



Editor's Note

If your mailbox is like mine, every day brings lots of printed material, most of which I didn't ask for, and don't want, but I must now somehow dispose of. This raises the question of how anyone distributing printed material can justify adding to that problem. So why do we produce and send out ESN?

Last month several tornados caused paths of destruction in our state (Connecticut), and one of them passed close to our home. We're still doing cleanup. Driving around town, it's shocking to see huge trees lying around, some

broken but many uprooted. Looking more closely, I noted that tree size didn't make much difference. The common thread was shallowness of roots!

That's why we produce and send out ESN! To help spiritual leaders grow deep roots in God's truth. People remark about the beautiful foliage and lovely flowers on trees, but have you ever heard anyone compliment a tree for its roots? But when storms come through, it's the trees with deep roots that stand. 

Biblical Foundations

God's Plan for Israel's Monarchy *by Robert Spender*

The historical books of the Old Testament provide us with examples of leadership, both failed and successful, illustrating the significance of the Lord's purposes amid the frailty of human choices. A study of Samuel through Chronicles brings us face-to-face with Israel's kings and how the Lord's grace provided help to His people as He moved His plan forward.

Transition to Monarchy

Events that transitioned Judges to the monarchy began with Hannah, a woman of great faith, and her son Samuel. Samuel's dedication to the Lord from birth and Tabernacle training explain the direction of his call and career. Undoubtedly influenced by his mother, Samuel became a great man of prayer who led his people righteously all his life (1 Sam. 12:3). While it was always God's plan to establish a monarchy in Israel (Gen. 17:6 & Deut. 17:14-ff), the people forced their own agenda for a king by taking advantage of Samuel's old age and family failures. Observing this situation alone should remind us to regularly place our plans before the Lord.

King Saul: Seeking Self

Saul, Israel's first king began well. He was young, attractive, humble, and the Lord was with him (1 Sam 10:6-7). His first real victory showed great potential given his focus upon the Lord (1 Sam. 11:13). However, once Saul gained power he grew increasingly selfish. In short, Saul's greatest problem was Saul. But isn't that an important part of this narrative? Saul, Israel, you, and I all fail by moving away from the Lord to go it alone. Three key moments chronicle Saul's decline. First, Saul failed to wait for Samuel and rashly assumed priestly duties. Then, he violated God's ban on

the Amalakites by participating in the spoil. Finally, his life ended after he consulted a medium to contact Samuel. With each step Saul grew further from the Lord, just the opposite of John the Baptist (John 3:30).

King David: Seeking God's Heart

David's climb from shepherd to king provides an amazing example of the Lord's work in the life of an individual to move His plan forward. Introduced into Saul's court as a musician, David became Saul's son-in-law and enemy before being endorsed as king over all of Israel. Following David's journeys as he avoids Saul illustrates the protection that God provides His own. David had his failures, most notably his affair with Bathsheba, but the Lord brought that to light despite David's attempts to cover it up.

David's faith, so frequently observed in the Psalms, prompted heartfelt repentance, affirming that he really was a man after God's own heart. David's greatest problem area was with discipline. He struggled to discipline himself, his military leader, Joab, and his family members. Scripture provides solid examples of discipline applicable to believers today. Remember that good discipline seeks restoration by pointing the way back. It is such a blessing to know that while the Lord does not always take away the consequences of our actions, He does promise to walk with us through them.

King Solomon: Seeking More

The rocky road of transition from David to Solomon prepares the reader for Solomon's great wisdom while hinting at growing tensions in the kingdom. One can only wonder why Solomon with such wisdom went astray. His life stands as a reminder of just how strong

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the temptations of pleasure and materialism are. Finishing well is not always easy but many who did are recognized in Hebrews 11. There is no mention of Solomon.

Our greatest example comes from the Lord Jesus Christ who despite His struggle in Gethsemane completed His Father's will and secured our salvation. Solomon's poor policies spawned discontent and spiritual laxness that culminated in the division of the kingdom. For the rest of Israel's history the geographical entities of north and south became the politically divided units of Israel and Judah.

The Northern Kingdom, Israel

The Lord's desire for unity is often disrupted (but not spoiled) by selfish desires. However, when people remove themselves from God's will they end up losing the blessing. Israel's first king, Jeroboam, radically changed Israel's religion by introducing new cult centers, festivals and priests that set the stage for national decline. Indeed, the theological assessment of all twenty northern kings is negative. Pagan influences flowed across the Phoenician border into Israel promoting a faster decline than Judah. The Lord worked with the North, providing them a period of economic and political stability under the dynasty of Omri/Ahab, along with invitations to repent from Amos and Hosea. But refusing to listen, Israel faced a bitter end.

The demise and dispersion of Israel has been recorded in 2 Kings 17 yet God's desire for ultimate unity was not thwarted, for just as Ezekiel envisions a coming revival of the twelve tribes (48:1-29) so too, Revelation affirms that God's future plan for the tribes has not ended (7:4-8). The Lord's work with Israel testifies to the wideness of His mercy and the depths of His grace but also the firmness of His plan.

The Southern Kingdom, Judah

The Southern Kingdom of Judah ultimately followed the evils of the North but declined more slowly due to the presence of the Levitical priesthood, the Temple and strong prophetic influences. These factors, coupled with the stability of one royal dynasty which produced several good kings, and a few spiritual

reforms, allowed an additional 135 years beyond Israel's fall.

However, growing international pressures from Assyria, Egypt and Babylon led to spiritual coldness and eventually political disaster. Helpful insights come from the study of individual kings and their political and economic environment. Relevant lessons for believers will emerge by combining the developed situations with the words of contemporary prophets. The Lord allowed, or raised up, political leaders for His people while revealing His own word to guide them and to move His plan along.

A recap of the people's history is arranged to show that obedience to the Lord lay behind their best days.

For example, the long-suffering nature of God and His international perspective can be illustrated from the kings of the Omri/Ahab dynasty in concert with the marvelous works of Elijah and Elisha. While Israel was looking to the nations for economic advancement and political support, God was revealing His glory and caring for the oppressed among their neighbors by bringing the Sidonian widow and Naaman the leper to Himself. No wonder Jesus used these individuals as examples of the wideness of God's mercy in His hometown synagogue!

On the other hand, the wealth of information that has recently surfaced concerning king Hezekiah of Judah continues to shed light on this most interesting king while affirming the historicity of the Bible. We can profit greatly from the study of Hezekiah, whose powerful prayers helped to deliver his people (Isa. 37:21) and who grasped the spirit of the law behind the letter of the law (2 Chron. 30:18).

All said, the kingdom eventually collapsed. First the North fell and was dispersed and then the South was taken into captivity. Initially, very few realized that God's ultimate plan would take His people into captivity as a path to restoration.

Chronicles

The book of Chronicles is best understood from a post-exilic perspective. Its concluding verses envision the return by mentioning Cyrus' decree. Chronicles was written to provide a spiritual shot in the arm for returning Jews. A recap of the people's history is arranged to show that obedience to the Lord lay behind their best days. Visibility to David, the Temple, and priesthood along with an abbreviation of most negative events (especially in Israel) serve to focus attention on walking rightly with the Lord. This was an emphasis of the return and should be an emphasis that we share today. Constructing an historical review of our journey with the Lord can provide encouragement and increase our accountability.

God's Plan for Messiah

Amid the struggles of the united and divided monarchies of Israel, God was moving along His plan for the coming Messiah. Revelation of the royal lineage through the Davidic covenant was a key step forward (2 Samuel 7). While Israel was focusing on human kings, the demise of the monarchy set the stage for the arrival of the King of Kings as the incarnate Son of God.

That so many leaders missed His arrival is surprising in light of Solomon's theological insight at the dedication of the magnificent Temple structure (1 Kings 8:27). His placing it in perspective of the greater majesty of the Lord serves as a constant reminder that we should never move church programs and facilities ahead of the real church: the people of God. How encouraging to know that the Lord continues to move His plan forward by using believers committed to following Him.



Practical Ministry

Helpful Tools for Elders' Meetings *by Jack Spender*

Most men love tools. Tools get the job done faster, enable creativity, provide satisfaction to those who learn the skills of using them, and so on. More than one elder's garage is too packed with tools to allow room for the car!

And yet with a full complement of the latest and most powerful gadgets for temporal work, many elders are content to limp along in their spiritual leadership, especially in the elders' meeting, without some of the best tools God has provided! Men who wouldn't dream of building a shed or repairing a deck with only a hand saw, are content to "table" items on the agenda for the church month after month, as a witness to ineffective leadership methods. These are not bad men! They sincerely believe that this is the way the Lord's work is to be done.

Now this is not an appeal for speed or gimmicks. Some things take time, and shortcuts can at times do more harm than good. Yet, one can actually get used to slow work from dull or misused tools. Reminds me of the man who brought his new chainsaw back to the dealer, complaining that he could barely cut one log in an hour. The dealer said he'd check it out, and pulled the starter cord. The surprised homeowner jumped back and exclaimed, "What's that noise it's making?"

So let's spend some time thinking about several tools to help elders in their work.

Don't be expecting things you never heard of. Sometimes when I speak to men on this subject, the typical response is, "Aw, we do that." But a visit to the elders' meeting will show a spiritual "tool" that's dull, or not plugged into the power source.

Prayer: Consulting the Head

When the apostles were confronted with legitimate "people needs" that could draw them away from leadership priorities, they quickly delegated those needs to others in the church, (Acts 6). What were those priorities? "We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (vs. 4).

Apparently prayer was a critical part

of what these men spent time on. This does not sound like "opening the meeting in prayer," nor even having "a season of prayer" at the close. More likely, this kind of prayer can be described as ongoing communication with the Head, Who though unseen, is both present, and should be presiding! One gets this impression from the events in Acts 4. After facing persecution, the apostles returned to their fellow workers, shared the concern, and immediately "lifted up their voice to God with one accord..." (vs. 24).

They did not spend hours arguing about the safest or most strategic course of action. They did not engage in a lengthy Bible study to see how Old Testament men of faith responded to trials. They consulted the Head!

Picture the scene. The meeting of elders convenes and the first item of business is a severe trial from the local authorities. A couple brothers supply the details. Turning immediately to the Lord Who is present as promised, the question is asked in a reverent and careful way, "Lord, what should we do next?" or, "Lord, will You help us to do what we know we ought to do?"

Is this the usual approach in leadership meetings? Is it not common that prayer is only resorted to when all else fails? Does the general tenor of the meeting give the impression that the Lord's presence is sensed, that He knows perfectly what they need and is willing to supply His guidance and peace?

Note the record of the Lord's response to being consulted in Acts 4. We read that the place was shaken, the men were filled with the Spirit, and the requested help was obtained, (vs. 31). There would be no long-standing item on the agenda: "What to do about persecution."

Has the Lord changed His promise to meet with us, and help us? Of course He will be gracious and bless us if we ask His help at the beginning of the meeting. But how much better to consult Him along the way, to confess that we have no confidence in "leaning on our own understanding" (Prov. 3:5). So in ALL OUR WAYS—i.e., for every thorny agenda item—we acknowledge Him, and

He shall direct our paths. (vs. 6).

Yes, prayer can be a sharp tool for cutting through time consuming discussions and worldly wise decisions by speaking directly to the Head, the true "Chairman" of the elders' meeting!

The Spirit of God; Revealing the Mind of Christ

In Romans 8:9, Paul declares that all Christian believers have the Holy Spirit, and in

I Cor. 6:19, that the body of a believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Couple these thoughts with another statement he makes, "But we have the mind of Christ." (I Cor. 2:16), and ask yourself the following questions pertaining to decision making in leadership meetings:

Do I keep in mind that the same Spirit who dwells in me also resides in my fellow elder who may hold a different view from me in a matter? Can I acknowledge that what's really important is not what I think, or what he thinks, but what Christ thinks, i.e., the mind of Christ? Do I understand that the spiritual work of fellowship will be to discover together the mind of Christ? Am I sure that our mutual enemy, the great "sower of discord among the brethren" will actively oppose this process?

This is a life changing thought! Think of it. My fellow elder who has given abundant evidence that he loves the Lord, loves the church, cares for the sheep, and has credibility gained from years of fruitful labor, may have keener insight into the mind of Christ in a given matter than I do. What should my conduct be?

Knowing that "in me, that is in my flesh dwelleth no good thing," (Rom. 7:18), I ought to be "swift to hear, slow to speak," James 1:19. Consider a humble approach like, "Brother, I'm sure you have reasons for seeing it that way. Can you help me/us understand why you have that perspective?"

Of course, this is the complete opposite of the thinking in the business or political world. Why should I care what you think when I have already decided that I'm right? Beloved, what a wonderful tool we neglect if we fail to remember

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Wives' Corner

Women to Know About *by Maria Forcucci*

Have you ever felt that your gender has either given you privilege or made you feel less than adequate? It can be a tough thing, being a woman, but in ages past, it was even more difficult. In today's world, you would think woman was the creator/victim of all things as "she" increasingly wants men to "pay for" any unhappiness or inconvenience she suffers. The whole world is seeking to hold "woman" up as a cherished, infallible being, while our male counterparts are being torn down, emasculated, guilt ridden, and ignored. Wouldn't it be good to go back and look at how both genders, although flawed by sin, could actually come together to bring about God's will and good pleasure?

Wives' Corner will be dedicating the next few articles to a few special women who in their sinful natures, had the potential to bring destruction, but with the movement of God's Spirit in their lives, actually became the forebears of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Under Mosaic

law, most of these women would be disqualified to have a godly Jewish heritage because of their nationality or occupation. How wonderful to serve a God who is no respecter of persons and without partiality, a God who uses anyone to bring about His plans and purposes.

I hope this series of articles encourages us to embrace our gender while taking our special place in God's timeline to "be about our Father's business" and affect our world like these four ladies did. We will be looking at:

- Tamar, the shrewd daughter-in-law
- Rahab, the harlot with heart
- Ruth, the familiar foreigner
- Bathsheba, the adulteress queen

If you haven't noticed, all 4 of these fascinating women are mentioned in Matthew 1, our Lord's genealogy. Each of their stories illustrates God's infinite grace and wisdom as He deals with fallen people. The women in each of these stories have their own unique backgrounds,

and we will be able to trace God's beautiful love story through them as they overcome obstacles that modern women may never have to face.

We will try to understand and relate to some of the emotions and situations these women had to face. Could we fare as well if we: had to marry our dead husband's brothers, live under constant judgment and scrutiny, leave everything that was familiar to us and journey to an unknown future, or be at the mercy of a powerful man who took advantage of us?

I am praying that we might learn from and appreciate just who God chose to be in the line of His Son. And with that appreciation, see ourselves as the "handmaidens of the Lord," as did Mary, the 5th lady in Jesus' genealogy. They each, like us, have a story to tell. May we allow the God of Heaven to write our stories and allow us to become examples to those who follow us. 

Elders' Meetings *(continued from page 3)*

that the Spirit of the living God lives within my fellow elder, and may perhaps be guiding his perspective in any matter. Should I not at least honor the divine Guest within him by seeking to draw out whether he is simply expressing personal

preference, or holding to time worn traditions, or perhaps expressing a perspective through which the indwelling Spirit would supply guidance to the group?

Some may object to thinking of normal Christian activities as "tools," but

when they are employed as a part of the oversight meeting, they can save time and increase productivity. Next issue we'll add another "tool" to the list. 

THE SMALL PRINT

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Specific Bible versions used are indicated at the first quotation in each article.

Note: All words referring to God have the initial letter capitalized. While the original languages of the Bible do not use capitalization, this is the convention in some translations but not in others. So at times there may be inconsistencies in usage in ESN articles.