult prostitutes out of the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made. ¹³He also removed Ma'acah his mother from being queen mother because she had an abominable image made for Ashe'rah; and Asa cut down her image and burned it at the brook Kidron. ¹⁴But the high places were not taken away. Nevertheless the heart of Asa was wholly true to the LORD all his days.

1 Kings 15:11-14 (RSV)

²² In the time of his distress he became yet more faithless to the Lord—this same King Ahaz. ²³ For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him, and said, “Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me.” But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel.

2 Chronicles 28:22-23 (RSV)

²⁰Thus Hezeki'ah did throughout all Judah; and he did what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God. ²¹ And every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God and in accordance with the law and the commandments, seeking his God, he did with all his heart, and prospered

2 Chronicles 31:20-21(RSV)

How God graded the various kings of Israel and Judah

Let's look at some examples of both good and bad kings, according to how God assessed them. We cannot look at them all, as there are so many, but we will consider a number. In each case, note carefully the characteristics God focuses on, and also those that He *doesn't* focus on, when assessing people. We shall begin by looking at King Jehoshaphat of Judah:

³The LORD was with Jehosh'aphat, because he walked in the earlier ways of his father; he did not seek the Ba'als, ⁴ but sought the God of his father and walked in his commandments, and not according to the ways of Israel. ⁵Therefore the LORD established the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought tribute to Jehosh'aphat; and he had great riches and honour.—⁶His heart was courageous in the ways of the LORD; and furthermore he took the high places and the Ashe'rim out of Judah.

⁷ In the third year of his reign he sent his princes, Ben-hail, Obadi'ah, Zechari'ah, Nathan'el, and Micai'ah, to teach in the cities of Judah; ⁸ and with them the Levites, Shemai'ah, Nethani'ah, Zebadi'ah, As'ahel, Shemi'ramoth, Jehon'athan, Adoni'jah, Tobi'jah, and Tobadoni'jah; and with these Levites, the priests Elish'ama and Jeho'ram. ⁹ And they taught in Judah, having the book of the law of the LORD with them; they went about through all the cities of Judah and taught among the people.

2 Chronicles 17:3-9 (RSV)

Note also the positive consequences for the people of Judah that came from Jehoshaphat's faithfulness and also the rewards that came to Jehoshaphat personally:

¹⁰ And the fear of the LORD fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, and they made no war against Jehosh'aphat. ¹¹ Some of the Philistines brought Jehosh'aphat presents, and silver for tribute; and the Arabs also brought him seven thousand seven hundred rams and seven thousand seven hundred he-goats. ¹² And Jehosh'aphat grew steadily greater. He built in Judah fortresses and store-cities, ¹³ and he had great stores in the cities of Judah. He had soldiers, mighty men of valor, in Jerusalem.

2 Chronicles 17:10-13 (RSV)

That was God's verdict on the reign of the godly King Jehoshaphat of Judah. But, note that God never even mentions his abilities or his achievements, as almost all of us would do. Instead, God's attention is focused on the fact that:

- a) he did not serve or worship the Baals. (These were the pagan gods that the Canaanites worshipped. Their occult practices had spread into both Israel and Judah)
- b) he sought instead for God, i.e. he worshiped only the true God.
- c) he walked in the commandments, i.e. he was obedient to God's written Word.
- d) His heart was "courageous in the ways of the LORD"
- e) He made it a priority to send out some of his best people to teach God's Word (the book of the law of the LORD) in all the cities of Judah.

Those are the things God focused on when evaluating the reign of Jehoshaphat. That speaks volumes about what our priorities should be. Now let's look at God's assessment of King Amaziah of Judah. He began well and showed some faithfulness. However, his problem was that his faithfulness was not sufficiently wholehearted:

Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. ² He did right in the sight of the LORD, yet not with a whole heart.

2 Chronicles 25:1-2 (NASB)

God's assessment of the reign of King Amaziah

There were three main things that caused Amaziah to go astray in the end and to abandon his faithfulness:

- a) He did not fully trust in God to help him. So, he formed an alliance with the idolatrous Northern Kingdom of Israel. God did not tell him, or want him, to do that, due to the wickedness of its kings:

⁶ He hired also 100,000 valiant warriors out of Israel for one hundred talents of silver. ⁷ 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 nor with any of the sons of Ephraim.

2 Chronicles 25:6-7 (NASB)

- b) He had a military victory over the people of Seir and, after the battle was over, he brought their false gods/idols back to Jerusalem. He then ended up getting into idolatry, bowing down to those gods and burning incense to them:

¹⁴ Now after Amaziah came from slaughtering the Edomites, he brought the gods of the sons of Seir, set them up as his gods, bowed down before them and burned incense to them. ¹⁵ Then the

anger of the LORD burned against Amaziah, and He sent him a prophet who said to him, “Why have you sought the gods of the people who have not delivered their own people from your hand?”¹⁶ As he was talking with him, the king said to him, “Have we appointed you a royal counselor? Stop! Why should you be struck down?” Then the prophet stopped and said, “I know that God has planned to destroy you, because you have done this and have not listened to my counsel.”

2 Chronicles 25:14-16 (NASB)

- c) His heart became proud and over-confident because of his victories. As a result, he started an unnecessary war and also refused to listen to God’s prophets:

¹⁹ You said, ‘Behold, you have defeated Edom.’ And your heart has become proud in boasting. Now stay at home; for why should you provoke trouble so that you, even you, would fall and Judah with you?”²⁰ But Amaziah would not listen, for it was from God, that He might deliver them into the hand of Joash because they had sought the gods of Edom.

2 Chronicles 25:19-20 (NASB)

So, Amaziah began well, as so many of us do. His crucial failure was that but he did not keep it up. He allowed himself to slip into unfaithfulness and even idolatry and he turned away from following the Lord. That caused God to engineer his downfall, which is so sad, because if he had stayed faithful and been wholehearted he would have had God’s help.

Instead, God arranged for the Northern Kingdom to bring Amaziah down and also for his own people in Jerusalem to turn against him. None of this would have happened if only he had remained faithful:

From the time that Amaziah turned away from following the LORD they conspired against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish; but they sent after him to Lachish and killed him there.

2 Chronicles 25:27 (NASB)

God’s assessment of the reigns of King Uzziah and his son, King Jotham

Now look at Amaziah’s son, King Uzziah of Judah. He too began well but then allowed himself to slip. He dropped his standards as a result of the same problems of pride, over-confidence and presumption:

¹And all the people of Judah took Uzzi’ah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amazi’ah. ²He built Eloth and restored it to Judah, after the king slept with his fathers. ³Uzzi’ah was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Jecoli’ah of Jerusalem. ⁴And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his father Amazi’ah had done. ⁵He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechari’ah, who instructed him in the fear of God; and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper.

2 Chronicles 26:1-5 (RSV)

Here we see God’s assessment of how King Uzziah *began* his reign. It focuses entirely on the fact that he:

- a) did what was right in the eyes of the LORD
- b) feared God
- c) sought the LORD

Again, none of these things have anything to do with Uzziah’s abilities, achievements or victories in battles. They are all about his loyalty and faithfulness to God. That makes sense. Why should God

praise us or reward us for our talents or abilities, when it was He that gave them all to us in the first place? Those things interest us, but not God, because our talents do not entitle us to any credit or reward.

Thus, in a certain sense, it would be inappropriate to praise Mozart for what he composed, given that the music usually just arrived, complete, in Mozart's head. All he had to do was to write it down. It was all given to him by God. So the credit for Mozart's music really belongs to God, far more than to Mozart.

However, what we could praise Mozart for is his diligence in writing it down, after he had received it in his head. That states the extent of Mozart's contribution more accurately. He was a diligent worker, for which he deserves credit, but the music itself was really God's, not his. The same principle applies to the Kings of Israel and also to us.

When we appear before Jesus at the Judgment Seat of Christ, He will not reward us for being good looking or clever or successful or powerful. If we have any of those things it is no credit to us, because they came from Him, not us. Jesus will limit Himself, therefore, to rewarding us for our faithfulness in terms of what we did with what He gave us.

So, at the Judgment Seat of Christ those who were given great talent have no advantage over those who were given very little talent. Once you stop to consider this, it becomes obvious that that would be how God would see things.

In the later part of his long reign, King Uzziah became less faithful and less obedient. God's blessings upon him for his faithfulness, and all the success that that brought him, started to go to his head and he became proud. He then usurped the role of the priests and became angry when they tried to stop him doing so.

God therefore punished Uzziah towards the end of his reign. What a shame for Him to spoil his good record in that way and to have his decline into unfaithfulness recorded in the Bible, for all of us to see for the next 3000 years. That failure must be seen as a lesson to us, especially as we approach the end of our lives or ministries.

That is when there is the greatest temptation to become self-satisfied and to rest on our laurels. We must never allow ourselves to become proud or complacent, such that Jesus revises downwards the 'grade' that He had been intending to give us:

¹⁵ In Jerusalem he made engines, invented by skilful men, to be on the towers and the corners, to shoot arrows and great stones. And his fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong. ¹⁶But when he was strong he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was false to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. ¹⁷But Azari'ah the priest went in after him, with eighty priests of the LORD who were men of valor; ¹⁸and they withstood King Uzzi'ah, and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzzi'ah, 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."

¹⁹Then Uzzi'ah 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. ²⁰And Azari'ah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked at him, and behold, he was leprous in his forehead! And they thrust him out quickly, and he himself hastened to go out, because the LORD had smitten him. ²¹And King Uzzi'ah was a leper to the day of his death, and being a leper dwelt in a separate house, for he was excluded from the house of the LORD. And Jotham his son was over the king's household, governing the people of the land.

2 Chronicles 26:15-21 (RSV)

However, Uzziah's son, Jotham did better. He avoided the sin that Uzziah had committed in the Temple. That was good but, despite speaking well of Jotham, God still notes in the end that he did not prevent the people from following corrupt practices. In short, Jotham did well, but he did not go as far as he should have gone to try to lead the people into the right path:

¹Jotham was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jeru'shah the daughter of Zadok. ²And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD according to all that his father Uzzi'ah had done--only he did not invade the temple of the LORD. But the people still followed corrupt practices.

2 Chronicles 27:1-2 (RSV)

Nonetheless, because of the general faithfulness that he did show, God made King Jotham mighty:

So Jotham became mighty because he ordered his ways before the LORD his God.

2 Chronicles 27:6 (RSV)

God's assessment of the reign of King Ahaz

Next we see a King who received a wholly bad report from God. We are told that King Ahaz "*did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD*". Now note the things that God highlights which led to his downfall:

¹Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD, like his father David, ²but walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. He even made molten images for the Ba'als; ³and he burned incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burned his sons as an offering, according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. ⁴And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree. ⁵Therefore the LORD his God gave him into the hand of the king of Syria, who defeated him and took captive a great number of his people and brought them to Damascus. He was also given into the hand of the king of Israel, who defeated him with great slaughter.

2 Chronicles 28:1-5 (RSV)

The sins of King Ahaz, which caused God to condemn his time as King, were that:

- a) he did not do what was right in God's eyes (By that God means what he did morally and spiritually, not economically or militarily).
- b) he walked in the ways of the Kings of Israel, i.e. in idolatry and unfaithfulness to God
- c) he made molten images of the Baals and burned incense as part of idolatrous worship
- d) he even burned his own sons as human sacrifices to the pagan gods.

The terrible sins of King Ahaz brought down the Southern Kingdom of Judah. God also brought judgment on Ahaz personally. As He did so, Ahaz turned towards the pagan gods even more thoroughly than before, seeking their help rather than God's. Instead of repenting when God brought him under such judgment, he continued, and even intensified, his sin. Thus he brought even worse judgment upon himself and also on his people:

¹⁹For the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had dealt wantonly in Judah and had been faithless to the LORD. ²⁰So Til'gath-pilne'ser king of Assyria came against him, and afflicted him instead of strengthening him. ²¹For Ahaz took from the house of the LORD and the house of the king and of the princes, and gave tribute to the king of Assyria; but it did not

help him. ²²In the time of his distress he became yet more faithless to the LORD--this same King Ahaz. ²³For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him, and said, "Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me." But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel. ²⁴And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and he shut up the doors of the house of the LORD; and he made himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem. ²⁵In every city of Judah he made high places to burn incense to other gods, provoking to anger the LORD, the God of his fathers.

2 Chronicles 28:19-25 (RSV)

God's assessment of the reign of King Hezekiah

Next we see a faithful King, Hezekiah of Judah. Note that the Northern Kingdom of Israel never had any faithful kings. Every single one of them was unfaithful and evil. King Hezekiah saw what the unfaithfulness of previous Kings of Judah had caused and also how the unfaithfulness of the people, and especially their idolatry, had brought them under God's judgment.

He was determined to put things right. His main focus was not on restoring the economy of Judah, or the power of its military. It was on leading the people into greater faithfulness towards God. What a striking contrast there is between his priorities and those of our political leaders today, or even our church leaders:

¹Hezeki'ah began to reign when he was twenty-five years old, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi'jah the daughter of Zechari'ah. ²And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done. ³In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD, and repaired them. ⁴He brought in the priests and the Levites, and assembled them in the square on the east, ⁵and said to them, "Hear me, Levites! Now sanctify yourselves, and sanctify the house of the LORD, the God of your fathers, and carry out the filth from the holy place.

⁶For our fathers have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the LORD our God; they have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the LORD, and turned their backs. ⁷They also shut the doors of the vestibule and put out the lamps, and have not burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel. ⁸Therefore the wrath of the LORD came on Judah and Jerusalem, and he has made them an object of horror, of astonishment, and of hissing, as you see with your own eyes. ⁹For lo, our fathers have fallen by the sword and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this.

¹⁰Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD, the God of Israel, that his fierce anger may turn away from us. ¹¹My sons, do not now be negligent, for the LORD has chosen you to stand in his presence, to minister to him, and to be his ministers and burn incense to him."

2 Chronicles 29:1-11 (RSV)

Hezekiah took steps not only to put things right in Judah, but even to help to improve the situation in the Northern Kingdom of Israel:

¹Hezeki'ah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to E'phraim and Manas'seh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the passover to the LORD the God of Israel.

2 Chronicles 30:1 (RSV)

However, despite his best efforts, not many people from the Northern Kingdom responded well to his invitations. Nevertheless, though he did not always succeed, God's overall verdict on King Hezekiah was very positive. In particular, we are told that he did what he did "with all his heart".

Again, God's emphasis is on Hezekiah's wholeheartedness and faithfulness, even though he did not fully succeed in the things he was trying to do for God, because the people were not willing to obey. His abilities and the extent of his achievements are not even mentioned, let alone emphasised:

²⁰Thus Hezeki'ah did throughout all Judah; and he did what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God. ²¹And every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God and in accordance with the law and the commandments, seeking his God, he did with all his heart, and prospered.

2 Chronicles 31:20-21 (RSV)

God's assessment of the reign of King Manasseh

Sadly, Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, was evil, at least for the majority of his reign. God's verdict on those wasted and misused years is very scathing:

¹Manas'seh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. ²He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. ³For he rebuilt the high places which his father Hezeki'ah had broken down, and erected altars to the Ba'als, and made Ashe'rahs, and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served them. ⁴And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem shall my name be forever." ⁵And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. ⁶And he burned his sons as an offering in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and practiced soothsaying and augury and sorcery, and dealt with mediums and with wizards. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger.

2 Chronicles 33:1-6 (RSV)

⁹Manas'seh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that they did more evil than the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel.

2 Chronicles 33:9 (RSV)

Strangely, at the very end of his reign, when God's judgment was already coming upon him for his wickedness and unfaithfulness, Manasseh repented. It is one of the very few examples we see in the Bible of a really wicked man repenting and genuinely turning back to God:

¹⁰The LORD spoke to Manas'seh and to his people, but they gave no heed. ¹¹Therefore the LORD brought upon them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manas'seh with hooks and bound him with fetters of bronze and brought him to Babylon. ¹²And when he was in distress he entreated the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. ¹³He prayed to him, and God received his entreaty and heard his supplication and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manas'seh knew that the LORD was God.

2 Chronicles 33:10-13 (RSV)

After his repentance, King Manasseh changed and sincerely tried his best to put right the terrible harm he had done:

¹⁴Afterwards he built an outer wall for the city of David west of Gihon, in the valley, and for the entrance into the Fish Gate, and carried it round Ophel, and raised it to a very great height; he also put commanders of the army in all the fortified cities in Judah. ¹⁵And he took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built on the mountain of the house of the LORD and in Jerusalem, and he threw them outside of the city. ¹⁶He also restored the altar of the LORD and offered upon it sacrifices of peace offerings and of thanksgiving; and he commanded Judah to serve the LORD the God of Israel.

2 Chronicles 33:14-16 (RSV)

Thus, having been grossly unfaithful for most of his life, Manasseh became faithful in the end. That gives us hope for ourselves and for those we know who seem very far from God. The final verdict on Manasseh is brief, but positive. It says he "*slept with his fathers*".

That is an expression used in the Bible to indicate that a man died as a believer and that he was saved. So, we will see King Manasseh in Heaven. In fact, we shall also see him on the Earth, when Jesus returns and Manasseh is resurrected, so that he can live again on this Earth during the Millennium:

²⁰So Manas'sseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his house; and Amon his son reigned in his stead.

2 Chronicles 33:20 (RSV)

Next came Manasseh's son Amon. He was evil but, unlike his father, he did not repent or change:

²¹Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. ²²He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, as Manas'sseh his father had done. Amon sacrificed to all the images that Manas'sseh his father had made, and served them. ²³And he did not humble himself before the LORD, as Manas'sseh his father had humbled himself, but this Amon incurred guilt more and more. ²⁴And his servants conspired against him and killed him in his house.

2 Chronicles 33:21-24 (RSV)

God's assessment of the reign of King Josiah

We now come to the most faithful King that Judah ever had, the godly child-king, Josiah. He was more faithful, and more wholehearted, than any of his predecessors, even the good ones:

¹Josi'ah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. ²He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father; and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left. ³For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David his father; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Ashe'rim, and the graven and the molten images.

2 Chronicles 34:1-3 (RSV)

King Josiah was deeply moved when he came across the Law of Moses and read it in the early part of his reign. He realised how great the need was for repentance and he led the people in that repentance, and in focusing again on the Bible:

¹⁹When the king heard the words of the law he rent his clothes. ²⁰And the king commanded Hilki'ah, Ahi'kam the son of Shaphan, Abdon the son of Micah, Shaphan the secretary, and Asai'ah the king's servant, saying, ²¹"Go, inquire of the LORD for me and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do according to all that is written in this book."

2 Chronicles 34:19-21 (RSV)

²⁹Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. ³⁰And the king went up to the house of the LORD, with all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the Levites, all the people both great and small; and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which had been found in the house of the LORD. ³¹And the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book. ³²Then he made all who were present in Jerusalem and in Benjamin stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the

covenant of God, the God of their fathers. ³³And Josi'ah took away all the abominations from all the territory that belonged to the people of Israel, and made all who were in Israel serve the LORD their God. All his days they did not turn away from following the LORD the God of their fathers.

2 Chronicles 34:29-33 (RSV)

The zeal, devotion and faithfulness of King Josiah led to him receiving God's commendation. Look at this passage from 2 Kings. Wouldn't you like Jesus to say something like this about you at the Judgment Seat of Christ?

²⁵Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him.

2 Kings 23:25 (RSV)