

2 Chronicles 8

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[0 : 0 0] Now, a fortnight ago, Calum preached from 1 Kings chapter 1, and in that chapter Calum was focusing on Adonijah. Adonijah was one of David's sons. David was king in Israel, and as he was reaching the end of his life, this son, Adonijah, tried to exalt himself and declare that he was going to be king. But as Calum reminded us and as he led us through that passage, we see that Adonijah was unsuccessful. Ultimately, because God's plan was not for Adonijah to take the throne, it was for one of David's other sons to become king. And that son was Solomon, and the throne was given to him instead of Adonijah. And today I want us just to spend a wee bit of time focusing on Solomon, and particularly on the words that we read in 2 Chronicles chapter 8. We're going to look at the chapter as a whole, but we'll just read again the first six verses. At the end of 20 years in which Solomon had built the house of the Lord and his own house, Solomon rebuilt the cities that Herem had given to him and settled the people of Israel in them. And Solomon went to Hamath Zobah and took it. He built Tadmor in the wilderness and all the store cities that He built in Hamath. He also built Upper Bethhoron and Lower Bethhoron fortified cities with walls, gates and bars and Baelath and all the store cities that Solomon had and all the cities for his chariots and the cities for his horsemen and whatever Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem in Lebanon and in all the land of his dominion. Now, this chapter is one of these chapters where it's easy to read it and think, I don't really know what this chapter is all about. There's obscure place names, strange terms and describing land and locations that are unfamiliar and can seem so far removed from us here today.

I hope that in the next few minutes as we look at this chapter we will see that it's really a remarkable chapter and it's got a huge amount to teach us. So the first question we should really ask is, what is this chapter all about? Well, in many ways, as we said, the chapter is summing up Solomon's life. And as we go through the chapter we see that various things have been emphasised and we can summarise these under three basic headings, places, power and prestige. And we'll just expand on these three very briefly to begin with. In this chapter a lot of places are mentioned and they seem very, very obscure.

I'm sure very few people here will know where Ezeon Giber is, for example. And when people refer to place names that are unfamiliar to us, it can be so hard to understand what they're talking about. I remember when I was studying at ETS, I would be in Edinburgh studying and I would meet people and I'd ask them where did they from and they would say that they were from some part of Edinburgh. I'm from Morningside or I'm from Newington.

And I had no idea what they were talking about. I didn't know if they were north, south, east or west. It was just names which I didn't understand. And we have the same thing here.

Many places mentioned but they're unfamiliar. And we have to ask the question, why are all these places being mentioned? Well the key point is where they are located. Verse 2 and 3 talk about Hamath. Then verse 5 and 6, upper and lower Beth Horon and Bela, verse 17 then mentions Ezeon Giber and Eloth. The important thing is where these places were. So where were they? Well we'll have to look at them and see on the map. There's Jerusalem where Solomon's throne was. That was the capital. Hamath is way up there in the north. Upper and lower are Beth Horon and Bela, they're in the middle. Bela, particularly significant, it's on the coast. And these were important trade routes for bringing goods to and from the nation. And Ezeon Giber, where's that? Way down there in the very south. And the key point that's being emphasised is that Solomon controlled a vast territory. And in terms of the history of the Old Testament, Solomon's reign is really the high point in terms of occupying the land. Remember God promised the land to Abraham way back in Genesis that he and his descendants would occupy this land. In the Old Testament, the days of Solomon were the best that there was for Israel in terms of the geographical spread in their nation. And we can see that quite interesting if we compare the reigns of Saul, David and

[5 : 14] Solomon. If you look at the map, that's the territory that Saul controlled, focused around Jerusalem. David's territory expanded to the north and to the south. And so David controlled a vast area. He was, as I'm sure you know, a very, very successful warrior in battle.

But Solomon's territory was bigger still, stretching from the river Euphrates in the north all the way down to the border with Egypt. Solomon's kingdom was the biggest of all. And the point being emphasised is that under Solomon, Israel became a very strong nation. And that's emphasised by our next heading, power. The chapter is making it clear that Solomon was a powerful king. We see that from verse five onwards. He built up a Beth Horem and lower Beth Horem, fortified cities with walls, gates and bars and bailath and all the store cities that Solomon had and all the cities for his chariots, his horsemen, and every desire to build in Jerusalem and Lebanon and all the land of his dominion.

And it talks about the other nations, people who are left of the Hittites, the Amorites, the Peresites, the Hittites, the Jebusites. These Solomon drafted in as forced labour.

And so they are to this day. People of Israel were not slaves. They were the officers, the commanders, the chiefs over the people. So the cities were strong and secure. Foreigners were not a threat to the nation. They were under Solomon's command. And remember the importance of the contrast. Israel were slaves back in Egypt. Now in the days of Solomon, they are the masters. And the whole nation is being governed well. And so Israel's borders are at their greatest. Solomon is a powerful king, both domestically and in relation to the surrounding nations. And so with that territory and with that power, there came great prestige. And that's highlighted in the last verse of the chapter.

Here I am sent to him by the hand of his servants, ships and servants familiar with the sea. And they went to offer it and together with the servants of Solomon and brought from there 450 talents of gold and brought it to King Solomon. And if you read on into chapter nine, which maybe you can do this afternoon if you get a chance, you will read about the Queen of Sheba coming to visit Solomon. And it gives details of the astounding of the astounding revelation and reputation that Solomon had among the nations. His wisdom was beyond anything that the Queen of Sheba expected. And there's a huge list of the gold and wealth and strength that abounded in Solomon's time. When Solomon was king, Israel were not weak. They were strong. They were wealthy. And Solomon was admired in the eyes of the world. His kingdom was abounding in riches, honor and prestige.

[8 : 31] And the author of Chronicles, we call him the chronicler because we don't actually know his name. The chronicler is wanting us to recognize, I think, two important lessons in all of this. Lesson number one that we are being highlighted, pointed to in this chapter, is that at the heart of Israel's success lay the worship of God. And although Chronicles 8 lists these places and people and prestige, it also highlights the fact that Solomon was focused on worshipping God. He had built the temple. And from verse 12 we read that Solomon offered up burnt offerings to the Lord on the altar that he had built before the vestibule.

As the duty of each day required offering according to the commandment of Moses for the Sabbaths, the new moons and the three annual feasts, the feasts of unleavened bread, of weeks, of booths. According to the ruling of his father David, he appointed the division of the priests for their service and the Levites for their offices of praise and ministry before the priests as the duty of each day required. And the gatekeepers in the divisions at each gate, for so David the man of God had commanded. And they did not turn aside from what the king had commanded the priests and the Levites concerning any matter and concerning the intercederies. Thus was accomplished all the work of Solomon from the day he laid the foundation of the house of the Lord until it was finished. So the house of the Lord, the temple, was completed. And the temple is really the key theme that runs through the book of Chronicles.

It is focusing on the worship of God. And the lesson that that's teaching us is that the worship of God is what matters most of all. Yes, there was a lot of success and wealth and prestige highlighted in 2 Chronicles 8, but at the heart of it all, the most important thing was the worship of God. And that's a lesson that you and I need to write on our own hearts as well. Because we live in prosperous days as well. We live in a prosperous nation just like the people of Solomon's time did. But in the midst of all our wealth, all our prosperity, we must never ever, ever forget what Jesus said. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you. So lesson one is that most important of all is the worship of God. But there's a second lesson that's been highlighted to us in this chapter, which is very, very interesting. And the Chronicle highlights for us the fact that although Solomon himself has accomplished so much, the people, the people of Israel benefited from what he had achieved. Solomon expanded the borders of the land in order for the people to have places where they could settle. Solomon used all his power to protect them. He built fortified cities that were strong and that were safe so that the people would be secure. And the wealth that Solomon enjoyed was shared among the citizens of his kingdom. There's an amazing verse in chapter nine, which I'll put on the screen. It says, all King Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold. And all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold. Silver was not considered as anything in the days of Solomon. It's not amazing. Imagine living there in Jerusalem and in the nation where you were so prosperous. Silver was nothing. Silver was nothing in the days of Solomon. And remember what we said, Israel have gone from being slaves in

Egypt to now being so well off that silver was as common as wood and stone. Now, just as we brief aside at this point, when we read a verse like that, it should always make us stop and think about our own circumstances and it should make us be careful regarding our own perspective on life. Because sometimes we can feel frustrated that we don't have enough of things and that things aren't the way that we want them to be in our country.

But we must remember that people can go to other parts of the world today and they can say, in Scotland clean water is like nothing. In Scotland free healthcare is like nothing.

[13 : 31] Free education for everyone is like nothing. Democracy is like nothing. And it's all reminding us that we must never, ever forget how privileged and blessed we are.

So just to recap, the great emphasis of this chapter is in many ways on how good things were. The land is big, the kingdom is powerful, the people are prosperous. And so at one level everything that God promised to Abraham back in Genesis 12 is looking as though it's coming true. And I want you just to try and picture in your minds the splendour of what Second Chronicles 8 describes. We've been speaking about this expanding territory, these strong cities and gold and silver in abundance. Try and picture that nation in your mind.

Picture how glorious it was. And now I want to read to you a description of the same place 350 years later. This is from the last chapter of Chronicles, same nation, same kingdom, same territory and let's read what has been described. Zedekiah was 21 years old when he began to reign. So following in the line of Solomon, he reigned 11 years in Jerusalem.

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord as God. He did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet who spoke from the mouth of the Lord. He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who had made him swear by God. He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the Lord the God of Israel. All the officers of the priests and of the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful following all the abominations of the nations and they polluted the house of the Lord that he had made holy in Jerusalem. The Lord the God of their fathers sent persistently to them by his messenger because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. But they kept mocking the messengers of God despising his words and scoffing at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people until there was no remedy. Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans who killed them young men with a sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He gave them all into his hand and all the vessels of the house of God great and small and the treasure of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king and of his princes all these he brought to Babylon and they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of

Jerusalem and burnt all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels.

[16 : 33] The kingdom, the glorious kingdom that Solomon ruled over had fallen apart. It was crushed by Babylon and the people were taken into exile. And the book of Lamentations in the Old Testament is a collection of poems that describes the wreckage that now characterised this land. It's a difficult book to read because it is so solemn in what it says. But I'm going to read just the first four verses of Lamentations chapter one. And again just picture in your mind the scenes in Jerusalem and compare it with the days of Solomon. How lonely sits the city that was full of people. How like a widow she has become. She who sits, she who was great among the nations, she who was a princess among the provinces has become a slave. She weeps bitterly in the night with tears on her cheeks. Among all her lovers she has none to comfort her. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her. They have become her enemies. That of course is describing the land. Judah has gone into exile because of affliction and hard servitude. She dwells now among the nations but finds no resting place. Her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress. The roads to

Zion, it's another word for Jerusalem, the roads to Zion mourn. For none come to the festival. All her gates are desolate. Her priests groan. Her virgins have been afflicted. And she herself suffers bitterly. Second Chronicles 8 had talked about how Solomon appointed these festivals. They kept them and it was glorious. Lamentation says now nobody comes. The streets are desolate. Everything has fallen apart. And the question immediately arises what went wrong? And the tragic answer is that the people turned away from God. And all along God had been warning them that this would happen. Second Chronicles is no exception. Just the very chapter before, these are the verses just before chapter 8. God says if you turn aside and forsake my statutes and my commandments that I've said before you and go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will pluck you up from my land that I've given you. And this house that I've consecrated for my name I will cast out in my sight and I will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples. And at this house which was exalted everyone passing by will be astonished and say why has the Lord done this to this land and to this house? Then they will say because they abandoned the Lord, the God of their Father who brought them out of the land of Egypt and they'd hold on other gods and worship them and serve them. Therefore he has brought all this disaster on them. And if you read in the Book of Kings you'll discover that even Solomon himself by the end of his life had started to turn away from God. After he died, Israel split in two and everything went downhill from there. And it's a reminder that although the days of Solomon were glorious, the ultimate story of the Old Testament people of God was one of failure. And all the time it is reminding us the lesson that we highlighted that it is the worship of God that matters most of all. And that's one of the reasons why the Book of Chronicles was written. It was written to the people who were trying to rebuild their lives after the disaster that had overtaken their nation because of their failure. And it's important to remember how this book, this whole Book of Chronicles fits in to the big story line of the Old

Testament. Now I'm going to show you just our story line. We've looked at this before but we'll remind ourselves so we see how the big narrative of the Old Testament fits together.

At the very beginning God created all that there is. Not long afterwards humanity fell. Adam sinned Genesis chapter 3. When you read through the subsequent chapters of Genesis 4-56-78 you see that sin became rife in the world and everything fell apart. And ultimately God judged the world in the flood in the days of Noah. Now throughout these chapters, chapters 1 to 11 of Genesis, God is dealing with the world as a whole. But in Genesis chapter 12 God focuses in on a particular area and on a particular person, Abraham. And that becomes the focus of God's purposes. He calls Abraham out of the land of the Caldees and he brings them to the eastern end of the Mediterranean and he says, I will give you this land. As you know Abraham then had children, Isaac was born, Jacob was born to Isaac, Abraham has gone from being an individual to being a family. That family because a famine moved down to Egypt where the family grew and grew and grew into a whole nation but there they became slaves. You get to the big of Exodus and we see this great deliverance where the people of Israel leave Egypt and they return to settle in the promised land. They conquer it in the days of Joshua and they come to settle in the promised land. After the period of the judges a monarchy is established. Saul is the first king followed by David followed by Solomon. And as we said Solomon is the high point where everything is at its best.

But from Solomon onwards things start to fall apart. When his son Rehoboam became king the nation split in two. The northern kingdom, the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom turned away from God and in 722 they were conquered by the Assyrians and the nation was obliterated. Another 140 or so years later the southern kingdom finally fell to the Babylonians which is what we read about at the end of Chronicles and the people are taken away into exile at around 586 BC. After 70 years they start to return and a remnant returns back to the nation, back to the area and they're trying to rebuild their lives. Now that was the one minute version of the history of Israel. First and second kings, first and second chronicles both tell that story. So first and second kings start from really the days of David in many ways and work all the way down to the exile. Chronicles charts the same course.

[23 : 38] The book of kings was written during the exile or completed during the exile and the main purpose of the book of kings was to explain why this had happened. People were thinking how could God have done this to us and kings is reminding them God warned you all along that this would happen. But the book of chronicles is written slightly later. It's written at the time of the return. It's written after kings and the purpose is not so much to give an explanation as to why the nation failed. The purpose is rather to give people hope in the midst of that failure. And one of the reasons why the chronicle gives us a report of the glory of the days of David and Solomon is to remind the people that God did great things in the past and God can still do great things for the people. So as these exiles returned to the wreckage of Jerusalem and to the temple that had fallen down, the chronicle reminds them of their history to give them hope that God can still do great things. That's a really interesting thing about chronicles. It's a history book. So it's looking backwards.

But really it's pointing us forwards that God can still do great things. Now the people of the days of the chronicle, they lived and died waiting for that hope that one day God would restore his kingdom. And all of this is a great reminder that although the glory of Solomon was great, God's plans were always much, much bigger than the days of Solomon.

And the chronicle that is pointing us forward to the days of the new covenant, to the coming of the Messiah. And in the New Testament, we see all that chronicles is looking forward to coming through in the Persian and work of Jesus Christ. And Matthew reminds us in chapter 12, verse 42, that now in Jesus something greater than Solomon is here. And it's important to remember that in the Old Testament, no one could compare with Solomon in terms of power, prestige and territory. But when we look at Jesus, we see that Solomon doesn't even come remotely close. Because Solomon ruled places from Hamath in the north to Ezeon D'Eba in the south. Jesus rules over every inch of the universe. Remember we said at the start when we went through the timeline, God's original plans were at a global, really at a cosmic level. And then in Genesis 12, they focus in on a territory. With Jesus,

God's purposes go back to that cosmic level. But it's not about him ruling over a piece of land at the end of the Mediterranean. It's about him ruling over all of creation.

And Jesus is the one who is far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.

[27 : 01] So every galaxy, every star, every planet, every nation, every city, every village, every house, it is all under Jesus's rule. Solomon had power. He was master over many others, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Peresites, the Hivites, the Jebusites. They all bowed down at the name of Solomon. But at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow. And every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God, the Father. Solomon had great prestige. He was a king abounding in earthly glory. But Jesus is the radiance of the glory of God. And his glory is the glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. And so all that greatness of Solomon is nothing, absolutely nothing, compared to the greatness of Jesus. That's why the Gospels refer to Jesus as the Son of David. He is the true heir that was to come to the Davidic throne. That's why Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of God has come, because that is the true kingdom that God has been establishing and everything is going to be put right. Solomon was great, but a far greater than Solomon is now here. And that's why we all gladly bow only before

Jesus as our glorious King. But the point I want us to focus on for the last five minutes is lesson number two that Chronicles chapter eight was teaching us. Remember we said he's teaching us two lessons. The first one was that the worship of God is what matters most.

The second lesson though is really remarkable. The lesson that the people benefited from Solomon's greatness. Remember he built cities for the people to settle in. He used his power to protect them and he shared the marvelous riches of his kingdom with all his citizens.

The people benefited from Solomon's greatness. But the absolutely amazing thing about Jesus is that he is doing exactly the same for you only on a far greater scale. Solomon built cities for his people to sit settle in. Jesus is preparing a place for you where you can settle for all eternity. One day Jesus will return and then he will renew the creation into a glorious new earth. And so we can look forward to that imagining everything that is good about this world being brought to a perfect level and everything that is wrong with this world will have passed away forever. And Revelation 21 gives us a picture and a description of that city that Jesus is preparing for everyone who trusts in him. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first earth and the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more. Now as we read these words think of Hamath that was built and prepared by Solomon and compared to this. I saw the holy city, New

Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with him and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said, Behold I am making all things new. Jesus is preparing this heavenly city, a new heavens and a new earth and his great goal is that you might settle there. That that would be your home. And Jesus will use his power to protect you so that nothing can threaten your security in him. Solomon built fortified cities with bars and gates and walls. He used his strength for his people's security.

[31 : 40] Jesus does that on a whole new level, which is why Paul can say who shall separate us from the love of Christ shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword. When you were in a fortified city, you could be threatened by people. People could come to the outside with swords to attack you. They could put you under siege and starve you so that you would have famine. You wouldn't be able to eat. You would be troubled. You would be distressed. All of these things were still a threat even in a fortified city. But in Jesus none of these things can affect you. As it is written, for your sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. Knowing all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. But I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor power, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. And the glory and splendour of King Jesus, that prestige that he has is something that he will share with you. And that's because by faith we are united to him. Jesus is heir to all the splendour of God's kingdom, but by faith you become a co-heir with him. Heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. Jesus is the Son of God himself, but by faith you are an adopted son or daughter of God too.

And the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. Jesus is the radiance of God's glory, the exact imprint of his nature, but by faith we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. Everything that Jesus is and has, he is sharing with us. So let me ask you, do you feel unsettled sometimes? Do you feel unsettled in life? Not sure where you belong, not sure what you should be doing, acutely aware of the fact that our precious homes, our families, are passing away before our eyes. If you feel unsettled like that, Jesus is saying, I will give you a place where you can settle forever. A continuing city, which will always be your home. Do you feel insecure sometimes? Unsettled about tomorrow, worried about the future, worried about your health, worried about life, worried about death. Jesus says, I will protect you. I will protect you forever and nothing, nothing can snatch you out of my hand. And do you feel worthless sometimes? It's so, so easy to feel like that and we can give ourselves so many reasons to feel like that, that we are worthless. But Jesus says, you are so precious. And you are so precious that I want to share my glory and my splendor with you.

So that instead of being a worthless stumbler who goes through life aimlessly, you are the precious, precious child of God, the brother or sister of Jesus of whom he will never, ever be ashamed. Jesus is so much greater than Solomon and his goal is to make you like him.

To give you a share of the astonishing and immeasurable privileges of his kingdom. That's what he wants for you. And if you are maybe not yet a Christian today, all of that can be yours. All of it can be yours. If you just bow down in your heart and pray to King Jesus, asking that he would save you. And if you are in that situation and if you're in two minds and if you're not sure, I want you to ask yourself, what is holding you back? What is it that makes you think, I can't do that just now? Because it's the easiest thing in the world to think, I can't do that just now. And ask yourself, what reason is that? Is it because of what people might say? Or is it because of what changes might bring in your life? Or is it because of something that you're uncertain of or something that's happened in the past? Or whatever it is, try and identify that reason. And if you can identify that reason, I want you to ask yourself one question. Is it worth it? Because Jesus is offering you so much more. Let's pray.