

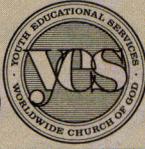
YOUTH



LEVEL 6

BIBLE

LESSONS



LESSON 11



Judah's Decline as a Nation

JUDAH'S DECLINE AS A NATION

The Bible tells us how to obtain the good and avoid the bad outcomes in life. As you study about the kings of Judah, keep in mind that the same rules that work in the life of a king will work in your life.

In the last lesson we learned about the political and religious events that led to Israel's captivity. In this lesson, we will learn more about the kings of Judah. We will also learn about events that brought about the decline of Judah as a nation.

JUDAH'S RULERS

Saul, David and Solomon each reigned over the nation of Israel. When Solomon's son, Rehoboam, became king the nation again divided. Rehoboam ruled the southern kingdom called Judah, while Jeroboam ruled the northern kingdom called Israel (I Kings 12).

Rehoboam's son Abijah next ruled Judah. Then Abijah's son, Asa, ruled and his righteous acts helped bring peace and prosperity. But later, instead

of trusting God for protection, he took treasures from the Temple to buy help from Syria. Because of his disobedience, Asa died of a disease in his feet.

Jehoshaphat, Asa's son, became the next king. He taught God's laws to the people. At his death, his son Jehoram ruled next. But he did not obey God and died from a terrible illness.

Ahaziah, the youngest son of Jehoram, began ruling over Judah. He was also wicked, so God chose a man named Jehu to bring an end to his rule. Jehu killed Ahaziah and many of Judah's royal family.

When Ahaziah's mother, Athaliah, realized her son was dead, she seized the throne of Judah for herself. She then executed all heirs to the throne.

Athaliah succeeded in killing almost all the royal family of Judah. She would have killed her own grandson, Joash (also called Jehoash), if she had found him. But Jehosheba, King Ahaziah's sister, had taken the young boy and his nurse and hid them from Athaliah (II Chronicles 22:10-11).

For the next six years, Joash lived secretly in the Temple while Athaliah reigned. Then a zealous and righteous priest named Jehoiada devised a plan to

ABOUT OUR COVER . . .

Ancient caravan carrying goods in the kingdom of Judah. Judah prospered only during the reigns of righteous kings.

Cover Illustration by Ken Tunell

unseat Athaliah from Judah's throne. Jehoiada's plan was successful, and Joash became Judah's new king (II Chronicles 23:1-15).

A YOUNG KING RULES

Jehoiada gave wise counsel to young King Joash. He was only seven years old when he began to rule, and he tried to obey God's laws (II Chronicles 24:1-2).

God was pleased when Joash planned to repair the house of God. Athaliah's wicked sons had broken down much of the Temple. They had taken many of the treasures from the Temple for personal use and idol worship (verse 7).

Joash commanded the people to bring offerings to pay for repairing the Temple. He also ordered the priests and Levites to collect the offerings. When the people heard the command, they eagerly gave generous gifts.

All had gone well for Joash and the people of Judah while Jehoiada lived. When Jehoiada was 130 years old, he died. Because of his faithful service, the people buried him among the kings in Jerusalem (verses 15-16).

At Jehoiada's death, the people of Judah again turned from obeying God. The king and the princes of Judah rapidly turned to idolatry.

In His mercy, God sent prophets to warn them. But they would not listen. They refused God's correction. They also murdered Jehoiada's son, Zechariah.

After this, God allowed the Syrians to

invade Judah. "For the _____ of the _____ came with a small _____ of _____, and the _____ a very great _____ into their _____, because they had _____ the _____ of their _____. So they _____ against _____" (II Chronicles 24:24).

King Joash had refused to heed the warnings of God's prophet. Had Joash repented, he would have been spared this disaster.

The Syrians did not kill Joash. But he did not live long after this. Joash's servants conspired and killed him while he lay sick on his bed (verse 25).

What began as a righteous reign ended in disgrace. The people of Judah refused to give King Joash the honor of being buried in the tombs of the kings as they had Jehoiada.

A RIGHTEOUS BEGINNING

Amaziah, Joash's son, began his rule on Judah's throne at the age of 25. He reigned 29 years in Jerusalem. But the end of Amaziah's reign was as bad as his father's (II Chronicles 25:1-2).

When King Amaziah began his rule, he executed those who had killed his father, but he did not kill their children. Write out the latter part of II Chronicles 25:4 on the lines below. _____

King Amaziah planned a war against Judah's enemy, the Edomites who lived in the area of Mount Seir. From Judah

and Benjamin, Amaziah raised an army of 300,000 men. Fearing this army was not large enough, Amaziah hired 100,000 men from Israel. Many were from the tribe of Ephraim.

God did not want Amaziah to join with the Israelites and sent a prophet to warn him.

“But _____ came a _____ of _____ to _____, saying, O _____, let _____ the _____ of _____ go with _____; for the _____ is not _____, to wit, with all the _____ of _____” (II Chronicles 25:7).

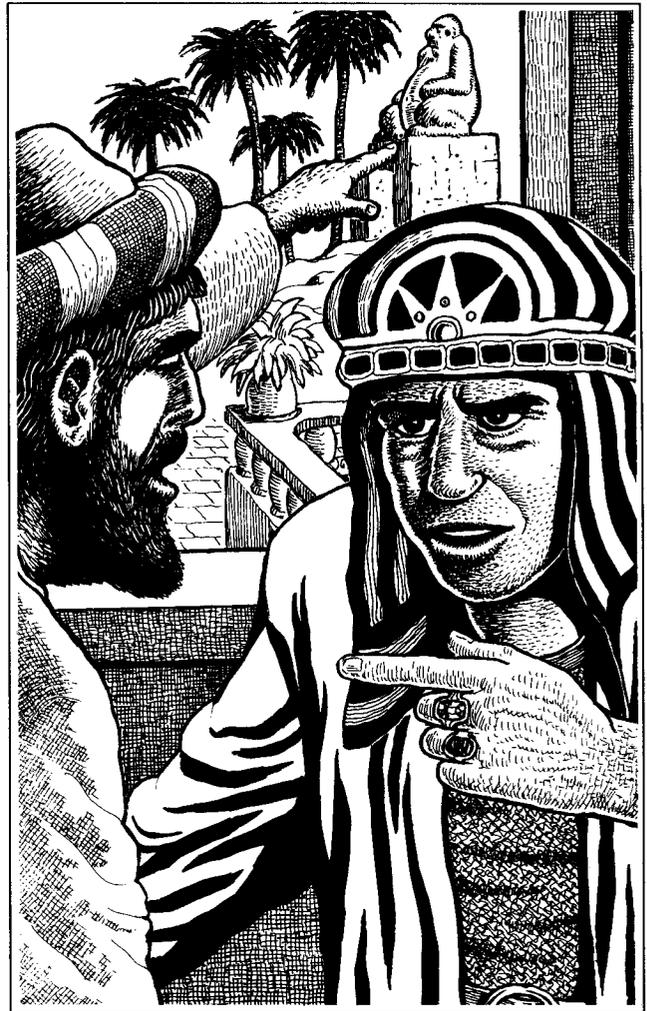
Amaziah believed the prophet, but since he had already paid the Israelite soldiers, he still wanted to use them. Amaziah reluctantly sent the Ephraimites away and set out for Mount Seir. In the battle, God helped Judah’s army win a great victory over the Edomites (II Chronicles 25:9-12).

In the meantime, the Ephraimites were angry at being sent from the battle and attacked several cities in Judah. The Ephraimite soldiers killed many people and took food, gold and other valuables (verse 13).

Then King Amaziah angered God by taking the Edomite idols and making them his gods. God sent a prophet to the king to warn him. The prophet asked Amaziah: “Why do you bow down to the gods of the Edomites? They could not save their own people!”

Instead of changing his foolish ways, Amaziah threatened to strike the prophet.

“God will destroy you for your idolatry,” the prophet continued. “This will



God’s prophet warned King Amaziah that he would be destroyed for worshipping the Edomite idols.

happen because you have rejected my counsel.”

Amaziah foolishly rejected the counsel of God’s prophet. Later, Amaziah listened to the bad advice of others.

“Then _____ king of _____ took _____, and _____ to _____, the _____ of _____, the _____ of _____, _____ of _____, saying, _____, let _____ see _____ in the face [fight each other in battle]” (II Chronicles 25:17).

When King Joash of Israel replied to

Amaziah, it only provoked the king of Judah even more. The outcome was terrible. Judah's troops fled from the battle. The Israelites captured King Amaziah and took him to Jerusalem. There they took treasures from the Temple and the king's palace. Afterward, they released Amaziah.

Haughty King Amaziah ended his reign in disgrace. He lived several years after the battle with shameful defeat and loss of great wealth.

Finally, a few men in Jerusalem conspired to kill him. Amaziah tried to escape by fleeing to the town of Lachish. They followed the king to Lachish and killed him (verse 27).

At King Amaziah's death, the people of Judah made Uzziah king. He was Amaziah's 16-year-old son.

Do You Remember?

1. King _____ set out to teach the people of Judah God's laws.
2. The prophet _____ sent a letter warning king _____ of Judah.
3. Who was the wicked queen who ruled after the death of Ahaziah?

4. _____ began ruling at age 7.
5. What priest gave Joash wise counsel? _____
6. Which king ruled after Amaziah?

7. Why was it wrong for Amaziah to make the Edomite idols his gods?

UZZIAH BECOMES KING

King Uzziah (also called Azariah) tried to obey God. Because of his obedience, God blessed him. He enjoyed a long reign of _____ years (II Chronicles 26:3-4).

Uzziah's army of valiant soldiers successfully fought against the Philistines and other nations. He built towers and fortified them with new weapons of war. He also obtained great wealth, cattle and lands.

"And he _____ in _____, _____ by _____, to be on the _____ and upon the _____, to shoot _____ and great _____ withal. And his _____ spread _____; for _____ was _____, till _____ was _____" (II Chronicles 26:15).

But Uzziah allowed his prosperity to change his attitude. He acted foolishly by taking authority that was not his. Uzziah decided to perform one of the duties God had given the priests. He entered the Temple to burn incense to God (verse 16).

Azariah the priest and 80 brave Levites refused to allow the king to burn incense. Uzziah became furious. He did not want a priest to deny his wishes.

While Uzziah stood angrily before the priests, God intervened. A dreaded disease suddenly appeared on Uzziah's forehead. It was leprosy!

The priests saw the king's leprous forehead and pushed him out of the Temple. Uzziah did not try to stop

them. He was also in a hurry to get out the door (verses 19-20).

Uzziah did not fully enjoy his wealth and power. He could no longer live in the palace. Because of his leprosy, he had to live in a house away from other people. He was a leper until the day of his death (II Chronicles 26:21).

KING JOTHAM'S RIGHTEOUS REIGN

Jotham, Uzziah's son, became king when Uzziah died. During his rule, King Jotham wisely governed the people of Judah. And Jotham was rewarded because he looked to God for guidance.

In spite of Jotham's righteous reign, the people continued to disobey God. They disobeyed by breaking the Sabbath and worshiping idols.

IDOLATROUS KING AHAZ

Following Jotham's reign, his son Ahaz became king. Ahaz followed the ways of the idolatrous kings of Israel.

"Moreover he _____ in the _____ of the son of Hinnom, and _____ his _____ in the _____, after the _____ of the _____ whom the _____ had _____ out _____ the _____ of _____. He _____ also and _____ in the high _____, and on the _____ and _____ every green tree" (II Chronicles 28:3-4).

God allowed terrible troubles to happen because Ahaz and the people had forsaken God. The king of Syria attacked Judah and took many thousands of people captive.

Then Pekeh, king of Israel, attacked and killed 120,000 brave soldiers in one day. Ahaz lost his son and his chief officers (verses 5-6).

The Israelite soldiers captured 200,000 women and children and took gold, jewels, food and animals from Judah. When the Israelite army arrived in the capital city of Samaria with the captives, God sent the prophet Oded to meet them.

"And now ye _____ to _____ under the _____ of _____ and _____ for _____, and _____ unto you: but are there not with _____, even with _____, _____ against the _____ your God? Now _____ me _____, and _____ the _____ again, which _____ have _____ of your _____: for the _____ of the _____ is upon _____" (II Chronicles 28:10-11).

The leaders of Ephraim refused to allow the captives into their cities. Using the food and supplies the Israelites had taken, the leaders ordered men to feed and clothe the hungry, weary captives. Afterward, they led the people back to the city of Jericho.

Ahaz knew he needed help to defend his kingdom. God would have helped him, but he chose to look to men for help. He asked the king of Assyria to help him fight the Edomites and Philistines.

Tiglath-pilneser (also called Tiglath-pileser), the king of Assyria, added to his troubles. Ahaz had sent treasures from the Temple and palace to Tiglath-

pilneser. The Assyrian king took them, but refused to help Ahaz.

In his distress, Ahaz sinned even more. He sacrificed to the Syrian gods, closed the doors of the house of God and placed idols throughout Jerusalem (II Chronicles 28:16-24).

When Ahaz's reign ended, the people did not bury him in the tombs of the kings. His reign ended after only 16 years on Judah's throne. After his death, his son Hezekiah became king.

THE PEOPLE KEEP THE PASSOVER

In spite of the idolatry of his father and the people of Judah, Hezekiah obeyed God. Hezekiah set out to restore worship of the true God throughout the kingdom of Judah. And he began with the house of God.

“He [Hezekiah] in the first _____ of his _____, in the first _____, opened the _____ of the _____ of the _____, and _____ them” (II Chronicles 29:3).

Restoring the worship of the true God to Israel was a big task for the new king. Following Ahaz's idolatrous reign, the Temple had fallen into disrepair. Many idols filled the house of God. He needed help.

Centuries before King Hezekiah's birth, God chose the tribe of Levi to serve at the Tabernacle. Hezekiah called on the priests and the Levites to help restore true worship and repair the Temple. He brought the priests and Levites together in an outdoor meeting. He explained that the people of Israel and Judah had forsaken God. He reminded

them that many of their relatives were in captivity because of disobeying God's laws (II Chronicles 28:4-5).

Hezekiah decided to diligently obey God. He wanted to turn God's anger away from the people of Judah.

What did Hezekiah say to the priests and Levites? (II Chronicles 29:10-11)

Many of the priests and Levites quickly responded to Hezekiah's request. They prepared themselves and began to clean and repair the Temple. They worked diligently and the job was soon finished (II Chronicles 29:16-17).

With the Temple cleaned and repaired, Hezekiah next assembled the leaders of the people at Jerusalem.

When Judah's leaders assembled to sacrifice, many of the people also came to the Temple. Because so many people came, Hezekiah knew God had inspired the people.

“And Hezekiah _____, and all the _____, that _____ had _____ the _____: for the thing was done _____” (II Chronicles 29:36).

Hezekiah next invited the people of Israel to keep the Passover. The king sent letters throughout the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, inviting the people to come to the Temple in Jerusalem (II Chronicles 30:1).

Because of their idolatry, the people had not kept the Sabbath or any of God's holy days for many years. But now people began to gather at Jerusalem. Since they could not assemble in the first month (Nisan, when the Passover was to be observed), God allowed them to keep the Passover in the second month (II Chronicles 30:2-5).

When does God command baptized members to keep the Passover? (Exodus 12:2-6) _____

Our observance of the Passover is important to God. He makes it possible for His people to keep it in the second month if they are not able to keep it the first month (Numbers 9:1-11).

Many people from the kingdom of Israel came to Jerusalem to keep the feast. But there were many who only laughed at Hezekiah's invitation (II Chronicles 30:10-11, 18).

The people of Judah and Israel kept the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. The feast was such a wonderful time that all the people agreed to keep seven more days of rejoicing and worship (II Chronicles 30:13, 23).

What did the people do before returning to their homes? (II Chronicles 31:1)

The people of Judah began to tithe again. They also gave generous offerings which God had commanded for the priests and Levites. The people were so generous, the priests and Levites had

more than they could use (II Chronicles 31:4-6).

Hezekiah continued to encourage the people to obey the laws of God. Many people think they can serve God any way they choose. God is very specific in what He expects us to do to obey Him (Exodus 20:1-17).

Hezekiah had set out to do all he could to please God. The more he obeyed God and learned God's way, the more Hezekiah prospered.

Hezekiah did much to restore worship of God in Judah. In your own words, list some of his deeds. (II Kings 18:4)_____

The Bible records a compliment about King Hezekiah (II Kings 18:5-6):

While the people of Judah obeyed God and prospered under King Hezekiah's reign, a final tragedy struck the kingdom of Israel. Because of continued idolatry and breaking God's laws, God allowed them to be conquered by the Assyrians. God warned the people of Israel, but they had ignored their Creator. Finally, the powerful warring nation of Assyria took the people of Israel into captivity (II Kings 18:9-12).

The people of Judah had often turned from obeying God. But through King

Hezekiah's efforts, many of the people had turned from their idolatry. Because of this, God protected the people of Judah.

THE ASSYRIANS INVADE JUDAH

In the 14th year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, invaded Judah. Sennacherib attacked because Hezekiah refused to pay tribute and serve him (II Kings 18:7, 13-14).

The large armies terrified the people. They knew the Assyrians had conquered and taken captive the ten-tribed kingdom of Israel. What could Judah do against the powerful Assyrian army!

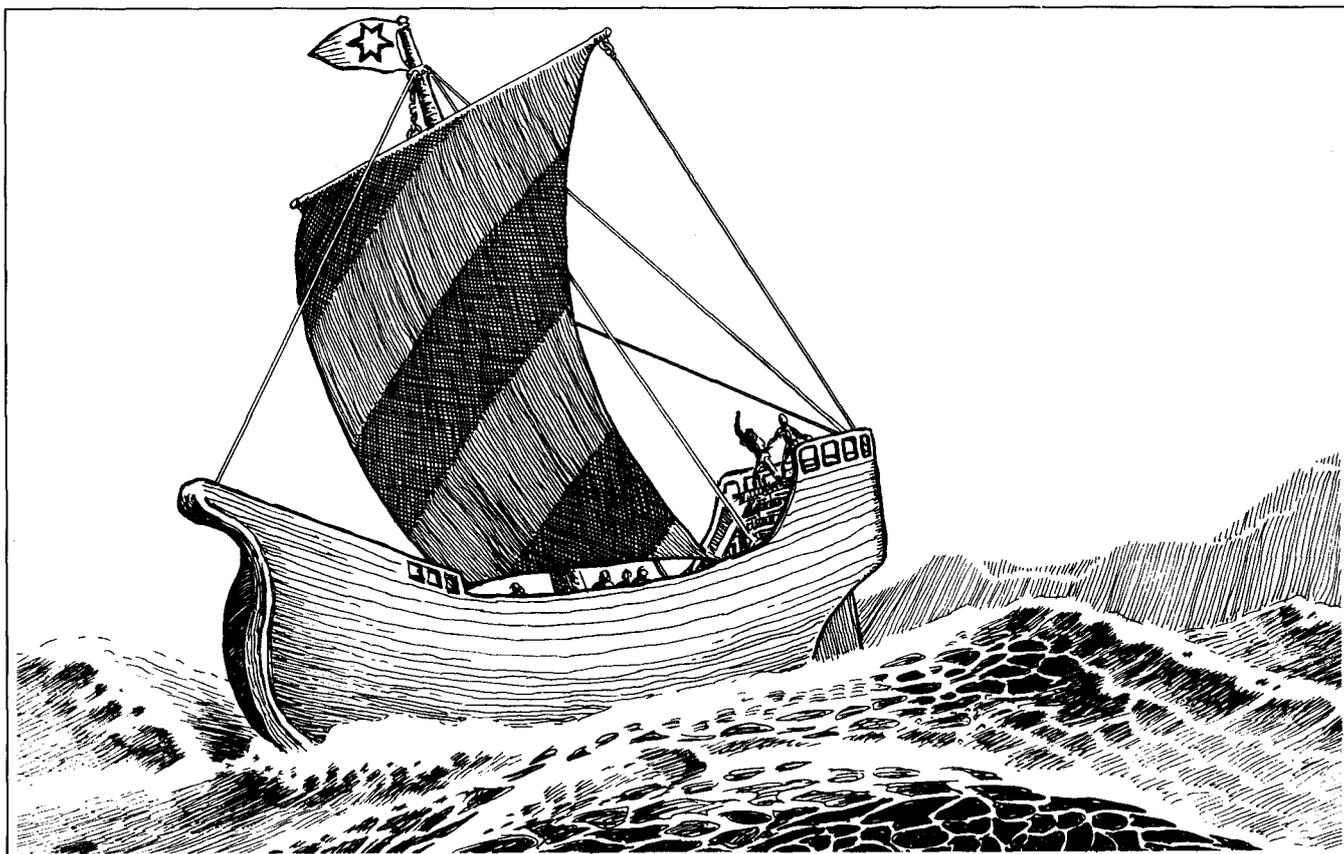
Sennacherib, an expert military leader, decided to make the people more

fearful. He knew his soldiers would easily conquer the people of Judah if they were filled with fear and doubt. So the Assyrian king sent messengers to Jerusalem. There his men shouted Sennacherib's message to the soldiers on the wall (II Kings 18:17, 28).

"Hezekiah has told you to trust in God to deliver you!" one of the Assyrian officers shouted. "What god is there that can deliver you from our army?"

The people of Jerusalem heard the frightening message. When the king heard it, he sent trusted servants to God's prophet, Isaiah, for help (II Kings 19:1-2).

What was Isaiah's reply to Hezekiah's servants? (II Kings 19:6-7)



King Hezekiah's ships brought great riches from other lands.

KINGS OF JUDAH

JOASH

AMAZIAH

AZARIAH

JOTHAM

AHAZ

HEZEKIAH

850 B.C.

750 B.C.

650 B.C.

The chart above shows the approximate times in which these kings of Judah ruled.

Both King Hezekiah and Isaiah the prophet prayed earnestly to God for help (II Kings 19:15-19; II Chronicles 32:20).

What was God's answer to Hezekiah's prayer? (II Kings 19:32-34)

When God fights the battles, God's people do not need an army for defense.

What happened to Sennacherib and the Assyrian army? (II Kings 19:35-36)

Insulting God never pays. Soon after Sennacherib returned to Nineveh, he was murdered by two of his own sons (II Kings 19:37).

God allowed the Assyrians to conquer the kingdom of Israel, but God protected Judah because the people were serving Him (II Chronicles 32:22).

THE SUN GOES BACKWARD

During the Assyrian seige of Jerusalem, Hezekiah became very sick. God sent Isaiah to Hezekiah saying, "Set your affairs in order, for you are going to die" (Isaiah 38:1).

What did Hezekiah do when he heard Isaiah's message? (Isaiah 38:2-3)

Before Isaiah had reached the gates of the king's palace, God told Isaiah to return to Hezekiah (II Kings 20:4-5).

God heard the king's earnest prayer and added 15 years to his life. Isaiah delivered God's message and instructed Hezekiah's servants to place figs on Hezekiah's disease.

Hezekiah then asked Isaiah to show him a *sign* that God would heal him.

"This is the sign that God will give you," Isaiah replied. "Do you want the shadow on the sundial to go forward 10 degrees or backward 10 degrees?"

"It is a small task for God to make the shadow move forward 10 degrees," Hezekiah said. "Let it go backward 10 degrees!"

God honored the king's request. Hezekiah watched in amazement as God performed a miracle. God caused the shadow to move backward 10 degrees! (verses 8-11.)

VISITORS FROM BABYLON

The king of Babylon had heard of Hezekiah's illness and quick recovery. The Babylonian king sent letters and gifts to Hezekiah by messengers. Hezekiah gladly received the Babylonian ambassadors into the palace (II Kings 20:12).

Flattered by the gifts, Hezekiah acted foolishly. He showed the messengers all the treasures of the palace, the gold, silver, jewels, ointments, spices and armor.

God was displeased with Hezekiah.

What did Isaiah tell Hezekiah about the Babylonians and Judah's treasures?

(Isaiah 39:6) _____

_____.

Showing the Babylonians the treasures of Judah was a mistake. In time, the Babylonians would return to Judah. God would some day allow the kingdom of Judah to go into captivity, just as the Assyrians had taken the nation of Israel captive.

The last 15 years of King Hezekiah's life continued to be prosperous. He also served the people by completing useful public projects (II Chronicles 32:30).

Hezekiah was a king who served God and his people. When Hezekiah died, the people of Judah buried him with great honor and dignity (II Chronicles 32:33).

God knew the people of Judah would again return to idolatry and forget His laws and His mercy. Soon they would return to living the way that seemed right to them and ignoring God's ways (Proverbs 14:12).

The stories of the kings of Judah reveal lessons that can help us live a successful life today. We should try to learn these lessons so that we will not make the same mistakes.

The people of Judah brought many troubles on themselves because of turning from God. Their disobedience only brought the misery of wars and captivity. Much of Judah's might and influence was lost. The nation's power was declining.

FOUNDER: HERBERT W. ARMSTRONG (1892-1986)

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BIBLE MEMORY

Romans 8:28

RULES FOR RULERS

On the lines below, write out the name of a king
whose life best illustrates the rule.

1. When a man's ways please God, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.
Proverbs 16:7 _____
2. It is a mistake to refuse correction.
Proverbs 10:17 _____
3. Do not join those who disobey God.
II Corinthians 6:14 _____
4. A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment.
Proverbs 19:19 _____
5. Use wise advice to make major decisions.
Proverbs 20:18 _____
6. Pride brings shame.
Proverbs 11:2; 16:18 _____
7. Look to God instead of man for deliverance.
Psalm 118:8-9 _____