

If They Come to Their Senses February 2, 2025

2nd Chronicles 6:36-40

36 "If they sin against you — for there is no one who does not sin — and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to a land far or near; 37 then if they come to their senses in the land to which they have been taken captive, and repent, and plead with you in the land of their captivity, saying, 'We have sinned, and have done wrong; we have acted wickedly'; 38 if they repent with all their heart and soul in the land of their captivity, to which they were taken captive, and pray toward their land, which you gave to their ancestors, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name, 39 then hear from heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their pleas, maintain their cause and forgive your people who have sinned against you. 40 Now, O my God, let your eyes be open and your ears attentive to prayer from this place (NRSV).

Chronicles is an edited version of the history of Israel given to us under a theological lens. Israel is a nation that was chosen by God for a specific purpose. It is not to be a privileged statehood that is destined to be a great world empire. It is chosen to be a light for the world, to draw people from all over the world to be closer to God. However, true to the nature of humanity, as the prosperous are blessed they get spoiled in the prosperity and ruin it. The word "if" is frequently used in the Bible. It indicates a conditional response; if they sin against you, if they come to their senses, if they repent.

In the Bible it is easy to see the pattern develop. Good or bad things happen to the nation depending upon their level of devotion, loyalty, and ability to keep the covenant. The people were cautioned upon entering the Promised Land. This conditional warning was recertified during conquest of the Promised Land. Israel was quite different from the other kingdoms. It is their religion that set them apart from the rest of the world. For Israel God was their king. However, they didn't want to be different, they wanted to be like the other countries with a human king. You see the same problem develop and repeat itself. They wanted their thing not God's thing. They let their human wants supersede the will of God. This is obviously disappointing to God but God does not give up on them and continues to emphasize the condition of the covenant,

David was a great warrior king. He made the nation strong and secure in the Promised Land. God rewarded his devotion and faith but he had a problem. David was a warrior and had too much bloodshed on his hands so God denied David the chance to build the temple. The honor fell to his son Solomon to build a sanctuary for a safe place to house the Ark of the Covenant and secure a central location for a permanent Jewish worship center. David was the architect that designed the temple and left instructions about the dimensions, material, and operation management. The temple began four years after Solomon became king and was completed in seven years. The temple was so magnificent, it achieved world fame. When the construction was completed, they brought in silver, gold, treasures, and the Ark of the Covenant which contained the two stone tablets. The temple is built on God's chosen site, in God's chosen city, by God's chosen ruler. The temple dedication was a big festive celebration. There was a national assembly with sacrifices, music, and a royal blessing. Solomon's blessing was a grand prayer request pleading to God for the temple to be the center of worship. Solomon asks God to

hear the prayers and forgive the people when they pray toward the temple. It is based on the condition that they repent, have a change of heart, and honor the covenant.

The temple is a house of prayer. It is not housing for God. We do not come to the temple to meet God because God can be met anywhere. The temple is a designated place to offer prayer and experience worship. It is a place to seek God's mercy and forgiveness. However, this goodness, grace, and mercy are withdrawn if the people are disobedient and it can be restored if the people repent.

The plight of Israel is a repeat theme of the covenant. God keeps covenant with the people and the people keep breaking covenant. Solomon's plea is like this. The temple is complete, instead of moving around Israel, now when people sin, after they come to their senses and repent, the temple serves as a permanent structure for that to happen. It is the spiritual center of the world. Sinning is inevitable. This is a place for God's will to be carried out. The sanctuary is where people can come for salvation. The temple serves as one place on earth where Jews can expect to encounter God by presenting their offerings and finding atonement for their sins. Israel is in covenant if the people repent and the temple is the centerpiece of that covenant.

The problem repeats itself since the very first sin of Adam and Eve. Human desire is followed instead of the will of God. Solomon marries several women for political alliances. The man that dedicated a grand temple for God then builds temples for the foreign gods of his foreign wives. Solomon did not live up to his prayer. This pattern of transgression sets up a domino effect. There is one problem after another all because they failed to understand, honor, and respect, their loving relationship with God. About three decades after the grand Temple is built, the nation is divided and Solomon's prayer fits the Exile. When the nation was conquered and the people scattered, they built temples in their respective communities. The modern church today is modeled after this tradition. The church building is a very significant place that is dedicated to be a sanctuary, of worship and study if the people come to their senses.