

The God Filled Must Not Be Negligent

Based on the inclusion of **II Chronicles 36:22-23**, we recognize that the account of Judah's history that we call **First** and **Second Chronicles** was actually written after Cyrus allowed the captive Israelites and Judeans to return to the Promised Land. We know from reading **Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi** that those returning Hebrews had all kinds of problems.

They were beset by their new neighbors, the foreigners who had been moved into the land by the Assyrians and Babylonians during their conquests. They were distracted by their own daily living and needs. They were lulled by apathy and familiarity with mediocrity. They were enflamed by greed that prompted them to enslave their own brethren. They were tempted by foreign wives. Even after they finally rebuilt the temple, the priests were tempted to go back to their own daily living, ignoring the temple, and letting it be defiled again.

Chronicles was written in this context. That explains why the stories selected were included. It especially helps us grasp **II Chronicles 29** as it describes Hezekiah's cleansing and restoration of the temple. According to **II Chronicles 29:3**, in the first month of the first year of his reign, he opened the doors of the temple and repaired them. What should the returning Israelites do and quickly? Get that temple open. And yet it lingered so long that God had to send Haggai and Zechariah to get the people moving.

But then Hezekiah explains why the Levites needed to consecrate themselves and get the temple worship back in order. In **II Chronicles 29:6-9**, he explained that the Judeans had been defeated because they turned their back on God and His habitation. Notice **vs. 9** specifically, "For behold, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and daughters and our wives are in captivity for this" (ESV). This doesn't directly refer to Assyrian or Babylonian captivity. This refers to the Syrian captivity described in **II Chronicles 28:5**. But don't for a minute think that the Chronicler isn't also talking about the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Those are the captivities that his readers experienced. The author of **Kings** doesn't include this story because he was making different points. But the Chronicler includes it because he is saying something to the returning Hebrews.

Why had Israel and Judah repeatedly been taken into captivity? Because they turned their backs on God, followed after the gods of the nations around them, and defiled the dwelling place of the living God. Why would these returning Hebrews need to remember this? Because they were in danger of letting it happen again. They needed to heed the exact same admonition Hezekiah gave the priests and Levites during his day: "Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD, the God of Israel, in order that his fierce anger may turn away from us. My 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 making offerings to him" (**II Chronicles 29:10-11**, ESV).

"Do not be negligent." That is exactly what the Israelites were doing when they returned from Babylon. That is evident from **Haggai 1:2**: "These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD" (ESV). They were negligent.

I find it completely fascinating to read these histories in the context of the first readers. It gives great insight into the true intent of the author. But this book wasn't written just for these first readers. It was also written for us. "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (**Romans 15:4**, ESV).

I Peter 2:9 says of us: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (ESV). Who are we? We are a chosen people just like those folks in Hezekiah's day, just like those Hebrews returning after the captivities. We must not be negligent. We must minister before God. We must make offerings to him. In fact **I Peter 2:5** says, "You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (ESV).

What kind of offerings are we to make without negligence? **Hebrews 13:15-16** says, "Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (ESV). We must bring offerings of praise to God. We must bring offerings to God in the form of serving our brothers and sisters, sacrificing time, resources, and finances to help others. But ultimately, we must not neglect to offer ourselves. **Romans 12:1** says, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (ESV). And **Galatians 2:20**, "I have been crucified with Christ. It

is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (ESV). We need to offer ourselves.

So, here is the question for us. Are we being negligent in praise, in service to others, in devoting ourselves to God? This has consistently brought destruction upon God’s people. Why should we think we will be different?

And so, my brothers and sisters, “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 making offerings to him.”

—Edwin L. Crozier