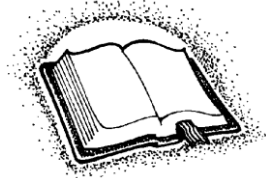


Unlocking the Bible (20)



The Failure Tendency: the effect of losing sight of priorities - Lessons from 2 Chronicles

With David now gone, it is left to Solomon to ensure that the dream is realised and the project completed. He now provides the lead and also carries out the work. 2 Chronicles records his exploits and continues the story.

Initially, as the first seven chapters record, everything goes well. He takes up the supply arrangements negotiated by David, engages the people, builds the exquisite Temple and oversees its dedication in a grand ceremony.

Solomon's significant contribution is in his skill, expertise, accomplishment and excellence. But, they are also the makings of his downfall, for they emphasise the external, the apparent, and that which can be quantified and embellished. They concentrate on the cosmetic appearance not on the expression of substance. Solomon succumbed to the temptation of continuing that endeavour – and use of goodwill and resources – for his own showmanship. It was achievements for the purposes of display and self aggrandisement. It was pride before a fall.

What followed makes sad reading. Solomon's legacy – apart from the visible Temple – was discontent, rebellion and division as the northern tribes revolted against the (by now purposeless) exploitation and formed a kingdom of their own, leaving Judah (and Benjamin) to continue in Jerusalem. Understandable as Israel's (the northern kingdom) complaints were, the inheritance is through Judah. Consequently, Chronicles ignores the Israel aspect of this story and concentrates on what happened through Judah and its kings. It is only concerned with the fulfilment of God's purpose.

What follows in 2 Chronicles are the exploits and achievements of a number of kings of the southern kingdom. Most follow the ways of the Lord, seeking to establish good practice even though a number fail in critical aspects, like incomplete clearance off foreign gods. Those who do follow the Lord find Him faithful. For example, Jehoshaphat proves God's strength and enabling in overcoming Moab in a battle where we have those oft-quoted words: "*O our God, we are helpless against this great host. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are unto Thee.*" God vindicated that stance and gave them the victory.

Others continued that trust and initiated further reforms and positive initiatives. Foremost among the reported (and therefore commended) activities were: restoring the Temple, encouraging voluntary contribution and celebrating the Passover – all activities emphasising the centrality of God and their responsibility to be His 'holy nation'.

But, despite these brave efforts the 'force of gravity' was such that, when deliberate, disciplined, enterprise was not being exercised obedience was weak and the ungodly influences strong. By the end of the book the nation has been taken captive.

What can we learn from it? Surely, it is a reminder that our responsibility is to be totally and always committed to "*do Thy will, o Lord*", to avoid the temptation of replacing God with ourselves at the centre, and to be strong in maintaining that positive witness and endeavour, knowing that the default tendency is "*prone to wander, Lord I feel it; prone to leave the God I love*". But, as Ezra, our next book will show, God is redemptive and such failure leads to restoration and success.

